



GURU AND DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO “A NEW DOMINION”, THE SEVENTH NOVEL OF RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA

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ABSTRACT

This paper's focus is on Guru and disciple relationship. Some recent cases of fake Gurus like Baba Ram Rahim and Bapu Asa Ram etc. who had unholy and illegal relationships with their disciples have given a shock to the sleeping brains of masses. Not even the illiterate and rustic people but also the educated one follow such self-proclaimed messengers of God. The innocent followers keep standing in the scorching heat or in rain to have a glimpse of these Gurus who contrary to the preaching of abstinence, enjoy VIP perquisites. This study will analyse the true responsibility of spiritual teachers or preachers with special reference to “A New Dominion”, the seventh novel of Ruth Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, who tried to unveil the blinds from the eyes of the people who visit such charlatans to seek spiritual guidance. She has shown the plight of Western travellers who come to India in search of the truth of life and fall in the trap of charlatans. Not only these Westerner but the Indians also who have weak ego, lack of social and psychological security also fall easy prey to such immoral frauds, who pose to possess healing power and spiritual guidance. In the present diaspora spiritual guides, gurus, priests, and spiritual leaders themselves need someone to show them the righteous path. The aim of this paper is to know the true meaning of being a Guru and ultimately to beware of this fake Guru culture which is spreading like epidemic in the country.

Key Words:- Guru, Disciple, Charlatans, Ruth Jhabvala's A New Dominion, spiritual awakening, blind faith.

Introduction

To understand the Guru concept well, a good and comprehensive study of Indian heritage and related functions of spiritual leaders is required. The most ancient Hindu religious texts are the *Vedas*. According to Indian tradition as well as the theory of the *Vedas* “one must have – as Yajnavalkya had – a master, or guru”; (Parbhavananda, *Spiritual Heritage India*, 29). In present time the ‘guru’ is a composite of ‘Acharya’, the teacher in his hermitage. Insofar as



the guru concept goes psychologically, the guru is one who takes the disciple to alternate states of consciousness.

Chanakya was the real mentor who gave true guidance and real teachings to Chandragupta and made him a pivotal figure in the history of India. The relationship between Guru and disciple should be like that of Chanakya and Chandragupta, but in the contemporary society it is hard to find such Gurus who have real insight.

Method

This paper is the study of emerging fake Gurus, Babas, Sadus, and Sadhvis, taking the reference of Ruth Praver Jhabvala's seventh novel *A New Dominion*.

Discussion

Ruth Praver Jhabvala, original name Ruth Praver, (born May 7, 1927, Cologne, Germany—died April 3, 2013, New York, New York, U.S.), novelist and screenwriter, well known for her witty and insightful portrayals of contemporary Indian lives and, especially, for her 46 years as a pivotal member of Ismail Merchant and James Ivory's filmmaking team. Jhabvala's family was Jewish, and in 1939 they emigrated from Germany to England; she was made a naturalized British citizen in 1948. After receiving an M.A. in English (1951) from Queen Mary College, London, she married an Indian architect and moved to India, where she lived for the next 24 years. After 1975 she lived in New York City, becoming a U.S. citizen in 1986. Her novel *Heat and Dust* (1975) won the Prize and was made into a film in 1982. Ruth Praver Jhabvala was awarded a CBE in 1998.

In the story of the novel *A New Dominion*, the Western characters happen to be 'spiritual seekers' who visit India to explore the rich cultural heritage of this country. The search for the truth of life brings the foreigners to India. As a general perception the Western society is full of degenerating youth. Some of them being fed up of leading fast life come to India, thinking it to be the country of sages and saints who can guide them and help them to achieve spiritual awakening but unfortunately fall into the trap of certain charlatans which creates several psychological problems and physical ailments (like jaundice).

Relatedly, certain Indian characters also suffer from the lack of social consciousness emanating from weak ego, narrow-mindedness and selfish desires. As such, they are socially maladjusted and exhibit lack of awareness of their genuine needs as well as feelings and beliefs. Therefore, they become easy prey to unscrupulous elements in the guise of godmen/god women with alleged powers of spiritual guidance and counsel while being mere impostors.

The novel has three parts: the first is set in Delhi; the second, in the holy city of Benaras; and the third, in Maupur, a small town in Rajasthan. Both Indian and Western characters move about a great deal from place to place undergoing different experiences of the religious, spiritual, political and socio-cultural domains.

A New Dominion highlights in depth and detail the story of three British girls, Lee, Evie and Margaret; Raymond, a British tourist. The first sub-heading of the novel is *Lee Travels*. It reveals that the main objective of Lee is to visit India and experience varied aspects of Indian spirituality and culture. Her quest along with that of Evie's and Margaret's, lands them in a



small ashram near Banaras of a Yogi, who is grandiloquent and has delusions of spreading his influence worldwide as if he were Swami Vivekananda, such be the inflation that he suffers. This stems from his colossal egotism whose hallmark is callousness. Under his sway, Lee is violently raped, and Margaret dies due to denial of medical treatment at the right time. Evie who is frail as a leaf identifies herself with Swami as she is hollow within. She, unlike Lee, never manages to free herself from the Swami's influence and remains a doormat. This section of the novel received the major focus from Jhabvala. Though the narratology is objective, Jhabvala criticizes the Guru tradition. She does not tell the reader about the familial and socio-cultural background of these three girls neither omnisciently nor through any flash-back, but it appears that they lack familial connections. In their need to belong they relate to this beastly guru. The reason for this in all the three cases is necessarily pathological.

Raymond (who does not belong to the Ashram), requests Swamiji to allow him to hospitalize Margaret who was severely ill. However, the god —man's sway over her and Evie is total. Thus, Margaret refuses and Evie, as per instructions, continues reading the holy book and administering potions. It appears both Western girls have strange obsession for the said Swamiji. While the horrified sexual experience of Lee with Swamiji makes her feel repugnant, Margaret dies of her illness. Evie, however, feels that proximity with Swamiji is divine and would give her spiritual peace.

Jhabvala has used the ironic mode to disapprove the charlatans who pose as authorities of religious and spiritual knowledge. However, they are not true gurus who can lead from darkness to light, but simply exploitative elements who harm both Indian and Western disciples indiscriminately. The Western characters fall into the predicaments in their respective quests for peace or inner identity — erroneously conceiving it as an Indian culturally branded product. However, they neither achieve peace; nor are they able to stand on the terra-firma of their own culture, instead, they become parody figures.

It would be briefly relevant to touch upon certain terms in connection with this project wherein these are applicable. Burlesque is often defined as "an incongruous imitation" (Abrams 17) in manner and matter of a literary genre, usually written for its own sake, though it is a form of satire. *A New Dominion* does have elements of the same as its diction and expression, plus atmosphere, are rendered descriptively and vignette-wise in a rather consciously satiric imitation of style of the less fluent writers. Here burlesque is used generically. Burlesque may be either high or low, that is, the mock epic or parody and the Hudibrastic satire respectively (Abrams 18-19). *A New Dominion* encompasses both at varying instances, depending on characters and subplots and overall creation as well as impact. As a parody it is of a high order and Jhabvala's work does contain strong elements of all of these.

Another term, Utopia (Abrams 177) is the class of fiction which represents an ideal political state and way of life. *A New Dominion* can be said to be a mock utopia, in a minor sense, in the total mock mould. So, a comparison with Plato's *Republic* would be ludicrous, a true utopia works in dialogue form, though actually an essay. Similarly, the horrible imaginary world of the '*Dystopia*' (Abrams 178) can also be applied to the novel in discussion in



connection with Lee, Evie and Margaret suffering at Swamiji's hands, a point elaborated later in the project, though without specific recourse to the term. However, the use of this is strictly narrow, not encompassing wider socio-political, technological and futuristic concerns of the proper genre as such. Therefore, suffice it to say, that *A New Dominion* has, in small or moderate measure all of these (Burlesque, Utopia, Dystopia) in the imitation mode.

Imitation can often become mockery in real life, but it is necessary as a tool to learn. Social inter-relationship is the basis of human societies, culture and civilizations. Within it are contained physical, socio-motivational, psycho-physiological, and cultural proximities. It presupposes class differences and both convergences and divergences. The importance therein of humanity or mankind is paramount instead of the masses. In today's world migration and its connected state of globalization assumes importance. Nowhere can the cultural and often the religious dimension be denied.

To examine Yasmin Gooneatne's view of *A New Dominion* in her book *Silence, Exile and Cunning: The Fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala*. She describes the novel as one of conflict between good and bad, old and modern.

'The conflict between good and evil in *A New Dominion* is not capable of a simple resolution into – let us say – a battle between Christianity and Hinduism for Lee's soul, or even between modern science and Indian spiritual disciplines for Margaret's life. It is both of these; and more. 'Good' characters show themselves to be occasionally both flawed and ridiculous, 'evil' ones are attractive and disarmingly polite; seriousness and comedy are inextricably blended in incident after incident. Good and evil co-exist, in fact, at every level and in every character in *A New Dominion*, just as they have a habit of doing in real life; and although Ruth Jhabvala supplies her readers (and her characters) with signposts and resting places along the path of their pilgrimage, her characteristic irony ensures that we each make our own way to that personal celestial city wherein, if we have read the signs carefully enough, puzzlement ceases and understanding is complete. For herself, however, one suspects that the pilgrimage continues, and that the sustained ironies of *A New Dominion* have made possible yet another stage on its author's journey towards a better understanding of India, of life and of herself.' (203-204)

So, according to Gooneatne, the conflict between good and evil in the novel is independent of religious leanings of the characters. It may be further argued that the mystical element of both religions — Hinduism and Christianity — is universal which neither time nor modernity nor sciences can swallow. Positivity towards life is thus pervasive to all faiths – which the superficial differences of ideologies, teachings, rituals and customs at the core cannot nullify or negate. The search for peace, satisfaction in modern comfort, or self-search all are just an escape from one world to another, as is evident in the case of Lee, Margaret, Evie and Gopi. However, the irony of fate comes into play in Lee's and Margaret's respective violations at the Swamiji's hands. Their companion Evie's brainwashed being also is of the same nature. Thus, their quest for peace becomes a parody of Indian spiritual tradition due to preconceived



notions of spirituality. Satisfaction in material comfort as well as the quest for self is also hollow, just an escapist drug in nature as evident in its transience.

The co-existence of modernity and traditionalism, and universal or mundane love can give real peace and salvation. In this light the irony of *A New Dominion* is stark in the sense that the good characters are rendered ridiculous and the evil ones 'magnetic' in hold and appeal. So, the beauty – on the surface – can be deceptive as proven in male Guru Swamiji and female Sadhvi Banubai. Their wisdom is proved self-serving and hollow, a vacuous parade in form. Banubai, a so-called theosophical character (Sadhvi), has an obsession for Gopi. When she comes to know about his engagement, she is disturbed, perhaps because she will be losing control over one of her disciples. This Sadhvi is herself in his fetters as the inordinate attention showered by her on Gopi illustrates a veritable obsession.

Now to detail what Lauri Sucher must comment on the novel as it is highly relevant.

A New Dominion details the progress of two major love triangles and several other minor rivalries. The first concerns the two English girls, Lee and Margaret, who love Swami; the next concerns Raymond and his rival, the fiery Indian prince Asha, who love beautiful Gopi. There is an old symmetry in the fact that Margaret literally dies as a result of her obsessional love for Swami, while Lee reluctantly repudiates him; and Asha, having succeeded in keeping Gopi, retreats into an alcoholic stupor, while Raymond rather reluctantly leaves for England. Both Margaret and Asha get their man, unluckily for them. Both Lee and Raymond do not and are the more fortunate.

There are other rivals too, for dominion in human relations is made up of, depends on, rivalry. If there were no rival, beloved would be that much less valuable. Gopi is also loved – though he becomes an issue in the novel – by the guru Banubai at her ashram. Sensing a rival in Raymond, she implicitly accuses him of racism and throws him out. Banubai also competes with Asha for Gopi. Both Margaret and Lee compete with Evie, the third English disciple, for Swami's attention. Asha's servant Bulbul resents Banubai's influence on her mistress. Raymond's servant Shyam resents Gopi. Lee sleeps casually with Gopi and thus is a rival to Asha. Even Swami and Banubai resent each other as fellow teachers of meditation, and each subtly undermines the other's competence. Every human relationship bears the seeds of jealousy. (51-52)

The infatuation and carnal relationships are thus of pivotal importance to the plot with respect to the love triangles, specifically. In carnal relationships there is no deep emotional bonding or *Rasa* (in Indian terms). The novel depicts Indian scenario of seventies, the period nearly twenty-five years after independence which should have shown the sign of independence both mentally and outwardly, but the things are being done turbulently at political level only.

Lee's quest stems from the depths of herself, which she desires to explore with the aid of a spiritual guru for inner illumination, spirituality. So, she decides to join Margaret at Swamiji's Ashram. This blind faith in guru, who is himself given to worldly pleasures, proves to be a horrifying experience to Lee, Evie, and Margaret. They had come to India separately, but the irony of fate is that all of them fall prey to the same guru, known as Swamiji.



Ruth Praver Jhabvala believes that India has tremendous spiritual knowledge and there are several spiritual gurus who can become torchbearers for seekers. But the true gurus are neither easily available nor accessible; a great deal of quest is required for the purpose. She touches this subject in Apologia to her latest work, *My Nine Lives*:

Although I soon felt at home wherever I happened to be, at the same time I held back almost deliberately, from being truly assimilated. It was as though I wanted to feel exiled from some other place and to be free to go back to or in search of it. But then these quests turned out not to be for a place after all but always for a person. This may have been a person I have looked up to, or been in love with, maybe even for some sort of guru or guide. Someone better, stronger, wiser, altogether other ... Does such a person exist, and if so, does one ever find him? (vii-viii)

Due to emergence of fraud Gurus, the above quotation is apt. There are no true spiritual Gurus who can show guidance to their disciples. By analysing the story of *A New Dominion* and the present horrid realities, it is difficult to say that true spiritual guides really exist. They themselves are deluded and need some psychotherapy and a mentor who can tell them the real meaning of enlightenment.

Conclusion

After 72 years of Independence, the mental slavery is still there, people are slaves of their own insecurities. Illiteracy, poverty and superstitions still prevail in our society. Not even illiterates but also the educated ones are blind followers. They don't try to search the peace and guidance from within themselves and think that these Gurus can show them the path leading towards salvation. How can someone like Ram Rahim, Bapu Asa Ram and Radhe Ma give spiritual guidance, when they themselves are not free from the worldly desires. They are rather worse than the commoners. These self-proclaimed Gurus or messengers of God are sexually starved beasts, hungry for power, name, and fame.

It is the time to have awareness and know that these thugs are alike the *Swamiji* of *A New Dominion*, who by no means is enlightened, rather an exploitative 'bhogi' and so is Banubai (Sadhvi). In common parlance, Swami means master, but its deeper meaning is spiritually enlightened; a holy man who should have attained Enlightenment and can direct his followers/disciples on the right path or at least, give a taste of it in relational terms to the seekers. In this sense he is a spiritual mentor. Thus, a true guru should invariably be a recipient of spiritual transference and able to make his/her disciple exalted.

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Dr. Vandana Sharma, belongs to Shimla, Himachal Pradesh. Her area of specialisation is Anglo-Indian novels. She has worked for 20 years in Higher Education Department of Govt. of Himachal Pradesh, India. She joined Jazan University, Saudi Arabia as Assistant Professor English Literature in September 2011 and is Head of the English Department for past three years at Faculty of Science & Arts Farasan, Jazan University, K.S.A. She is an active member of Quality Assurance team of the University for English Department.
