

## SOCIAL REALISM IN RUTH JHABVALLA'S NOVEL *HEAT AND DUST*

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### Introduction

Human evolution is interesting. The simple reason is that we are the only living being having six senses. Human history moves in various criteria like country, religion, race and language. Every country has its own heritage that recommends a different walk of life. India stands high with its glorious tradition. Though Unity in Diversity has been the mantra of living in India, one can still observe social evils like poverty, superstition, domination of women. India is divided in many things. Ruth Jhabvala has beautifully portrayed the theme of social realism in her novel *Heat and Dust*. She says, "I have seen some terrible sight in India. I've lived through a Hindu-Muslim riot, and a smallpox epidemic, and several famines, and I think I may rightly say I have seen everything that you can see on this earth" (HD 23).

### Stark Poverty

Poverty has been defined as an inability to gratify the psychological needs. The minimum requirements for fulfilling the psychological needs are food and nutrition, shelter and protective health care. "Poverty puts people's lives in danger and robs them of their future or deprives people not only of safe water and adequate food, clothing and shelter, but also education and health care"(Attarchand 57). Ruth Jhabvala portrays this in her novel *Heat and Dust*.

The story is narrated by the granddaughter of Douglas and Jessie. The narrator has come to India to know about the life of Olivia, the first wife of her grandfather Douglas. When the narrator comes to India, she observes the scenes of unhygienic conditions. She builds an image of contemporary Indian reality. On the first day of her arrival in Bombay, she stays in women dormitory in S.M. Hostel where she gets a glimpse of stark poverty in Indian streets. She finds another European woman who has been staying in India for 30 years. The European woman, in the beginning advises her to be extra careful for food. That is she should exercise priority to satisfy her hunger. She has seen several famines, a small epidemic, a Hindu Muslim riot and some terrible sights. When she looks into the street, there is no place for people to sleep. "She observes many children who spend most of their time begging and involved in stealing. Some of them

are very young, mere children there may be hope for them, God willing they will go home again before it is too late. But others there are, women and men, they have been here for years and every year they get worse” (HD 7).

### **Unemployment**

Unemployment affects individual family as well as society. Having no outlet to release their depression, the young generation direct their creative energies into wrong channels that paves way to the raise of bandits, highway robberies and bank holds ups. “Unemployment affects the unity of interest of family members, the unity of objectives, as well as the unity of personal ambitions. Then, they start to involve in anti-social activities” (Naba 108). Ruth Jhabvala has expressed her views on unemployment through the incidents that happens to a young man and a girl coming from Europe. She exposes the problems of the Europeans through the lives of some Indians.

Ruth Jhabvala turns her focus on a young man and a girl. They have arrived to India to find peace. They want to stay in traveler’s rest house. As the watchman does not open the door, they give three rupees to stay on the verandah. The watchman expects amount from those who come to stay here. As the watchman does not get good salary, he wants to earn like this. The girl comes to India to find peace, but she finds dysentery and ringworms. The young man and the girl narrate their troubles. In Amritsar they meet a person who has promised to take them to important places. But, he absconds with their watches and bags. They are impressed by the speech given by Swami about universal force in London. But they have lost their peace of mind. The Youngman’s pocket is picked at Goa. Such experience enlightens them of the situation in India. They come to realise that such incidents happen because of unemployment. They both launched into a recital of their misadventures. “They had been robbed of their watches in a house of devotion in Amritsar; cheated by a man they had met on the train to Kashmir who had promised them a cheap houseboat and had disappeared with their advance; also in Kashmir the girl had developed dysentery which was probably amoebic”(HD 23).

Many Europeans come here, try to establish some kind of relationship with India but fail. Like the character Chid, they reject India and go back. The narrator rightly observes that the only way to understand India is to stay.

### **The Indian Family System**

Family is more or less a durable association of husband and wife with or without children. “Family is a system of relationships existing between parents and children” (Bogardus 105). Each family is different

from another. She has shown the Inder Lal's family. In his family, Inder Lal's wife suffers a lot. Inderlal has planned to marry an educated person. He marries Ritu as per his mother's advice. Inder Lal cannot say whether his wife is beautiful or not. Inder Lal's wife has to pass her life in two small rooms.

Inder Lal's wife Ritu will not speak with others properly. Her mother-in-law wants to serve food to her son. They do not have rights to speak with each other. Ritu spends most of her time alone. Ritu is psychologically affected because of this loneliness. She does not eat properly. The narrator tries to speak with Ritu but she does not allow anyone into her room. She feels shy to speak with another woman. It is all because of illiteracy.

Ritu does not spend her time at home but takes pleasure in going out with her friends who are mostly healthy widows like herself. They roam around quite freely and do not bother when their sarees slips down from their heads. They gossip and joke and giggle like school girls: very different from their daughters-in-law who are sometimes seen shuffling behind them, heavily veiled and silent and with the down cast eyes of prisoners under guard (HD 55)

### **Superstition in India**

Superstition is the conviction that something shall happen owing to the causes utterly disproportionate to the event. For example, the belief that there would be some trouble in the journey or pain at its end just because a cat has crossed the path is a superstition. "Superstition means a belief or notion, not based on reason or knowledge" (Bogardus 117). In this novel, Jhabvala asserts how superstition has taken a strong hold in the routine life of these simple folks. One night Ritu suffers some sort of a bite. She screams but her mother-in-law places her hand on her mouth. She chants some mantras. Her mother-in-law does not believe modern medical treatment. Instead of taking Ritu to doctor, she treats her by mantras and applying holy ash on her head.

Ruth Jhabvala has shown Indian's misplaced faith. In *Heat and Dust*, the narrator happens to visit the Baba Firdaus shrine. People believe that the Lord of the shrine has got special powers to cure women's childlessness. She finds a priest and receives offerings. They assemble in front of the shrine on their wedding day. They chant the name of God repeatedly. Stories are around that some women who had made offerings at the shrine are blessed with a child for which they have long been waiting. Therefore, these women are superstitious and blindly believe such stories.

## The Malady of Beggars

The novelist describes the pathetic condition of a beggar woman and also the attitude of various people in India. The narrator comes across a beggar woman of the town. She is begging at the roadside. She is lying on the roadside without any movement. Nobody comes to help her. Everybody is passing by as if nothing had happened. The narrator takes the beggar woman to the doctor with the help of Inder Lal. The beggar woman groans of her situation. "What I understood best was that the problem of the beggar woman, if I wished to undertake it, was now mine. Everyone else had many problems of their own. I thought what to do. Perhaps she could still be treated and, on that chance, I had to get her to the hospital" (HD 113). When the narrator explains it to the doctor and asks him to send the ambulance, the doctor replies that the ambulance is out-of-service. There is no bed, nor sufficient medicine. The narrator understands that everyone has problems and to survive in a world full of human suffering and misery, one needs a lot of courage and determination. One develops a kind of insensibility, and applies the same to any situation.

In modern society, the need of religion is no less paramount, As long as suffering exists in this world, the value and essence of religion is necessary. Ruth Jhabvala has known the importance of religion. But, she hates some rituals followed blindly by the people. She has expressed her views through the character Chid. Arnold W. Green defines religion as "a system of beliefs and symbolic practices and objects governed by faith rather than knowledge" (HD 449).

Ruth Jhabvala wants to create awareness through the story of Chid in this novel. Chid has arrived to India to get the salvation. Though dressed in saffron robes and shaved his head, he is not a real Sadhu. Indians are attracted by the external appearance of fake sadhus. Looking at him people await to get his blessings. Unfortunately, Chid is unable to control his sexual desires. Still, he is very much interested in renouncing the worldly possessions. He plans to return to his country but in the middle, Chid comes to know that Indian people start to believe and respect fake sadhus.

## Conclusion

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is an Indo-Anglian writer. Her observation of India is clear and honest. Often the readers become uneasy reading Ruth Jhabvala's records on superstition, women's domination, poverty and dishonest sadhus. She does not hesitate to reveal her views on India frankly. As a writer, she has rights to express her views and at the same time it should be seen and accepted as a modern thought. In 1975, Indian government took more efforts for urbanization. So, in those periods education was concentrated on urban. So, education did not reach properly to the rural areas. So, there was an unemployment. The

unemployment was the reason for the poverty .Besides superstition, women domination also were seen in our country.

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