



Spiritual Quests in the Novels of Ruth Praver Jhabvala

*Veerendra and **Dr. Ajit Kumar

**Research Scholar, Department of English, SunRise University, Alwar, Rajasthan (India)

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, SunRise University, Alwar, Rajasthan (India)

e-mail: veerbiradar999@gmail.com

Abstract: Jhabvala gives a revelation and an enjoyable change for her readers in her novel *A New Dominion*. It makes a different point in Jhabvala's literary profession, and a divergence from the rule which stroke her previous works. The novel deals about India but with a new viewpoint. It is additional concerning the new phenomena of argument between the Indian spiritualism and the Western seekers. It is a horrible proposal and despair tale about European women weary of covetousness; European trips to India on a spiritual search and end up in fantasy. Europeans are naive, innocent and feeble nerve, the Indians no better; and also perpetually petite minded and sensual with a total 42 deficiency of any true love or attraction. The theme East-West encounter does not present in this novel but rather East-West agreement or eventual compromise.

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Introduction: Jhabvala, here again, takes the site of an outsider and eloquent the experiences of these Western women from the point of a woman on a quest. Her hallucination is ironic and even acidly sarcastic on the degradation of cultural ethics and spiritual heritage of this sub-continent. She conveys the Indian and the Western values in colloquy through the association or clash of the characters from distant races in the Indian setting. V.A. Shahne is exact about this aim of Jhabvala when he says:

Her principal attempt is to portray the various feature of 'A New Dominion', the actuality that is current India in its social, cultural, religious, political and spiritual circumstance. Since the magnitude of this reality is so enormous and obstinate, she tries to grasp it in wreckage through the characters she creates, both of East and West; they not only respond to each other, creating a complex of human relationship which is middle to the novel. (4)

Mrs. Jhabvala vehemently attacks awful and savage social practices of India. Moreover, she exposes moral degradation and insincerity among Indians of the new dominion through the heart teasing experiences of Westerners here. The contemptuous mind-set of Indians towards Western women at nothing more than treating them as gratis indulging sexual cranks and therefore so many Indians gaze at Lee only to persuade her to succumb to their sexual desires. This attitude of

Indians is by hook or 44 by crook exposed in the form of Gopi's character, who is not satisfied by his friendship with Lee, he wants more. He knows that it would not be a difficult task for him to oblige Lee and get some physical pleasure. He takes her to the inn and indirectly makes his target clear. Initially Lee refuses, but on instant thought, and in endeavor to clear up all misunderstandings and also in her quest to unite herself completely in the Indian society, she gives in, she says O.K. and unbuttons her blouse. Jhabvala's bitterness and irony is obvious when she writes that Gopi does not squander the time and lies on top of her. Lee suffers quite than enjoying this experience: "But 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 has so ardently desired, while looking out of the window" (AND 55).

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Jhabvala has attempted to bring out a unity between physical bliss and spiritual quest. Lee in her wish to merge herself completely in this unknown Indian society gives way to Gopi's wish, but to a usual reader, the situation is repulsive and degrading. One can find Lee doing this not once but repeatedly to mislay. These relationship of comparatively voluntary dominion and subjugation in the novel fall into two categories, blur and family dissolve it refers to the arms of craving on the one hand and spiritual or religious quest on the other. The female devotees and male guru are linked

in a relationship of traditionally endorsed psychological thralldom of woman whose sexual module is only thinly veiled. Thus these three girls are in voluntary thrall to Swamiji the Spiritual lead as he creates an illusion of divinity by singing Rama-Gopala! Hare Krishna! In reality the Swamiji is a knave humbug waiting to make a victim of these innocent devotees to satisfy his fleshy thirst. The unwise devotion of three girls has been suitably defined by S. Krishnaswamy as:

They located their trust in the Swamiji, thinking he will being succor to their beleaguered souls and transform them into new combined beings at peace with themselves and the world. Instead we have a squalid picture of selfish treatment, social mistreatment, midnight orgies and heartlessness verging on unkindly. The Swamiji treats them as belongings....(325)

Jhabvala's narration about the sightless faith of European girls in Swamiji in search of self-actualization and spiritual peace is pathetic. If, one can inspect that how brutally Lee is raped in a hypnotized state of mind by this so called god-man Swamiji we could easily recognize that he wants all his followers not only spiritually but physically, he wants to possess them with their bodies and souls. The tormented girl Lee describes the trauma of this rape: "He was terrible, terrifying; he drove right on to me and through me and calling me beastly names, shouting them out loud and at the same time hurting me as much as he could" (AND199). After facing this self-destruction Lee's scorn and revulsion for her fanatic endeavors spiritualism is intensely pathetic. Swamiji rouge of first water. It is rouges similar to him that have brought ignominy to Indian spiritual heritage overseas. The recurrent animal imagery represents a stark dissimilarity to Lee's expectations and sinister Swamiji as a kind of beast or satyr. Such a conclusion to the nuanced and thrilling emotionally serves to underline the oft-noted inequalities among female romantic expectations and male sexual greediness. But it is weird that Lee has reached the point of no return in her relation with Swamiji who has no qualms, either ethical or religious in abusing her. Though she once breaks out of his charismatic spell and runs under the protective umbrella of rationalistic Westerners like Raymond and Mrs. 46 Charlotte, yet her escape is all too concise and in spite of her brutal rape at Swamiji's hands she once more returns to his Ashram

This peculiarity of A New Dominion stems from inquisitive authorial tendency to state everything in duplicate or triplicate. For instance we discover not just one Lee but at least two additional versions of her

in the characters of Evie and Margaret, the identical characters whose variations lie mainly in terms of their degrees of commitment to the Swamiji. Margaret has rather a profound faith in Swamiji's spiritual powers deeper even than Lee's because when she indentures infections and deadly diseases she does not admit it. She has mislaid all her rationality under the spell of Swamiji's mysterious wisdom and spirituality. However she pins her faith on the holy man's powers of rejuvenation and, though on the threshold of death, she rejects Raymond's advice and offer of hospitalization and treatment at all. She argues that Swamiji has explained to her the exact cause:

Doctor's don't know a thing. These sickness that people obtain in India, they're not corporeal, they're simply psychic. We only obtain them because we try to defy India-because we shot ourselves up in our little Western egos and don't want to give ourselves. But once we study to give up then just fall away. (AND172-173)

Jhabvala ironically, state that bitter and grave of India, and those of Europeans who in their everlasting quest for spiritualism and a whole merger in this world lose their good sense. Margaret goes back to the Ashram only to die in pathetic state in the store room of a small hospital in Maupur. The entire episode appears to be highly cruel and one cannot help but think whether this was her way of merging herself completely in this world, the new dominion, never to revisit.

Evie is already with Swamiji and almost crucial for him. She does everything Swamiji wants her to do without of any wavering. Evie has implicit faith in Swamiji's spiritual influence and clarity of mind. The occurrence of reading the Big Book in the ashram is a good instance of dissimilar attitudes of these Western characters towards Swamiji. When Lee and Raymond showed their anxiety towards the critical condition of Margaret due to her deadly diseases, Evie appear to be totally indifferent. She announces that the relationship of the disciple with the Guru is the most powerful and it withdraws all other blood-relationships. Her fascination for swamiji appears to be inscrutable, and complicated to explain. Evie now deems her and all those who are in Ashram with Swamiji to be Hindus. As after Margret's death, the question arises of her funeral but Evie is firm in her certainty that she was a Hindu.

The novelist has skillfully summed up the East-West relations in the modern world in the above lines. The West hunger for spiritual morals in turning to the East, what can the East offers them, in the question Jhabvala endeavors to answer in her new Dominion. Jhabvala

exposes the moral dreadful conditions hypocrisy and sexuality of Indians like Swamiji, Gopi and others who make use of the Western seekers aiming at attaining the Indian magnificence. V.A.Shahne is right in his appraisal of *A New Dominion*: “The Indians in this novel are almost invariably sensual, sex hungry, hypocritical, pretentious, egoistic and self-willed except for Banubai, the puzzling prophetess, and Bob, a go-head young man” (52). The principles is at its lowest ebb in the country as the novel is not simply of a few individuals thrown together but of a country in a moment of meeting of two different cultures. It fails to solve the enigma of malfunction of three women’s attempt to build a bridge between the two limits. Jhabvala endeavors to counter-balance these with the portrayal of aspects of India’s spiritual actuality. This spiritual reality would help to get over the intelligence of alienation and frustration. People, particularly women move towards religion to find consolation and comfort for their disturbed mind. There are two of type characters; Jhabvala consistently bases the conflicts that happen between Indians and Westerners in her novels upon the intricacies of culture and history, avoiding the simpler, more obvious issue of color. Western eyes see her Indian characters as assortment from the comic to the beautiful, Westerners as seen by Indian eyes, assortment from the sexually titillating. Once they have crossed the primary barrier set up by what is unfamiliar or foreign, her characters act in response to one another as individuals. Those who are unable or unwilling to do expose their immaturity or the falseness of their claims to liberalize moral spirituality, Gopi character on both sides of the cultural bigotry that betray their silliness and superficiality of their sophistication. As time and experience revealed how much there is and always will be to study about India, 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 effortlessly acquired or inherited by birth.

Jhabvala’s *A New Dominion*: Jhabvala’s *A New Dominion* also like other main novels dealing with the experiences of the Westerner in India, takes up the responses of a group of Westerners, distinguished by the degree and nature of their participation in Indian spirituality embodied in the worship of the guru. Though none of the characters measured up to set of British people, Jhabvala studies in *Heat and Dust*, the novel throws up with irony and ambiguity, the magnetism and murky attraction of India, about which not even the most rational of the British people in *A New Dominion*, Raymond can provide the right answers. The domination of India’s spirituality over the forces of Western materialism, seen in the

cautiously individualized single girls-Evie, Margaret and Lee-is Jhabvala’s problem theme in the novel.

Ruth Jhabvala’s most satiric study of an unaware Indian who sets himself up as an influence on India’s cultural traditions, deeming himself better qualified by his ‘Indianness’ to penetrate to necessary truths than any Western seeker after awareness, however clever they may be or earnest. These sketches obtain deeper ironic shading when they begin to comprise Westerners who seek to interpret India to the Indians. Spiritual quest lead three girls come to India for diverse basis and meet different fates according to the bent of their own nature. Evie, is exposed in her last phase (Passivity and humble adoration) in relation to the Swami who heads the ashram ten miles away of Benares, which emerges to be the middle of nowhere to lee. Evie has been chosen note-taker and chronicler of the Swami’s dialogues and thoughts-her will is not split from his. Of the three, she has been the longest at the ashram. Margaret has rebelled against the contemporary materialism of her family back home, and has walked out of her own sister’s wedding to find consolation in India. She interest Lee, and their discussions as fellow boarders at Miss Charlotte’s task in Delhi, centre on the Westerner in India, separated 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...”(AND 37). The fact of her comment is exemplified in the banishment orders Miss Charlotte receives for her duty in the ebbing of the missionary rush, Jhabvala records the fadeout of British dominion. Lee turns into the first-person, the narrator of this story. Unlike Margaret, vary in her perceptions of an appetite for the Swami. She starts out with an euphoria which makes her write to Raymond.

Daphne surrenders herself to her guru. He pretends to alter her and she responds positively to him. She wears a plain white cotton sari given by the Swamiji to her as a present her stay in the ashram does not get any achievement in spiritual heights. It is understandable that the basis of the swami’s attraction for her is sexual. Daphne comes to India for spiritual comfort but as an alternative she loses her individual personality. Her submission to the guru is absolute when he makes the decision for her. In doing so it not only cements her attachment to him but also causes her to dump her own ego to his will. The crucial moment comes when she is picked up to go with Swamiji to Southern California: “She was completely happy to be going to California, and anywhere else he might want her to accompany him” (ASC 110). Jhabvala ironically suggests that Daphne’s spiritual call has

attained its tragicomic fulfillment. In some of Jhabvala's stories, the female protagonists come from the crumbled, materialistic socio-cultural backgrounds of Europe or America. They travel from continent to continent with a confessional advise to submit or surrender themselves to some spiritual mentors whom they believed to bring them spiritual succor and transcendental spirit of their existence. Rishi Pal Singh in his article "Motifs of Piety and Profanity: A Critique of Guru-cult in the Novels of Ruth Praver Jhabvala" in the book *Generic Manifolds Indian English Literature Since 1950* states:

It is ironically awful and ethically unbelievable that the god-fathers of these women are mostly vicious and vindictive to exploit these disciples and have their direct or indirect origin from India – a country of renowned religiosity and spiritual heritage. (81)

Jhabvala in her story *An Experience of India* portrayed in the collection *How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories*. The English woman, the unnamed narrator tries to discover the connections between sexuality, spiritual quest and discipleship. The narrator is the spouse of a Western Journalist, Henry. Both the husband and wife come to India with some prospect of change. Their visit to India is a kind of escapism from the materialistic Western world: "Here was our escape from that Western materialism with which we were both so terribly fed up"

Conclusion: Jhabvala is Polish German by birth, English by education and Indian by marriage. She stayed in the land of her birth for nearly twelve years. In an interview by Ram Lal Aggarwal when she is asked whether she considered herself as an Indian writer. She replied: "No, how could I be? I'm not, am I." There is no getting away from the fact. I write differently from Indian writers because my birth, background, ancestry and traditions are different. If must be considered anything, then let it be as one of those European writers who have written about Indian."³ Her language is not English that why she can be compared to the writers such as R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, who write in English, though English is not their mother tongue. Raja Rao says, "One has to convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omission of certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language.

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