REVELATION OF PSEUDO-MASK OF SPIRITUAL FIGURES IN RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA'S HEAT AND DUST

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Abstract:
The spiritual figures of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's Heat and Dust appear to be very shallow and mendicants. They are poor *Sadhus* who move from place to place like vendors selling their gods. Though, they pretend to live in a world of spirituality but in reality their feelings and emotions are earthy. Even those who come from Europe as young men and initiated, do not live a sex-free life. At this backdrop, the present paper tries to explore the world of pseudo spiritual figures in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's Heat and Dust.

Keywords:
India, spirituality, religion, life, character

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala seems to mock at the society especially at the young man and his girl friend who came to India in search of peace. She has written broadly on the life of middle-class Indians "The major motif in her fiction is the marital dissonance which may arise from maladjustment" (Ram 81). In Heat and Dust, the theme of inter-racial union is dealt in terms of sexual relation between Indian men and British women. Both the British women are "bewitched by Indian spirituality and sensuality and male sexuality in their own respective periods" (David 18).

In fact, the European people are bored of materialism of the west. They come to India to find a simpler or moral way of life. They come to the conclusion that nothing good comes out of coming into contact with Indian *Sadhus* and the novelist also conveys that the spiritual message of India is noble no doubt but it is not practically possible to put into practice. So this kind of spirituality serves no purpose in the context of society and only leads a society and culture to the path of degradation, which is entirely opposite to the path of '*Moksha*' or salvation. It even increases lust for materialism and sexuality.

In Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* at the beginning the young woman narrator proclaims that "India always changes people, and I have been no exception. But this is not my story; it is Olivia's as far as I can follow it." (Heat and

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Dust, p.2) But this study reveals that even the psyche of the young narrator has been highly affected by the traditional spirituality of India. Yasmine Gooneratne states that *Heat And Dust* employs "a single narrator, whose function is not only to relate two stories- her own and Olivia's- but to present characters in such a way that they reinforce, without strain or loss of objectivity, this double exposure of event and experience" (Gooneratne 235). The narrator "belongs to a new generation of liberal-minded educated travellers from the West, who consciously strives to communicate with India" (Gooneratne 22).

Ramesh Chadha remarks very rightly that the story moves on two planes of the past and the present with diary and journal used as narrative techniques, adding an extra dimension of time to her fiction by going back to the past for confirmation of a pattern that she has traced so far only in terms of contemporary India. The two streams of the story are juxtaposed as if in an editing room of a film studio where the available material is cut, trimmed and shuffled to make a contrastive pattern. The more subtle form of this technique has been used by Jhabvala in the film script of *Autobiography of an Indian Princess* … (107).

There are critics who have compared Jhabvala's novels to those of Jane Austen because of her propensity for middle-class characters and the associated theme of love, marriage and family life…Her foreignness gives her another artistic advantage. She can explore with considerable assurance the themes of the expatriate in India and the mixed marriage, of Indian and European. Her novels are never about abstraction such as racial conflict or racial integration: they are about human beings- in love or in marriage- … (Williams 9-10).

In the Heat and Dust, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala gives a satirical picture of child, the transformed Christian boy with his meager learning of religious scriptures. He found a guru to give him initiation and to strip him of all personal characteristics and the rest of the possessions including his name Chidananda (his two companions called him Chid). From now on he was to have nothing except his beads and the begging bowl in which he had to collect his daily food from charitable people. He came to India with a spiritual purpose. He was attracted by the Holy Scriptures and decided to visit India. On the instruction of his guru, he had set off on a pilgrimage right across India with the holy cave of Amarnath as

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his ultimate goal. Chid's character is like a religious leader. He gives lectures on religion and philosophy whereas he practices none of them.

This young man, Chid was attracted to Hindu religion after attending a spiritual talk by a visiting Swami in London on universal love. The Swami talked of love as an ocean of sweetness that surrounded all men and enfolded them in tides of honey. He had melting eyes and a joyous, serene face and the young man and his girl decided to visit India to realize this universal love and India's great spiritual heritage.

"The young men and his girl had come away from this meeting with such exalted feelings that they could not speak for a long time; but what they could, they agreed that, in order to find the spiritual enrichment they desired. They must set off for India without delay."(Heat and Dust p. 22)

Chidananda found impossible to live simply under trees as instructed by his Guru but had to seek shelter at night in cheap hotel rooms where he had to bargain quite hard in order to be quoted a reasonable price. Afterwards he fell ill and was given shelter in the narrator's room. He recovers from his fever but does not want to leave the room - he is too demanding type of character. He expects the young woman to give him food - and he is also hungry for sex.

"He is always hungry, and not only for food. He also needs sex very badly and seems to take it for granted that I shall give it to him the same way I give him my food." (Heat and Dust p. 65)

Chid was physically weaker than the narrator. He wanted the narrator, perhaps to reach a higher plane of consciousness through the powers of sex. The narrator wrote about Chid's sexual character:-

"He has constant erections and goes to a tremendous size, so that I am reminded of the Lord Shiva whose huge member is worshiped by devout Hindu women. At such times, it seems to me that his sex is engendered by his spiritual practices, by all the chanting of mantras he does sitting, beads in hand on the floor of my room." (Heat and Dust p. 65)

Though, Chid explained the narrator that he did not believe in possessions and thought it is bad for people to be attached to them yet he was a very demanding type of person. He spent a lot of time walking around town and had become a familiar figure there some of the shopkeepers allowed him to sit in their

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stalls with them and occasionally he collected quite a crowd as he sat there cross legged and expounded his spiritual philosophy.

Chid also had a begging bowl and often people put something in it - a banana or a guava - which he ate by himself in a corner of the narrator's room. Inder Lal was also impressed with Chid. Chid told him about the centers of energy within the body and the methods to be employed in order to release them. Thus, it is noted that Chid has picked up scraps of spiritual and religious lore here and there, and as he is neither an intelligent nor very educated boy, it has all sort of fermented inside him and makes him sound a bit mad at times.

This study has also observed that the Swamy, who talked of the universal love, affected the psyche of the young man and his girl friend. The Swami sang devotional songs in ecstasy and fervour that everyone was moved; some of his followers wept, some laughed.

There is also one more character in the Heat and Dust named as Maji who liked touching people. She sat in *Samadhi*. To be in that state means to have reached a higher level of consciousness and to be submerged in its bliss. She sat in a lotus pose. Her eyes were open but the pupils turned up, her lips slightly parted with the tip of the tongue showing between them. Her breathing was regular and peaceful as in a dreamless sleep. When she woke up she was like a person who has just stepped out of a revivifying bath or some other medium of renewal. Maji is depicted as a bedraggled motherly self.

Maji explains to Chid that the people go to pilgrimage if either they have some desire or they are unhappy. Such was the shrine of *Bada Firdaus*. It was sacred to Hindu women because offering at the shrine cured bareness. It was given out that a childless woman was driven away by her husband who wanted to marry again. The woman went to Baba Firdaus grave to hide her shame. Here she had a vision that she would get a child in nine months. And so it happened. The day is called 'Husband's Weeding Day.' Since then all types of women - the widows, and the barren have been visiting the place and fair was being held on that day every year in the grove near the shrine.

Man can not achieve deliverance from sufferings of life and death by directly renouncing any unpleasant action which he is otherwise called upon to do under various circumstances as his duty but only by renunciation of the desire to

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enjoy the fruit of the action he undertakes and by giving up attachment for the same. To enable to do this one should rise above the forces or impulses of nature so as to have a pure and perfect mind, speech and body. This needs self-control, true knowledge or knowledge of our relationship with nature and God and implicit love and unflinching love to him. It has been described in the *Bhagvad Gita* as

"ब्रह्मार्पणं ब्रह्म हविर्ब्रह्माग्नौ ब्रह्मणा हुतम्।
ब्रह्मैव तेन गन्तव्यं ब्रह्मकर्मसमाधिना।।"

(The Bhagvad Gita, IV; 24)

It seems that Indian society is more afraid of 'Pap' (vice) and wants to earn 'Punya' (virtue), by performing the noble acts, attached with spiritual world. The apathetic attitude of Indians to all life is beyond the understanding of the western mind. Their lack of aestheticism is horrifying and contrary to the Indian principle of cleanliness that the western mind finds baffling.

Jhabvala's characters loudly proclaim that "God does not need temples or priests, the singing of bells, the clash of cymbals ---. He needs love and pure heart." (The House Holder, p.31) Thus, to Jhabvala, the places where these spiritual figures dwell are seats of corruption. It is revealed that the Swamis, the Sadhus and the Bais of Jhabvala's fiction are not often paragons of virtues or bembodiment of the true and pure spirit. They are sometimes an odd combination of worldly wisdom and other-worldly charm; they are of the earth, earthy. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala appears to have been influenced by the spiritual teachings of great saints and sages of India but at the same time she does not spare any moment in criticizing the pseudo spirituality of the fake swamis and the Bais of India.

Thus, the study reveals that the spiritual figures of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala pretended to be in search of spiritual values but because they did not know what true spiritual values were; they fastened themselves to harmful elements that helped them deeper down into their disturbed egos. They themselves suffer bad consequences. All kinds of poisonous influence are released, polluting the air breathed by truly spiritual Indians.

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