CHAPTER VI

A NOTE ON SPIRITUAL INDIA: INTERCULTURAL THEME IN A NEW DOMINION AND JOURNEY TO ITHACA
Religion forms one of the basic elements of culture in a society. Thus religion plays a crucial role in encounter between two different cultures. In a comparative study of the intercultural theme in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *A New Dominion* and Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca*, the novelists "touch upon religio-philosophical encounters because they are impediments of a fruitful linking of hands." In these novels, *A New Dominion* and *Journey to Ithaca* Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and Anita Desai have focussed mainly on the subject of 'spiritual India' in the eyes of the westerners.

Set in India of the 1970s, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *A New Dominion* (1972) revolves round the experiences of Western men and women in India. They are Lee, Margaret, Evie, Raymond and Miss Charlotte. They have come to India for different reasons: Lee, Margaret and Evie come to India "to seek peace of
mind and spiritual solace in order to give meaning to their empty lives.” They are attracted towards India “not only because the East has a message to give but also because they are tired of their material west.” The novel also portrays important Indian characters- Asha, Rao Sahib, Gopi, Bob, Banubai and Swamiji. They are shown as closely associated with the westerners in the novel.

_A New Dominion_ is divided into three parts—“Delhi”, “The Holy City” and “Maupur.” It opens with the episode called ‘Lee Travels’. In India, Lee travels several places of the land in crowded buses and trains. Her first encounter with the alien country introduces her to its realities—especially its backwardness which is characterised by poverty, dirt, over population and adverse climatic conditions:

The land was usually parched and ugly except where there were fields. When there were fields there were peasants in them and these too were always the same: drab bodies in drab loin clothes. Inside the buses or trains it was also always the same. But whereas outside it was empty and silent, inside it was just the opposite. The public transport was always overcrowded.... Everyone was travelling. They went to attend weddings, join pilgrimages, visit relatives in distant place. They brought many children with them, and home livestock, and a variety of shabby bundles ... Journeys were always long for, in order to get from one place to another, great distances had to be traversed. Everyone accepted the overcrowding and the ensuing heat, smells and discomfort without question.

However, she is ready to accept everything about the land as it is because she has come here for a specific reason—“to lose herself to in order – as she liked to put it—to find herself.” (10).

During the course of her travel, Lee comes in contact with both the westerners namely Margaret, Charlotte, Raymond and Evie as well as the
Indian ones namely Rao Sahib, Asha, Gopi, Bob, Banubai and Swamiji. Lee’s journey takes her to many places from small towns to big cities like Delhi. In Delhi, she meets Miss Charlotte. Charlotte is a Christian missionary who has been in India for thirty years. She runs a mission house. And Lee stays in the mission house of Miss Charlotte.

Charlotte’s mission house, a large rambling bungalow, is in a poor shape. But the house serves many purposes, specially social work: one of its rooms, is used as a school for the children of sweepers; in another room, girls of poor families were taught to knit and sew and a corner of the back veranda is used as a part time dispensary. However, Charlotte’s missionary activities have been under threat and she has been having a hard time at present. This is because the Indian government questions the running of christian missions and seems to discourage such activities. As a consequence, the Christian missions have started closing all over the country. And Miss Charlotte has to leave India for her homeland.

It is in Charlotte’s mission house that Lee meets Margaret—an English girl. Margaret has also come to India in order to break free from the materialistic and mechanised world of the west and attain self-fulfillment. Margaret says.

People just don’t come to any more to India to do good. those days are over. What they come for now is—well, to do good to themselves, to learn, to take from India. That’s what Margaret’s here for. Above all, she wants to be pure—to have a pure heart untainted by modern materialism (37).

Before coming to India, Margaret was supposed to be a bridesmaid at her sister’s wedding. But she seemed to be fed up with everything at her place because it appeared too worldly and artificial to her. Therefore, she abandoned
everything at her place and left for Bombay in India. Margaret’s zeal for her beliefs seems to appeal Lee. Lee admits: “I admire Margaret. I like having discussion with her and I am very glad. I met her. What she says is always interesting and her purpose and everything she is.” (39).

In India, Margaret travels from place to place in search of a real guru. Finally, she comes to know of a Swami who speaks English. The Swamiji lives some miles away from the 'holy city' of Benaras. Margaret asks Lee to come to Benaras so that they join Swamiji’s ashram. So, she sends Lee a letter which gives information about her plan.

When Lee receives Margaret's letter, she gets excited about joining the ashram. Lee tells Raymond about the Swamiji Margaret has heard about. But Raymond is not interested in such matters of Indian spirituality. Lee meets Raymond and Gopi at an old monument. Then, she goes with Gopi to a small restaurant. Here, they have kebabs and Gopi takes her to a room upstairs in the hope of making love to her. But Lee does not show any intention of responding to his desires; rather she is too engrossed in looking at the view outside the window:

Lee gave a cry of pleasure and strode to the window. She stayed there looking out, so enraptured by what she saw that she quite forgot about Gopi (50-51).

Thus, she makes an attempt to be a part of the alien land of India.

When Lee fails to respond to Gopi’s urges and desires, he feels hurt and rejected. At this, Lee is sorry that her repulses have hurt Gopi. Therefore, she allows her to make love to her in order to cheer him up. But Lee does not seem to enjoy the experience with Gopi for Gopi is an inexperienced youngman in such matters. On the whole, the experience is not significant for both of them. However, she also feels that it is a part of 'surrender' to the
land. At the same time, this incident seems to reflect the general attitude of Indian men towards western women like Lee: the Indians take it for granted that the western females are brought up on sex and must have slept with many men.

Besides the sexual encounter with Lee, Gopi has also relations with Raymond and Asha. The novel portrays Gopi as a young student who comes from a lower middle-class Indian family in Delhi. Gopi attends a third-rate college as he is unable to get admission in a good college which requires a good score. Gopi has no father, and he lives with his mother and sisters in a "crooked little house in a very crowded locality" (45). In addition to this, Gopi's family share their house with some of their relatives.

Gopi has met the Englishman, Raymond at a wedding party. The novel shows Raymond to be a tourist who comes to India to see the land. In fact, his purpose of his visit is not very significant but he tries to appreciate the country for its rich cultural heritage and its ancient civilization – in terms of its traditional and historical objects. In India, Raymond stays in a flat. And he has a servant by the name of Shyam. Raymond decorates his flat with objects from Indian handicrafts. He seems to enjoy the environment of his flat and feels at ease with it. As he says, "Actually. I feel as if I've been living in this flat for ages. I'm already familiar with the exact daily routine of my neighbours"(10). Being sensitive, Raymond is very much aware of his Indian neighbours and other natives around him. This awareness helps him to know about their manners, customs and their lifestyles. And Raymond writes about his Indian experiences to his mother who is in England.

When he came to India, he had brought the names of some Indian with whom he can establish contacts from England. Through these contacts.
Raymond is able to attend dinner parties held by the Indian hosts. Thus, Raymond is being entertained by the Indians at such parties. Later on, he also starts entertaining the Indians as his guests. His servant, Shyam has been of great help to him in this matter. Among his Indian guests, Gopi seems to be a significant one. In fact, Raymond seems to be charmed by Gopi's 'youth and beauty'. At the same time, the young Indian has also been impressed by the pleasant personality of Raymond and his hospitality. Gopi has even misunderstood Raymond to be a rich foreigner who is connected to an embassy or some international organisation. He becomes a bit disappointed when he finds out that Raymond is not so rich as he (Gopi) presumes him (Raymond) to be. But Raymond is only a middle-class Briton with a small legacy from an aunt. He has a job in his uncle's publishing house in England. He had taken a leave of one year to pay a visit to India.

Nevertheless, Gopi being a poor Indian from an ordinary Indian family considers Raymond to be "fabulously wealthy in comparison to him." Gopi has no interest in studies. So, he idles away his time in visiting Raymond's place. In no time, he becomes a frequent visitor to Raymond's flat and spends most of his time with the Englishman there. They also go out together many times. Thus, they become very close with each other. In fact, Raymond's friendship with Gopi seems to be something more than simple friendship between two men: rather there is an element of homosexuality in their relationship. A critic, Haydn Moore Williams comments: "Raymond's relationship with Gopi is frankly homosexual."

Raymond's association with Gopi makes Gopi interact with other westerners—Lee, Margaret and others. It is through Raymond that Gopi is introduced to Lee. And Lee introduces Gopi to Asha, the sister of Rao Sahib.
Rao Sahib is one of the names of the Indians she has brought from England to whom she can be introduced. Lee calls him up when she feels she is in need of a great meal. In return, Rao Sahib invites Lee to an evening party at his residence. It is at this party that Lee meets Rao Sahib's sister, Asha.

_A New Dominion_ shows Rao Sahib to be a politician—an M.P. who aspires to be a Minister. Rao Sahib belongs to some royal family in India. So, he has his palace in his native place, Maipur. Besides the palace, he has a beautiful house—a mansion in New Delhi. His wife, Sunita, is a smart woman who knows how to control a house which is full of servants. And Sunita is as modern in her ideas and views as her husband. In fact, she is an ambitious woman who has been of great help to her husband's political career.

The novel portrays Rao Sahib's sister Asha as a rich middle-aged widow. Asha lives in a beautiful apartment in Bombay. Her fierce and passionate nature revolts against her single lonely life. Despite her wealth and status "she is worried about the passing of time, about her aging and loss of powers—particularly over men." As a consequence she becomes restless and depressed. Now she has realized that she is no longer a young woman and even if she is a good looking middle-aged woman, she has nobody to admire her in the way she desires. In such a state, she is ready to do anything to save herself from such trauma for she feels that she will be losing her sanity.

At this critical juncture of her life, she meets Gopi who is already closely associated with Raymond and Lee. In her first meeting with Gopi, Asha thinks that Gopi is the ultimate solution to her problem. So, she becomes a rival to Raymond to a considerable extent for Gopi's love and attentions. And she also becomes jealous of Lee who is much younger to her. So, Asha
uses her power of wealth and status to win Gopi from Raymond. And she does succeed to a considerable extent. Gopi being from a low income background, is fascinated by Asha’s royal status, wealth and the luxury associated with it. And he loves to enjoy the lifestyle of the rich and the famous offered by Asha. Asha’s relationship with Gopi is a kind of symbiosis between the two. She offers him the luxury of food and dress and he, in his turn satisfies her physical desires.

The Asha-Gopi liaison is also a reminder of Caroline-Valmiki relationship in Kamala Markandaya’s Possession. Possession depicts the unusual relationship between an English patroness—Caroline Bell and her Indian protege—Valmiki the goatherd who is also a talented artist. As R.S. Singh remarks.

She wanted therefore to play the patron and eventually possess the unpossessable… Valmiki acquired the undesired qualities in staged course of six years’ tutelage under Caroline till he grew enough to understand her motives and decide to return to the Swamy back in the village.

In this way, the Caroline Valmiki liaison differs from that of Asha-Gopi. Unlike, Asha and Gopi who belong to the same nationality, Caroline and Valmiki are from different races. Moreover, Asha-Gopi liaison is of mutual benefit to each other but there is no question of such benefit in Caroline-Valmiki relationship. However, the similarity between the two relationships lies in their peculiar amorous relationship between an older rich woman and a younger poor man.

When Asha gets fed up with Gopi she goes to Banubai, a female spiritual leader for spiritual guidance in Benaras. The novel shows Banubai to be an
extraordinary woman. She comes from a rich Parsi family. She had been pampered by her parents and had the best education possible at convent school in India and abroad. She has always been an unusual person with unusual gifts.

She has the ability to look deep into other people's mind and can tell them something about their past and make a guess at their future. In this way, she had gained popularity among a lot of people which includes from all walks of life. She has a number of sophisticated, highly westernised visitors, and if most of them came in the first place to see her as a curiosity, some of them were truly impressed by her power. Many years ago Asha had come to Banubai when Asha was still young and beautiful and Banubai in early middle age. When Banubai sees Gopi, she falls for him. Thus, she also competes with Asha for Gopi. However, it is Asha who finally wins Gopi from both Raymond and Banubai. In fact, the bond between Asha and Gopi is too strong that Gopi loses his interest in marriage arranged by his family. In the end Gopi decides to remain as Asha's gigolo.

In the meantime Lee joins the ashram of the Swamiji whom Margaret has recommended. The ashram of the swamiji is located ten miles away from Benaras. In fact, the Swamiji has chosen the site of the ashram due to many reasons:

This was deliberate policy on Swamiji's part: he did not wish to batten on the holiness of the past but to inspire how souls with a new spirit. It was also convenient that land was going cheap in that area.

The ashram has hutments to be used by the Swamiji and his disciples. The living conditions in the ashram are very poor and causes a lot of discomforts to the followers of the Swamiji. But they are considered as blessings. This is
because the ability to transcend or overcome the physical discomforts is the
surest way of testing a disciple's sincerity. As a consequence, those followers
who are unable to pass the test, leave the ashram. On the other hand, those
disciples who survive the test remain in the ashram to get closer to the Guru.

Among the disciples, there are westerners as well as Indians. However,
the Swamiji encourages his disciples to think themselves as one family. A
sense of unity seems to be achieved when all the disciples are grouped around
Swamiji and he is giving them his beautiful discourses or leading them in
singing devotional songs.

One of the hutments of the ashram has been used as a communal prayer
hall and here the disciples gather every morning and evening for their devotions.
The room of this hutment is decorated by a large coloured picture of the
Swamiji's own Guru, a very holy man who wears no clothes and wears deer
skin. Underneath the picture of the Swamiji's Guru there is a big velvet armchair
with an antimacassar embroidered by one of the disciples and here Swamiji
sat with two devotees, waving a peacock fan over him. They all face the picture
of the holy Guru and Swamiji sitting beneath it, and then they sing their
devotional songs with a great inspiration.

When Lee and Margaret first come to the ashram, they find it difficult
to keep up the daily routine of the ashram. However, they change themselves
and become accustomed to the ways of the ashram under the hypnotising
influence of the Swamiji. The Swamiji seems to be endowed with a special
power of drawing his disciples close to him:

But slowly, as the days passed, cunningly, he enticed them out of themselves. To each of them it appeared and become clear beyond doubt with each successive meeting that he was concentrating only on her (83).
Lee and Margaret meets Evie, a westerner with whom they share a room at the ashram. Evie is a disciple who has stayed in the ashram for three years. Lee considers Evie to be her ideal for she (Evie) has attained the Swamiji's attention that Lee and Margaret have been craving for. In fact, Evie has reached this stage of spiritual swakening after her complete surrender of self to the Guru – the Swami. When the Swami writes a book on the Essence of the Upanishads, Evie patiently assists him by taking down notes of whatever thoughts and ideas the Swami has dictated. She also indulges in other activities associated with the Swamiji's work. Dressed in white cotton sari, Evie follows and obeys Swamiji blindly. Thus, she tries to keep up with the Swamiji who always remains energetic and active. Lee comments on Evie:

I can't imagine him ever feeling tired, and as far as I can see he doesn't, he's always awake long after the rest of us have gone to sleep and he's always the first up, so that sometimes I wonder whether he ever goes to sleep at all. And because he keeps these fantastic hours Evie has to too. She doesn't ever like to leave him in case he says one of his things while she's not there and then it would be lost forever and she's never forgive herself (91-92).

Margaret too is in the process of following Evie's footsteps. She tries hard to please the Swami and gets his attention. She will do anything to achieve her goal. She even becomes jealous of both Evie and Lee for Swamiji's attention that she begins to pick up fights with them. And the Swamiji makes her perform several tasks to mould her in his way. Margaret has to do work which is beyond her capacity. Although she does not know how to cook he has to do it for the whole ashram under the instruction of the Swami.
In the course of time, Margaret becomes totally submissive to the Swami. At the same time, the poor living conditions of the ashram along with the adverse climate affects Margaret’s health badly and she becomes infected with jaundice. When Raymond comes to the ashram, he meets the three female disciples – Evie, Margaret and Lee and their ‘Guru’. Here, he finds Margaret seriously ill; but the sick girl is not so worried about her sickness for she seems to be engrossed in attaining her spiritual goal. When Raymond and Lee become worried about Margaret’s health and offer their help Margaret turns down their help.

On the other hand, she is completely obsessed with Swamiji who is everything to her. Her love for the Swami seems to overwhelm her. In fact, she has reached a stage where she does not believe anybody except the Swami. As a consequence, she does not go to see a doctor even when she knows that she is very ill. This is because she wants to cure herself according to the ways of the Swami and the Swami does not believe in doctors or modern science:

He believes in the ancient form of Indian medicine like it’s written in the Shastras. I believe in it too (161).

However, the Swami is not so concerned with the well-being of his disciples. He just takes Margaret’s illness very casually and does not care about it. Instead of showing his concern towards his disciples, the Swami is too busy in his work of spreading his teachings and religious principles to different places of the world. In fact, he has a plan of giving lectures, gathering new followers, opening new centres in new places. For this purpose, he will travel by aeroplane and helicopter and will appear on T.V. Besides this, he wants to have his ashram air conditioned. And Swamiji wants to publish his manuscript on the essence of Indian religion. So, he befriends Raymond and
tries to win his trust for he knows that Raymond is in the publishing business. And the Englishman will be able to help him to publish his material. On the other hand, Raymond is displeased with the Swami who is too self-centred that he is not at all bothered about the sick disciple, Margaret. Nevertheless, Raymond seems to be impressed by the cheerfulness and vivacity of the Swami. He also finds the Swami as someone who enjoys non-vegetarian food and takes wine.

Inspite of the pleadings from fellow Englishmen like Raymond and others, Margaret continues to remain firm in her goal of belonging to the Swami in the manner a disciple should belong to his or her guru. And she goes on with her spiritual activities. When Margaret’s condition becomes very serious. Lee immediately appeals to Raymond for help. Lee, Raymond along with Bob, takes Margaret to a hospital.

The novel portrays Bob as an efficient young man who has been educated in the U.S.A. He is the son of Rao Sahib’s financial supporter. And Rao Sahib has decided to sell his ‘Retreat’ – the grand palace built by Rao Sahib’s father at Maupur. In fact, Rao Sahib has taken this decision because of his forthcoming election. On the other hand, being a member of the family of the Banias, Bob’s sole aim in life is to make a lot of money; even the country of India is just a stretch of land for him that will be utilised. In this regard, Yasmine Gooneratne comments,

Bob, the go-ahead young man educated in the United States, whose father is a Maupur moneylender, is vigorous proof that in the new India the maharajas are going down before a new plutocracy of young business moguls. 10

However, Bob’s efficiency plays an important role in helping the
distressed westerners -- Raymond, Lee and others in India. In fact, he has been of great help to the westerners when they have to take the sick Margaret to the hospital and make arrangements for her stay there. Unfortunately, Margaret succumbs to her disease after staying in the hospital for a few days. However, she seems to be satisfied with her association with the ashram and the Swami till the end because she considers it as a kind of spiritual enlightenment for her. On the other hand, her fellow Englishmen and women have been deeply affected by the grief of her untimely death.

As for Lee, she does not submit to the Swami easily. She cannot believe in the ways of the Swami from the beginning. Being proud and obstinate she is unable to do what Swamiji has wanted her to do. Like all the other disciples, she also shows her devotion and respects towards the Swami. So, she touches his feet, crouching down like an obedient and humble follower. But she also questions the Swami’s ways: when Swamiji wants Margaret to work in the kitchen, Margaret agrees but Lee makes protests against the Swami because none of them -- Evie, Lee and Margaret can do kitchen work. And when they are confined to the kitchen she (Lee) does not go out from the kitchen against when Evie tells her that the Swami wants her. She tells Evie why Swamiji asks Margaret to do kitchen work, when he knows she cannot. She feels that Margaret should have said ‘No’ to him.

In the meantime, the Swami observes Lee’s attitude and behaviour from close quarters. He feels it is very necessary to change Lee in order that she may become his disciple in the real sense of the term i.e. to possess her completely in mind, soul and even body if necessary. Thus the Swami is fully
determined to possess Lee. The Swami says:

She is my responsibility to mould and to make. But before I can mould and make I have to break. The old Lee must be broken before the new Lee can be formed (144).

Once the Swami has sent every one away from the ashram and stays with Lee only. He forces her to look into his eyes which are quite different from usual – no longer narrow and shrewd, rather, his eyes appear enormous and glow and burn with a supernatural power. He raises one finger and slowly he brings it forward and she watches it, in fear and fascination. He finally brings the tip of it to rest between her eyes. In this way, Lee has been under the spell of Swamiji. Then he puts his hand on her small breast in a casual way. This makes Lee tremble and shudder.

On one occasion, Lee goes to his hut and finds him awake at night. Lee sits on Swami’s bed with him. Then he rapes her by calling her beastly names, shouting them out loud and at the same time hurting her as much as he can. The rape goes on for a long time that it not only hurts but also bores Lee. It also reminds Lee of her sexual experience with Gopi in the hotel room. But then the thought disappears. When the Swami satisfies his lust, he turns her out without a word.

When Lee comes out of Swami’s room, she catches two disciples by surprise. And they are both sitting upon their beds with their ears turned towards the open doors and their mouths dropped open. At this, Lee feels wounded and torn and is filled with rage and disgust. The incident of her rape along with Margaret’s death seem to make Lee revolt against the Swami. And she begins to despise him for what he has done to her and her fellows. However, she
decides to go back to him in the end. Thus the novel ends on a melodramatic note with Lee’s final decision to return to the ashram. The conclusion of the novel also shows Raymond’s planing to return to England and Evie’s unquestioning merging with the Swami.

Thus, in the novel, the intercultural theme at the spiritual level is studied through the westerners’ interaction with the spiritual leaders—Swamiji and Banubai. In this regard, Aruna Chakravarti comments:

The central theme of the novel is an encounter between the forces of Hinduism, as embodied in a spurious godman and an enigmatic holy woman, and the forces of Christianity and modern rationality represented by three western girls on a spiritual quest, a Englishman on a study tour of India and a female missionary who has spent thirty years in India.11

A New Dominion presents Indian spirituality primarily through the character of the Swami and that of Banubai to a considerable extent. In the novel, the Swami is shown to be a charismatic figure and is a great fascination and attraction for the Westerners -- especially the three girls—Lee, Margaret and Evie who are spiritual seekers and the English tourist, Raymond to a lesser degree. O.P. Saxena remarks.

The Swami of course, is a magnetic personality. He can create illusions of hope and happiness through a skillful manipulation of words, gestures and facial expressions.12

Lee, Margaret and Evie look upon the Swami as their spiritual saviour and guide. They hope that the Swami will help them find spiritual peace and solace in their empty meaningless existence. A critic, S. Ambika remarks.

Lee, Margaret and Evie abandon western pragmatism and rationalism and come to India as travellers in search of
Asian mysticism. These westerners who are disgusted with the material stodginess of the western world come with high expectation about oriental spiritualism.\textsuperscript{15}

However, their hopes and dreams about Indian spirituality are belied. This can be known from their association with the Indian spiritual leader—the Swami. In their bid to merge with spiritual India, the three white girls become the credulous victims of the Swami. In fact, the Swami manipulates the westerners by playing on their beliefs and aspirations. Aruna Chakravarti says,

The Swami’s doctrine \emph{to belong and not to be} proves to be source of degeneration for the westerner who responds to it.\textsuperscript{14}

Behind the superficial and pretentious preachings and sermons, the Swami has his own selfish motives.

In her complete surrender of self to the Swami, Evie becomes a non-entity. In fact, she has been drained of all her energy to express her individuality, intellect and emotion. And she does everything as dictated by the Swami and even remains unaffected by Margaret’s death. Laurie Sucher describes Evie’s association with Swamiji.

Evie is his silent, obedient slave; already seasoned Evie, already turned her out, already broken her in. The language is that of the American street, but Swamiji has his own exact equivalent, which described a similar psychological process, culminating in the girl’s fragmentation of self, complete dependency and severing of ties with the outside world.\textsuperscript{15}

On the other hand Margaret’s experience with the Swamiji proves to be fatal when she contracts Jaundice which kills her in the end: she is physically
destroyed in the process of merging spiritually with Swamiji. As S. Ambika comments.

Margaret meets with death due to the Swamiji’s neglect to get her medical help, when she becomes ill.16

Among the three western disciples, Lee’s encounter with the Swamiji is a bit different from those of Evie and Margaret. Unlike the two girls who submit to the Swamiji easily, Lee does not do so. Her reluctance to accept the concept of total submission is mainly due to “her western upringing with its emphasis on freedom and self-respect” which rebels against the philosophy of the Swami.17 Thus, she becomes a problem and challenge for the Swamiji.

In order to mould Lee according to his ways, the Swamiji tries to possess not only her soul and mind but also her body. So, he sexually assaults Lee in a terrifying and abominable manner. In fact, the assault is a clear indication of the Swami’s attempt to tame and control her so that she may “live by his will and not by her own.”18 Towards the end of the novel, Lee becomes totally disillusioned with the Swami. However she has reached a stage where she has no capacity to separate herself from the Swami and his ashram. The novelist says:

No! she knew at once: it wouldn’t be like before. True, the journey would be the same and the view out of the window: but now if some place they passed looked attractive— or she heard of some interesting monuments— or some fellow passenger invited her to and go wherever— she was taken. She would have to say I can’t. Because now she would be travelling in one definite direction and get off at one definite station: and then wait for the bus; and travel in that bus down a long and dusty road; and jump off at what looked like the middle of nowhere and, lugging her bedroll behind her, walk across the fields till she came
to a board and some barbed wire. There he would be, sitting under the only tree. Oh-ho! he would say, Just see who has come (253).

This makes her return to the ashram.

In *A New Dominion*, Banubai is a female saint. Many people come to her for advice and comfort. But she is fond of sweets as much as nice looking boys. So, she has an eye for Gopi who is a handsome young man. She tells everyone that Gopi is like a son to him but in reality it is not so. Thus, Banubai’s status as a spiritual leader remains debatable.

In contrast to the Swami and Banubai is the Christian missionary Miss Charlotte who has dedicated her life to the service of mankind. Charlotte’s charity in India may symbolise the Christian values of piety, universal brotherhood, compassion and benovolence; but they are not strong enough to withstand the forces of Hinduism represented by the Indian spiritual leaders—Swamiji and Banubai. The evil forces of the Swami lead to degeneration of the Western girl. Although Christianity renders momentary solace to the western questers—especially Lee and Margaret, it fails to save them from degeneration.

Anita Desai’s *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) also takes up the intercultural theme at the spiritual level. *Journey to Ithaca* revolves round the expatriate experiences of a European couple—Matteo, an Italian and his German wife, Sophie in India. Matteo has come to India in search of spiritual solace. In fact, Matteo’s journey to the East has been inspired by Hermann Hesse’s *The Journey to the East* and *Siddhartha* which he had read during his youthful days. Matteo is accompanied by his wife in his journey to India. However, she has no spiritual aspirations unlike her husband.

Matteo belongs to a rich and affluent family in the country side of Italy.
He has been sensitive and unconventional since his childhood. During his school days, he did not show interest in studies and disliked the school activities:

Matteo could not stand the school from the first day to the last. Grandmother continues, almost proudly: He couldn't take orders from the teachers. They could not make him do his lessons or sing or play football, it didn't matter what they did to him. \(^{19}\)

Besides this, he would take only bread and water instead of meat and pastries served by his mother. Being a lonely child he had always played by himself. As a result, he found it difficult to mix with other people. His unsocial attitude became a problem when he had to play football with other boys in a team. Being an introvert child, he would rarely speak about himself to anybody.

When his parents felt that Matteo became a failure at school, they stopped him from going to school. So, they hired an Englishman, Fabian to tutor Matteo at home. In this regard, Mukund Padmanabhan says:

The sensitive Matteo, a failure at school and football, the despair of his father who wants him to be a man is placed under a tutor.\(^{20}\)

Fabian introduced Matteo to the world of the East through the books—*Journey to the East* and *Siddhartha* written by Hermann Hesse. In fact, the books aroused Matteo's interest: And they play a significant role in shaping his future. However, Matteo's parents disliked his tutor for influencing Matteo with such philosophical texts. Besides Fabian, there were also other people who tutored Matteo in subjects like Latin, History, Mathematics and Logic.

When Matteo attains a marriageable age, he gets married to Sophie who is a journalist. Sophie is the daughter of a German banker who is supposed
to be an acquaintance of Matteo’s father. In 1975, after his marriage, Matteo and Sophie set off for India in blue jeans, T-shirts and sport shoes and rucksacks. Matteo carries a copy of Hesse’s *The Journey to the East* in his pocket during his journey. In India, Matteo and his wife meet a group of foreigners who are also on a spiritual journey. In his first encounter with the alien country, Matteo has been fascinated by the spiritual life of the Indian holy man and feels that the deep religious faith of the Indian is not present in any part of the world. 21

But Matteo’s beliefs about spiritual India do not appeal to his wife, Sophie. Being practical and worldly-wise, Sophie does not believe in abstract matter such as spirituality as manifested in the mystical experiences of Indian sages. She makes fun of the idea:

> Oh, please, groaned Sophie again. What is spiritual about one’s head into the sand? Is an ostrich holy, Pierre Eduard? (36).

In his quest for spiritual truth, Matteo and wife wander to many places for a long time. During the course of their wandering they hold at many ashrams. In the ashrams Matteo and Sophie have to live under certain principles. But Sophie is unable to follow the rules of the ashram. Moreover, she is appalled by everything at the ashram – its overcrowding of devotees and their alien customs and tradition, the rule of the ashram with different sessions of prayers and hymns and the visitors who come to the ashram to seek blessings. In fact, she feels stifled in the atmosphere of the ashram:

> Every place in the meeting hall was taken up and the air thick with the adours of perspiring humanity in an atmosphere already heavy with incense, marigold garlands and lamp oil. Drums banged.
When the devotees have to go on a pilgrimage, Matteo and Sophie also join them. The pilgrimage turns out to be a long and tiring journey and involves a lot of hardships. In fact, it overwhelms Sophie with the harsh realities of the land. She has come to India only to enjoy the exotic beauties and delights of the country and not to experience the hardship. As she expresses the purpose of her visit,

I want to go Goa and eat shrimp I want to go to Kashmir and live on a house boat (47).

Thus, she becomes completely fed up with everything associated with Matteo's search. As a protest against Matteo's spiritual activities, she leaves him and joins a group of hippies in Goa. In the company of the hippies, Sophie has been high in drugs and leads a disgusting and miserable life. When she cannot bear it any more she comes back to her husband.

In the meantime. Matteo is deeply engrossed in his quest so, he has no time for his wife and spends most of his time in meditation. In his search for the Guru. Matteo behaves like a madman and has been nearly on the verge of losing his life. So, Sophie takes him to a doctor. Finally, Matteo meets his destination at an ashram in the mountains. During the course of the journey to the mountains. Sophie becomes seriously ill and has to be taken to a nearby hospital. Moreover, she is also expecting her first child. Therefore, Matteo goes to the ashram without Sophie who is under the care of a doctor, Dr. Bishop.

When Sophie's condition becomes better. Matteo asks her to stay with him at the ashram. He tells her how the ashram is run by a female spiritual
head called the ‘Mother’ And he has considered the ‘Mother’ as his real Guru. But Sophie does not share the same views as her husband about the ‘Mother’. Rather, she considers the Mother to be a sort of a magician who has cast her spell over Matteo. Sophie says,

And what is she, this Mother – a hypnotist, a magician? It sounds as if she gets up on a stage and hypnotises you all like some magician (107).

Finally, Sophie moves to the ashram to stay with her husband for she has no other option but to join Matteo. In this way, the couple begins to stay at the ashram with other devotees. At the ashram, Matteo is totally absorbed in the activities of the ashram and the Mother. He rarely spends time with Sophie. Bhaskar Ghose comments.

His obsession with the mystic woman, the Mother; become total as he sees the Divine Light in her. is convinced of it and spends all his time serving her as amanuensis and devotee. 22

Matteo’s association with the Mother seems to affect his relationship with his wife. He does not seem to show concern for his wife because he has dedicated his life to the work of the ashram and the ‘Mother’. This makes Sophie frustrated and miserable. She accuses the ‘Mother’ of snatching away her husband from his family. Even the birth of babies to the couple, does not help Matteo to get closer to his wife and children. In addition to this, Sophie has to go through the harsh realities of the hills.

Matteo’s failure as a responsible husband and father forces Sophie to leave him at the ashram and returns to her country. She takes her children with
her. She stays at her parents' place and raises her children. But she is full of anguish at the thought of leaving her husband in the company of the Mother.

She is determined to trace the origin of the mystic 'Mother' for she wants to prove her (Mother) as a fraud. So, she takes her children to Matteo's parents and allows them to stay with them (grandparents). Then, she undertakes a journey around the world to discover the roots of the 'Mother.' Her search takes her to many places such as Egypt, Paris, New York and Bombay. It unfolds the story of Laila, the original name of the 'Mother.' Laila, the daughter of Hamid and Alma, was a Muslim girl who grew up in the early twentieth century Egypt. She used to be a headstrong and independent child. She would not conform to tradition and custom. She would not listen to her parents and seemed to love unrestrained freedom. So, she did anything she wanted in an uncontrolled manner:

Laila would fly in, bare foot, her hair widely tossed about, her bright dress dirty, even torn. She would swoop at the food waiting on the table, and cram it into her mouth with both hands hungrily. But she would not tell them where she had been, what she had done (164).

Laila had her first formal education at Cairo. Then, her parents sent her to Paris for further studies. In Paris, Laila stayed at her aunt's place. Here, her unconventional behaviour became a problem. Her aunt and her family seemed to dislike her due to this attitude. As a consequence she tried to avoid their company as much as she could. In Paris, she came into contact with Madame Lacan who owned a bookshop. It was through her that Laila had been introduced to the East through its books on philosophy.

However, Laila's encounter with Indian began only after she had witnessed a Krishna Lila performed by a group of India dancers in Paris. She
had been highly fascinated by the Indian dance and its music for she could see an element of spirituality in it. Then, she was able to join the troupe led by its master Krishna with whom she became very close. She had followed her dance Guru to India in the hope of attaining spiritual solace. In fact, it was the spiritual side of the Indian dance which had charmed Laila. However, she became disillusioned with her stay in India for Krishna had shown only the materialistic and worldly aspects of his art. So, she gave up her dancing career and left Krishna for seeking spiritual truth. She wandered from place to place in search of a real Guru who would show her the path to eternal truth. At last, she found peace and solace in the company of a sage who stayed in the mountains. The sage became her Guru. After death of her Guru she took over his place as the ‘Mother’ to spread the message of universal love to mankind.

After having discovered the true identity of the ‘Mother’ Sophie comes back to look for Matteo in India. In India, he finds Matteo lying sick in a hospital. However, the sick Matteo suddenly disappears following the death of the Mother. In fact, he has been overwhelmed with sorrow at the death of the Mother. And Sophie and the devotees of the ashram (where Matteo and Sophie have stayed) think that Matteo has once again begun his spiritual quest:

Then he just got up one day and told us he would travel north to the mountains where the Mother received enlightenment, and he left. No one could stop him. We didn’t think we should stop him. Perhaps over there he will find peace (304).

Sophie has been unable to trace her husband and has to return home empty-handed. However, she decides to continue the quest initiated by her husband. This is because she also begins to understand why her husband and
the Mother have undertaken such spiritual voyages. Besides this, the novel also closes with Matteo’s son recounting the appearance of a Christ-like figure of Matteo in the garden of his (Matteo’s son) grandparents in Italy. Thus, the novel ends in an ambiguous way.

*In Journey to Ithaca*, the spiritual theme is exquisitely analysed through European’s quest for spiritual solace in India. In this regard, Matteo’s search for spiritual truth in India occupies a centre stage in the novel. His search has been initiated by Hermann Hesse’s book, *The Journey to the East* from an early period of his life. Moreover, his sensitive temperament is also responsible for his attraction towards Hesse’s book. Temperamentally, Matteo has been a non-conformist to convention and tradition since his childhood. Worldly and materialistic values of life do not appeal to him, Rather he seems to shun these values and aims for something which is from the higher realm of life. As Mrinalini Solanki comments.

Like so many western youths in the sixties and seventies, a young Italian boy leaves his luxurious home and affluent family in search of something more and beyond his mundane existence.23

In a way, Matteo’s situation is similar to that of Meursault, the protagonist of Albert Camus’ *The Outsider*. Like Matteo, Camus’ protagonist too remains an outsider and a stranger to the human world due to his absolute defiance of the societal norms of life.

Matteo has given up everything in pursuing his spiritual goal. At times, he may be accused of being crazy and irrational in his struggle for spiritual peace. But he is never shaken in his faith at any stage of his struggle. As a consequence, he accepts everything in India and remains unaffected by the
harsh realities of the land. However, his wife responds to India and its spiritual life in a different way. This may be explained by the fact that she has no spiritual cravings and believes in the practical and ordinary values of life.

Matteo’s encounter with the ‘Mother’ is a significant example of the cross-cultural theme at the spiritual level. It may symbolise the success of the European mind in its attempt to understand the religio-philosophical aspects of Indian spirituality. The appearance of the godwoman in Matteo’s life has helped him to find meaning in his quest of attaining spiritual peace. In this regard, Rama Kundu comments.

After running from pillar to post in search of a Guru (Master), Matteo reaches an ashram on the mountains in the North and coming here at last Matteo finds peace, joy, deep contentment. Matteo seems to get closer and closer to his goal under the blessing and guidance of the Mother, the head of the ashram.

The death of the Mother shatters the spiritual world of Matteo. It seems to drain the life out of him: he has forgotten hunger and thirst in his sorrow at the loss of the Mother. Then, he vanishes from the sight of humanity into the unknown. However, his appearance as a Christ-like figure at his home in Italy may indicate the completion of his spiritual journey through his attaining the stature of a saint.

*Journey to Ithaca* also presents another example of the religio-philosophical interaction in the character of the Mother. Before becoming the spiritual head of the ashram, the Mother too had gone through a long and tedious spiritual voyage. Like her disciple Matteo, she too had been a rebel against her community and its norms since her childhood:

She could not conform to the conventional religion of her
society or the common ways/norms of life as upheld by her relative and acquaintances. She had become and alien even before she heard of India.²⁵

Besides this, she had even alienated herself from the materialistic values of life and had been restless in her search for freedom of the spirit. As Rama kundu says.

An undefined urge for some sublime life and experience stirred within her.²⁶

Her association with her Indian dance Guru, Krishna is brought about by her passion for the spiritual and divine form of Indian dance. In fact, she had followed Krishna to India in the hope of fulfilling her spiritual dream. But she felt betrayed by Krishna for he did not show any interest in her spiritual aspiration. On the other hand, Krishna was interested only in his material gain. Therefore, she left him and underwent an ordeal of physical and mental trauma in her quest for spiritual truth. At last, she found her Guru in the mountains of North India and achieved a sense of harmony with her inner self. Then she came to be known as the Mother after the death of her Guru.

In contrast to Matteo and the Mother is Sophie who is unable to understand India in terms of its spirituality. This is because she lacks the inner urge to comprehend the basic elements of Indian Spirituality. Moreover, her rationalist and materialistic attitude towards life does not allow her to see things beyond the ordinary world. As a result, she does not believe in the Mother and even suspects the Mother’s association with her (Mother’s) Guru. Reena Kothari comments in this regard.

It was beyond Sophie’s understanding to understand this union. Presumably for her, whether two people have sex
with one another or not is the paramount means of ascertaining their relationship with one another however, from the spiritual point of view, sexual union is not the most but perhaps the least intimate of unions.27

Her suspicion leads her to enquire into the Mother's past. She also wants to prove that the Mother is a fraud. However, she is proved wrong after her discovery of the Mother's past life. She comes to know that the Mother had also been a quester like Matteo. This makes her realise the significance of the spiritual voyages undertaken by spiritual seekers.

A close examination of the novels. *A New Dominion* and *Journey to Ithaca* seems to reveal the points of differences and similarities between the two novels. In both the novels, spiritual India seems to be a great fascination for the westerners and other foreigners. As a consequence, many of them engage themselves in a quest for spiritual truth in India. While some succeed in their attempt to understand India, others fail to do so and become disenchanted with the land. In Jhabvala's *A New Dominion*, the spiritual theme is perceived in terms of the westerners' interaction with the spiritual leaders of India. In this encounter, the western questers are being manipulated and beguiled by the Swamis, Sadhus and Mais. As a result, their dreams and hopes of spiritual fulfillment are never realised. In the novel, Lee, Margaret and Evie become the victims of the Swami who is guided by selfish motives. Thus, they get "trapped in the ashram of a bogus Guru."28

Normally, the Indian holymen—Gurus, Swamis and Sadhus are supposed to be selfless and abstain themselves from worldly pleasures and desires. However, in Jhabvala’s *A New Dominion*, the spiritual heads have turned out
to be cunning schemers who thrive at the expense of their followers:

The Swamis, the Sadhus and the Bais of Jhabvala's novels are not always paragons of virtues and intellect or the embodiment of the pure spirit. They are sometimes an odd combination of worldly wisdom and other-worldly charm; they are of the earth, earthy.  

The concept of faked or fraudulent holyman is present in many of the novels and short stories of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. In this respect, Jhabvala's *Three Continents* may be taken as a significant example. In *Three Continents*, a rich American heiress and her brother fall into the trap of an Indian holy man, Rawul and his adopted son, Crishi. The novel shows Rawul to be the founder of a movement for world unity. But in reality, the movement is involved in a number of illegal and criminal activities.

Among the short stories, "A Spiritual Call" from the author's collection, *A Stronger Climate* is noteworthy in its portrayal of the dubious holy man in India. The story focuses on Daphne, an English woman who comes to India in search of a Guru. She stays at the ashram with a group of westerners. During the process of her spiritual regeneration, Daphne's Guru uses her for his purpose. As Fritz Blackwell comments.

Unlike the housholder, Daphne has no strong ties. There thus is no competition for Swamiji's demands upon her. and though she really does not want to be irrevocably tied to him. she allows herself to become so, largely through lack of will to resist.

Thus, the integrity of the Gurus in Jhabvala's novels remains doubtful and questionable. This seems to indicate the author's attitude towards the spiritual side of India. It may arise from the author's ambiguous position as an expatriate
writer in India. In fact, in her essay, "Myself in India" she has confessed her inability to understand the alien land in its totality. On the whole, such a view of the author seems to be limited in its scope. Therefore, it needs to be reviewed in a wider perspective.

Whereas, in Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca*, the spiritual theme is given a different treatment. Here, the white spiritual seekers' encounter with Indian Swamis and Sadhus brings about spiritual peace and satisfaction to them. Moreover, 'Spiritual India' seems to offer meaningful solution to their existential problems. Towards the end of the novel, even the protagonist's wife, a non-believer in Indian spirituality seems to be cleared of all her doubts regarding spiritual India. And she tries to understand the significance of spiritual journeys. This shows a positive and balanced view of the author in her depiction of the spiritual motif. Unlike Jhabvala, Anita Desai has taken an objective stance here. This may be related to the author's mixed background. Rama Kundu says:

While Chauhan emphasizes Desai's parental background to explain her rejection of India. Bliss stresses her 'Eurocentric' view of India. Both observations, however, predate remarkably, and she exploits her mixed heritage to achieve something unique. She empathizes with the westerns' search for India: at the same time she also attains a harmonious, clear vision of India, a sense of delighted, joyous, serene fulfillment. 31

Like Anita Desai and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala Kamala Markandaya is also an Indian English novelist who has also discussed the spiritual element in her novel. In Markandaya's *A Silence of Desire* and *Possession* the image of the Indian Swami is significant. Although many critics question the integrity of the Swami in Markandaya's novels, the Swami has been endowed with the
healing power for spiritual regeneration. In this way, the absolute negative image of Indian holy man which is seen in Jhabvala's novels is absent in Markandaya's works.

Thus, Anita Desai is closer to Kamala Markandaya in her depiction of the positive aspects of Indian spirituality. But Ruth Prawer Jhabvala differs from Desai and Markandaya as she focuses primarily on the negative aspects of Indian spirituality. This may be explained by her partial rejection of the land and its culture which is a part of her alien European sensibility:

She does not think it at all possible that a European can adopt Indian beliefs and be at peace. There will be some frustration, a disillusionment at the end. 32
NOTES


16. A. Ambika, “Conflict of Values and Creative Tension in the Novels of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala: A reading of *A New Dominion* and *Heat and Dust*” Rev. of *A New Dominion* and *Heat and Dust*, 11.


