Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's first collection of short stories, *Like Birds, Like Fishes* confirms the impression of Western audiences of an author whose writing 'sheds a cool, clear sight on the new India.'

In *A Backward Place* Jhabvala's central problems as a creative artist and as a foreigner living in India are most intricately combined in creating the tensions of attitudes and emotions, the genuine sources of the art of fiction.

'Oh do stop it, Franz!' Etta interrupted. 'India, India, India all the time, as if there was anything interesting to be said! One has the misfortune to be here, well all right, let's leave it at that, but why do we have to keep on torturing ourselves by talking about it?' (28).

The 'backward place' of Jhabvala is India. Despite Etta's assertion that there is nothing interesting to be said about it, India is the unconscious theme of nearly every conversation that takes place among the characters of *A Backward Place*.

Haydn Moore Williams in his book *The Fiction of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala* writes:

In *A Backward Place* ... we have conflicting loyalties and different ways of looking at life in India .... The tone of *A Backward Place* is one of social comedy with touches of farce and near-tragedy. The novel deals with the problems of expatriates living in Delhi in various stages of assimilation or of refusal to be
assimilated and this gives a new twist to Jhabvala's treatment of Indian social life. The prevalence of misery amongst the expatriates, the Indian middle-classes and the artistic bohemians, gives the novel a more disturbing and anguished tone ... It is the misery of exile, displacement, and restlessness. At the beginning of the book the disposition of the characters is more or less fixed, although there is a general air of rootlessness and discontent. By the end of the story, the two central characters have left Delhi and those who remain have learned to come to terms with their fate.

Etta, the Hungarian expatriate who longs to return to Europe but cannot, has constructed a life for herself in Delhi that is, in effect, a tiny European island set in an unfriendly Indian sea. Trapped by time and circumstance, growing increasingly desperate, Etta calls the land of her exile 'this primitive society' (5) declares it to be possessed of a 'primitive morality' (5) and wages a bitter war against both India and the spectre of approaching age which seem to her to be different aspects of the same antagonist. "Don't you know that the Indian sun has been put specially into the sky to ruin our complexions?" (7) is a characteristic comment that concentrates her anger and her fierce resolve to preserve her individuality, her Europeanness and her good looks in spite of all that India can do to her.

Another Westerner stranded in India is Clarissa, an English woman of good family who declares that she, unlike Etta, is in India 'out of conviction and idealism' (20). She manages, with a fervour not
entirely unmixed with expediency, to find beauty in everything around her; but her superficiality is exposed by her comments to Sudhir, a sensitive young Bengali intellectual, on the 'splendid work' being done by him and his assistant, Judy, at the Cultural Dais, an institution at which, despite the high hopes attending its establishment, "there was nothing much going on" (14). Clarissa's eagerness strikes Sudhir as unpleasantly reminiscent of the British era:

The hand laid on his shoulder seemed to him the pseudo-paternal hand of the British Raj, and his instinctive reaction was to want to shake it off as rudely and violently as possible (92).

Here lies, possibly, the seed of the idea that germinated four years later, in the A New Dominion. Spiritual 'seekers' like Clarissa and casual Western travellers fall willing captives to the attractions of the country that they had once ruled. Sudhir listens to Clarissa as she delightfully disclaims any right to be referred to as 'an English lady.' But he imagined how she must have come out to India first, spurred on by Romain Rolland and the Light of Asia and the Everyman edition of the Bhagavad Gita, and intent on a quest in which notions of soul and God played a prominent, if vague part; and how valiantly she had kept up this quest, or at least the pretence of it, though she was getting older year by year, and lonelier, and more ridiculous, and soul and God perhaps no nearer (94).
Two other Westerners in India, Dr. Franz Hochstadt and his wife, Frieda, short-term residents in Delhi on a university exchange programme, adopt a tone of lofty idealism when discussing India: 'India gives us so much,' Mrs. Hochstadt said. 'What joy to be asked to give a little in return' (85).

The two-year limit on the Hochstadts' sojourn in India sets them apart from other Westerners in Delhi; while Etta, long-term resident and avowed 'prisoner' in India is driven into 'a frenzy of irritation;' Mrs. Hochstadt can say tolerantly and with positive affection, "It is one of the many charms the country has for us" (26). They are, unlike Etta and Judy, "cultured people and had of course prepared themselves thoroughly before coming out to India" (27) intellectually and aesthetically, so that they are ready on any occasion with an apt quotation from E.M.Forster or Swami Vivekananda that instantly sets the immediate problem in its correct perspective. Given to theory and generalisation, they comfortably fit Etta into their theories regarding "the effect India has on a certain type of European" (29) though they are insensitive to the fact that their friend is on the brink of a mental breakdown. Delighted to be able to quote Forster at an apparently appropriate moment, Dr. Hochstadt tells Etta: 'Life plays itself out to a different rhythm here,' ... 'It is fatal to come to India and expect to be able to live to a Western rhythm' (26).

Although sympathetic people at heart, the Hochstadts have designed a programme for their stay in India. While they 'contact' India, they are careful not to step in too far or to cross the dividing lines that keep them safe.
The views of these Western expatriates are contrasted with other opinions about India, expressed by Indians. Sudhir despises his job as general secretary of Delhi's Cultural Dais, and regards with amused contempt the efforts of that institution 'to draw in the cultural threads of all nations' (47). His criticisms of India's backwardness arise, unlike Etta's, out of genuine concern for the condition of his native land. His career, presented in a quietly ironic outline, suggests that there is no place for high principles in middle-class India. In accepting his futile job at the Cultural Dais, Sudhir has admitted defeat, but later he abandons it to become a teacher in a remote part of India. He reflects his creator's consciousness of the poverty and backwardness of the 'great animal' she rides: "All the time I know myself to be on the back of this great animal of poverty and backwardness."

Yasmine Gooneratne writes:

The events of the novel ... reveal ... India ... to be a region where material concepts of 'backwardness' have no real relevance, since there good and evil, beauty and terror are to be experienced with an intensity unknown elsewhere. The 'India' of A Backward Place is a universe complete in itself, where the human spirit is strenuously tested to be sometimes generously blessed and rewarded, sometimes utterly destroyed. As events run their course and characters meet and part in conflict or accord against the background of Delhi in the 1960s, India annihilates Etta, increases poor Clarissa's confusion of mind and eludes the Hochstadts, yet fills Judy with new confidence, and bestows on Sudhir a quiet heroism and a purpose in life.
As the plot of *A Backward Place* develops, bringing Etta ever closer to the point at which she loses control, suggestions of menace and desolation cluster thickly about her. Her little flat — the expression of her 'European' sophistication — becomes "stale with cigarette smoke, untidy and dusty, closed in like a cage" (171).

Around the Rangmahal, a week-end resort conceived as an imitation palace of pleasure to which Etta is brought by Mr. Gupta, there stretches a landscape that is empty and silent, redolent of transience and decay:

> Beyond the cottages, the countryside stretched far and wide and empty into the darkness. No sound came from it, no smell except of dry dust. The sky seemed equally endless and desolate. There was no moon visible, though it must have been lurking somewhere, for the clouds that drifted slow as ghosts across the sky seemed faintly shadowed with light. This was just sufficient to outline a few ruins that stood far apart on little mounds. Now and again the jackals howled (96).

The characters of Etta and Clarissa have close connections with Jhabvala's other works, providing (among other things) two carefully contrasted studies of the Western sensibility under stress in India. Indications are given quite early in the novel that Etta, despite her poised appearance, is under severe strain. She is aware of her own condition and frightened by it: 'I'm smoking too much,' she added as she lit another cigarette with slightly agitated fingers' (28).
This incident occurs when Etta is reminded that the Hochstadts, unlike herself, are short-term visitors to India. She is not only smoking too much, but is soon found to be relying on sleeping pills. She drinks too much, too fast. Although not yet too despairing or proud to study the dress and manners of transit passengers in hotel lounges; "these brief emissaries of a Europe she had left over twenty-five years ago but still looked to for everything that was valuable to her" (66).

She is ageing rapidly, and she begins to lose control over her emotions. The novel follows her through every stage of the process of deterioration. Her smart flat turns into a 'cage', and she begins to scream at her Indian servants and suspect them of dishonesty. As a last resort, she even suggests to Judy that they go away to Europe together. Her violence is ultimately vented on herself, and her attempt at suicide provides the novel with its climax.

Clarissa, too is caught up in the process of change that affects Etta, although she is Etta's opposite in background and convictions. Of British upper-class origin, Clarissa has lived 'many years in India'. Jhabvala says:

Her accent had lost some of its local colour and idiom, and her complexion, once probably rosy and redolent of English skies, had taken on the withered pallor of all Western women too long in the East (19).

Despite her declared abandonment of material values in her pursuit of the eternal, Clarissa is inclined to sponge on her wealthy friends and adopts a frankly physical and sensual approach to young men like Bal. Not over-burdened with a self-critical spirit, Clarissa
rationalizes most of these inconsistencies by calling herself "a sort of free-and-easy mixture of sadhu and artist" (61). One inconsistency, however, surprises Clarissa herself: "[I] don't know what came over me" (75). Her failure to keep to her liberal 'principles' finally reduces Clarissa to hysteria.

That Jhabvala is extremely sensitive to the poverty and misery that encircle the people in India is clearly seen in A Backward Place. To the handful of foreigners living an artificial life in Delhi, India is backward in every sense; poverty and backwardness are so predominant that it is impossible to pretend that they do not exist. Etta, Judy, Clarissa and the Hochstadts agonise when confronted with the miseries of life in India, though not in the same way that Jhabvala seems to have done:

The most salient fact about India is that it is very poor and backward. There are so many other things to be said about it but this must remain the basis of all of them. We may praise Indian democracy, go into raptures over Indian music, admire Indian intellectuals — but whatever we say, not for one moment should we lose sight of the fact that a very great number of Indians never get enough to eat .... Can we lose sight of that fact? God knows, I've tried.

Life in India for her and the Europeans in her fiction becomes a traumatic chore. Transients like the Hochstadts have a way of escape. The assignment at the university over, they are happy to go back to England. Jhabvala states: "But what a store-house of memories they would be taking with them! How greatly they felt themselves enriched by their contact with this fabled land!" (189).
But Etta fights a losing battle against alienation. She is tired of India, its heat and dust, its squalor and backwardness. Like her creator, she longs to flee, to escape from the awful squalor all around her. But Europe has become distant, though intensely desirable. She knows that she is no longer young and may not be acceptable there. Trying to be fashionable, she realises that she is woefully out of date. She had planned to go and reorient herself with the money-power of Guppy; she would have been rich and well-protected. She needs Guppy, crude as he is:

She could not face it; to break through such a barrier of indifference would take more strength and youth than she had for a good number of years. She longed for Europe, it was true, and would do anything to get there, but she could no longer tackle it on her own (171).

Unlike Esmond, who plans a way out, she is totally trapped in a country whose spirit is alien to her, whose masses of people induce revulsion in her.

Two options (of either merging with the Hindu society or drowning in it) are offered in A Backward Place; Etta chooses to drown in it, Judy chooses to merge with it. According to Haydn Moore Williams, expatriation is a theme which Jhabvala finds irresistible .... In a novel like A Backward Place, Jhabvala makes expatriation central. There are three expatriate European women, Etta, Clarissa and Judy; they react and come to terms with India, which is for each of them "a backward place".
Jhabvala is almost overwhelmed by the stark reality of India; this shows itself in her writing and in her view of life. The controlling metaphor of the novel encompasses the viewpoints of the various characters. India seems to the Europeans a kind of 'backward place'—a view unmistakably expressed in the utterances of Etta. The Hochstadts go into raptures over India, although they are quite aware of the differences between East and West.

Vasant A. Shahane writes:

Jhabvala's irony in A Backward Place is ... two-pronged and the Europeans as well as the Indians are brought within its purview. It is primarily through the flux of their relationships that the central metaphor operates and binds various characters and situations in one single fabric of form.

One can see that in A Backward Place, setting, dialogue and incident are exploited daringly for their symbolic significance and given added economy and subtlety by experience evidently gleaned from the disciplines of short-story and screenplay writing. Most striking of all is the fact that the novel indicates a fundamental change of direction. Indian characters are replaced at the centre of Jhabvala's fictional stage by Westerners caught up in the disillusionment with India that is part of her own experience.

To quote Margaret Berry,

In A Backward Place Jhabvala portrays and contrasts Europeans and Indians of the present day reacting to the environment of contemporary New Delhi .... Here are Europeans, variously self-deceived, seeking happiness
or satisfaction in the maddening and magnificent ambience of India. Here, too, are Indians, painting themselves with Western veneer and disdaining native ways. As with the characters of Thackeray, few are spared from the acidulous pen of the satirist. Almost everyone is guilty.


A Westerner, according to Jhabvala can never be reconciled to the type of life led in India, however sincerely he/she makes the attempt. It is this sense of incompatibility that forms the theme of almost all the stories in her third collection of stories, *A Stronger Climate*. The Westerner comes seeking something wonderful, is gradually disillusioned, and either returns home patiently or helplessly allows himself to suffer, — in which case his condition is rather pathetic, as is that of Miss Tuhy, in the short story 'Miss Sahib':

Miss Tuhy's mother had died almost forty years ago, but Miss Tuhy could still vividly recall her funeral. It had drizzled, and rich smells of damp earth had mixed with the more delicate smell of tuberoses and yew. The clergyman's words brought ease and comfort, and weeping was restrained; birds sang cheerfully from out of the wet trees. That's the way to die, thought Miss Tuhy, and bitterness welled up into her hitherto gentle heart. The trouble was, she no longer had the fare home to England, not even on the cheapest route.
A Stronger Climate presents nine stories, six of which are about Westerners who come to India in search of spiritual enlightenment, only to find themselves betrayed by India or by their own self-deception. To these studies of 'Seekers', Jhabvala adds three studies of 'Sufferers', Westerners who have stayed too long in India, and for whom the rapture of their first encounter has turned into bitter disillusionment and the revulsion she describes as the third stage on her cycle of response to India. It is worthwhile to quote here what Kamala Markandaya says in her Possession:

Undilute East had always been too much for the West; and soulful East always came lap-dog fashion to the West, mutely asking to be not too little and not too much, but just right.

A New Dominion is a sordid tale of three Western girls (Lee, Margaret and Evie) coming to India on a spiritual quest and ending up a study in self-deception. If the Europeans seem naive and gullible, the Indians are invariably sensual, with a total absence of any genuine love. All the characters display a lack of emotional balance and of fulfilment of any sort, Indian or Western.

Vasant A. Shahane observes:

A New Dominion primarily projects the British and American view of contemporary India. India in Jhabvala's A New Dominion comes off rather badly; and the Indians even worse; the total effect of it is very disappointing and negative. Granting that Jhabvala's main position is that of a social satirist, and that she has the total freedom of the creative artist to choose her human material, her view of the new dominion
Like so many sensitive Englishmen before him, Raymond, the tourist, enjoys India aesthetically and emotionally. But Lee and Margaret have come on a more important quest, which leads them to become disciples of a swamiji. Asha, the middle-aged princess, likes neither her advancing years nor the new dominion she sees around her. Failing to find comfort in the arms of her young lover, Gopi, she finally turns to a spiritual life. In pursuit of their various quests, the characters are drawn deeper into India.

R.M. Varma says:

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. Westerners are attracted towards them not only because the East has a message to give but also because they are tired of their material West. Some of them come to these so called holy men and women 'to lose themselves in order to find themselves.' They come to India in the hope of finding a simpler and more natural way of life. Hindu religion interests the Westerners.

_A New Dominion_ opens with Lee, Margaret and Evie each trying to get spiritual salvation under the guidance of a swamiji, who is a disturbing study of an ascetic who uses his powers to create illusions of hope and claims wholly the souls and bodies of his disciples. He
has no qualms, either moral or religious, in abusing these girls sexually. It is a pity that the three English girls are tormented by their fascination for such a manipulator of women. Each tries jealously to guard her proximity to this bogus holy-man, who becomes the agent of their ruin. Margaret dies a slow, painful death; Evie lives in a mindless stupor; and at the novel's end, one sees Lee struggling hard to resist her temptation to go back to the swamiji.

The three girls had tried to break out of the pretentiousness and falsity of middle-class life in England; they placed their faith in the swamiji, thinking he would bring relief to their tormented souls; instead, one has a sordid picture of sexual abuse, midnight orgies and callousness verging on cruelty. The swamiji treats them as his possessions, his 'little mice' (208) waiting to be transformed by him.

The Western women, in Jhabvala's world of fiction, seem to have decided against marriage and family life. This is perhaps her way of sharing her own experience of living in the cross-fire when two different cultures come into contact. Her vision of Westerners living in India is jagged with a tormented view of traditional taboos and a foray into new thickets of adultery, trial relationships and pseudo-religious cults. Not one character in A New Dominion and Heat and Dust remains pure or unvictimised. The old credo of virginity is entirely absent, but the new freedom that the women, Indian or European, enjoy as liberated beings, as emancipated wives and daughters, the new level of honesty they boast of, has led them nowhere. They are faced with new problems, different traumas and a new set of puzzling dilemmas, so that life once again is an adventure. Under such circumstances, the picture of the white woman carrying the burden of grace and civilization into a chaotic society is simply obsolete and redundant.
In its American edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), *A New Dominion* was re-named *Travelers*, a title that connects the plot with the theme as the four major characters (Asha, Gopi, Raymond and Lee) travel from sophisticated New Delhi to the holy city of Varanasi and then to the desert state of Maipur, moving more and more deeply into India and farther into experiences that put their personalities to severe tests.

In accordance with the theory of a cycle of experience on which Jhabvala bases her studies of Westerners in India, the period of time in which the intense effects of a full turn of the 'wheel' of torture and disillusionment can be experienced provides the time-span of *A New Dominion*. In the final outcome, it is not the travellers who 'see', 'enjoy' or 'understand' India, but it is India that dominates and absorbs them. Lee is submerged in the life of swamiji's ashram, and Raymond leaves India, horrified by the violence of his own intense emotions.

Raymond's experience of India resembles Esmond's in *Esmond in India* and Etta's in *A Backward Place* in being a fictional illustration of Jhabvala's conviction that Western characters of sensitivity are, by being in India,

"exposed to another dimension and begin to open up in response to it. But this is often a painful process and not everyone can stand it, especially not for any length of time."

Raymond's fellow-traveller, Lee, holds the key to a second theme: that of self-delusion. Lee is essentially "truthful, with others, of course, but first of all with herself. She wanted her whole life to be based only on truth found and tested by herself" (252).
Such an approach to life and to the Indian experience should make Lee, one would think, as reliable an observer as Raymond. She has come to India 'to try and learn' (44). She moves freely at all levels of Indian life in order to do so. But 'learning' is associated by Lee with the feelings rather than with the intellect, so that her search for the meaning of life turns into a process of emotional rather than intellectual, education. It is certainly very far from being the spiritual progress for which she mistakes it. Her youth and emotional inexperience make her very vulnerable indeed, as her response to the magic of an Indian evening makes clear:

I feel restless, I don't know what to do .... The garden is wild and overgrown and full of exotic bushes with very strong scents. There's something sinful about these scents and also about the too bright moonlight that comes in through the window and falls on the whitewashed wall and the icon of Christ hanging there. It's so disturbing out there in the garden .... I keep thinking there must be tigers behind those bushes ready to spring, and surely there must be snakes in all that uncut grass (39).

Lee is physically and emotionally ready for love, despite her desire to rise above these small things that engulf people to a spiritual plane. Her preconceptions and self-absorption blind her to the truth about herself and those around her. Amusingly, she writes off the agonisingly sensitive Raymond as a mere tourist and agrees without protest to Gopi's sexual demands in a charitable spirit: "she was glad to be doing this for him" (55). When love comes to her at last, in the shape of the 'phenomenal' [her word] (91) and predatory swamiji, she does not recognise it:
I drag myself around. I've never been like this before. Everything is so strange, so dismal; it's as if there's no light in the sun, and those glorious Indian nights ... are dark and drab to me (185).

The conflict between good and evil in *A New Dominion* is not capable of a simple resolution. In fact, both of them co-exist at every level and in every character in the novel. Though Jhabvala supplies her characters with signposts and resting places along the path of their journey, her irony ensures that we make our own way to that personal celestial city wherein, if we have read the signs carefully enough, puzzlement stops and understanding is complete. For the novelist, the journey continues, and that the sustained ironies of *A New Dominion* have made possible yet another stage on Jhabvala's journey towards a better understanding of India, of life and of herself.

An exploration of many of the incidents that make up the plot of *A New Dominion* helps to point out how Jhabvala transforms personal experience into art and why her ironic detachment is essential to that art. Her essay 'Myself in India' resorted to 'exaggerated images' in order to "give some idea of how intolerable India — the idea, the sensation of it — can become."

These images, which are perhaps 'exaggerated' but nonetheless drawn from the realities of life in India, are explored in *A New Dominion* at the levels of experience and symbol. The oppression of a Delhi summer 'when the air-conditioner has failed' is captured at the level of experience in the terrible heat of Maupur when the electric fans fail to work but is, at the same time, symbolic of the
sense of oppression Raymond feels as Asha gathers herself, like the heavy dark birds' that hang in the sky above them, to strike death into his heart with her story of Peter, her brother Rao Sahib's English tutor. Gopi's enjoyment of the physical mishaps of others and his casual torture of Raymond link him with the 'outlaws with the hearts of wild beasts' described in Jhabvala's essay, who "make raids into the villages and ... rob and burn and mutilate and kill for sport."

A swamiji could be seen without strain as a fictional version of the priest who recites holy verses over the body of a murdered child. This list is without end, due to the range and intensity of Jhabvala's observation and her ability to fuse experiences with art. This brief selection suggests the strenuousness of the experience that lie at the heart of *A New Dominion*. It also indicates why a technique that allows her to remain detached from what she is writing is essential to maintain balance in her writing. Vasant A.Shahane is right when he says:

> Jhabvala's *A New Dominion* endeavours to grapple with a vast and varied harmonious and discordant, noble and profane reality that is India, almost inexhaustible in its range and inscrutable in its depth.

While commenting upon *Heat and Dust*, Bruce King writes:

> *Heat and Dust* is a well written novel, carefully put together, but contrived in comparison to the novels of Naipaul and Gordimer. The events are parallel between the two narratives throughout the novel, which has been influenced by the recently popular cinematographic technique of jump shots and intercutting scenes. The
juxtaposition of two diaries is fleshed out by interviews, descriptions, and the voice of the narrator. Unfortunately the contrast between the highly stylized life of the past and the cold, unrevealing modern narrator appears a mechanical device to create irony and ambiguity. One feels left on the surface of the experience. We see an India which has decayed from past grandeur, which was built upon now unacceptable exploitation of the poor; and we see young inarticulate Europeans seeking a spiritual refuge in India, but we feel neither India in any depth nor the inner emotions of those who have rejected European society. There is a sense in which this is an outsider's novel in which romantic infatuation with the exotic has been made to appear disciplined through narrative techniques carrying associations of paradox and puzzlement.

Heat and Dust is set against the background of Delhi. After writing this novel, Jhabvala left India, maybe once and for all, and settled in the United States. One doesn't know the actual date of her abandonment of India. Heat and Dust is perhaps her final farewell to India, with all its drawbacks, the heat and dust. It shows her disillusionment to the maximum extent and one can feel the sense of alienation in her interview with Ramlal Agarwal:

I was practically born a displaced person, and all any of us ever wanted was a travel document and a residential permit. One just didn't care as long as one was allowed to live somewhere. I'm still like that. I have absolutely no patriotism for, or attachment to, any country whatsoever. None.
It is no wonder that Jhabvala was disillusioned with every place that has affected her mentally. At the end of A New Dominion, while describing the future plans of Lee, she writes about the image of India:

The only part of it visible from here was the old fort on its hill, but Lee disregarded it and thought only of the railway station that lay beyond it. She loved this thought: also that of buses, trains, travellers; endless hours of monotonous landscape; heat, and dust; unexpected adventures in strange towns.

The effect of heat and dust, the sense of alienation of Lee, in this place sounds pathetic. Even if one tries to ignore the bare facts of life and continues to live with an attitude of come what may, there won't be any possibility of escaping the inevitable. In Heat and Dust, Jhabvala has poured out her conclusions on India. She has included the whole pattern of life — the rich, the poor, the spiritual, the sensual, the practical and the unpractical aspects of life.

Olivia, who is a living past in the story, has come to India by virtue of her marriage (like Jhabvala); she has been fascinated by India and has no need to be exposed to the miseries of life but feels bored with life — like her creator, who says:

I have a nice house, I do my best to live in an agreeable way. I shut all my windows, I let down the blinds, I turn on the air-conditioner; I read a lot of books, with a special preference for the great masters of the novel.
Jhabvala says in the beginning of *Heat and Dust*: "Olivia was alone in her big house with all the doors and windows shut to keep out the heat and dust" (14).

The heat and dust, the backwardness and the artificial forwardness of India have finally drawn Jhabvala, the Central European lady, who has been twice expatriated by virtue of family circumstances, a third time by the facts of life, leaving her lonely in a fourth place to which she does not belong by any kind of relation — the United States.

One doesn't know whether she is going to stay on in the United States or whether she will move to another place, being bored with the life of the United States as she has been obsessed with the poverty and backwardness of India. In her own terms, she may go through the whole cycle again.

What she has imagined about the unwitnessed facts of India, with which Jhabvala was convinced, does have a place in *Heat and Dust*. Gobinda Prasad Sarma remarks:

In *Heat and Dust* ... we are shown an India which is really detestable and which has little relation with the real India. There are two pictures of India, one of pre-independence days and another of today — but none of these is a true reflection of the original.

Brijraj Singh says:

Jhabvala's threefold vision of time in *Heat and Dust* as that which brings to a new birth, preserves, and destroys — as Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, in fact — marks a new departure for her. In her other novels she
has dealt only with independent India, and with that part of India's history which she has seen shaping with her own eyes. In *Heat and Dust*, however, she studies both the past and the present as a way of getting to understand the present better, and also because she wants to see what in the past is dead and what still survives.

Olivia came to India during 1920, whereas the young narrator of the story has come to India during the post-Independence period: but their fate ends up ironically in the same way, but with a slight difference: the former because of emotion and the latter because of pity.

Jhabvala says that people who come to India with a mission cannot survive outside India. She gives the example of a woman doctor who stayed for a long time in India and who had gone to Europe after twelve years. She reacted abnormally to the question Jhabvala had asked:

"But what does it feel like to go back after such a long time? How do you manage to adapt yourself? She didn't understand. This question which was of such tremendous import to me — how to adapt oneself to the differences between Europe and India — didn't mean a thing to her. It simply didn't matter."

The same is expressed in *Heat and Dust* by a foreigner who has come and lived in India.

What strikes one at the outset is the effect of the Indian environment on the European sensibility. India seems to make demands
on Olivia and the narrator, demands which are difficult to reconcile. They are faced with Jhabvala's dilemma of break-down of personality or salvation by withdrawal or flight, a dilemma that is absent in the earlier works, which dealt with the comic situations in daily life in India, trying to cast them off from the vantage point of a light, unfettered, uninvolved, fun-loving consciousness. Gone, too, are the days of hesitation and confusion that one finds in the middle group of novels. Here as in *A New Dominion*, the die has been cast: Major Minnies is definite about the harmful effects that living in India engenders in the European consciousness, especially so in the case of the women. India overwhelms them. The day she arrives at Bombay, the narrator is warned by the missionary lady at her hostel that "nothing human means anything here. Not a thing" (6).

Olivia, shut up in her bungalow all day long to protect herself from the hot climate, reminds one of Jhabvala herself, who speaks of her being immuned in an air-conditioned room. Yet the electric power fails often, the oppressive heat and dust seep in and affect the writer's sensitivity:

> <i>India swallows me up and now it seems to me that I am no longer in my room but in the white-hot city streets under a white-hot sky; people cannot live in such heat so everything is deserted.</i>  

The European, used to a cool, clean climate, abhors the heat and the dust and also (as Etta in *A Backward Place* puts it) the germs and the disease that India offers to her visitors. The aptness of the title of the novel *Heat and Dust* is evident enough in this light; however, the author also hints that discomforts of life in India do not rest at the physical level. They symbolise obliquely other
aspects of existence, more deeply embedded. The narrator meets a tourist at the guest house.

"Why did you come?" I [the narrator] asked her.
"To find peace." She laughed grimly: "But all I found was dysentery."
Her young man said "That's all anyone ever finds here" (21).

This view of India is found again and again in the novel.

R.S.Singh remarks:

In her [Jhabvala's] novels of the fifties and the sixties she had been noted for ironic representation of the middle-class life of Delhi, although her observations were those of an outsider in India. An expatriate in India ... she had mixed feelings about its people: sometimes she found the country under-developed but acceptable (A Backward Place) and sometimes despicable (Esmond in India). The last two novels [A New Dominion and Heat and Dust] are no exceptions to the love-hate relationship she had had with her adopted country .... A New Dominion portrays the pathetic tale of three British women who were duped by a sanyasi. Another Indian character is presented as bisexual and the sister of a prince as disgustedly sexual. The picture of India that emerges from the novel is rather unflattering. The novelist seems to have indulged in sensationalism to attract the Western audience through exoticism and the unusual but it does not give evidence of a better understanding of the
Indian mind. In the same manner *Heat and Dust* also depicts India as a country of heat and dust, the two symbols she had used even earlier to express her fear of the backwardness of her adopted country.

In *Heat and Dust* Jhabvala shows that the two English protagonists of the novel become victims of illusions created by their liberalism and sensitivity. They do not see the dangers of excess of feeling for a country they love. Olivia admits that she does not understand India, and she says, "India always changes people, and I have been no exception" (2).

With these words the narrator initiates the most moving study of the theme that has been at the heart of every novel or story that Jhabvala has written that has taken up the subject of individuals uprooted from a Western background and planted, however temporarily, in India. It is evident that in her exploration of such characters as Douglas and Olivia; the Minnies, Crawfords, and Saunders; the narrator and the Christian missionary she encounters in Bombay; Harry, the Nawab's English friend; Chid and a young English couple who come to India to seek Universal Love and find only disease and dishonesty, Jhabvala is externalising and probing through fiction certain aspects — painful, exhilarating, puzzling, and comic — of her own experience of India.

To quote Vasant A. Shahane:

*Heat and Dust* is as much Olivia's story as it is the young narrator's. This mode of double narration enables Jhabvala to cultivate a sense of detachment. It also enables her to project the novelist's vision
amidst a human and natural landscape enveloped in heat and covered by dust.

Jhabvala's world signifies space - the space that is India, the India moulded by her experience and fictional art. Her endeavour should be designated as 'time-art', and not 'spatial form', since her narrative mode in *Heat and Dust* is conceived in terms of history as a sequence of time. Her mode of narration follows the traditional time-span, the individual's and family's and the latter's cyclic decline. The time-dimension of her fictional art is so dominant in *Heat and Dust* that her art fails to show any spatial dimension or visionary quality. *Heat and Dust*, therefore, is handicapped and cribbed by the very implications of its title.

*Heat and Dust* examines the experience of Europeans in India, using flashbacks (from the narrator's continuous experience, as recorded in her diary of India in the 1970s) to incidents that occurred in the 1920s, in order "to add an extra dimension of time for the confirmation of a pattern ... so far traced only in terms of contemporary India."

The reader is presented with a series of case studies of Europeans of both periods who are at different points on the wheel of change - change, both of principle and behaviour - that Jhabvala has suggested as being an inevitable part of the experience of living in India. The narrator (in her twenties) who has come to India in the hope of finding out more about the life led in India by her
grandfather's first wife, Olivia, both before and after her elopement in 1923 with the Nawab, is at 'stage one' when she matter-of-factly accepts the sick, and deformed citizens of Satipur as part of the 'landscape'. Olivia is at 'stage one' herself, when she casually accepts the idea that there is "always something like that going on in the quarters. Someone dying or getting born or married" (129-30). The same insistent drumming and chanting that she dismisses as being merely a part of life in India have, however, begun to seem 'like brain fever' to Harry, who is in the grip of 'stage three', and feels that he cannot 'stand it another day'. Mrs. Saunders, the wife of the British medical superintendent of Khatm, is clearly at 'stage three' when she begins to shout like a mad woman, see haunting visions, and nourish sexual fantasies about her Indian servants.

Some Europeans in Heat and Dust manage to resist total change but invariably pay a price for such immunity: the missionary's selfless social work is one approach to the problem, though it makes of her a "paper-white, vaporous ... ghost" (4). Major Minnies's refusal to immerse himself in what he calls 'the other dimension of life' in India is another. Beth Crawford, wife of the British collector, knows "where lines had to be drawn, not only in speech and behaviour but also in one's thought" (168-69).

Neither she and her husband, nor the missionary, nor Major Minnies, however, can penetrate to India's intimations of heaven and spiritual fulfilment, of which even Major Minnies's appreciation of Indian poetry reflects only a pale and unsatisfactory shadow. Douglas, stoically resisting change of principle, cannot escape physical change: Olivia finds that his face has become "heavier, even somewhat puffy, making him look more like other Englishmen in
India" (116). And she finds the discovery unbearable. Some kind of confirmation of these experiences, and of Jhabvala's theory (as expressed in 'Myself in India') is voiced by an Indian character, Dr. Gopal, who looks briefly up from his task in the hospital to say "I think perhaps God never meant that human beings should live in such a place" (158).

The narrator is quick to contest the point, and by her own decision to stay on in India eventually contradicts it. But the problem is examined from many points of view, and the novel's detached narrative tone, though occasionally modulating to irony, never ceases to be objective.

At the novel's end, however, when Olivia's letters have come to an end, the narrator begins to seek not illumination or truth but confirmation of her own ideas. When Dr. Gopal remarks, half-jokingly, that India's hell — like her heaven — is for Indians only, the narrator reveals her heart directly for the first time: "I don't want to admit it; I don't want it to be so" (159).

In an unexpected burst of passion, she lists examples to support her claim that Europeans have stayed on in India of their own free will. The narrator's shift from objectivity to a decision to see only one point of view — her own — is skilfully caught by Jhabvala in the narrator's description of and comments on Major Minnies's monograph:

Although the Major was so sympathetic to India, his piece sounds like a warning. He said that one has to be very determined to withstand — to stand up to — India. And the most vulnerable, he said, are always those who love her best. There are many ways of loving
India, many things to love her for — the scenery, the history, the poetry, the music, and indeed the physical beauty of the men and women — but all, said the Major, are dangerous for the European who allows himself to love too much. India always, he said, finds out the weak spot and presses on it. Both Dr. Saunders and Major Minnies spoke of the weak spot. But whereas for Dr. Saunders it is something, or someone, rotten, for the Major this weak spot is to be found in the most sensitive, often the finest people — and, moreover, in their finest feelings. It is there that India seeks them out and pulls them over into what the Major called the other dimension. He also referred to it as another element, one in which the European is not accustomed to live so that by immersion in it he becomes debilitated, or even (like Olivia) destroyed. Yes, concluded the Major, it is all very well to love and admire India — intellectually, aesthetically, he did not mention sexually but he must have been aware of that factor too — but always with a virile, measured, European feeling. One should never, he warned, allow oneself to become softened (like Indians) by an excess of feeling; because the moment that happens — the moment one exceeds one's measure — one is in danger of being dragged over to the other side. That seems to be the last word Major Minnies had to say on the subject and his final conclusion (170-71).
The narrator distinguishes carefully here between Dr. Saunders's remarks and Major Minnies's, recognizes the warning to herself that is embodied in the latter, and does her best to present it fairly and truthfully. But the subject is too close to her heart to permit her to maintain her objective stance: going on to remark that Major Minnies warns against an excess of feeling and love for India, she remarks: "He who loved India so much, knew her so well, chose to spend the end of his days here!" (171).

So unusual in the narrator is this kind of direct critical comment that the remark reveals at once the intensity of her feelings and the violence of her disagreement with Minnies's view. Indirectly, one's belief is confirmed in the sensitivity and self-control that have between them given one (up to this point) a recorder whose objectivity one can trust.

The first pages of Heat and Dust, like the last, need to be seen in the light of the narrator's description of her own changed condition: "my early impressions .... are no longer the same because I myself am no longer the same" (2).

Viewed in this way, the entire record made by the narrator of Olivia's experiences and her own may be regarded as 'an exercise in self-analysis.' Jhabvala, in 'Myself in India', has referred to her own "deplorable tendency to constant self-analysis." Since she has also stated that her Western characters 'of course include myself', one has to link the impulses to self-disgust and self-isolation (and the intense sensitivity to atmosphere and seasonal changes Olivia shares with the narrator) with their creator's frank description of her own experience in India.
David Rubin remarks:

Although her earlier novels, like those of any genuine Indian writer, tend to deal with Indians as people first and only secondarily as Indians, in her later ones this is reversed as the East-West theme comes to obsess her. Her characters become increasingly emblematic and less human, the impoverishment and triviality of the Indian life she knows is presented more and more bitterly, and in consequence the alleged comic nature of these books appears ever more dubious. Their relation to her "constant self-analysis" can only be speculated upon in the light of her abandonment of India, but it seems likely that she can no longer allow herself to be regarded as an Indian novelist.

In *Heat and Dust* the personal and psychological crises of Jhabvala's characters, Indian and Western, are treated at greater length and in far greater detail; she has not only written a penetrating and compassionate love story; but she has also exposed the soul and nerve-ends of a fascinating country.

Vasant A. Shahane observes:

It is difficult to relate Jhabvala's constant sneering of the experience of India, as depicted in the attitudes, postures, and gestures of the characters in *Heat and Dust*, to anything like a Himalayan vision of snow-covered peaks and the vast arch of a heavenly blue sky. Does she finally suggest that the puny Olivias and the erratic Chids whom she has created will become one with the vast spaces of the Indian earth and
Indian sky and in this process transcend their smallness, their puny dimension?

At the end of *Heat and Dust* the English are preparing to go back home — to 'sweet little England.' The Crawfords, Harry, and Chid are booked for their homeward journey. Ironically, the Nawab also goes to London to lead a calm life there. Later he dies in New York.

Technically, *Heat and Dust* is a departure from Jhabvala's previous ones, as she adopts a completely new method — the pendulum movement between the past and the present — where the consciousness of time plays a very important part.

Shyamala A. Narayan remarks:

The novel [*Heat and Dust*] has been praised for its style and its depiction of India, but one wonders whether the praise is well deserved. No attempt is made to create any inner life for the characters, and they remain lifeless marionettes .... Jhabvala spends a number of pages describing the heat, dust, squalor, and overcrowding of Indian towns and hospitals, but does not tell us what the narrator thinks of having a baby in these insanitary conditions .... Glib generalizations abound: India changes people, all Indians have deep and yearning eyes, they miss no opportunity to talk to the Englishwoman in order to practise their English; India is a strange country, where strange things happen .... Jhabvala's India can impress the casual tourist, but I find it totally unreal.
However, as the title suggests, her inspiration seems to have run dry because of the heat and dust that fill her vision of India. She apparently could not utilise her talents and techniques as a novelist to the best advantage in this novel. The promise that she had shown in her earlier fiction becomes very stale in this novel. *Heat and Dust* is Jhabvala's last novel with an Indian setting. Naturally, it sums up her experience of India, an experience refined over the years.

According to S.N. Kumar,

*Heat and Dust* is in fact two stories in a single book and the style of presentation is also rather unusual. The reader has to constantly adjust perceptions because the narration darts back and forth, but this is not an insurmountable job if you are determined to finish the book.

But to quote K.P.K. Menon, "Instead of saying ... that *Heat and Dust* is really two stories, we might correctly describe the novel as two variations of a single story."

Jhabvala published her fourth collection of short stories, *How I Became a Holy Mother* in 1976, and this collection emphasizes her statement that her interest lay from 1960 onwards no longer in India as a subject, but in 'Myself in India.' Most of the stories in this volume are essays in self-analysis.

Bruce King writes:

Each of the stories is an example of the craft of writing; characters are so well sculptured as first to appear stereotypes, but when put into motion are found
of deeper, less clearly articulated emotional lives; often the main plot leads to a secondary character who is found to be the real interest of the story; the main characters’ habits of thought are reflected in the author’s narrative style, which grows more supple as the characters develop. Such craftsmanship should produce great art; it does not because the emphasis is on irony, pacing, and paradox instead of the rich inner life that the stories imply after the original stereotypes have been demolished.

Jhabvala’s brilliant novel *In Search of Love and Beauty* is a sharply ironic portrait of a small group of wealthy Europeans exiled in New York. This is her first American novel, and it has three minor Indian characters (Ahmed, the musician; Sujata, the singer; and Ravi, Sujata’s lover). All the major actions of the novel take place in New York; and Marietta, who ‘wanted light — and life, always!’ (8) makes frequent visits to India. During one of her visits to New Delhi,

She adored, simply adored, the bazaars and the merchants sitting inside their booths amid their goods: copper pans, or silver ornaments, textiles fluttering in the wind, gaudy sweetmeats — such colours, she had never seen, never dreamed such colours! She liked the smells, too, of incense and clarified butter, and even the denser ones of rotting vegetables and more sinister rotting things — even those didn’t bother her, for she regarded them as part of everything; as the beggars were part of it all, and the corpses on the pyres, and
the diseased people healing themselves in the sacred river, and the very fat priests (23-24).

Though the principal characters of the novel go in search of love and beauty in their own way, the novelist finds time and place to refer to the ashrams in India.

The ashrams always seemed to be situated in dust bowls, and the followers of the gurus had the same drained, infertile air as the landscape. As for the gurus themselves, although they varied in personality, there was something about all of them that reminded her of Leo: not so much in themselves, as in the effect they had. Moreover, while Marietta kept excellent health all through the rest of her travels, every time she visited an ashram she got some infection; so she stopped going (25).

But the novelist says that Marietta visits India "to immerse herself in different forms of life and enthuse over different expressions of it; to glory in variety" (65). Marietta soon begins to export Indian materials for a fashion house in New York, and she has business appointments with officials of the Ministry of Commerce and with the directors of textile mills. The novelist observes:

But for the first time, after all these years and all these visits, she suffered some of the irritations that India holds for its visitors. She didn't even have the excuse of heat, for it was winter and the days were cool with a mountain freshness infused into the mild Delhi sunshine (119-120).
Jhabvala always has a dig at Indian cuisine and the ways in which Indians relish their food. When Marietta goes to one of the luxury hotels for a lunch the novelist writes:

"the company assembled on the lawn consisted of upper-class Indians and their ladies in gorgeous saris. Everyone was enjoying their meal, the ladies as much as the men, tearing the legs of skinny ovenbaked chickens and bringing their heads forward to bite into them. They talked and laughed a lot, opening their mouths wide and showing the food and their healthy teeth" (120).

Marietta goes on a shopping tour after lunch, and after making her purchases, she is looking for a taxi to take her to her hotel; at that time

"two little boys descended on her, shouting cheerfully how they were hungry — starving — hadn't eaten since Tuesday. Marietta managed to fumble out a note to give them but they asked for more, making a sport of it as if they had bet each other how much they could get. Other little boys came running, and a somewhat bigger girl with a very old face and someone's baby on her hip. They pressed Marietta so close that she began to run ... they pushed against her and laughed the way the people in the hotel holding chicken legs had laughed. Only the girl with the baby kept right on whining in a grown-up way how hungry she was, and the baby, which had a growth on its shaved head, looked on with great beautiful eyes full of solemnity" (121).
The driver tells Marietta how these children are no good, that they have been trained to beg and make a nuisance of themselves to nice people. Jhabvala doesn't hesitate to point out that India is still 'a backward place' and that the majority of her population is suffering from poverty. At the same time she laughs at the eating habits of rich ladies. When Ahmed notices that Marietta is too thin, he tells her ironically:

'You're not strong. You must eat. Women must eat. They have to be strong .... You should see in my house how they eat, the food they put in themselves each day. And they're big, big women. When they walk — everything shakes, they shake, the house shakes, it's like an elephant walking. And when they laugh or, God forbid, when they get angry — oh oh oh, thunder from heaven. And all because they eat good food' (128).

Though Ahmed is very much interested in the 'astonishing features of American life' (75) and likes life in the West, he decides to return to India. The novelist says:

It was impossible to tell whether this decision was the result of slow gestation or came to him on a sudden impulse; nor was it clear whether it was due to homesickness, or that he was tired of New York, or of Marietta (23).

To quote K.T.Sunitha:

All the characters in the novel (In Search of Love and Beauty) are preoccupied in the search of love and beauty. Depending upon the quality of vision, each
character finds it in a particular person in a particular and different way.

It is quite probable that Jhabvala also, like her Ahmed, may have the same kind of feeling towards India in the passage of time. But one thing is certain: that she does not and cannot cast off her Indian experiences even though she abandoned India in 1975. At one time she was 'in India' and at present she is 'out of India' and thus she is a strange blend of an 'inside-outsider' and an 'outside-insider.' She says:

Louise now entered what was known in Leo's group as the D phase — Depression, Discouragement, and Disgust (with self). Also Disappearance from Sight ... (62).

(emphasis mine)

From the period of Disappearance from Sight, will Jhabvala go to the period of Appearance to Sight? It may happen; who knows? It is to be noted that she has started to divide her time now between New York, London, and New Delhi. She writes,

To live in India and be at peace one must to a very considerable extent become Indian and adopt Indian attitudes, habits, beliefs .... But how is this possible? Should one want to try and become something other than what one is?

Both the European and the Indian characters search for answers to these questions in the fifteen acclaimed stories selected from Jhabvala's three collections. A reviewer of Out of India remarks:

Jhabvala's troubled fragments provide consolation, not in art, but in the understanding that differences
between continents and cultures cannot deny the common core of human yearnings.

Raised in an East European environment, educated in Great Britain and thrust via marriage into an Asian setting and now settled in the United States, Jhabvala has dexterously used her multiple experiences to sharpen her fiction. She criss-crosses three continents in her latest and perhaps most ambitious book, *Three Continents*. A reviewer of the novel remarks:

'The final chapter is a *tour de force*, a gripping battle between good and evil, with an ending that reverberates in the memory.'

Like *A New Dominion*, *Three Continents* also has been divided into three parts: Propinquity, The Family and In the Rawul's Kingdom. The three continents that Jhabvala speaks of in the novel are America, Europe and India, thus giving her readers her knowledge of and experiences in the three continents.

The Wishwells — Harriet and Michael — are nineteen-year-old twins who have inherited a considerable fortune from their old, established American family. But they are not interested in money or possessions and want something far better than what their family or society — especially their divorced and selfish parents — can offer them. Towards the beginning of the novel, Jhabvala says:

Michael leaned weakly against his pillow and even shut his eyes for a moment. But when he opened them, he was radiant. He tried to tell me; he said "This is it, Harriet. *Om, the real thing,*" and an outsider might have interpreted this as meaning that Michael
was in love. But I [Harriet] knew it was something much more, for that wasn't what Michael and I had been searching for — the Om, the real thing — through our restless yearning childhood and growing up (16-17).

One wonders whether Jhabvala herself has been searching for that Om, after having spent fourteen years in the West. One also wonders whether she has fed up with the West and has become to take interest in the East. Or does the cycle 'renew itself' in her case too?

When the Wishwells meet the leader of the new world movement — Transcendental Internationalism as it is called — they think that they have found what they have been searching for. The narrator (Harriet) says:

While our parents were having marital squabbles and adulterous love affairs and our grandparents were giving diplomatic cocktail parties, he and I were struggling with the concepts of Maya and Nirvana, and how to transcend our own ages. Anything smaller than that, anything on a lower plane, disgusted us (17).

The leader of the movement is the Rawul, an Indian prince with a dubious title and a very ancient kingdom, Dhoka. He is supported by a pair of splendidly handsome adventurers, the Rani — another dubious title — who is actually Renee, and their adopted son, Crishi, of murky origins but charismatic charm. The Rawul is the apex of the movement, but the Rani and Crishi are the base on which it rests. They are collaborators, and they work together. Jhabvala writes: "Michael got involved with them all — that is, with the Rawul and Rani and their entourage, and with their sixth World movement" (19).
When Michael becomes deeply involved in the dubious movement, Harriet shows much interest in it, as she begins to love Crishi. The Wishwells believe that the Rawul would make them know the higher values of things and life. But the novelist remarks: "He [the Rawul] didn't want to be a world leader, but he felt he was born to be — chosen by exterior circumstances rather than any value he set upon himself" (30).

One can see the ironic weapon of Jhabvala when Crishi says: "The Rawul really is a ruler and from a dynasty older than any other in the whole world .... He's a direct descendant from the Moon" (34). The novelist satirises him:

He came to a conscious realization of everything that lay behind him and was in him: and ... he came truly to understand his ancient lineage, his own place in the story of Man, and with it, the responsibility that place conferred on him. Technically, he was no longer a king: there were no more kings; the world today didn't want kings. What then did it want? ... It wanted ... men who were prepared to be kings in spirit; not to conquer and rule kingdoms but, extracting what was best in each, to merge them into one great all-embracing kingdom of this world. This was his dream ... This was what had brought him ... into the heart of America (79).

The Rawul is very keen on publicity also, for he considers it the best way to penetrate into the minds of men, the hearts of nations, and the core of the world. He sees the union of Crishi and Harriet in
wedlock as a symbol of the synthesis that is the heart of his movement. Harriet says of the Rawul:

   He said the same sort of things about the transcending of East and West to bring them into a higher synthesis; only here he saw the actual realization of that synthesis in the joining together of Crishi of the East and Harriet of the West: so that our marriage was not only a personal but also an historic celebration (148).

Surrendering themselves and their fortune, Harriet and Michael join the group of the disciples of the movement and follow them first to England and then to India. Their allegiance does not waver until it becomes clear that the leaders are engaged in suspect and even criminal activities.

It is in London that Harriet discovers that the Rawul has another wife. No one has mentioned her before, but it is not as if she were being kept secret — at least not privately, though officially, as the leader of the movement, he has only one consort, and that is the Rani. But actually, legally, the Bari Rani, as she is called, is his wife; and so as not to get them mixed up, the Rani is actually called by her real name (that is, Renee) in England. One day when the Bari Rani speaks to Harriet about the nature and aim of the movement, Harriet begins to feel trapped. The Bari Rani tells Harriet:

   "You'll find out that everything is not what you expected. Perhaps you've found out already .... I'm used to it by now but — oh what a pity when young people are disappointed" (161).
Jhabvala doesn't hesitate to expose the dubious nature of the so-called new movement and its leader. She writes:

The Rawul shut his eyes and said: "If you ever listened to anyone but yourself you would have heard me say repeatedly that the movement is a religion for a world which has outgrown religion. I'm a rationalist, through and through; a modern man; a leader for modern men, and women of course: (184-85).

Jhabvala describes the Rawul's new world movement in the following lines:

Transcendental Internationalism. The use of the word **transcendental** was surprising because he had always insisted on being secular and operating entirely within the limits of this world. Now he explained that the boundaries to be transcended were not spiritual but national ones, and all political forms: It was these he wished to pull down and build up anew, just as other movements had aimed at doing within the mind and/or spirit of man. Anna was useful to him, for she drew him out and guided him beyond his founding vision to some sort of statement of practical principles. Practical! Well, it might still have sounded weird to an outsider, but as was pointed out to us [Harriet and Michael] over and over, every revolutionary movement started off with the vision of one man who was regarded as a crank by all except a tiny nucleus of believers (190).
One can easily see the ironic mode of the novelist in many of the important scenes of the novel. But the seriousness in the mode of narration, as one sees in the beginning of the later period, is absent in this novel. For example, while describing the Founder's Day celebration towards the end of Part II of the novel, Jhabvala writes:

The climax of the ceremony consisted of the Rawul being weighed against a pile of books. He explained that in Dhoka it was the custom on the royal birthday to weigh the ruler against gold, which was then distributed among the poor; a beautiful custom, he said, as were so many prevalent in his country, and one he wanted to preserve and adapt to the conditions of his modern world-state. And so it was not gold that this modern ruler had himself weighed against but wisdom — the Wisdom of all ages and all cultures; the Wisdom of Mankind (278).

But the Rawul tries to form an independent political party in opposition to the ruling party, which he intends one day to defeat: and from this base, with real political power in his hands, he hopes to work outward towards his great ideal — that is, from ruling India he can advance to uniting the world. There is an absolutely practical first step to be taken, and that is to have himself elected to a seat in the upper assembly which he hopes to achieve by his contacts and the votes he can count on from his own district. But he needs organizational work, and Bari Rani organizes lavish entertainments for the politicians, journalists, government officers and big businessmen who are going to help the Rawul to a seat in parliament. She hires banquet and conference halls and the best caterers, and she mingles
among the guests and is charming to them. But she privately confides to Harriet that they are very uncultured people whom she is only treating as equals for the sake of her husband's career. The Rawul's men, called the Bhaís, act as guards at his political meetings, and it is they who recruit people and pay them and bring them in truckloads to cheer for the Rawul. Thus in a way Three Continents is a satire on present-day Indian politics. Without wounding the sensibilities of anyone, Jhabvala gives an exact picture of the world of politics in the post-Independence India; she describes the following scene to show how the Rawul gives rich parties to guests in order to capture their votes.

He was standing among a group of the chieftest of all the chief ministers. Anyway, they were the most massive — vast men in thin drapery shoveling food into their mouths. Whenever a bearer passed with a dish, the Rawul stopped him and insisted on serving the guests himself, ladling food onto their already overflowing plates, bowing low over them as he did so, coaxing and smiling and putting everyone in a good mood so that bursts of fat laughter rose from that group (331).

Michael is annoyed at this attitude of the Rawul and is highly critical of the way in which Indians eat rich dishes. He hates the guests: ever since he has come to India, he has had these feelings festering inside him; they are responsible for his sick look.

It is not until the Wishwells get to India that Michael, finding that his selfless devotion is being exploited for unworthy ends, becomes disillusioned and wants to turn back and go home, taking his
sister with him. But by this time Harriet has so entirely given herself to Crishi that she is ready to sacrifice everything for him — maybe even her own life or her brother's.

But Michael dies under mysterious circumstances during the night of Bari Rani's big party. Crishi lures Harriet to Dhoka with lies. Harriet's birthday celebration takes place in the derelict palace. Crishi then reveals the truth of Michael's death, which has been described as a suicide. A letter is supposed to have been written by him, declaring Harriet the sole heir of their joint inheritance.

Three Continents is perhaps Jhabvala's only novel in which she tries to analyse the inner working of the minds of people, both East and West. One review of the novel remarks:

'The clash of cultures has always been a central theme in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's fiction. In her new novel the clash is pleasingly puzzling: the easternized West meeting the westernized East ... marvellously acute.

Even in the beginning of the novel Jhabvala talks about the Indian travellers in a sneering attitude. She writes:

One reason Michael preferred to travel alone was that others on the same trail often had a depressing effect on him. They would sit around in their hotel rooms or outside tea stalls in the bazaar, swapping information about the cheapest places to stay, or stories of how they had either been cheated by or had outwitted some native trader. Some of them were sick with dangerous and infectious diseases like jaundice or dysentery, and some of them had blown their minds so that you might as
well have been sitting with robots, Michael said. He also said that some of them were so stinking dirty, it was difficult to be near them (18).

While talking about the Rawul's kingdom of Dhoka, Jhabvala writes: "It is such a backward place ... no civilized person can stand it. (181). When Harriet gets ready to go to Dhoka with her brother, Bari Rani warns her about the place. The novelist says:

"Oh my God, that dump," is how she referred to it and advised me [Harriet] to take every kind of necessity, like Tampax and ballpoints; she said you couldn't get one single thing there, except of course for diseases you had never heard of and thought had been wiped out since the Middle Ages (253).

Even Crishi is critical about the place and tells Harriet: "I don't know how you're going to cope with it ... it's so primitive and you're used to such a nice standard of living" (253). At another time, the Rawul attributes the frustration of Michael to the climate of India. He tells Michael: "It's our climate ... Our climate and our wretched conditions. My poor squalid country" (303).

When Harriet travels in a bone-shaking auto-rickshaw in her futile attempt to find Michael, who is found missing, the novelist writes:

It was hot, the season had changed, we had got into the Delhi summer, and its heat and dust blew through the open rickshaw in which I [Harriet] sat. There was no cooling water under the bridge, for the river was in its dry stage and had contracted to a few wet patches seeping into acres of mud flats from which flies arose (351).
When Harriet goes to the bazaar street near the railway station in search of Michael, the novelist writes:

Here it was even hotter, for the dense city streets had stored up the day's heat, along with the smells that had accumulated in the gutters and from the day-old produce of the vegetable and meat stalls (352).

Jhabvala gives a description of the Delhi railway station towards the end of the novel:

I [Harriet] saw him [Paul] stretch himself out on a stone bench on the platform. He lay between a fat peasant in a dhoti and with Shiva marks on his forehead and a very thin poor woman who may have been a beggar and was eating something messy from a leaf. People pushed and shouted and spat all around him, and skeletal red-clad porters, balancing huge metal trunks on their heads, screamed for passage way. Paul didn't stir; he lay in the middle of it all, utterly spent and gaunt, his eyes shut, stubble on his face, the soles of his feet as black as any beggar's or holy man's (355-66).

When the two Bhais take Harriet and her grandfather's wife Sonya to the Rawul's palace, one gets the following description of the place through which they travel:

We drove through utter darkness — it was as though the entire landscape, or country, had been blotted out. It seemed to me [Harriet] that our whole journey had been like that, ever since we had left the hotel: in darkness, in a country shrouded in dust, a region of
invisibility, which we had traversed encapsulated within our own thoughts and fears (369).

While describing the cremation of Michael, Crishi refers to the intense heat of India and tells Harriet: "I wish we could have waited for you, but you know how it is with the heat in India; it has to be done the same day" (382).

It can be seen that there is a definite change in the author's attitude towards India after her move to America in 1975. After passing through the three stages in her literary career — comedy in the early period, tragi-comedy in the middle period, and tragedy in the later period — Jhabvala has, in a sense, completed one full cycle of life, consisting of her varied experiences in the three continents. She herself has made an inter-continental journey in her life and hence she tries to make her characters undertake the same kind of journey like hers. A kind of self-knowledge, self-awareness, or self-discovery is discernible in the later life of Jhabvala who says:

It was one more thing to deal within my mind. I [Harriet] looked back at myself as I used to be — at Propinquity, or in Grandfather's embassies — Michael and I both. We used to think we had to deal with such a lot: our parents, Lindsay and Manton, and going from country to country and being in international schools and not belonging anywhere, not wanting to settle anywhere, not wanting to go to any more schools, and not knowing what to do next; and the way we would discuss it and try to think out our values in absolute truth and purity (259).
One can notice that Michael is the mouthpiece of his creator. About Michael, the novelist says: "his thoughts were so far beyond it .... he never looked back — not even to last night — but only forward, forward, to new plans and triumphs" (348-49).

It is probable that these words may be applied to Jhabvala also. To sum up, a reviewer of *Three Continents* critically comments:

"Can it be that this is really a novel about an innocent rich girl in the clutches of an unscrupulous fortune hunter? I'm afraid so ... It is ... a girlish variation of a theme of Henry James and E.M. Forster."
NOTES

1. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, *Like Birds, Like Fishes* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, n.d.). All citations are from this text.

2. *Punch* review. Quoted on the back wrapper of *Like Birds, Like Fishes*.


5. 'Myself in India', *How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories*, p.11.


7. 'Myself in India', *How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories*, p.10.


11. This collection was first published by John Murray, London, in 1966 and it was later included in the volume *How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories*, published by Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, in 1984.


13. 'Miss Sahib', *A Stronger Climate*, p.181.


19. 'Myself in India', *How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories*, p. 15.
20. Ibid.
24. *Quest* 91 (September–October 1974), p. 36.
26. 'Myself in India', *How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories*, p. 11.
29. 'Myself in India', *How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories*, p. 10.

33. Meenakshi Mukherjee, 'Inside the Outsider', p.6.

34. 'Myself In India', How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories, p.9.


40. This collection was first published by John Murray, London, in 1976 and it was later included in the volume How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories, published by Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, in 1984.


42. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, In Search of Love and Beauty (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1985). All citations are from this text.


44. 'Myself In India', How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories, p.16.

46. The Times Literary Supplement review of Out of India. Quoted on the back wrapper of Out of India.

47. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Three Continents (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988). All citations are from this text.

48. Sunday Times review. Quoted on the back wrapper of Three Continents.

49. Observer review. Quoted on the back wrapper of Three Continents.