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RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA'S

Heat and Dust

I. H-SHIHAN

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PR
9499.3
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Z68
2006



Published by

ATLANTIC[®]

PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS

B-2, Vishal Enclave, Opp. Rajouri Garden,
New Delhi-110027

Phones : 25413460, 25429987, 25466842

Sales Office

7/22, Ansari Road, Darya Ganj,
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Phones : 23273880, 23275880, 23280451

Fax : 91-11-23285873

web : www.atlanticbooks.com

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Printed in India
at Nice Printing Press, Delhi

General Preface

The Atlantic Critical Studies, modelled on the study-aids available in England and America, among other places, are primarily meant for the students of English Literature of Indian universities.

However, in consideration of the local conditions and the various constraints under which our students have to study—non-availability of relevant critical books, dearth of foreign and Indian journals, inaccessibility to good, well-equipped libraries, just to mention a few of them—the models have been considerably improved upon, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Thus, while these studies are meant to be comprehensive and self-sufficient, the distinguished scholars who have prepared these study materials, have taken special care to combine lucidity and profundity in their treatment of the texts.

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Chief Editor [English Literature]
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The Race Relations in *Heat and Dust*

• ENCOUNTER ACROSS CULTURES • BRITISH RESPONSE TO INDIA - DURING THE RAJ
& AFTER • INDIAN RESPONSE TO THE BRITISH • REFERENCES

ENCOUNTER ACROSS CULTURES

During the post-war era, literature in general, and the novel in particular have widened much in geographical and cultural spaces horizontally. Migration of people from one geo-cultural territory to another is the obvious reason behind this new phenomenon. However, face to face trans-cultural affairs can be traced back even in past times. In ancient times the relationship was only casual, sporadic and was mainly sustained by trade and business. During the seventeenth century, a purely political reason, i.e. colonial expansion, initiated the process and thereby facilitated the Indo-European direct contacts on a long term basis. The Anglo-Indian tradition of the novel, though appeared later, has given literary shape to the Indo-British relationship quite at length. During the post-war era the new waves of migration to different parts of the world, and also the post-decolonization developments gave the phenomenon a further momentum. It may not always be reasonable to put the Anglo-Indians, who have written about India during the British Raj, and the expatriate British or European authors, who write about India during the post-Independence era, in the same category. The reason is simple. During the British Raj, the British presence in India was a political reality and many of the authors were either directly or indirectly working from a kind of politically conditioned position in terms of the attitudes they reflected toward the British colonialism and India; whereas Ruth Jhabvala and

many others who came to India did not have any political obligation. It is simply a question of personal choice on their part and they worked under a totally different socio-cultural environment. However, the question of cross-cultural relationship or interaction remains as equally a valid issue as it has been before.

Ruth Jhabvala's people encounter India physically as well as metaphysically. At the physical level, India, its geography, its social life, do form a quantitative factor in the novels. They come across varied scenes of India—ranging from the decent, humble, homely affairs to the dance of the eunuchs, and even the den of the dacoits. They freely move, see India's relics, and often take Indian foods. They react to India's otherness, its backwardness, heat and dust; they befriend Indians and often marry them. Metaphysically they respond to India's art, religion and philosophy. It is not only the outward life of India with which they are familiar—its religious affairs, its dusty heat, its grinding poverty—but also the inner life of the people. *Heat and Dust* (like many of her works) openly depicts face-to-face interactions of people belonging to two cultures and thereby the novel's one of the major themes happens to be one of the modern human issues, i.e. cross-cultural encounter. In the second phase of her career as a novelist, which encompasses her three major novels, *A Backward Place* (1965), *A New Dominion* (1972) and *Heat and Dust* (1975) and two collections of short stories, *An Experience of India* (1971) and *How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories* (1976), Ruth moves slightly away from her interest in India and Indians to an interest in the effect India has on Westerners who live in or visit India. This is a theme she has already treated in *Esmond in India* (1958). During this phase Ruth Jhabvala consistently interrogates the way India acts on the Westerners, particularly women. The unanswered question she repeatedly raises in her writings is whether or not it is desirable for Europeans to live in India. This phase of her writing is marked by a systematic interrogation, appropriation, and rewriting of E.M. Forster's celebrated novel, *A Passage to India* (1924).

BRITISH RESPONSE TO INDIA—THE RAJ ERA

In *Heat and Dust* there are two time zones—the 1920s and the 1970s; both of which witness two cultures, the British and the Indian, meeting together. In the first story, it is the political necessity and political philosophy perhaps that strongly interferes into human relationships. Douglas Rivers knows the Hindustani language very well, but he never tries to make the best use of his knowledge to understand the country and its people. Rather it is an utter administrative shrewdness on his part that he discovers a new field for its application: “It is the only language in which you can deliver deadly insults with the most flowery courtesy” (38). He all along remains a colonial *burra sahib* so that he can rule the country better. One must note here how Douglas’ handling of the Indian language further stabilizes the British colonial ideology. This is what Warren Hastings wanted. He believed that the ruler must know the culture of the ruled so that the country can be governed more efficiently. In Douglas’ case also, cultural interaction means strengthening of domination, and not understanding an alien people for a meaningful negotiation on the basis of a mutual exchange of material and nonmaterial properties. Douglas’ attitude is the keynote of the British attitude toward India. During this period, India has had no access to the Civil Lines, the well-barricaded area, where the British community lived. Except perhaps the land, the heat and dust in the ‘British zone’ there are not many things that are truly Indian or known to the native people. It is by all palpable senses the British outpost. The creatures to be seen inside are the Rivers, the Minnies, the Crawfords, the Saunders and the like, who speak differently, eat differently, think differently and in fact do everything differently. An Indian needs some sort of a passport to enter into this de-indianized part of India. All the doors and windows are shut to keep out heat and dust, and metaphorically, India itself. A few Indian faces inside the barricade are those mute faces of servants who are always at the beck and call of their masters.

And what do the white people think of India and the Indian people? For Douglas, Indians, especially those

who come to him for some reason or other, are “a pack of rogues” (38) and he does not mind to tell them directly about his assessment of them. However, the rich visitors bring with them baskets of gifts, and Douglas does not mind accepting them. Douglas very consciously serves the British imperial interests. Unless he can prove his superiority, he cannot politically justify his presence in India. He places himself in the position of a white man who has undertaken the burden of civilizing the “wretched inhabitants of this wretched” country (148). In such an environment the question of cultural interaction does not arise much. Incidentally, Ruth Jhabvala is very silent on the nature of political clashes taking place there at the time.

It is not that Douglas alone has this imposing attitude to India. Mr. and Mrs. Saunders’ attitude to the country, its people and culture also are all along antagonistically negative. Dr. Saunders’ opinion is a reassertion of what Aristotle believed ages ago—that Asians are only fit to be slaves: “I had the fellow called to my office and, no further argument, smartly boxed his ears for him, one-two, one-two.... It’s the only way to deal with them, Nawab Sahib. It’s no use arguing with them, they’re not amenable to reason. They haven’t got it here, you see, up here, the way we have” (121). By ‘up here’ he means the ‘head’ and thereby ‘intellect.’ His sense of superiority works the same way in matters concerning Indian life and culture. On the *suttee* issue he is confident that the custom exemplifies savagery like “everything else in the country, plain savagery and barbarism...” (59). Dr. Saunders further exemplifies his stand with numerous examples of cruelties, gruesome and horrible mutilations in the name of religions. Mrs. Saunders cannot almost tolerate the presence of an Indian although she knows she cannot do without them. Once in the presence of Olivia she rather violently reacts to her Indian servant and “She said that these servants really were devils and that they could drive anyone crazy; that it was not stupidity on their part—on the contrary, they were clever enough when it suited their purposes—but it was all done deliberately to torment their masters. She gave examples of their thieving, drinking and other bad habits. She told Olivia about the filth

in which they lived inside their quarters..." (28). Olivia too cannot approve of the misconduct of the servants; but she is amazed and frightened by the strength of Mrs. Saunders' reaction (27). Mrs. Saunders does not keep her criticism limited to the offending servants only; rather she generalizes her attitude to India: "everything was like that, everywhere the same—the whole town, the lanes and bazaars...their heathen temples" (28). She would be happy if she simply could have left the country: "I've asked him—over and over—I've said: Willie, let's go" (28).

Major Minnies' position is in between two extremes—say, between the Saunders' and Olivia's. He is candidly outspoken in his attitude to India. In his monograph he declares: "I'm not quite the right kind of person to be in India" (148). Interestingly enough, it is Major Minnies, who finally happens to settle in Ooty after his retirement while many of his friends go back to England. He believes, "There are many ways of loving India, many things to love her for—the scenery, the history, the poetry, the music, and indeed the physical beauty of the men and women" (170). At the same time he cautions that India always "finds out the weak spot and presses on it..." Therefore, the decisive suggestion is that one should never "allow oneself to become softened (like Indians) by an excess of feeling" (170-71). India for him is an altogether different element, another dimension, "in which the European is not accustomed to live so that by immersion in it he becomes deliberated, or even (like Olivia) destroyed" (171), and "it is all very well to love and admire India—intellectually, aesthetically...but always with a virile, measured, European feeling" (171). It seems that Major was in a contradictory position. He loved India, but his European orientation, his culture came on his way to accept India wholeheartedly. That's why he tries to defend himself and make a compromise. His appreciation of India is purely intellectual and aesthetic. His position is very much like that of the visiting German scholars, the Hochstadts, in *A Backward Place*, another novel of Ruth Jhabvala. However, so far as real contact with India is the issue, they are no better than many of their contemporary

friends and colleagues. A real cultural contact is totally different from an aesthetic or intellectual appreciation of a nation. Major Minnies very carefully opts for the second one and virtually remains as negative as many of the kinds of the Saunders.

Finally, however, it is Olivia alone who seems to strike a different note in this regard. She proves herself capable of negotiating the alien world. Hers is totally a case of subjective assimilation. It is to be noted that she too is one of the British 'troops' and she has not much ideological foundation to be different in her attitude to India. Be it her loneliness, boredom, or whatever, she ventures out of her scheduled world and strongly holds a distinctly antithetical perspective on India. No racial or political consideration overshadows her rather broad and optimistic views about human relationship—"I don't know India. It's true I don't, but what's that got to do with it? People can still be friends...even if it is India" (103). She emphatically disarms the whole troop of the British officers on the *suttee* issue: "It's part of their religion, isn't it? I thought one wasn't supposed to meddle with that.... And quite apart from religion, it is their culture and who are we to interfere anyone's culture especially an ancient one like theirs" (58). Olivia's non-authoritarian, apparently reasonable view, in a way, challenges the very foundation of the British policy on India, and thereby questions the authority of the British to anglicize the country. It is, however, obvious that Olivia fell in love with the Nawab and her contact with India is dictated by her personal preference rather than by her British cultural and political locations. This may explain why the image of India she offers is different from many others of her clan. It is purely her individual estimate. She ceases to represent the British community by her thought and action. And Ruth Jhabvala's projection of Olivia as the unquestioning friend of India is again a questionable issue. First, Olivia's is a strongly dubious character; her community has ostracized her, and secondly, the way she is presented in the novel does not seem to be at all respectable. Dr. Saunders finds 'something rotten' (170) in her character and the Narrator too describes early Olivia "as a

pretty young woman, rather vain, pleasure-seeking, and a little petulant" (160). Ruth Jhabvala's ironical approach further makes it difficult to see the real woman and thereby the entire episode puts a big question mark as to the intention of the author, Ruth Jhabvala herself.

BRITISH RESPONSE TO INDIA—INDIAN ERA

It is mostly through the Narrator that the second phase of the Indo-British encounter during the post-Independence era has been seen in *Heat and Dust*. Her room-mate at the S.M. Hostel, the lady she meets first, seems to be a frequenter to India, but her constant contact with India does not seem to have much affected her preconditioned response to India. She deliberately avoids many Indian things, especially food: "I hate their food, I wouldn't touch it for anything" (3). However, Miss Tietz, the Swiss lady who is looking after the S.M. Hostel, has a living experience of almost thirty years in India and she does not mind in case she has to breathe her last in India: "She tells me she has been in India for thirty years, and if God wants her to die here, that is what she will do" (4). The Narrator, however, knows that it is no longer the British India except for some other factors like the heat and dust, the poverty and superstition, etc that have remained the same as before. The house of Inder Lal she stays in is in the midst of the crowded lanes and bazaar, no longer the other side of the Civil Lines. Otherwise a self-conscious modern woman, she has no objection to abide by Indian norms and customs. Instead of resisting India, she begins to feel the way it subtly works on her sensibility: "India always changes people, and I have been no exception" (2). This observation of the Narrator is Ruth Jhabvala's own realization too. It is difficult to accept the way she singles out India in this respect. No matter if it is England, America or a country in Africa, any country for that matter has its own impacts on the inhabitants it houses. The cross-cultural theoretical discourses, as available, have observed that "people are active processor of information and do not simply surrender themselves to the situations they encounter. Rather they modify their behavior to cope with the sorts of new problems they will inevitably encounter as part of their

cross-cultural experience" (Brislin 15). Ruth Jhabvala knows very well how first England, and then India and finally the US have shaped and reshaped her consciousness during her sojourns in the three continents. Maybe India is by nature a very different country from the other two, but it does not mean that only India always changes people and no other country does so. The very faces of thousand Asian Americans prove how America also changes people. On the other hand, it is also true that the presence of the British in India too has changed India a great deal as the presence of the diasporic population has changed the US. That India needed a change was basically a British political requirement and they tried to do all they could in this respect. Politically speaking, it does not much matter how India changes an individual keeping in view the changes the British have wrought upon on a global scale. The kind of changes the Narrator undergoes is in perfect tune with sociological theories and there is nothing exceptional about such changes. However the idea of resisting India comes from the European traditional superiority complex and it is quite appreciable that after initial resistance the Narrator can overcome the dictates of a popular European image of India and submits to changes that are quite natural in a particular socio-cultural context.

However, in due course of time, Inder Lal, her host, and Maji, a spiritual woman, become her friends. Despite rampant poverty, human suffering, human callousness, heat and dust, the Narrator begins to discover meaning in the way people live together and safeguard themselves from loneliness and boredom. While sleeping on the rooftop with many known and unknown people she discovers herself and India together: "I have never known such a sense of communion. Lying like this under the open sky there is a feeling of being immersed in space.... How different from my often very lonely room in London with only my own walls to look at and my books to read" (52). She offers an image of India that seems to have the answer relating to the problems of fragmentation and alienation of human beings in the modern West and some parts of the westernized East.

This experience discernibly refers to the spiritual India in search of which Chid and two other European youths have come to during the same period. They all are frustrated as the spiritual India they are in search of is something that appears very illusive to them. They fall prey to cheats, diseases and go back home with their problems aggravating and at the same time reinforcing the old western image of India. The girl with them seems to be very frustrated. She came to find peace but "all I found was dysentery," is her candid confession. She holds a very negative view of India as a whole (21). The girl and her boy friend narrate how they became very interested in the Hindu religion after attending a lecture by a visiting swami in London. The popular image of spiritual India draws thousands of western visitors to this country. This team was so enchanted by the swami that they made a pilgrimage to the land and dropped themselves into real troubles. The man known as Chidananda, which is shortened to Chid, however thinks that the spirit of the Hindu scriptures is still manifest in the great temples of the South. He has lived like an Indian yogi, has tried to purify himself despite physical ailments and outward difficulties. He has almost nothing except his beads and his begging bowl. In practice, however, he thinks his plan has not worked well. On his pilgrimage to Amarnath he finds it impossible to live under trees and often he seeks shelter in cheap hotel rooms.

The Narrator in the beginning tries to realize how different India is now from her knowledge of India she has gathered from letters and memoirs. But when she describes Indian buses, the crowds and the landscape of India, the broiling sky, distances and dust, *hijra* dance, etc., modern India does not seem to have anything new to offer to the foreigners. To her, India is still a big country that accommodates many ideas and things, often incompatible in nature: "Town is used to accepting and merging all sorts of different elements—for instance, the grand old tombs of Mohammedan royalty on the one hand and the little grey *suttee* stones on the other. There are also the town's cripples, idiots, and resident beggars" (78-79). However, the Narrator accepts India, its people as they are and finally

decides to stay in an *ashram* to give birth to her baby, a cross-cultural product.

INDIAN RESPONSE TO THE BRITISH

Although *Heat and Dust* depicts the intercultural relationship and related issues at length, the novel has an overtly western point of view. It is Olivia's account in the first part of the novel, and the Narrator's in the second that count much. The first part again is the outcome of the Narrator's investigation which is mainly based on some letters. Therefore the reaction of Indian people to the British is by nature very limited in the narrative framework of the novel. In Olivia's story it is Olivia and some other Britishers who are in the centre; whereas in the second part it is the Narrator. In this narrative scheme India is more looked at by the European people than it looks at the white people. In the first story of the novel the Nawab is the only important Indian character. However, there are only some few instances where the Indian image of or response to the West or, to be more specific, to the British people, can be derived from.

The Nawab's reaction to the British has no reason to be encouraging. Both his power and position have been considerably crippled by the British sanctions. When he praises Douglas for the latter's ability in handling the *suttee* issue, he is apparently more hypocritical or ironical than actually he is by nature. At home the way he humiliates Dr. Sanders shows his real reactions to them. However with Harry he is always friendly. Here again he maintains a doubtful relationship with this Englishman; and it is Harry, who, knowingly or unknowingly, becomes instrumental to Nawab's successful operation in eloping with Olivia. Although perturbed very much by the pressure from Major Minnies, the Nawab speaks of the British in general to Harry and Olivia: "How different from these terrible orientals. Olivia, do you also hate and despise orientals? Of course you do. And you are right I think. Because we are very stupid people with feelings that we let others trample on and hurt to their hearts content. English people are so lucky they have no feelings at all" (144-45). The Nawab understandably does not hold good opinion of the

British. His reactions are, of course, entirely personal and political. The kind of life he wants to enjoy is very much modern and he has all the European comforts at home. The Nawab knows about his own ends better in the same way his father knew. The British are his enemies and he can instigate his ill feeling toward them. While speaking to Olivia about the relationship between the British and his father, at the shrine he once again speaks of his view of the British: "Oh they were always very cunning people and knew which way to take out their advantage. They offered him the lands and revenues of Khatm and also the title of Nawab" (135-36). This opinion about the British in general does not match his personal relationship he maintains with Harry and the kind of relationship he apparently aspires for with Olivia. His attitude, therefore, can clearly be seen on two levels—political and personal. It is well worth noting that his political views do not interfere with his personal relationship with Harry and Olivia. Even if these two Britishers happen to be instrumental to his ulterior motives, when in distress, both of them receive from the Nawab full protection and security.

Inder Lal is not much happy with the Narrator's way of simple living: "It's not very comfortable for you, and quickly lowered his eyes as if afraid of embarrassing me" (7). The popular image of the British in India has somehow interfered with Inder's assessment of his guest. The British have left India long ago, but that the old values of the subjugated and notions about the British still dominate many quarters is a postcolonial reality. The Narrator is quick to guess: "It would have been easier for him if I had been like Olivia" (7). The Narrator too is conscious of this Indian reality: "I suppose we must look strange to them, and what must also be strange is the way we are living among them—no longer apart, but eating their food and often wearing Indian clothes because they are cooler and cheaper" (9). Inder Lal's own image of the British does not fit in when he comes across the Narrator. He wants to know why should people who have everything—motorcars, refrigerators—come here to such a place where there is nothing. And he is ashamed of the fact that "by

western standards, his house as well as his food and his way of eating it would be considered primitive, inadequate—indeed, he himself would be considered so because of his unscientific mind and ignorance of the modern world" (95-96). Inder Lal's assessment of himself and his attitude to the British are, in fact, realistic. The long drawn British rule, policies have their negative effects on the Indian people; the life and culture of the ruling class people become the standard before the common people and they begin to believe that anything other than those practised by the rulers is by nature negative. After the Norman Conquest, the Anglo-Saxon people too did the same mistake. The British effort to anglicize India has resulted in such fruits. Dr. Gopal, too, thinks that India is not a fit place for decent living. Dr. Gopal details and fortifies his arguments with a full list of ills that make life hell here. And he believes: "I think perhaps God never meant that human beings should live in such a place" (158). Incidentally, Dr. Gopal's views are almost similar to those presented by the Narrator's room-mate at S.M. Hostel in the beginning of the novel. The Nawab's nephew, Karim, and his wife, Kitty, are also the product of the same conviction. They find India not a suitable place for living. Knightsbridge has become their new address simply because they find England and the English culture and way of life more acceptable than what India can give them. Given an opportunity, Dr. Gopal too perhaps would opt for a life of an NRI. Seen India as a vast country these responses are by nature very limited and peripheral. The structure of the novel has no room for common man's response to the British.

SUMMING UP

It is a fact that *Heat and Dust*, after its publication, has created much heat and raised much dust in India. Many have openly criticized that Ruth Jhabvala's handling of the cross-cultural theme is not convincing. While commenting on *Heat and Dust* and *A Passage to India*, Chaman Nahal observes that there is a measure of racial chauvinism, which places the West on a better plane. Naturally Jhabvala's India is half medieval, half modern, more spiritual than real; and when

real, it is invariably scarred by poverty, beggars, cheats, urine, heat and dust. This may be a partially true picture, if magnified. But the Indians she portrays "probably dislike them as much as Jhabvala appears to do" (de Souza 258). Her India thus evokes antipathy among western readers and resentment among Indian counterparts and this is detrimental to race relations and cultural integration. Her characters, whether Indian or European, are not always necessarily the representatives of their respective cultures on the positive side. Their actions too often are far from convincing in the context of either one of the cultural modes. Often they are comical, or are viewed rather comically. Her overall handling of the issue does not take it to a better position; the popular age-old Western image of India remains almost unchanged. Pearl S. Buck's treatment of China in her novel, *The Good Earth* (1931), may make the issue clear. Poverty, beggars, dust all are there in Pearl's work, but the way she handles the issue adds a human touch to her work. It is not an attempt just to expose a country's sordid elements to add fuel to the western curiosity; it is a sincere feeling for a country suffering from maladies. It evokes empathy for humanity and not antipathy for backwardness. This is where Pearl Buck excels and Ruth Jhabvala fails. However, Ruth Jhabvala builds up our view of characters, not so much by telling about them as by showing them in different situations, and through each other's eyes. She makes it clear that the English way of seeing India is different from the Indians' view of themselves and within the English community there is also a range of attitudes. It may be noted that Ruth Jhabvala's depiction of India during the Raj is less concerned with depicting Indian reality, whereas the modern India gives more about India that somehow matches the traditional western image of India. Although the Narrator states that there has been a lot changes, but she relies more on the unchanged elements. Many critics have reasons to charge her of partiality and they are not always wrong.

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Other Issues and Non-issues

• JHABVALA'S INDIA - A POST-COLONIAL VIEW • FROM CENTRE TO PERIPHERY:
HIPPIES & SOLDIERS • LOVE AND CULTURE • REFERENCES

JHABVALA'S INDIA—A POST-COLONIAL VIEW

The West, no matter whether loves India or hates her, has produced a substantial amount of materials on and about India. Be it in the form of fiction, non-fiction or travelogue, the contributions often make a part to the already built up huge body of western discourse about the Orient. In recent times in India and other third countries counter discourses are amassing as against the western discourse. The attitude to bring everything western under scrutiny has been accommodated under what is known as 'Postcolonialism.' The theoretical position offered by it has become a handy instrument in this respect. Simply speaking, Postcolonialism is a broad umbrella term and it includes more than it excludes whenever an issue has something to do with the colonial connection or power relationship between the ruler and the ruled—literally and metaphysically. The term is very often confusing just because of the wide range of writings to which the label is being liberally applied. One simple answer to the problem is that postcolonial writings are those that have arisen out of experience resulting straight from contacts with the British or European empires in non-European countries. However postcolonial literature should be clearly distinguished from colonial literature. For the purpose, colonial writings are the kind of writings produced by authors who belonged to the colonizing power, or to put it differently, say, 'white writings' about India during the British Raj. For example, the Anglo-Indian writings

of the Raj era are 'colonial writings' or 'white writings.' Colonial writings, in a way, can act as backdrops highlighting the particular concerns of the postcolonial authors, who have, in various ways, responded to them philosophically with a view to offering an answer, or counter discourse to a position already established by the colonial power and philosophy. Bill Ashcroft's title—*The Empire Writes Back*—in a very clever way accommodates this aspect of the issue.¹ The obvious reference the title offers is to the way in which the old ruled are responding to the old ruling class, or to the methodology with which the colonized people are restructuring their every past and present associated with colonial politics.

However, Ruth Praver Jhabvala's position in this respect is a bit complicated. She is a white writer, and writing about India during the post-Independence era from the Indian soil. But seen from her own dislocated position, her choice of subjects, time and space, and the points of view offered by her, her writings, especially those about India, defy any rigidly particular theoretical choice. And simply because of this fluctuating nature it is difficult to put them in any one of the above categories—colonial or postcolonial writing. She seems to shift her position every now and then. The present novel, *Heat and Dust*, has two distinct time zones that cover both the British and the post-British India. Interestingly the novel, often seen as a rewriting of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, is mixed up together with some colonial and postcolonial concerns.

The problem of cultural encounter, or cross-cultural interaction, i.e. Indo-British relationship in the present context, is one of the major issues of colonial and postcolonial conditions. It is because of the expansion of empire that direct contact and relationship between India and England became a historical reality. The British India of *Heat and Dust* amply records the British activities and the kind of relationship with India and the Indian people they maintained while in the country. The major British figures in the novel are Douglas Rivers, Mr. Crawfords, Dr. Saunders, Major Minnies and their women folk. The kind of attitude Douglas has to the country

is the typical attitude often associated with a British *burra sahib* posted in India with some specific colonial assignments. He never has the slightest doubt about his position and authority in India; his is the last word, and that his subjects are no better than "a pack of rogues." There is no doubt about the fact that he is industrious and talented; and all his talent and industry are invested for the British imperial cause and the man Douglas is nowhere to be found except only rarely when he is a little intimate with Olivia. The philosophy of colonialism has adversely affected both India and the Britishers in India. Interestingly, these people do not seem to be aware of this reality; they are all busy managing their estate with full confidence. The sense of superiority is, in fact, the common factor that binds almost all of them, except Olivia, and to some extent Major Minnies. Mrs. Saunders' reaction to her servants is very biased and harsh: "She said that these servants really were devils and that they could drive anyone crazy; that it was not stupidity on their part—on the contrary, they were clever enough when it suited their purposes—but it was all done deliberately to torment their masters." And it is not just the servants, "everything was like that, everywhere the same—the whole town, the lanes and bazaars...their heathen temples" (28). It is a fact that the servants employed by the British were all Indians and to them the Indian people in general were no better than servants. The British presence in India was philosophically substantiated on the basis of inaptitude of the Indian people; whereas Mrs. Saunders thinks the servants are no fools. What are Indian people then and what are they themselves? Ruth Jhabvala is able to picture these colonial contradictions quite realistically and critically in the novel. Any Indian author too would perhaps be glad to do that.

However, one basic aspect Ruth Jhabvala deliberately disregards to depict is the Indian political scene of the time, the theme of resistance, a decidedly important and major aspect of postcolonial concerns. There are—once when Douglas and Olivia were studying the inscription at the grave of Lt. A. Edwards, and later when Olivia was flying toward the palace—passing references to the Indian Mutiny. Nowhere else in the

novel the existence of Indian people as a whole and their reactions to the Raj have been duly touched upon. It is almost incredible the way the British ladies found it so easy partying, merry-making and arranging trips to Simla. One must not forget the incidents were taking place in the year 1923, just four years after the Amritsar Massacre. When Douglas fondly remembers dutiful Lt. Edwards who died in 1857, his memory cannot be so dull as to make him forget what happened in the year 1919, and its aftermath. In fact India between 1919 and 1923 was a turbulent place for the British, in no way safe for Mrs. Crawford's plan for holidaying. Surprisingly, if she wanted to go back to England, it was for the Indian heat and dust and for the unruly servants; not for political reasons. This is almost unrealistic. The resistance raised by the National Congress, the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Khilafat Movement, etc made the lives of many Douglasses out of tune, whereas Douglas in *Heat and Dust* is shown awfully busy with some dacoits and underground criminals only. Had there been adequate reference to the exact political situation in India, his observation of the graves could have been symbolically significant. But Ruth Jhabvala and her characters prefer to keep silent on the heat contemporary political situations created. The existence of the British in India cannot be alienated from the political unrest of the time, but in *Heat and Dust* she deliberately does this. Ruth Jhabvala's (and also Douglas') is in no way the true picture of the country. Only a faint protest of the Nawab, a rather questionable character—"Who is Major Minnies that he should say to me don't do this, and don't do that" (132)—remains a purely personal issue and it has nothing to do with any nationalistic end. The entire world is seen from a defective and purely British point of view. Despite suitable issues raised in the novel for that matter, this part of *Heat and Dust*, therefore, ceases to become a postcolonial work. It remains largely a specimen of the 'white writings' about India.

The second one, i.e. the post-Independence part of *Heat and Dust*, again brings in a white woman and depicts her reverse navigation into India. The British residential area, Civil

Lines, does not exist any more. The Government has taken over the old imperial buildings and they are now Government offices. Mr. Crawford's house incidentally has been turned into Inder Lal's office, Department of Disposal and Supplies, Douglas and Olivia's bungalow, houses the Water Board, the Municipal Health Department and a sub-post office. Both these houses have, like everything else, been divided and subdivided into many parts to suit many functions of the Indian government. Only the Medical Superintendent's house is kept intact but is converted into a travellers' rest house. Through these old offices, old bureaucratic practices and the English language, the traces of the Raj linger on in India. The presence of the Narrator, a British lady, in India may serve as occasional reminders to the past history.

The unnamed Narrator² knows she is neither Olivia, nor is the India she treads on Olivia's. Therefore she does not mind wearing Indian clothes, eating Indian foods and even living with the common people of India in alleys and bazaars. She learns Hindi for her own benefit unlike her grandfather Douglas who learnt Hindustani purely for the imperial reason. She has come to India with an altogether different purpose—not to rule, but to be ruled by the Indian way of life. She represents the post-war British generation. This postcolonial reality is something that even a highbrow lady like Mrs. Saunders cannot ignore now. The Narrator's contact with India and her experience here give some other aspects of India's postcolonial reality too. This part of the novel has some treatment of crises prevalent in the country, such as, unhealthy competitions in the office, rampant corruption, human suffering, etc. All these can be read as legacy of colonialism and are common in many Third World countries. Inder Lal more than once refers to the goings-on in his office: "There is a lot of intrigue and jealousy against him as the head of his department is favourably disposed towards him" (12). Dr. Gopal's assessment of India too is one of the perspectives on modern India: "you see our problem," he said again. "There has been no addition to the hospital for over twenty years. We don't have beds, we don't have staff or equipment" (112).

The way post-Independence India is struggling with multi-headed problems finds expression in the novel.

The problem of the affluent class of Indian population is of different nature. Thus, another important postcolonial reality is the emergence of a class, of which many are born in India but mentally so oriented as to prefer to settle abroad. Karim and Kitty represent that particular class. They live in Knightsbridge, England and are engaged in export-import business and thus reaching out India to the West. Be it their properties or Indian boutique clothes made exclusively of Indian materials—all come within the purview of their business. They have started a partnership with Keith and Doreen. Kitty's designs are based on the paintings of Ajanta. India is of course their home but "was becoming so impossible to live in that they had to stay mostly abroad" (98). It is the government bureaucracy they are mostly critical about: "try and explain that simple point to a Secretary of the Government of India who knows only one word which is no. In the end foreign investors got discouraged and had gone elsewhere" (98). And again, "Whenever we go to Khatm, Kitty gets a stomach upset due to the water. And of course there is no proper doctor there so what are we to do, we have to get back to the hotel in Bombay as quickly as possible" (100-101). However, Karim knows he is Indian and "wants to serve the country and all that" (100); but Kitty's bad stomach makes all his good intentions futile. Karim, Kitty and too some extent Dr. Gopal too are culturally more colonized than many ordinary Indians are. For them India is not a fit place for decent living. Dr. Gopal, who lives in India, too, thinks in terms of many a nonresident Indian: "I think perhaps God never meant that human beings should live in such a place" (158). However, it is a fact that India, despite plagues and poverty, has remained an overpopulated country for centuries. It is only after the British education and exposures to the West, many have begun to think in terms of "crossing the black sea," which was a taboo for Indians for ages. Karim and Kitty and thousands of them in the United Kingdom and the United States are just

living examples of new realities during the post-war and the post-decolonization era.

Heat and Dust, therefore, belongs to a mixed category of writings. In some parts Ruth Jhabvala continues the tradition many Anglo-Indian authors initiated and E.M. Forster further refined; and in some others she tries to portray the Independent India. Her perspectives, although often biased and traditional in many ways, highlight some aspects that are no doubt real.

FROM CENTRE TO PERIPHERY: HIPPIES AND SOLDIERS

“Among the twentieth century major human concerns migration is one key area where human drive is easily discernable on a global scale. The major transmission curve manifestly moves from the so-called underdeveloped countries to the so-called developed countries, or in other words, from the East to the West, from the colonized to the colonizers, and so on. A great body of the twentieth century fiction receptively accommodates this new historical and human phenomenon. Here again fact and fiction merge together—the diasporic literature seems to dominate the field now” (H-Shihan 206). However, Ruth Jhabvala as an author of cultural interface has a complicated position as she herself has adequate experience of a multiple diaspora. To her credit she has a few novels and short stories that illustrate some Europeans’ (and also Americans’) cultural navigation to India. The routing in her works interestingly exemplifies a perspective in reverse to the popular trend—i.e. from Europe and the US to India, and not the popular way round. The frustrations and aspirations of the displaced Europeans in India occur passim in her novels and stories. *Esmond (Esmond in India)*, *Judy*, *Clarissa* and the *Hochstadts (A Backward Place)*, *Major Minnies (Heat and Dust)* have adequate knowledge of India’s cultural patterns, its history and philosophy. Lee, Margaret and Evie (*A New Dominion*), *Chid (Heat and Dust)*, and many others in Jhabvala’s stories, such as *Daphne* and *Helga* in “A Spiritual Call” (*A Stronger Climate*) actually forsake their own religion and try to embrace India’s spiritual cultural tradition with a view to reshaping their lives under changed circumstances.

Judy (A Backward Place) and the *Narrator (Heat and Dust)* find in the Indian social life a sense of togetherness and belonging, the kind of which is almost alien to European life style. A kind of spiritual awareness too is, to a great extent, responsible for their decision to come and stay on in India.

It can be argued that their attachment toward India has its origin more in their own culture rather than in the Indian environment and spiritualism. The *Narrator’s* candid statement makes this issue further clear: “that many of us are tired of the materialism of the West, and even if we have no particular attraction towards the spiritual message of the East, we come here in the hope of finding a simpler and more natural way of life” (95). This view can further be substantiated by the western hippie influx on the Indian shores. In the 1960s and 1970s there was a sudden growth of interest in India and Indian culture among young people from Europe and America. The hippie trail to India consisted of mainly middle-class youth, who felt dissatisfied with the callous cash nexus of the western society in which they had grown up and were looking for a simpler, more spiritually satisfying alternative mode of life in the eastern hemisphere. They tried to break away from the rat race and look for what eastern religion and philosophy could do for them. This highlights at least one bankruptcy of the post-war western culture—the need for less concentration on a totally money oriented life-style. This particular development can be seen simultaneously with a sudden growth of drug culture on the one hand, and mushrooming of such organizations as 3HO, SYDA Foundation, Zen Society, Sivananda Ashram, Aurville Associations, Yoga Society of San Francisco, Blue Mountain Meditation Center, Divine Life Mission, California Institute of Asian Studies, etc in different parts of America and Europe on the other. Those who could not migrate to the eastern world physically, tried to attain a kind of cultural migration through their association with these societies and Indian *gurus* in their homelands. Rightly or wrongly, the practice of yoga and the use of drug together became a high fashion among these hippie bands. Expanding one’s mind through meditation and religion was thought to be

favourably conditioned by intake of drugs like marijuana and LSD. Pop stars fuelled up the interests further, with groups like the Beatles coming to India to meditate under the guidance of Indian *gurus*. The movement has often been termed as a positive gesture: the “movement from LSD to Eastern religion as a conversion from confusion and self-destruction to clarity and health.” (Cox 32)

In *Heat and Dust*, Ruth Jhabvala's hippies—Chid, his compatriots, a man and his girlfriend, the unfortunate group of Europeans in the Hostel 'A' in the novel—all should better be seen as cultural products of the post-war West. In Jhabvala they are frequent, as many as one can see white people chanting *Hare Krishna Hare Ram* in an ISCON programme. Many of them fail to achieve something worth the while; but their cultural and physical migration is a reality. The vast physical reality of India often kindles a kind of spiritual awakening in them and this, in a sense, strengthens their tie with India. All of them at least try to negotiate India culturally, at least with one aspect of its diverse cultures. As against the vast popular westward wave of migration, this reverse navigation looks rather thin in its volume; but even then the phenomenon reflects at least a minority group of Europeans and Americans firmly negotiating an alternative mode and meaning of life in a so-called 'backward place.' In any case whatsoever, Ruth Jhabvala's works are more than they just confirm Europe's literary interest in India; they invariably exemplify one aspect of western perspectives on India too.

In *Heat and Dust*, during the Raj era a big troop of the British administrators and soldiers was shown settled in Satipur, a small town in central India. It is difficult to include these people under the term migration. They were part of the British administration and it was because of the British cause they were sent to India for a specific period of time as part requirement of colonial policy. Although examples of 'forced migration' to India, or 'the dumping ground,' as it was often called, were not rare, they were better known as expatriates, and not emigrants. A strong sense that they were bearing the British flag made them out-posted British soldiers than anything

else. Their stay in India was a political obligation and going back home was almost guaranteed. A sense of rootlessness, which often torments the migrants, did not make them suffer; if they suffered it was because of the hostile Indian conditions they lived in. Many of them, e.g. Major Minnies, opt for staying in India and accepting a life of residual British after 1947. In Olivia's case also, the 'staying on' is, to some extent, very close to a deliberate decision to settle in a foreign country. Both the cases are a matter of choice mixed up with circumstances and never forced from outside. Major Minnies' theoretical position is very uncertain about his own participation in Indian life style. His position is no doubt contradictory—he loves India and he tries to resist it; he tries to resist India and he stays on at Ooty for good. This was of course one of the attitudes of the Anglo-Indian community as a whole.

Seen against this 'inside-outsider' group, the position of Karim and Kitty, Nawab's nephew and daughter-in-law, gives the other side of the coin too. People like Inder Lal and Dr. Gopal, if suitable occasion comes, would like to join Karim and Kitty and add to the Indian population abroad. They, of course, exemplify the popular trend. And both the groups together—one from the West to India, from centre to periphery, and the other from India to the West, from periphery to centre—testify to the fact that no culture, no matter Indian or western, can satisfy all its members equally. A balanced synthesis, as envisaged by such great minds as Swami Vivekananda, Romain Rolland and many others in all parts of the world may perhaps help both the cultures and the peoples of both the hemispheres. The novel thus predicts globalization of culture and some of other cultural concerns that were beginning to form their shapes and were soon to gain momentum. The possibility of a multicultural reality is now already a serious trend in many parts of the world.

LOVE AND CULTURE

Fiction of all ages and all countries has frequently treated love and sex and related matters with greater interests than any other single subject. *Heat and Dust* too has full contribution to these evergreen elements. The treatment here goes beyond

usual geographical and cultural boundaries and thus adds dimensions to the subject. In the centre of the novel there are two British women, Olivia and the Narrator, who get bewitched by Indian spirituality, sensuality and also sexuality in their respective times. However, the treatment of love in its purest form has been overshadowed by the sensational acts carried out by the two British women. What makes this issue mostly striking is that Ruth Jhabvala, in place of focusing her attention on the relationship between Douglas and Olivia, or Inder Lal and Ritu, shifts it on the Nawab-Olivia and Narrator-Inder affairs, and thus making it clearly an issue dislocated from the usual location. This is exactly where the novel gets extra mileage. Otherwise the novel has all the interests of a sensational work.

The so-called hidden sensuality of India and the overpowering sexuality of the Nawab of Khatm attract Olivia to venture outside the recommended confines of codes of conduct prevalent in both the societies. An almost similar incident some fifty years later with the Narrator and Inder Lal further adds to this particular theme an extra significance. It must be noted that during the Raj physical proximity with the natives of India has been almost abhorred by the British. The first case has surely upset the British moral standards and thus has proved detrimental to the concern of the ruling class in India. And even after the independence of India, although such incidents apparently cease to have political implications, they are not very easy-going affairs in both the societies. Both the cases are purely a matter of personal choice and do not abide by the prevalent moral codes of the societies involved.

The clash between the codes of conduct and the individual aspiration has its origin somewhere in the life-style of the participants. The kind of environment Olivia lives in does not assure her of a life worth living up to her expectations. She feels fairly bored all alone. Douglas is too busy to give her company, and Olivia has almost nothing to do all through the day. The codes of conduct she is expected to abide by are more political than cultural in nature and strictures within the Civil Lines and strangeness outside coupled with Indian heat and

dust narrow down her life almost to insignificance which she detests. Both geographically and culturally, thus, Olivia finds herself rather suffocated. Secondly, her natural expectation of having a baby is also very strong and frustrated for a long period of time. Therefore, Olivia needed an avenue to channelize her expectations and frustrations. Her individual desires strongly make way through a hazardous path, which goes against the British imperialism in India. Her attitudes to India, therefore, appear quite out of tune with those of her compatriots. The Nawab's position is no better. The British restrictions on his power and income has frustrated him, his personal conjugal life is in a bad shape, and by establishing a relationship with Douglas's wife he could satisfy himself both ways—finding an emotional solution and directing his vengeance against the British by seducing one of the white women.³ Olivia's escapade has been severely criticized by her own people. It takes generations to reconcile with the scandalous affair. What seemed blasphemous to Tessie and Beth has finally become a story of romantic escapade to the parents of the Narrator. In India too the situation is almost similar: "All those people are dead, and even if any of them should be left alive somewhere, there is no one to be interested in their doings" (12). Karim too, jokingly dismisses his uncle's 'adventures' as one done by a 'naughty boy.'

In the Narrator's case, too, the traditional injunctions fail to restrict her movement. First, she lives alone, far away from her home; secondly, she, for some reasons, finds Indian people friendly and the Indian way of living together much more emotionally fulfilling than her own; and thirdly, she is determined to explore exactly what happened to Olivia through her own experience of similar circumstances. Therefore, her intimacy with Inder Lal is not just coincidental; rather it is the Narrator who occupies herself in a situation for herself with a determination without much surge of emotionality involved in it. Inder Lal's situation too is not very far away from the Nawab's. An already perturbed man in his conjugal and professional life, he too needed some physical and emotional respite and space. The Narrator's advances just accelerate his

uncared for needs, which he could not perhaps achieve through his own initiative. However, the way Satipur people seem to ignore the extramarital affairs between the Narrator and Inder Lal, and also between the Narrator and Chid, may not be all realistic in terms of the place and time in which such incidents take place. Satipur is basically a semi-urban Indian habitation and in the 1970s such incidents are expected to create some ripples in society than is narrated in the story. Some extent of urbanization and westernization is perhaps no proper excuse to make such things tolerable to common people. If Ruth Jhabvala wants to convince readers that westernization of India may make extramarital love a smooth affair, she is wrong. Even today's western society too may often react unfavourably to such cases. The US President Bill Clinton and Monica scandal may authenticate the western reservations. The attitudes to the issue from the time of Nawab-Olivia to that of Narrator-Inder are understandably different; but the difference is one of degree, not of kind.

However, the western notion on Indian sexuality itself is perverted; so is the Indian notion of the western sexuality. What Mrs. Saunders thinks of Indian servants—"It's not good to let them see you in bed.... But you don't know what goes on in their heads" (119)—is for them a commonly accepted notion about the Indian in general. Even Major Minnies too recommends a relationship from a safe distance. The Indian notion of the West, on the other hand, is no better. On the one hand, Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra*, the images on the walls of Indian temples, caves, and the ancient stories, and on the other, western popular films, photographs and the behaviour of the couples visiting India have just further aggravated the popular notions of both the camps. Both the sides, therefore, love to imagine in negative terms about the other halves and none is impartial and realistic on the issue.

Bertrand Russell comments that there are three extra-rational activities in modern world—religion, war and love. However, love is not anti-rational, that is to say, a reasonable man may reasonably rejoice in its existence. Society, however, has its own demands, and the prevalent code is expected to be

honoured by individuals. When a man and a woman come together on the basis of intimacy, there is an urge to create an emotional space between them. What kind of bond existed between Olivia and the Nawab, or that between the Narrator and Inder? Are they Platonic attachment, ardent love, or are their liaisons just charged with physical desires without serious emotional qualities which did not attain any kind of satisfactory goal, or did they just come together out of some compulsion, or were they just excuses for sexual gratification? The involvement of Olivia with the Nawab seems to be out of sheer boredom. Inder's case is more or less similar. The Narrator undertakes experimentation. Neither from an individual point of view, nor from social, are both the relationships satisfactory. They are frustrating and almost meaningless. Olivia loves Douglas, this might be true; but her boredom and desire for a baby do not socially justify her involvement with the Nawab to the degree she goes. Her attachment to the Nawab is again genuine; but she aborts the baby possibly by him. On the other hand, the Narrator also fails to be convincing. She comes to India, befriends Inder more rationally than emotionally, gets pregnant by him and finally decides to get her baby—all these are rather cheaper stuff for a sensational novel. At the core she never feels for Inder Lal and never thinks in terms of a lasting relationship. It must be remembered that cultures do not pose any problem on their way toward intimate relationships. Individual desires get the upper hand in both the cases. However, as mature agents of cultural interaction, both the characters are disappointing for no cultures recommend sex without proper love between two individuals. Furthermore, the very structure of the novel becomes more of a hindrance than help to the understanding of the characters and the situations.

In addition to these heterosexual relationships there are other forms of sexual relations treated in the novel. Ruth Jhabvala is not an outspoken novelist, especially if it is about sex. Though never uttered properly, it seems very probable the Nawab and Harry maintain a sort of homosexual attachment. Ruth Jhabvala does not depict their behavioural pattern directly.

Conclusions have to be drawn by the readers if at all the relationship is based on homosexuality. With the depiction of sex there are some metaphors for sexlessness also. Reference to the *hijras*, eunuchs, serves this aspect. Both the periods in the novel have the demonstrations of *hijra* dances. However, neither homosexuality nor sexlessness counts much in the narrative of the novel. It is the affairs of Olivia-Nawab and Narrator-Inder that figure more significantly and Ruth Jhabvala's focus too rests on these pairs. These two relationships can be interpreted in terms of individual, social and also political proportions. The irony is that sexually the most immoral acts are taking place in *Satipur*, literally speaking, a habitation of the virtuous women. It is the foreign elements that make this otherwise virtuous place immoral. The considerations on the basis of colour give these relationships an overtly political significance. Seductions of British women by Indian men have of course political message that indirectly may suggest the response of the dominated to the dominant when subjugation becomes an unavoidable reality and the subjugated need psychological relief by any means whatsoever (Buxwallah). What type of India is it where such things are taking place? Obviously, it is de-Indianized India. The Nawab, Inder Lal, Dr. Gopal, Karim and Kitty represent this new India. *Satipur* remains almost the same, but all *saties*, virtuous women, are gone; old women like Maji move forward and backward in the periphery. Things fall apart; centre can hold neither love nor healthy sex, neither in the Indian way nor in the western.

NOTES

1. Bill Ashcroft, Garath Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989; London: Routledge, 2002) 219.—“But for all the vituperation and heat of the last decade few would deny that the concept of the post-colonial has been one of the most powerful means of re-examining the historical past and re-configuring our contemporary world-wide cultural concerns.”
2. <http://www.mouthshut.com>, in its summary, has given the Narrator a name, i.e. Anne. However, I have failed to come across the name anywhere in the text. I quote here a few lines from the essay: “The author has crafted 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.” I admit, I am not aware if the film version of *Heat and Dust* has referred to the Narrator as Anne.

3. Boxwallah, *An Eastern Backwater* (London: Melrose, 1916) 288.—“When men of conquered race mate with women of the conquering race, the prestige of the latter is lowered as if by a defeat on the battlefield. The European feels himself humbled by such unions, and the other hugs the knowledge that he has put a subtle affront upon the European.”

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6

Men and Women in
Heat and Dust

• A FEW WORDS • DOUGLAS RIVERS, OLIVIA RIVERS, THE NAWAB, MAJOR MINNIES,
HARRY, NARRATOR, INDER LAL • SUMMING UP

A FEW WORDS

Heat and Dust, incidentally, is peopled with characters from two different worlds—India and England. They are, therefore, culturally different. The difference is once again accentuated by temporal factor, i.e. from Olivia to the Narrator, or from the Nawab to Inder, it is almost a gap of some fifty years that temporally separates them. This is where the novel ceases to become a novel of a particular region, nation and time. In her essay, “An experience of India,” Ruth Jhabvala notes that to “live in India and be at peace one must to a very considerable extent become Indian and adopt Indian attitudes, habits, beliefs, assume if possible an Indian personality.” Seen from this observation many of her western characters during the British India fail to achieve this goal. One must note that the observation, if at all valid, is valid during the post-Independence India only. The British came to India to change the country and change their future, and apparently resisted change in them. This attitude gives validity to the rigid and uncompromising British characters she portrays in the Novel. They are more real under a specific circumstances, be it Douglas or Major Minnies, or any other British character for that matter.

Ruth Jhabvala’s Indian male characters—both during the 1920s and the 1970s—are in many respects not realistically portrayed. Neither the Nawab nor Inder Lal for that matter

represents proper perspectives one is expected to do as Indian. The Nawab is an irresponsible leader of his community, hated both by the British openly, and in secret, by the Indians as well. His time was a politically turbulent time and it was not possible for any Indian to be neutral. But Ruth Jhabvala deliberately remains silent on the issue and makes her people less real in the particular political context. Inder Lal too fails to convince. He is rather an effeminate type of character. He cannot lead anybody; he is always led—first by his mother and then by the Narrator. Seriousness is something that he seriously lacks.

However, it seems that women characters in *Heat and Dust* are more interesting than the male characters. The women—from the main characters, Olivia and the Narrator, to the minor ones, such as Beth Crawford and Maji, are all strong persons, who are not afraid to assert themselves, even if it means going against the conventions of the time. The strength and figure of the Narrator is much better than Inder, and Inder finds it difficult to keep pace with this lady while walking together (49). But somehow none of the two major women characters tell us much about what sort of ideals they represent, which passions move them or how they are reflecting their respective times. Olivia is clearly a neurotic woman who does not know what she wants and the nameless Narrator is just observing the time passing by in India and trying to understand why Olivia ‘sidetracked’ from her normal path to opt for a passionate love affair with a local prince. But such love story is really sensational and silly. No characters or nothing in this novel offer a striking or daring cultural perspective which is very much expected in a work like Jhabvala’s *Heat and Dust*. Attempts are made here to look at individual characters in terms of his/her socio-cultural contexts and circumstances in which he/she is portrayed.

DOUGLAS RIVERS

One of the main male characters in the first story of *Heat and Dust* is Douglas Rivers, Olivia’s husband. Born in India, Douglas maintains the line of generations serving faithfully for the British colonial project in India. An ICS officer, he

“worked like a Trojan and never ceased to be calm and controlled, so that he was very much esteemed both by his colleagues and by the Indians” (1). A very hardworking man, Douglas is used to get up early in the morning and work till late evening. Olivia also observes his qualities: “She had always loved him for these qualities—for his imperturbability, his English solidness and strength; his manliness” (116). Obviously, morally a most suitable soldier of the British Empire, Douglas has a matching physical and moral stature—“He was upright and just” (1). This justness is, of course, his second wife Tessie’s estimate. But in many ways Douglas is an embodiment of the British colonial ideology in action. He knows the Hindustani language very well, and knows well how mastery over the cultural components of the ruled can best be utilized to reinforce the colonial hold. It is a supreme talent of an administrator like Douglas, who does not try to appreciate the niceties of a language, but discovers a new field for its function and application: “It is the only language in which you can deliver deadly insults with the most flowery courtesy” (38). Any Indian will be ashamed of defining an Indian language in terms of a purely derogatory application. But this is exactly what Warren Hastings wanted. He believed that the ruler must know the culture of the ruled so that the ruling class could have better hold over the subjugated majority. In Douglas’ case, therefore, knowledge and power are correlated; mastery over knowledge becomes a tool for political supremacy. He all along remains every inch a colonial *burra sahib*: “It was almost as if Douglas were playing a musical instrument of which he had entirely mastered the stops” (37). However, despite his apparent principles, he does not mind receiving gifts from his subjects: The rich Indian people often come to pay him their respect and the visit would invariably bring him some offerings like “baskets of fruits and trays of sweetmeats and pistachio nuts” (37).

A product of colonial philosophy, Douglas, therefore, is more a type than an individual. In his airs there is a kind of mechanical look. Maybe, he lacks the individual human touch in him; but he appears to be quite a considerate man too.

Although he personally does not like the Nawab much, he does not mind when he comes to know that the Nawab has visited Olivia: “She was lonely, and it was decent of the Nawab to have called on her” (19). He could be rigid too. Despite Olivia’s coaxing he refuses to accept Nawab’s second invitation for dinner only because his colleagues and friends, the Crawfords, are not invited. The very next moment he feels for Olivia—“He watched her turn back into the house; she was in her kimono and looked frail and unhappy: “‘I’m a brute,’ he thought to himself all day” (20).

When Olivia, after watching the grave of the Saunders’ baby, gets emotionally disturbed, Douglas soothes her: “He had to forget his files for that one evening and devote himself entirely to her” (25). No doubt he loves her very much: “he hugged her tighter and could hardly stifle a small cry—as if it were too much happiness for him to have her there in his arms, flooded and shining in Indian moonlight” (26). But so far as the conjugal relationship is concerned, he seems to be very faltering, at least outwardly: “Inarticulate by nature, sometimes he reached such a pitch of high emotion that he felt he had to express it: but his feelings were always too strong for him and made him stutter” (85). Too busy with other things he does not have much time to give to Olivia. He cannot disown his responsibility in Olivia’s frustrations. He does not mind asking Olivia to go to Simla for a change when he should know that it is his company that could restore her to normalcy. He obviously fails to look into the very innermost desires of his wife and cares more for the pat on his back from his seniors. However, there is no doubt about the fact that he loves Olivia and trusts her. But his feelings are very silent; they often misguide Olivia and others. Even when Olivia’s escapade is discovered, he allows no one to guess his feelings. He too, otherwise a very responsible officer, fails to judge his wife. Marcia tries to give her estimate of Douglas, which is not much in tune with the impressions he produces otherwise: “Marcia never could understand what Olivia had seen in Douglas, as far as she, Marcia, was concerned, he was just a stick and she was not in the least surprised that Olivia should

have got bored to death with him and gone off with someone more interesting" (179). Olivia only for once brings charge against him for his incapacity to impregnate her.

However, in the novel, Douglas is not much elaborated as an individual character. He remains a one-dimensional personality throughout the novel. His interaction with India and Indian affairs too are only referred to rather than actually detailed in the novel. His colleagues never give their estimate of Douglas as an individual much. More than anything else he remains all along a British officer determined to carry out his royal responsibilities.

OLIVIA RIVERS

There is no doubt that Olivia Rivers is the central character in *Heat and Dust*. The Narrator too makes this point quite clear in the opening chapter: "But this is not my story, it is Olivia's as far as I can follow it" (2). This statement settles the matter. The scheme of the novel itself originates from the Narrator's project to reconstruct the story of this rebel lady, Narrator's step-grandmother.

Olivia comes to India after her marriage with Douglas Rivers. The Narrator observes about Olivia: "When she first came here, she may really have been what she seemed; a pretty young woman, rather vain, pleasure-seeking, a little petulant.... She couldn't have remained the same person she had been. But there is no record of what she became later, neither in our family nor anywhere else as far as I know. More and more I want to find out; but I suppose the only way I can is to do the same she did—that is, stay on" (160). Therefore, what we gather of this lady is mostly the observation of the Narrator, which she assembles from Olivia's letters and partly from her personal experience.

The marriage of Olivia and Douglas was, by no means, a loveless one. The Indian heat has kept Olivia mostly indoors, making her lead a life of seclusion and utter loneliness. Olivia seems to be aware of the fact where her loneliness might lead her to: "Just sitting inside her house and imagining things. I don't want to become like Mrs. Saunders. But if I go on sitting

here by myself, I shall" (130). The only people she and her husband entertain themselves with are the Crawfords and the Saunders. Olivia does not personally like them much and her confinement within the Civil Lines and a narrow friend circle makes her almost frustrated soon. Her frustration is further intensified by her strong desire to have a baby of her own, that too remains unfulfilled. The arrival of the Nawab in her life at this moment of time is more than a welcome relief. At the dinner party she "felt she had, at last in India, come to the right place" (15) and instantly got interested in the Nawab, and she "realized that here at last was one person in India to be interested in her the way she was used to" (17). She is impressed with the arrangements at the palace and also the way the Nawab manages everything. Since then she becomes a friend of the Nawab and unknowingly begins to drift away from her own folk and footing.

It is not that Olivia does not love Douglas; she does it extremely. But the way Douglas keeps himself busy with his official responsibilities, and the way her desire for a baby has remained unfulfilled count much for her departure from the permitted borderline. In the Nawab she finds a real man and gradually she becomes a victim to his personal charm and circumstances created by him. The most critical part of her character is that she knowingly loves two persons. She loves Douglas, and she needs the love of the Nawab too. At the time when Douglas leaves for his office "She waved to him for as long as she could still see him. A servant held the door open for her to go back into the house, but she stayed looking out a bit longer. Not in the direction in which Douglas had left, but the other way; towards Khatm, towards the palace" (117). Her affairs with the Nawab take a definite shape; she ventures to get physically involved with him. Once her pregnancy detected, she is dismissed by all of her kinsmen and accepted by the Nawab. This happens so suddenly that the incident scandalizes the entire British community. Everyone determines to forget her for good.

By nature Olivia loves to dress herself well and be praised by people. She loves others' attention: "She was glad to think

that soon she would be wearing them and people would see her" (14) and she loves flowers too. "Olivia was by no means a snob but she was aesthetic..." (26); and she loves to play the piano. But there is a bit of the neurotic about her. Her emotion often overpowers her rationality and, therefore, she behaves rather contradictorily. Seeing the grave of the Saunders' baby she gets emotionally disturbed and longs to go back to England. Douglas assures her that in course of time she too will feel comfortable in India. Once she even quarrels with Douglas. When Douglas tells her that the Indian heat is telling on her, she protests and tries to reason her discomfort: "Because I'm not...getting pregnant.... She longed to be pregnant; everything would be all right then" (117). The next moment she becomes calm and quiet. Olivia's expectation for a baby and her frustration in not getting one are genuine, and this particular feminine aspect of her character is universal.

What make Olivia different from many others of her clan are her temperament and also her attitude to India. She holds drastically opposite views on India and the Indian culture. When all of the British people suspect that the Nawab is the ringleader of a band of dacoits, she does not believe it. Rather she tries her best to prove that the Nawab is a gentleman and he is as good as any Englishman too. On the *suttee* issue she makes her point quite clear. She tries to philosophize her stand: It is natural, "I mean, to want to go with the person you care for most in the world. Not to want to be alive any more if he wasn't" (59); or it is "a noble idea," as she tries to drive home. There is no room to consider if the issue is an example of savagery as is claimed by Dr. Saunders or a "noble idea" as Olivia claims. The point is that it upholds Olivia's standpoint and temperament definitely. She has respect for a foreign custom. She even goes further: "And quite apart from religion, it is their culture and who are we to interfere with anyone's culture especially an ancient one like theirs" (58). Rather unknowingly, Olivia raises a very fundamental question and that goes against the very structure of the British imperialism in India. However, this is not much clear if this is Olivia's

standing location, or it is one of her post-infatuation stands. We do not have much option to verify it.

The delineation of Olivia, however, does not always seem convincing. The way she tries to fluctuate faithfully between Douglas and the Nawab is not acceptable to any of the cultures involved here. And her boredom does not justify the kind of a step she undertakes. She has come to India with Douglas, but never is she interested in his works and responsibilities. She may have sympathy for Indian culture; but when it comes to a real test, she fails. She permits to terminate her pregnancy because of her apprehension about the colour of the baby and the hair supposing that the baby could be Nawab's. Dr. Saunders finds "something rotten" (170) in her character and the Narrator too describes her as a pretty young woman, rather vain, pleasure seeking, and a little petulant. The last part of her life remains an unknown story except that she passed her last life somewhere in the mountains almost all alone again.

THE NAWAB

The Nawab of Khatm, a small Indian state, in many ways outshines all other characters including Douglas. He remains in the centre of action during the British period, and is perhaps more elaborated than Douglas. He has two major problems before him—first, the British administration in India has drastically crippled him, both politically and financially; and secondly, he is quite unhappy in his conjugal life. Major Minnies has an estimate of the Nawab: "In some ways...he is a fine man. He has some fine qualities—and if only these were combined with a little self-restraint, self discipline.... But somehow I admire him" (148). And again: "He is a man who needs action—a large arena" (149). His state Khatm has neither interesting ruins nor is it a hunting country and he, therefore, is in a tight corner without a fitting income. However, he tries his best to retain his old aristocracy despite the heavy odds thrown upon him. Like many Indian rulers, the Nawab is fond of entertaining the Europeans. After his father's death, at the age of fifteen he became the ruler of his

state and since then he is in a disadvantageous position in not having much to entertain them with. However, whatever little he has is enough to bring to light the amount of luxury the Indian aristocracy has been used to. Olivia's eyes glow as she is led into the dining room and sees beneath the chandeliers the long table laid with a Sèvres dinner service, silver, crystal, flowers, candelabras, pomegranates, pineapples, and little golden bowls of crystallized fruits.

By nature a lively man, the Nawab is the most debated and therefore a fascinating character in the novel. Once on the face of angry Douglas, Olivia says about the Nawab: "he is a fascinating man.... And terribly handsome" (149). Marcia later meets the Nawab and she frankly seconds Olivia's view. To her too he appears more interesting than Douglas (179). Harry, an Englishman, has all along remained a friend of the Nawab. He has not a single word against him to utter. Harry observes that he is very "manly and strong" and comments "When he wants something, nothing must stand in his way" (34). He knows that kind of pressures from all around is subduing the Nawab and Harry has a mixture of admiration and pain for him.

Douglas, quite predictably, has almost everything contrary to say about the Nawab. With certain accent of reservation he says, "He is strong, forceful character," and at the same breath he adds, he is a "menace to himself, to us, and to the wretched inhabitants of his wretched little state. The worst type of ruler—the worst type of Indian—you can have" (148). Seen against the assessments of Major Minnies, Olivia and Harry the view of Douglas appears rather prejudiced. Douglas's observation is of course politically conditioned and, maybe, he knows better the kind of threat this kind of man can be to the stability of the British in India. Or it may be that, a practical administrator as he is, his assessment is free from all romanticizing. The British had once to make compromise with Nawab's father, Amanullah Khan. Secondly, Douglas has no doubt that this man is very much involved in the underworld criminal activities and he knows this more than many who know the Nawab from a distance. With a large estate and a big retinue to

maintain, the Nawab perhaps has no other options than resorting to criminal kind of activities. Olivia loves him and cannot just believe that otherwise quite a gentleman he can have such a nasty nexus. The Nawab himself never gives a direct answer to Olivia's question as to his reactions to the allegations. Only once he rejects the 'slander' outright, and when Olivia herself finds him talking with the robbers at the Baba Firdaus shrine, the Nawab only vaguely replies to her, which she cannot read properly. It is in the form of a self assessment: "Of course I would like to be a fine and noble soul—it is necessary for all of us to strive for this—but also I know how far I am from such a goal. Yes very far indeed" (135). Olivia takes this for a gentleman's confession and such confessions are very general in nature and valid for many people. Olivia takes this gesture of the Nawab as more of a genuine and honest quality in him and this, in fact, raises her estimate of the Nawab.

Whatever his character may be, the Nawab is a fascinating man. He has the gift of the gab and a charming personality. Olivia is too naïve to see what is in the depth of such a mind. It is obvious that what he does, he does out of frustrations. And to satisfy his ego he can go to any extent. He can humiliate Dr. Saunders and can derive some amount of sadistic pleasure; and even worse, he can use Olivia too to take revenge of the British injustice on him: "Wait till my son is born, he said; then they'll laugh from the other side of their mouths" (161). He can be so un-chivalrous and ruthless at times. It may be noted that whatever he does, he does it for his own interests and he is never worried about the fate of the country in the hands of the foreign rulers. The old aristocracy, until and unless suffered by the British, has more often than not upheld the British cause. The Nawab's case is not much different. While in the graveyard roaming with Olivia Douglas makes this aspect clear: "Unlike the neighbour at Khatm, our friend's great-grandfather, who remained 'loyal': after making sure which was the best side to remain loyal to. That's how he got his English title and all his other parks. Clever chap" (106). The conditions of all Nawabs and Maharajas were further worsened since 1920 onwards; for by then their sovereignty

was threatened not only by the British Government but by the Indian National Congress Party also as the party did not guarantee any room for the independent rulers in free India. However, finally many of the class joined the popular movement only when they realized that the British were not to guarantee their interests either. The British however always played clever games with the Maharajahs and Nawabs. The Nawab of Khatm does not seem to be interested in his role as an Indian. Ruth Jhabvala, however, has all along remained silent on overt political issues as best as she can in her novel.

The relationship that the Nawab maintains with Harry is a questionable one. But all along the Nawab has remained faithful to his friends, of course, in his own fashion. He has disgraced Olivia to her own people, but when necessary, he has given her full protection. In his bad days he has done his best to give the best comfort to Harry and hundreds of guests and relatives at his palace. He represents the old aristocracy and even in his defeat he remains so. The character of the Nawab is as complex as that of the Maharaja in *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* by Mulk Raj Anand.

MAJOR MINNIES

Major Minnies is the Political Agent appointed to advise the Nawab and the rulers of some adjacent small states on matters of policy. A similar role has been assigned to Malcolm Darling in E.M. Forster's *The Hill of Devi*. Major Minnies has been in India for some twenty years when Olivia first comes to India and he knows all there is to know about India. Among other British officers, he appears to be a little more sympathetic to India and his response to India and things Indian is more aesthetic and intellectual than anything else. To the *suttee* issue he is never as antagonistic as others in the community. In Ruth Jhabvala's another novel, *A Backward Place*, the role and response of the visiting German couple in India, the Hochstadts, are in some way or other similar to Major Minnies. Dr. Hochstadt stresses the un-changeability of India. Even in modern India he finds vestiges of the past and he loves to theorize them. Major Minnies too does not oppose Indian old

cultural tenets outright the way Douglas and Dr. Saunders do. He loves Indian art and culture, its scenery and people. He knows the Urdu language; but never tries to apply the charisma of this charming language to such purpose as humiliating the native speakers in the way Douglas does. On the contrary, he appreciates the Urdu couplets of Amanullah Khan. He can recite a few of them from his memory: "The major went on reciting in Urdu. His voice was loud and sonorous..." (150). Only vaguely Olivia can appreciate the magic of this foreign tongue.

Outspokenly friendlier with India than many of his clan, Major Minnies is very uncertain about his tie with the country. His final comment on India reveals the man and his character to some extent: "Sometimes I feel that I'm not the right kind of person to be in India" (149). It is interesting to note that finally it is he who decides to settle in India and later, during his retirement in Ooty, he has a lot more time to think about the Indo-European relationship and he writes a monograph on the influence of India on the European consciousness and character: "Although the Major was so sympathetic to India, his piece sounds like a warning. He said that one has to be very determined to withstand—to stand up to—India. And the most vulnerable...are always those who love her best" (170). His statement and his personal decision seem to be contradictory. In fact, he tries to make a compromise between his personal opinion of India, which is apparently positive, and that of the measured European opinion of India, which is biased on the whole. In his time, may be, he is not in a position to go against the popular British notion; therefore, he prefers for the golden mean. However, the way he singularizes India as a threat to those foreigners who love her most does not hold water. According to the cross-cultural theories available, it is a known fact that an outsider in a foreign land needs considerable time to get used to the uniqueness of the land and its culture. Once he begins to appreciate the distinctly other elements, he appropriates himself with them and finally finds them comfortable and acceptable. There is no question of threats inherent in the circumstances. A form of culture

shock is the initial reaction only before one gets used to an alien culture. The British presence in India has a definite political purpose and the process of acculturation has always been interfered by at least two mutually related factors—the interest of the Empire and the popular western image of India. Therefore, the caution, which Major Minnies refers to, is in fact, the caution of the Empire. He suffers from a kind of imperial dilemma—“to be or not to be” sort of thing. He is a divided self—half individual and half agent. In the first part of the nineteenth century and later this was the popular response of the so-called liberal Anglo-Indian community in India. With the growth of English power in India a gradual hardening of position came into social practice. His attempt at keeping up his British integrity and living in India is sociologically incompatible. Environment, be it geographical or cultural, must tell on the inhabitants, they like it or not. No amount of philosophizing can protect one from the ‘onslaught.’ It was the problem of the British in India that they tried to change India and keep themselves untouched by changes. To a great extent Major Minnies opinion comes very close to that of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala which she outlines in her essay, “Myself in India.”

HARRY

Harry's full name is Harry Hamilton-Paul. In the novel, Harry is the only British, who has apparently no assignment, political or otherwise. He hails from Kensington, England, and has stayed with the Nawab for a considerable length of time as the latter's houseguest and without any official position at the palace. Harry has an unquestionable access to the Nawab and his establishments including home. He gives company to the Nawab and the reciprocity of the relationship is beyond any doubt. Not alone with the Nawab, Harry has developed a rapport with all others, even in the *purdah* quarters. He often plays cards with the Begum and he is confident she likes it. He is received there on a footing of intimacy. This is a very special kind of privilege he enjoys. The Nawab has given him the best suite, a European chef and often supervises his food himself. He, of course, has been entrusted with another responsible job

by the Nawab—that is working as a bridge between the Nawab and Olivia. Harry does not however seem to be aware of this role of his. Physically, as Olivia observes, he is a little plump and unattractive. Douglas does not like to see an Englishman hanging around an Indian and he calls him a “hanger-on” around the Nawab (35). In his eyes he degrades the British as a whole.

Harry, however, does not mind much what the British community thinks of him. He loves the Nawab and is ready to do whatever pleases His Highness, the Nawab: “I do want to do everything I can do to make him—happier” (35). And again “I'm here because I like him, not for any other reason” (35). He has not seen his mother for three years and often worries for her, but his love for the Nawab makes it difficult for him to leave him. By nature he is a feeble person. It is Olivia, Douglas and other British people who try to make an arrangement for his return journey to which he initially agrees. But his decision is not quite strong. He is not confident enough about his decision. The Nawab knows his mind better and almost snatches him away from the Rivers: “But don't you see, Mr. and Mrs. Rivers, he is like a child that doesn't know what it wants! We others have to decide everything for him” (78). Finally, however, it is the Nawab who makes all the arrangements for his return journey.

The relationship between these two men is very fuzzy. The way they behave themselves may signify some sort of a homosexual relationship between them. But Ruth Jhabvala is very carefully silent on this issue. Whatever hints and suggestions she offers make things quite cloudy and it is up to the readers to decide on the issue. The bond between the two men is so strong that neither of them can accept separation. When they meet after some fifteen years later, it is found that Harry, after his mother's death, has managed another “boy friend” in Kensington. He tries to look back on his stay in India with dislike, but he knows he has been very happy there. In the novel Ruth Jhabvala has not hinted at any kind of social discrimination or repression towards the questionable relationship. The other characters are aware of the friendship.

The Nawab has been seen only politically by the British and his liaison with Harry has never been criticized for the nature of the relationship they maintain. If the relationship is ever threatened, it is because an Englishman is making a friend of an Indian. This humiliates the British, and such relationship threatens the British imperial position, as the friendship between the rulers and the ruled has no room in their political ideology.

NARRATOR

The unnamed British woman is the step-granddaughter of Olivia. She comes to India with a view to investigating into Olivia's life and story, which happens to have taken place some fifty years before. This is for the first time she has come to the country and, therefore, she has to learn about the country and its manners always and everywhere. She is mentally prepared to face the newness of circumstances. Although she is in many respects a modern counterpart of her grandmother, Olivia, she encounters a different India, although the heat and dust remain almost the same. During the 1970s India is a free country and she knows the difference of circumstances from the kind Olivia encountered. She no longer represents the British ruling class, nor does she encounter India under the British rule.

The Narrator puts herself up with the Lals, a middle class Indian family in Satipur. This is the same locale where Olivia's drama took place some fifty years before. Interesting part of her personality is that she recognizes the fact that now it is her turn to change in case she wants to stay in the country; and in no circumstances she can think of changing the country. Accordingly, she wears Indian dresses, eats Indian foods and can easily befriend the Indian people. She even tries to learn an Indian language so that she can understand India and the Indian people better. Like Major Minnies, she also believes that India changes people: "I myself am no longer the same. India always changes people, and I have been no exception" (2). However her change is the outcome of her experience of India and she does not regret the change that comes easily. When she

comes across the dying woman Leelavati, and when finally, with the help of Maji, she can arrange for a respectable death of the woman, a sense of pollution grips her. The way she reacts to the situation is quite unknown to her. She philosophies her position: "I was at myself, I realised I was changing, becoming more like everyone else. But also I thought that, if one lives here, it is best to be like everyone else. Perhaps there is even no choice: everything around me—the people and the landscape, life animate and inanimate—seemed to compel me into this attitude" (112-113). This is obviously a departure from the earlier British stand on India. Indianization of a British woman, in place of anglicization of India, is the new reality she accepts without lament.

Therefore, whenever there is choice and utility, she opts for the Indian way. To beat the heat she goes to sleep with her neighbours on the rooftop. And there she discovers a bond of togetherness among the ordinary people. The experience she gains is quite uncommon in the western world. For once she becomes a part of the in-group community: "The town has become a communal dormitory.... I have never known such a sense of communion. Lying like this under the open sky there is a feeling of being immersed in space.... How different from my often very lonely room in London with only my own walls to look at and my books to read" (52). This is, of course, a positive appreciation of an apparently alien culture. The British, during the Raj, have never been able to look at India from this point of view. Rather, it was necessary for them to establish that everything was defective and deficient here and it was their responsibility to set everything in order. The Narrator's stand, therefore, is a major shift from the British cultural convention and strategy on India. Despite Major Minnies theory, most of the British in India consciously try to remain unaffected by India and its culture; whereas the Narrator surrenders herself to the normal process of acculturation.

It is nice of her that she can often give an independent view of India. This aspect of her character needs adequate appreciation. She frankly admits that India also has something to offer to the European. The western life has developed too

much on materialism, and simpler form of Indian life can be a remedy to many of the Western ills. The Narrator once makes her point clear to Inder: "I tell him that many of us are tired of the materialism of the West, and even if we have no particular attraction towards the spiritual message of the East, we come here in the hope of finding a simpler and more natural way of life" (95). During her stay in India she comes across a spiritual woman, Maji, and under the influence of the lady, and her association with realities, to some extent, she tends to find some solutions to the modern problems. Her personal relationship with Inder Lal has no major importance since the affair is not based on any sincere feeling or any long term resolution. However, she toys with the idea of raising the baby by Inder. She is hopeful that future will protect such mixed products. With this view she proceeds to the mountains to complete the unfinished task of Olivia, her grandmother.

INDER LAL

Inder Lal, an office clerk of about twenty-five or twenty-six, is in many ways a modern counterpart of the Nawab, without, of course, the stature and background of the royalty. A middle class man with a wife and an old mother, he is by no means as bold as the Nawab of Khatm. By nature a very meek man, he is bowed down with many cares—his problems with his wife and also in his office. His eyes are beautiful, full of melancholy and liquid with longing. The Narrator hires a room in his residence and he gradually becomes friendly with the foreign lady. The Narrator observes—"He is very frank with me and tells me all sorts of personal things: not only about his personal life but also about his feelings" (49). He is not one of the modern smart guys, rather a confused man tossing between his desire and confidence. Initially very ashamed to be seen alone with the Narrator, he finally gathers enough courage and goes ahead with the Narrator to extremes he never could have rationally thought of. More or less, it is the Narrator who describes Inder Lal throughout the novel. In many ways he plays the second fiddle beside the Narrator. Physically, too, inferior to her, he finds it difficult to walk with her side by side. He represents the first generation of the

Indian educated people, not much exposed to the modern ways of life and culture. The Narrator explains that he "had never had sandwiches before and ate them with interest, always glad to be learning something new. What was also new to him was to have an outing with only one other person present instead of the usual crowd of family and friends" (125). He seems to relish collecting irrelevant bits of information and to store them for further use. About the British he has an inferiority complex. He is sure that the kind of accommodation he gives to the Narrator is not enough to satisfy her. Inder once asks the Narrator "why should people who have everything—motor cars, refrigerators—come here to such a place where there is nothing?" (95). The Narrator does not fit into the image of the British woman he holds.

Inder Lal gets instantly interested in Chid, once he comes to know that Chid has a spiritual mission in India. Oftentimes he tries to talk with him in the matter and finds Chid an interesting man. However, he is never an assertive man himself. About Ritu's treatment he has no say. It is his mother who does everything, he likes it or not. With his relationship with the Narrator again it is the Narrator who leads him. He is rather passive in taking any initiative. But once the Narrator takes the initiative, he is prompt in reciprocating the bid. At the Baba Firdous site this is how he physically comes close to the Narrator.

However, the relationship he maintains with the Narrator is almost meaningless seen from the context it springs up. It does not appear that he ever loves the lady. He is neither a very modern or postmodern man to give importance to only the present happiness without any consideration of its associated implications. He enjoys the physical relationship with the Narrator, and at the same time he does not want to make it public. A broken down man in his family life, Inder makes the best of time he can under the circumstances. The Narrator knows the limitation of the man and she does not tell him about the pregnancy she has had because of the intimacy. However, as a representative of modern India Inder Lal's

character is not well-drawn. What he seriously lacks is individuality. He is always led by others and never can he take a decisive move himself.

SUMMING UP

It is true Ruth Jhabvala's characterization has often been adversely criticized. Her characters in *Heat and Dust* are more imaginary than real, representing preconceived images more than representing individuality. And when representing individuality, such as Olivia's or the Narrator's, things go to extremes. Maybe, Ruth Jhabvala has been guided by her notion of the two worlds and two sets of characters having cultural affiliations to respective cultures. This way her European characters are often markedly different from the Indian. In the first part of the story all the major British characters, therefore, can speak in unison on any particular Indian issue. Major Minnies, though appears to be deviating from the beaten track, cannot virtually make his position very clear. As an educated person, at best, he can be a member of the British liberal humanist tradition as formulated by the teachings of John Lock (1632-1704), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and other European scholars, and portrayed by E.M. Forster in the form of Fielding in *A Passage to India*. Against his measured steps, the unmeasured one of Olivia has been totally regretted by the entire community. Harry remains unassigned all along, and he is termed as a hanger-on. Whereas Douglas, the Saunders, the Crawfords, etc who happen to be in the main action of the novel, are all of almost one opinion about India and the sympathizers toward India as well. On the Indian side it is the Nawab alone who counts in the novel's framework. He is an irresponsible man, rather reckless, neither fights for his subjects nor does he uphold the British cause. He lives for himself and his misadventures. His recklessness and irresponsibility give Douglas better political footing.

On the other hand, the second part of the story has the Narrator and Inder Lal. They are in fact shadows of the past—the Narrator being the modern version of Olivia and Inder the modern replica of the Nawab. There are striking similarities between these two couples. Both the women willingly accept

the Indians as equals; and both the men were troubled by their neurotic wives. Although without pomp and splendour of the olden days, in many ways Inder Lal seconds the old master. The second pair too has similar experience of the *hijra* dance and the shrine of Baba Firdous; both are responsible for giving birth to babies. The couple thus highlights certain elements of un-changeability in a changing world.

Again, Ruth Jhabvala's world is infested with beggars, cheats, dirt, and many other ugly elements. Interesting thing about her world is that many of the beggars in India are white beggars, beggars by choice, not by circumstances or profession; and they are as nasty as their Indian counterparts. In her description of A.'s Hotel the narration goes on—"Eight nine of them to a room, and some of them don't even have the money for that, they just sleep on the street. They beg from each other and steal from each other" (5). The condition of one of them is even worse—"He can't have been more than thirty, perhaps a German or Scandinavian—he was very fair and tall. His clothes were in tatters and you could see his white skin through them. He had long hair, all tangled and matted; there was a monkey sitting by him and the monkey was delousing him. Yes the monkey was taking the lice out of the man's hair. I looked in that man's face—in his eyes—and I tell you I saw a soul in hell" (5). Interestingly, the free India is nastier than the British India and some European hippies have contributions to that 'hell.' Thus both European and Indian beggars (and thereby cultures as well) come under Ruth Jhabvala's scrutiny.

It must also be noted that many of the characters in the novel are not really the products of the Narrator's personal experience. The people of the first story actually are recovered from secondary sources, Olivia's letters and interviews. However, Inder Lal, Maji, etc are the people of the present time and the Narrator knows them personally. In any case, all her characters remain a little enigmatic—many questions such as who, why and where, etc. can be raised as to the veracity of these characters. Ruth Jhabvala has mostly relied on the characters of the periphery rather than of the mainstream life of India for

her novel. Maybe this was the requirement of her ironic mode of treatment. Since irony emerges from incongruity—a gap between what is and what should be, it was safer to depict these people who were somehow lacking in certain roundness somewhere in their mental make-up. But there is no doubt that the very structure of the novel makes it more of a hindrance than help to the understanding of the characters and the situations.

Rounding Up

- CONTEXTUALISING JHABVALA AND *HEAT AND DUST* • *HEAT AND DUST* AND
A PASSAGE TO INDIA • RUTH JHABVALA AND E.M. FORSTER • PROBLEMS
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CONTEXTUALISING JHABVALA AND *HEAT AND DUST*

It is a general literary practice to locate an author in a particular tradition for assessment of his/her works. Since Ruth Praver Jhabvala is not an avant-garde writer, the norm applies to her also. However placing Ruth Praver Jhabvala in a literary and cultural tradition becomes a problem issue in case the major facts of her personal life are ignored. Very often than not she has been guaranteed of the epithet 'Indian,' and at the same time the preliminary information about her life has legitimately been prefaced by her European heritages and connections. She has been described as an Indian author in *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* (1988). K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in *Indian Writing in English* and similarly, Ronald J. Warwick, in his checklist, *Indian Literature in English* comfortably place Ruth Jhabvala along with such 'Indian' authors as Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster, Paul Scott, none of whom is, culturally or socio-politically speaking, Indian. Once she relocates herself to the US, the problem of her individual and political-national identity becomes further complicated—her birth in Cologne, her parents' dispersal from homeland as refugees, her education in England, her marriage to an Indian, her own shift, by choice, first to India and finally to the US, her choice of language and the themes she undertakes to portray in her novels and stories, etc make her identity a really problematic issue. Ruth's own confession in this regard is

something that must be taken seriously. When asked if she would like to consider herself as an Indian author, she makes her position very clear: "No, how could I be? I'm not, am I? There's no getting away from the fact. I write differently from Indian writers because my birth, background, ancestry, and traditions are different. If I must be considered anything, then let it be as one of those European writers who have written about India" (Agarwal 36). One might raise objections, but in the traditional sense she is not an *Indian* author. And when traditional watertight definitions and categorizations fail to offer her a comfortable placement, her multiple diasporic characteristics settle the issue, and mark her as one of the first generation authors of the diaspora. The frustrations and aspirations of the displaced Europeans in India occur *passim* in her novels and stories. As she quite candidly admits in her essay, "Myself in India," her main interest lies more in herself and her survival in India than India itself, and this is exactly what happens with many of her European (and also American) people she portrays in *Esmond in India* (1958), *A Backward Place* (1965), *A New Dominion* (1972), *Heat and Dust* (1975), *In Search of Love and Beauty* (1983) and her short stories. Many of the expatriates she handles are 'residual' Europeans who opted for staying on in India after India wins freedom, whereas many are newcomers to the country during the post-colonial era. Prof. Vasant A. Shahane is perhaps the first Indian critic to ascribe for Ruth Jhabvala a special location, "inside outsider," which seems to be appropriate for this occasion. During Shahane's time the term 'diasporic' was not in the currency, otherwise he too would perhaps have liked to share the term. Shahane's definition, however, has a specific Indian point of view; whereas the term 'diasporic' is, no doubt, double edged—i.e. it may include both insider's and outsider's points of view. In Ruth Jhabvala's case specially Shahane's "inside outsider" and our 'diasporic' are in many ways seem to agree with each other as both of them decisively place her in a tradition that includes authors who are not Indian by birth, but handles mixed issues like the western people in an Indian context, or to be more precise, who come

to India from outside and take up people and subject for treatment that are more transnational than purely Indian in the real sense and in the ventures undertaken.

Her novel, *Heat and Dust*, is no exception to this. What is special about the novel is that it handles a subject that is not purely indigenous. The subject matters are obviously products of post-war and postcolonial environments. The basic framework of the story or stories arises out of either collaboration or friction between two kinds of people, who are culturally located in two different worlds, but physically dwelling on the same geopolitical surroundings. *Heat and Dust*, of course, becomes more complex in this regard—Ruth Jhabvala has tried her best to encompass both the subjugated India and the independent India within the framework of her work. The old India she depicts keeps her close to that depicted by E.M. Forster in *A Passage to India* (1924), whereas the modern India comes close to Paul Scott's India in *Staying On* (1977). However, the humorous way in which the British in post-Independence India are seen in the latter novel makes all the difference between *Staying On* and *Heat and Dust*. In a way Forster's novel has a lot many things in common with Ruth Jhabvala's. A part of Ruth Jhabvala's novel and the whole of Forster's deal with very similar things during the British era—the relationship between the English and India, the effect of India on English women and the consequence on their lives of their time spent here. This way both are social documents on the experiences of some European expatriates in India. *Heat and Dust*, therefore, by nature is a diasporic writing for the same reason as Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* is, of course, the venue and people being evidently different. In the United States expatriates' works are defined by such categories as Asian American writings, Chinese American writings, etc; but in India this is perhaps not the popular way of categorizing the writings of foreign authors as the total volume of such works is very thin in relation to the mainstream and regional writings. Otherwise there is not much to object to if Ruth Jhabvala were designated as European Indian author and her works as European Indian writings. At least first phase of her literary career fits comfortably under such a category.

RUTH JHABVALA AND E.M. FORSTER

Heat and Dust is an enormously *déjà vu* inducing book. We have encountered almost every scene and character time and again before—the heat, dust, poverty, superstition, the rigidly rational British colonial administrators, the catty British wives, the noble and rogue natives, the reaction of British men and women who are seduced by the setting and scandalizing the communities, etc. This may be one reason why the novel has very often than not been described as a rewriting of E.M. Forster's novel, *A Passage to India*. The Anglo-Indian community of Satipur in *Heat and Dust* is almost an exact replica of the Chandrapore community of *A Passage to India* with close associations between Crawford and Turton, Douglas Rivers and Ronnie Heaslop and the Nawab and Aziz. Other similar things like the picnic at Baba Firdaus shrine and the Marabar Cave incident, practical jokes and Urdu poetry, etc bring the two novels very close together despite some definite differences of depth and dimension in the treatment. Forster's title, without any further suggestiveness, hints at a European's visit to India, whereas Ruth Jhabvala from the very title of the novel is rather committed to a particular perspective. Apart from the title, these two novels together attempt to make almost a single subject elaborate, one is the older version, while the other is partly modern.

One part being set in the 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 ruler. 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. The crisis humiliates her husband and outrages the British community breeding a scandal that lives in collective memory even long after her death. *A Passage to India* is also about the presence of the British colonists in India in the 1920s. The main focus of the

novel is the incident in the Marabar Caves. India is a very hot and dry place, and as Miss Quested is not used to this, she begins to have hallucinations. She is overwhelmed by everything Indian—religion, nature, the people, and most especially Dr. Aziz, a charming young Indian. It is probable that she half-wanted something to happen in the caves with him, which could have contributed to her hallucinations about an assault. Miss Quested is a naïve, young girl, who is confused about love, and more particularly about her marriage. She is overwhelmed by India itself, and also by the Marabar caves which seem to epitomize the very soul of India. It is no wonder that she lets herself get carried away, and imagines things that would be unthinkable in ordinary circumstances.

Both the novels, in a way, thus expose the degrading effects of the British rule on Indian society, and the tremendous effect of India on the British. It is now much easier to be open-minded and racially unprejudiced than it has been at the time of Forster's work. The second story of *Heat and Dust*, i.e. the story of the Narrator, can be read as the second and revised version of the Forster story and also of the first story of *Heat and Dust*. Here the Narrator comes to India almost half a century later with a view to reconstructing the story of her step-grandmother and entangles herself in almost a similar situation to that of the old lady. Looked from the bottom, by fluctuating in time, Ruth Jhabvala in fact goes back to colonial India to add an extra dimension of time for the confirmation of a pattern she has so far traced only in terms of the contemporary India. In Forster it is always the contemporary event, in Ruth Jhabvala it is the contemporary backed by the past. In effect, however, as a work of art, *Heat and Dust* is less enduring than *A Passage to India*. Beyond the local and the temporal, Forster's work is basically about a significant human experience. Forster clearly focuses on the disappointments in human relationships caused in part by inhibitions and the distances the two people knowingly or unknowingly have set between themselves. In his work "the psychological tangles human beings ensnare themselves in are played out against the backdrop of colonial India.... As in the works of Conrad that

probed the motivations of people operating in colonial settings, Forster's book is made all the more compelling through the portrayal of characters deluded by their own ideas and defeated by their own best intentions, even when those intentions give evidence of an admirable generosity of spirit and tolerance of cultural difference" (Winders 110). Ruth Jhabvala's novel has the glitter, and Forster's has insight and depth. Forster's work is already recognized as a classic, whereas Ruth Jhabvala's, strictly speaking, at best remains a specimen of a popular novel for a certain period of time; its future is not yet assured.

It is not that *A Passage to India* alone has striking similarity with *Heat and Dust*; Forster's another novel, *The Hill of Devi* (1953), too confirms the same between the two authors and between the two novels. To begin with, behind Ruth Jhabvala's Khatm lies the shadow of Dewas as it is described by Malcolm Darling. The similarity is further consolidated by the suggestive similarities between the Nawab and the Maharajah. Both princes succeeded to the throne at very young ages—Tukoji Rao at the age of eleven, and the Nawab at fifteen. Both married the daughter of powerful neighbouring prince, and both marriages mysteriously broke down, alienating the bride's family. The Cabobpurs were absolutely furious with the Nawab, and Forster's Maharajah had made an implacable enemy of the leading Maratha power, the Maharajah of Kohlapur. Both the Nawab and the Maharajah ruined their states' finances and fell deeply into debt. Though family feuds, marriage difficulties, etc are common factors, the most striking similarity is also the most obvious: the Nawab and the Maharajah both retain in their service an English homosexual friend (Cronin 161-62).

These apparently parallel positioning of the princes and situations may reflect some similar viewpoints of these two authors too. In an apparently hostile circumstance, both Ruth Jhabvala and E.M. Forster seem to advocate for personal relationship. *The Hill of Devi* is Forster's account of his personal relationship with the Maharajah, and *Heat and Dust* too in many ways highlight the same through the relationships of Olivia and the Narrator with India. While race relationship

fails to achieve anything worthwhile, the personal ones reflect a minority response to the problem.

PROBLEMS RAISED IN HEAT AND DUST

The main problem Ruth Jhabvala probably raises in the novel is what India does to a foreigner or, in other words, how India metamorphoses the foreigners staying in India. This is one of her repeated concern dealt with in many of her works, including *Esmond in India*, *A New Dominion*, *A Backward Place* and many short stories. Actually this is one field she finds herself comfortable in. Ruth Jhabvala, who has personal experience of living in India for almost twenty-five years, in *Heat and Dust* too, has portrayed different categories of the Europeans living in the country for different purposes on a greater temporal scale, both during the colonial era and after. First, there are the British officers in India with definite political assignments. They, by all means, try to create a mini England within the Civil Lines and their involvement with India and its people is not more than what is exactly politically necessary to survive and uphold the British cause here. The Rivers, the Crawfords and the Minnies make up this group. Secondly, there are those who come to India with a spiritual mission; they are frightened of the western materialism and in India they try to find peace and prosperity of mind. Chid and two other Britishers represent this group. Thirdly, there is Harry, who does not have any specific purpose in India; but who lives the life of a parasite. And fourthly, the Narrator herself makes a group by herself. She does not fit into any of the categories given above. She is distressed with the western materialism, but she does not have a special craze for Indian spiritualism. Simpler form of life attracts her, and furthermore, she has undertaken a special assignment—the reconstruction of Olivia's story. Viewed broadly, all these participants can be brought down to two categories—those who come to India for a shorter period and those for a longer period. The common factor among them is that all these people try to negotiate India, although the means and methods of approach differ from person to person. Some negotiate India politically, some others either spiritually or socially or culturally. What Ruth

Jhabvala tries to show is that irrespective of the participants' assignments in India, India always tries to shape and reshape all of them—"India always changes people" (2) and the degree of the change they undergo depends on the extent they surrender to the new soil. Whereas Douglas remains almost unaffected, except physically, Olivia does not; and Major Minnies tries to maintain a very well defined involvement with India keeping a well-premeditated distance. The Narrator comes to India for something else and finally merges herself, whereas Chid and two other spiritual seekers come to merge with India but go back home frustrated. It appears that it is Major Minnies who happens to underscore Ruth Jhabvala's moderate view or the thesis in *Heat and Dust*.

However, Major Minnies' view, i.e. involvement with a finely tuned measurement appears to be a dangerously reactionary and imperial theory of co-habitation with the dominated. Put this view of attachment and detachment to the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, it clearly advocates in favour of the colonial demarcation between *we* and *they* or *other*. Further simplified, Major Minnies' speculation backs the British who have 'passionately' ruled India for almost two hundred years without much attachment to the country and its people. And Ruth Jhabvala says, "India always changes people." A tension, therefore, is quite understandable—India tries to change the foreigners and the foreigners try not to surrender to this specific demand of the habitat. And those who surrender to the claim of the soil and merge with the country, Major Minnies says, they 'destroy' themselves. One of the identifiable facts about the British imperialism in India is that during their long stay here the British have categorically refused to adopt anything Indian. This, according to Nirad C. Chaudhuri, is perhaps the greatest failure of British imperialism in India, for no empire can last without practising cultural proselytization. The British in India rejected this role (Chaudhuri XX). Cultural theories too do not subscribe to this British view. According to authorities like Richard W. Brislin and Milton Gordon, it is natural that cultural interaction or encounter must affect the participants'

in-built cultural constitution, and in due course of time they must learn to appreciate the alien elements in the cultural components of the host country. However, the political theories may contradict this theoretical position, i.e. politics may necessitate living in a foreign country without being affected by the host culture.

Interestingly, in *Heat and Dust*, the tension between the pull of India and the push of the British colonists is noticeably absent in the novel. Rather, they consciously try to insulate themselves within the Civil Lines, a mini England, so that they can resist India's 'onslaught' upon them. Many of them cultivate a lifelong hostility toward India. Except the Indian heat and dust nothing has any access to their protected zones—both their minds and the Civil Lines. Neither Douglas, nor the Crawfords, nor the Saunders have the least desire to understand the country they rule; for only after acquiring proper 'understanding' (read brainwashing) of their "essentialist position in European culture proclaiming that Europeans should rule, non-Europeans be ruled," (Said 120) they have been declared fit for undertaking assignments in India. Therefore, neither India (nor theories of Brislin or Gordon for that matter) can teach them anything worthwhile. Dominating India politically and resisting India culturally become the only mutually inclusive theoretical premise acceptable to them under the specific circumstances. Olivia is a dissenter and she is ostracized for her "counter discourse." Major Minnies has the tension operating in him; but he finds his emotional release by loving India aesthetically and intellectually, and thereby keeping himself in a balanced hypocritical position between Douglas and Olivia. The Narrator comes only almost thirty years after the death of the British India. Her initial tension, if there is any at all, is gradually resolved with time and intimacy and other compatriots like Chid and the seekers go back dissatisfied early enough. Therefore, how India operates on the foreigners virtually remains an almost unexplored area in the novel. Unless and until there is adequate free play of individuals and cultures, conclusion becomes difficult to arrive at. This is especially true about the interaction in British India Ruth

Jhabvala portrays. She obviously depends on the India myth in the western world.

Another theoretical problem raised by Ruth Jhabvala in the novel is that she rather confidently declares that, "India always changes people" (2). This statement may lead to at least three major deductions—One, only India changes people, England does not; two, all Britishers in India during the Raj and after have changed themselves accordingly; and three, as a result of a long British contact India has not changed. None of the foregoing deductions is true simply because the premise itself is wrong. The way India is singled out as the catalyst is wholly unacceptable. According to the available cultural theories any individual in any country under any circumstances is supposed to undergo changes, and in fact does change. This is the norm of inter-cultural relationship, theoretically confirmed and historically proven. The problem is further aggravated by Jhabvala's own people—have Douglas, the Crawfords and the Saunders, or Chid and the two seekers, for that matter, really changed? Ruth Jhabvala knows by her own experience how first England, then India and finally the US have shaped and reshaped her. Her characters, Karim and Kitty, are glaring examples of how England has changed Indians too. Thousands of Indian immigrants in the United States, and United Kingdom are like Karim and Kitty, translated persons in all respects—language, dress, food habit, thought pattern and even attitude to their homeland. Not a single British in the novel, except Olivia and the Narrator, matches these examples. Therefore, if India changes people, there is nothing special about it, and what is unusual about the problem is that India incidentally cannot change the majority of the British population housed in *Heat and Dust*.

PROBLEMS RAISED BY HEAT AND DUST

Read without reference to socio-political or cultural contexts, which is of course difficult especially for Indian readers, *Heat and Dust* impresses many for its superb technical skill, cold brilliance of understatement, detachment and irony, etc, but the final effect it produces as a work on culture issue is one of almost barrenness. Nissim Ezekiel terms this novel

'worthless' as a literary work in its narrative structure, obtrusive in its authorial point of view, weak in style, stereotyped in its characters; and viciously prejudiced in its vision of Indian scene. The nature of the subject, i.e. cross-cultural encounter, requires very sensitive treatment. The kinds of people involved in the novel for the purpose are all perhaps pathetically unfit for the job. On the one hand, Douglas is a real *burra sahib*, his friends are all highbrows and snobs, most of the British women are either neurotically batty or pleasure seeking and scandal mongering, the Nawab is a don of the underworld, Olivia, a "rotten element," loves Douglas and runs away with the Nawab, Harry is a parasite—all are disappointing as agents of respective cultures. On the other, the Narrator too fails to uphold a cause. She comes to India, befriends Inder, gets pregnant by him and goes to an *ashram* to have her baby. All these are rather cheaper stuff for a sensational novel and television serials that thrive on popular culture and in no way can they work for the cause for a cultural synthesis or dignified encounter. Despite the Booker Prize, the novel raises many serious questions than promotes a cultural cause. Meenakshi Mukherjee tries to diagnose Ruth Jhabvala's problem as an artist: "Perhaps her failure to develop...points to one hazard that the rootless writer is prone to. While to some writers absence of a single homogenous culture base sharpens their sensibility, in some others it might result in arrested creative vitality" (Mukherjee 91).

Whatever the reason might be, Ruth Jhabvala should have taken care of the cultural and political implications such works might produce on the readers of the land she speaks about. She has her liberty to voice her opinions, so has the readers too. Her partiality and prejudice begin from the very title of the book (see chapter VII). The Britishers in India are intruders and certainly not guests in a hotel, and, therefore, the constant complaint about "heat and dust" only, indirectly, highlights their desperate attempt to demonstrate what a great sacrifice they have to do for the benefit of the country! In this way even the topographical hazard is made a part of the imperial discourse. At the same time she deliberately keeps her

characters and incidents far away from the burning heat and dust Indian political movements for freedom raised all around. And here lies the crux of the problem with such a literary work. Ruth Jhabvala, knowingly or unknowingly, becomes a party to the clever cause of the colonial era. Nissim Ezekiel is not just unhappy with the title, *Heat and Dust*; he finds it a part of a motive attempting to demean India. Here Ruth Jhabvala is no better than Miss Katherine Mayo, who has had a tirade on the land, *Mother India* (1927) to her credit, whereas Ruth Jhabvala was in a position to be the ambassador of multi-cultural perspective. The new world requires that this new cultural location be clarified from an unbiased position and break away from the Euro-centric, often pro-imperialistic, discourses. The emergence of multi-cultural perspective would help greatly to clarify the validity of others' culture too. True culture hates hatred; its aim, as Matthew Arnold puts it, is "sweetness and light." In a multi-cultural or cross-cultural situation this 'sweetness' can be derived from the otherness, and only then the new literature of cultural encounters can be meaningful. Only heat and dust created out of conflict and confusion does not give one anything of a great magnitude.

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