

## Deterioration of Morality in Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*

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### Abstract

Ruth Praver Jhabvala (1927-2013) is a well known name because her elaboration of experiences in India and writing novels and tales on Indian subjects. *Heat and Dust* (1975) is a very well known novel by Jhabvala. It was the novel which brought the Booker Prize in 1975, the year of its publication, was something of a watershed for this expatriate novelist. This most celebrated novel came at the end of a series of three novels which dwell upon the dilemma of western women living in India. More strikingly after this novel Jhabvala took her final flight for the United States after living in India for 25 years of her married life. *Heat and Dust* is again a sordid tale of misadventures of the Europeans coming to India either on administrative task or for spiritual enlightenment or on some other adventurous mission. Jhabvala presents the European individuals especially women suffering from the agony of a tragic obsession with India-the country that metamorphoses every being and everything. In *Heat and Dust*, the British individual identity was tarnished by a married English woman, Olivia Rivers. Olivia got exploited by a fading bankrupt dynamic 'Nawab' in whose pursuit she became the fallen Eve of the high English moral society. The bridge between the two societies widened as this kind of a relationship was not accepted, especially in the rigid Indian society, where marriage held certain 'moral values'.

**Keywords-** Morality, Symbolism, Expatriate, Patriarchy, Sexual Passion

The title of the novel, *Heat and Dust*, symbolizes the psychological state of the characters involved. The first reference to the title occurs in Olivia's 'way of life' in fact, the first phase of it when, as the wife of Douglas, she lives in a large and dull house. She feels bored and lonely in that spacious house-

“The rest of the time Olivia was alone in her big house with all doors and windows shut to keep out the heat and dust”.<sup>1</sup>

Douglas is always busy with his official duties. He has little time to spare for his wife who is all the time waiting for him. He is a workaholic. His superiors applaud him for his sincerity and honesty and the way he handles the administration in the district-

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“Douglas 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. He was upright and just”.<sup>2</sup>

The fortitude with which Englishmen bear the heat while on duty in the plains is related to the strength, tenacity and moral uprightness of their character. This, in fact, is one aspect of the general image of an Anglo-Indian. Douglas is the prime example of such an image in the novel. His wife loves him very much ---- "for his imperturbability, his English solidness and strength, his manliness".<sup>3</sup> Douglas is worried very much about Olivia as he finds 'her bored' and 'out of mood'. He feels that the effect of the heat and dust on Anglo-Indian women is such they often become irritable and quarrelsome. According to A. Ramakrishna Rao - "Douglas for instance, blames the Indian heat and dust for increasing tension building up between Olivia and himself".<sup>4</sup>

The young Nawab of Khatm invites all the Anglo-Indian officials along with their wives for a dinner party. Mr. Harry is a close house guest to the Nawab Sahib. Douglas and Olivia also attend the dinner party. For Olivia, all the officials look dull and boring except her husband. --- "Only Douglas was different. She stole a look at him: Yes, he was right. As always, he was sitting up very straight; his nose was straight, so was his forehead; his evening jacket fitted impeccably. He was noble and fair".<sup>5</sup> Such a favorable view of Douglas' appearance is not restricted to Olivia who, being his wife, may be partial. Even in Harry's opinion, Douglas distinguished himself from others in the party. Surprisingly, the host, Nawab's eyes rest on Olivia. She allows his gaze to study her while she pretends not to notice. She likes the 'behaviour' of the Nawab, the style of his conversation, the way he receives the guests, the arrangement of the dinner with long tables decorated with flowers, candle bars, the variety of the dishes, pomegranates, pineapples, crystallized fruits, little golden bowls, etc. -- - "She felt she had, at last in India, come to the right place".<sup>6</sup> Olivia likes the way the Nawab looks at her when she first comes in. --- "His eyes had lit up - he checked himself immediately, but she had seen it and realised that here at last was one person in India to be interested in her the way she was used to".<sup>7</sup>

Jhabvala very scrupulously observes the behaviour of the Anglo-Indians and the effect of heat and dust on them. They often become irritable and quarrelsome. The only escape for them is to go to some hill-station like Simla. But the men posted at far off places would not avail of such easy options. They would instead remain at their posts of duty and devote themselves to their work. Thus, Douglas, Saunders, Major Minnies and other Anglo-Indian officials do not think of going to any hill-resorts. However, the option is open for the ladies and they generally make use of it to spend half the year at Simla. Douglas ascribes Olivia's irritability to the climate-

“He sucked at his pipe in rather a pleased way which made her cry out sharply; "Don't do that" He took it out of his mouth and stared in surprise. "I hate you with that thing, Douglas," she explained.

Although he didn't understand why, he saw that she was upset so he laid it aside. "I don't like it much myself," he said frankly. There was a pause. She stopped sewing stared into space; her pretty lower lip was sulky.”<sup>8</sup>

Douglas decides to send his wife to Simla with the other European ladies but Olivia's refusal to go to Simla is beautifully illustrated in the following passage- "I'm not going" Olivia said, sitting up

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very straight and looking at him very straight too. Then she said, "The Nawab Wants to give a party for us."

This conversation between Douglas and Olivia makes it clear that broken moral values between them is at peak level. Douglas plans something for Olivia but she has different ideas. He wants to provide her a comfortable stay at Simla but she is not ready and reacts in a 'negative way'. This lack of mutual understanding and settlement strikes a chord of broken moral values between them. Olivia realises this, "Why are we quarreling?"<sup>9</sup> she asked.

He considered her question for a moment and then came up with his reasoned reply- "Because the climate is making you irritable. That's only natural, it happens to all of us. And of course it's much worse for you having to stay home all day with nothing to do. That's why I want you to go away."<sup>10</sup> After a moment he added --- "You don't think I like it any better than you, do you."<sup>11</sup> Then she collapsed completely and could only be held up by his strong arms. ----"She said she'd be bored, she'd be irritable, she'd be hot, she'd quarrel with him - all right ! But please not to send her away from him."<sup>12</sup>

Olivia does not like to go because of her growing involvement and interest in the Nawab. She pleads with her husband not to send her away to Simla. Her growing attraction towards the Nawab leads her gradually away from her family. K.P.K. Menon rightly remarks:--- "The attraction is mutual and culminates in her elopement with him."<sup>13</sup> It is true that Douglas and Olivia are married and they are wife and husband but their 'marital life is in disarray'. It is understood that Olivia is sentimental, emotional whereas Douglas is a man with a 'practical bent of mind'. Actually, they require mutual understanding and settlement. It is conspicuously absent and 'this broken moral values may be owing to different attitudes towards life'. Douglas does everything for Olivia, he is so busy and he does not have the time to talk to his wife leisurely and pleasantly. He does the work mechanically. He does not take care of her psychological views for making life more pleasant, more enjoyable by going for outings, picnics, and pastime activities.

Besides all these things, his routine and tight schedule for the day-to-day administration of Satipur province has disturbed the 'peace of his family life'. Olivia is often obsessed with the idea that Douglas has 'time for others and not for her'. Douglas feels that his wife should be a conformist, but Olivia feels that she is not an 'object' but a human being with her own 'psychological and emotional desires'. Though she is materially well off and has all the comforts, her emotional life is 'badly shattered'. Douglas thinks that the closed bungalow without heat and dust, the servants to carry out the orders of his wife, food to eat, books to read and piano to play on are enough to stay at home and live happily. But Olivia thinks that there are certain situations when she needs her husband; he should sit with her without hurried programmes, talk to her without administrative worries, and move together 'keeping the wife and administration separately'. She feels that there must be a fixed time for administration and the rest of the time should be for her only as she wants to be the queen of her life with pleasures but not with pains with such dry life.

Some-how, the conservative mind of Douglas does not suit the mental behaviour of his wife. Therefore, she diverts her mind towards the Nawab and she takes his help for the outings. During one of her secret visits to the Nawab that she pays without the knowledge and permission of her husband,

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she tells Harry that she does not want to see the Begum [Nawab's mother] but is interested in the Nawab.----"I come here to be with you-and him of course-I mean, as your friend. Both of you".<sup>14</sup> She likes the Nawab Sahib very much. He is very strong. She is charmed by him. His gay and courteous manners, his mellifluous voice in reciting Urdu poetry, his luxurious palace and its inscrutable interiors, his grand parties attract Olivia. She feels that there is life in the temperament of the Nawab. As a young European girl, it is such Oriental aspects which impress her. Compared to the charming Nawab, the Anglo-Indian officials appear quite boring to Olivia.--- "She kept asking herself how it was possible to lead exciting lives-administering whole provinces, fighting border battles, advising rulers-and at the same time to remain so dull".<sup>15</sup> Thus, Douglas' absence of feelings towards the emotional feelings of Olivia creates a 'gulf between wife and husband'. Laurie Sucher opines that this 'novel is rich in nature imagery. It contrasts the heat and dust of the plains-which signify at once an obsessive sexuality and the absence of feeling-with the life giving moisture of the Himalayas'.

As a young bride, Olivia adores Douglas Rivers' gentlemanly idealism. She lives his English solidness and strength but with the passing of time and closer perspective of wifehood, her ardour fades. She suddenly thinks about him and says:--- "What manliness.? He can't even get me pregnant!" Then, she allows herself to be drawn into a liaison with a powerless minor prince of Khatm as that is the only option left to her. It is an option between a wooden British official and a charming Nawab; she prefers the latter. There was no alternative option left to her but to decide to go with the Nawab because she has become 'like the lovesick ladies of the Kangra miniature paintings, who toss on their lovely embroidered couches while dust-storms gather threateningly overhead, she is racked by the delicate fire of a passion that her affectionate but unimaginative husband fails to recognise although he had seen a lot of Indian fevers'.

'Prompted by the decision to opt for Eastern way of life she goes to the 'Shrine of Baba Firdous' at the invitation of the Nawab. There she sees the gang of dacoits armed with guns saluting the Nawab. She suspects their relationship with the Nawab but he clarifies that they are good people. She believes him and --- "he respectfully touched her arm with his finger-tips."<sup>16</sup> In gay mood, the Nawab also describes to her the way his ancestor, Amanulla Khan, was treated by the British people and he in a gloomy mood terms them as very cunning. He suddenly cries and gets upset. Olivia cannot tolerate his misery. So, --- "she put out her hand and laid it on his chest as if to soothe him. And really he was soothed; he said, 'How kind you are to me.' He laid his hand on top of hers and pressed it closer against his chest. She felt drawn to him by strength, a magnetism that she had never yet in all her life expected with anyone."<sup>17</sup> Later, --- "he led her away from the shrine and they lay together under a tree."<sup>18</sup> She cannot resist the temptation to love him. In Nirmal Mukherji's view --- "Olivia is destroyed because she is the most vulnerable. She who is sensitive, passionate, human, and aesthetic is destroyed. Whereas the 'tough old hens' like Mrs. Crawford and Mrs. Minnies survive."<sup>19</sup>

The discomforts of the British are brought forth, the monotony of life, the heat of the plains, diseases they had to confront. This was the life which even Ruth Jhabvala had to face. It was during such times of frustration that Olivia could not fight against the powerful grip of Eros. However hard she tried. She couldn't help being drawn magnetically to the deadly Nawab, like a victim in a

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whirlpool. The attraction was very strong and fatal. Being young and enthusiastic, Olivia finds the company of the other English boring and calls the women old hens.

Olivia becomes pregnant. She first informs the Nawab Sahib and later her husband. Both the lover and the husband were happy over this news but Olivia worries more when she comes to know that her would-be child will have black hair on the head because she knows that the Nawab and not her husband was the father. So, she opts for an abortion under the supervision of the Nawab's mother and subsequently she is admitted to the hospital where Dr. Saunders declares that it is a case of abortion. When everything becomes public, she straightway goes to the palace of the Nawab who in turn provides her accommodation at the Himalayas. There she breathes her last.

In the novel we see the fluctuation of moral standards according to the change of time. The outlook towards the physical relationship between Olivia and the Nawab is viewed differently by the then existing English society, the modern narrator, Inder Lal and others. The fate of the narrator is entirely different and faces no kind of criticism when she indulges in pre-marital sex with the married Inder Lal and the over sexed Child. Their liaison is an open affair in the township of Satipur.

Inder Lal is justified by his reasoning. What connection did the past have with the present? He was more of a practical thinker where for him the present problem needed more attention than the people of bygone days whom he had never set eyes on. He lived in a secular India where thoughts of equality and inter-racial marriage were being accepted. The narrator, her parents and Inder Lal were people who did not resist total change of human thoughts on changing moral values. The nephew's outlook towards the Nawab has been expressed to the narrator in a different light. The immoral acts of the Nawab are looked upon as 'naughty boy' and they don't feel ashamed of the ancestral doings, as it had been a part of their life style.

Olivia and the narrator were two different entities having different characteristics, their ways of living and dressing up were different. Olivia was more homely and well dressed, the narrator was comfortable with her rented out room by the government clerk Inder Lal, and lived a life of a traveler. She shocked Inder by doing manly deeds of carrying her own luggage upto her own room. She was not impressed by the disorganised way of living when saw Inder Lal's untidy house. Another difference was that Olivia had come before independence as the team of the ruling Raj, and her lifestyle had to follow certain code of conduct always under the eyes of the English seniors. The narrator arrived in Independent India as a traveler and had freedom to live and adapt to the Indian social, political and psychological lifestyle.

In the narrator's life, Inder Lal fell in the shadow of the Nawab of Khatm, the relationship between the two was very free. Initially Inder Lal felt odd moving with her, but later on with their excursions of the town, their friendship grew. Maybe at first his kind gestures brought out the Indian attitude of being hospitable. Just as the Nawab glorified about his ancestors to Olivia, similarly Inder Lal told about the past from a historical point of view. Inder Lal finds a friend, a confidant in the narrator and she tries not to hurt his sentiments. When she is offered "prasad", she holds on to the sticking thing and later throws it out of the bus window.

Inder Lal's wife Ritu is a 'mentally unfit woman'. The suffocating relationship with Ritu leads him to find sexual and social asylum in the narrator. The Nawab's wife Sandy, was declared unfit and

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he finds solace in Olivia. The narrator tries to find a modern solution to Ritu's illness, i.e. psychological treatment, but Maji prefers pilgrimage.

One is amazed to see the modern outlook of the neighbours in the early.70s ---

He makes a pretence of going to sleep downstairs but when it is dark he comes creeping up. I'm sure everyone knows, but it doesn't matter. They don't mind. They realise that he is lonely and misses his family very much; no human being is meant to live without a family.<sup>20</sup>

Maybe the narrator's pre-marital affair is overlooked by the neighbours, but Inder Lal's extra-marital liaison would definitely have been scandalous in the Indian society, especially where the law of marriage holds man and wife together till the end of their lives. For the narrator who was a Christian, maintaining virginity was an initiation of the divine model that is Virgin Mary. A chaste person according to St. Luke was equal to the angels.

Inder Lal's frequent night visits to the narrator make him a dark lover.--- "I think he prefers to be with me when it is dark. Then every-thing is hidden and private between us two alone."<sup>21</sup>

In *Heat and Dust*, moral actions depend on individual characters; some feel their actions to be morally right and others do not. Moral judgments are made on good intentions and motives. There are some actions which cannot be blamed. Moving away from normal relationships, we move into areas of sexual dissidence pictured in the novel.

The central theme in *Heat and Dust* is the inter-racial union of sexual passion between characters such as the Nawab and Olivia, Narrator and Inder Lal. In this paper we shall discuss the broken moral values between husband & wife and different kinds of passions which are reflected in the novel which do not abide by the moral codes set up by the society. The morality of abortion and the birth of illegitimate children with emphasis on the cure of female infertility has been examined in the novel.

We have also analyze the patriarchal system of Indian marriages, the strength and power behind the laced purdah, the elevated status of the male, and the political and social conflict between the diminishing princely states. And finally, We have brought out the change in the moral system during Olivia's time (1923) with that of the narrator's (1970). Man by birth is not immoral, but is conditioned into being one by social conditions such as unemployment and poverty. Inequality of human rights. Secondly, the reason for temptation or the ability to lead an immoral life is due to the restrictive life of the does and don'ts of a society, and due to this lack of freedom one is tempted to break the defined moral values. Dr. G. Srinivasan remarks: --- 'A choice of value implies ethical freedom, which is the core of authentic human existence. In choosing his own freedom, he chooses the freedom of others as well.'

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