

Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*: As an Autobiography of the Narrator

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Abstract: *In the novel Heat and Dust, Jhabvala describes two parallel very different narratives- one going on in the present and the other from the past. The novel offers a double vision in terms of the image of the country that it portrays. Here Jhabvala has depicted the autobiography of the narrator. The narrator, a young unnamed English woman who comes to India to reconstruct the story of her grandfather's first wife Olivia, who had an affair with the Nawab of Khatm. While reconstructing the story of Olivia by actually visiting the places where she lived, the narrator also records her own life in her diary. As a result, the novel presents more about the narrator than that of her grandfather and Olivia. In this sense, the novel is an autobiography of the narrator.*

Key Words: *narratives, vision, image, portrays, depicted, autobiography, reconstruct, affair, records, narrator.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Autobiography means the life-history of a person written by himself or herself. In *Heat and Dust*, Jhabvala has depicted the autobiography of the narrator. The narrator, a young unnamed English woman who comes to India to reconstruct the story of her grandfather's first wife Olivia, who had an affair with the Nawab of Khatm. While reconstructing the story of Olivia by actually visiting the places where she lived, the narrator also records her own life in her diary. Here the narrator makes the use of Olivia's personal letters to her sister, Marcia as a venture of her research. In this way, the narrator presents the story of her grandfather's first wife Olivia as well as the story of her own relationship with Inder Lal. Thus, *Heat and Dust* is a very engaging story with romance, history drama, political intrigue, scandal etc.

2. DISCUSSION:

The young narrator, Miss Rivers (Though her name is not mentioned in the story but being a granddaughter of Douglas Rivers, it is possible to call her Miss Rivers) comes to India on a quest for the truth of a relationship entered into by her grandfather's first wife, Olivia Rivers with the Nawab of Khatm in 1923. The narrator's subject of research slowly widens from Olivia's life in India to her own in India. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator says, "Fortunately, during my first few months here, I kept a journal so I have some record of my early impressions. If I were to try and recollect them now, I might not be able to do so" [1]. The narrator makes it as much her story as that of Olivia's.

The narrator narrates how Olivia and her husband come to India, how she falls in love and then elopes with the Nawab. The affair results in Olivia's pregnancy and the subsequent abortion. And at last, Olivia has to run away from the hospital to the Nawab's palace where she is given a cottage and then she lives as the mistress of the Nawab. Apart from the story of Olivia, the novel is an autobiography of the narrator. Here, the narrator records the life-style of Olivia and the Nawab and Douglas Rivers. The narrator records her own experiences in India, her love-affair with Inder Lal. The narrator also records India in its variegated form; a country of heat and dust and moral depravity. The narrator highlights India with its poverty, its beauty and its heat and dust.

At the time of her arrival in India, the narrator has nothing; neither acquaintances, nor dignity. She develops her relations with Inder Lal, Dr. Gopal, Chid, Maji and other women. The narrator tries to Indianize herself as much as possible. She mixes freely with the Indians, dresses herself in Indian clothes and learns their language. In the novel, the narrator records her first sexual relationship with Chid, a dirty man who is lying in graveyard groaning in pain, and she has taken him to her home. Later on, the narrator records her sexual intimacy with Inder Lal, a Government officer and her guide. In the novel, at one place the narrator refers to the true personality of Inder Lal: "When I first saw him, he seemed to me a typical Indian clerk, meek and bowed down with many cares. But now I see that he is not meek and bowed down at all – or only outwardly – that really inside himself he is alive and yearning for all sorts of things beyond

his reach” [2]. The narrator records her friendship with Inder Lal. She refers how her relation developed with Inder Lal. Gradually, the narrator and Inder Lal have started meeting secretly. As she says:

Inder Lal and I lie on my bedding on the opposite side, and it is more and more delightful to be with him. He trusts me now completely and has become very affectionate. I think he prefers to be with me when it is dark. Then everything is hidden and private between us two alone. . . . I also think of my pregnancy and I think of it as part of him. But I have not told him about it [3].

Though the narrator is unmarried, she wants a child as she herself says, “It was absolutely clear to me now that I wanted my pregnancy and the completely new feeling – of rapture – of which it was the cause” [4]. The narrator does not disclose her pregnancy to Inder Lal and joins to deliver the child.

3. CONCLUSION:

To conclude, the narrator records the complete story of when and why she has come to Satipur; and how she falls in friendship and then sexual relationship with Inder Lal. And lastly, she goes back to England with her pregnancy. Thus, there is the large description of the narrator’s story during her stay in India. She has given a picture of her experiences with Indian people and India. Above all, the narrator has recorded the life-history of her family, particularly her grandfather and his first wife. Thus, while reconstructing the story of Olivia, her grandfather’s first wife, the narrator has recorded her own life in the diary. As a result, the novel presents more about the narrator than that of her grandfather and Olivia. In this sense, the novel is an autobiography of the narrator.

REFERENCES:

1. Jhabvala, Ruth Praver (1994). Heat and Dust (p. 2). Harmondsworth: Penguin.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 50-51.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 140-141.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 165.