Chapter-IV
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In 1975, Ruth Jhabvala published Heat and Dust—her last and most controversial novel of India. More than any of her works, this one earned her critics and reviewers in India. Convinced that the novelist was identifying with a tradition of writing which projected a damaging view of India, many of her Indian critics took a very negative view of the novel. F.R. Isar and Shantha Krishnaswamy criticized it as anti-Indian and viewed it as the epitome of the novelist's twenty-three year itch in India. The merchant-Ivory film version of Heat and Dust, eight years later, let loose a fresh wave of outraged feelings in India. Eunice De Souza and Sunil Sethi, among others, felt that the film was racist in spirit and "hollow at the centre". However, Heat and Dust did find some admirers in India. Yasmine gooneratne and Brij Raj Singh found much to appreciate in the book, and Anita Desai, in a spirited defence of the film, failed "to see any trace of an anti-Indian stance," maintaining that "if any society was being criticized here it certainly wasn't the Indian one." Coming after A new Dominion, Heat and Dust repeats the earlier novel's warning of false assimilation at the same time as it projects a vision of a genuine merger—of the alien moving from a
physical involvement with India to a spiritual one Heat and Dust, in fact, hints at a renewal not only of the novelist's own cycle of response to India but of her faith, lost to her in the last decade, in India's genius for those who genuinely seek it.

Ruth Jhabvala's analysis of the alien's assimilation in India is seen in her new novel in a double perspective.

Using as her material a packet of letters and a journal written in 1923 and 1975 respectively, she adopts the Fowlesian technique of interlocking the two planes of time for her novel's structure. A juxtaposition of the two India's One ruled by the ideals of separation and one characterized by the social and racial mobility. Thus, while the novelist on the one hand, revives the world of her forebears, she also continues to comment on the India she knows intimately. Heat and Dust then evolves as much out of Jhabvala's relationship with her literary ancestors as out of her continuing involvement with India.

A sense of historical continuity is in the novel be depiction of the present commenting on the past. Two stories run side by side; their twists and turns following a common route in a common landscape of two hot, dusty little towns of Central India. They are the stories of two women linked not by birth but by the common sensitivity and openness they bring to the land in which they are expatriated. Though differing in character and temperament, their responses to India and their
experiences in it are similar. An illusion of time having stood still is created by the device of projecting the two women's experience against a common cycle of seasonal change. Both come out to India in the early summer, experience emotional ecstasy through an inter-racial union in the hot dusty months, and are faced with the necessity of making a major decision—whether to cast their lot in favour of East or of West—during the monsoon and are seen thereafter among the mountains seeking a dimly visualized spiritual goal.

Yet, the ultimate fates of the two women differ, created as they are by their differing times and environments. The break with the past is as distinct in Heat and Dust as the sense of continuity. It is mirrored in an Independent India, separated by a gap of fifty years from an Imperial India of undiminished glory effectively but crudely controlling the princely States, in which Imperialism and Royalty exist as relics. The beautiful bungalows in which the British lived their stately and gracious lives in 1923 have been stripped of their luxurious trappings and reduced to their utilitarian essentials to serve the needs of the new India. The palace at Khatm is no more than a shell, its owners compelled to make a living by selling family treasurers. The marble angel put up by the Saunders in the British cemetery is worn away by fifty years of sun and rain to a "endless wingless torso", which comes far closer to the "armless Apsaras and headless Shivas" of Hindu architecture than to its Italian counterparts. Through this double perspective of continuity
and change, Jhabvala presents her most composite picture up-to-date of a historical, sociological and spiritual India and examines the differing depths of the alien's penetration into the two India's—the separatist one of the Raj and the catholic one of post-Independence. Together they constitute an exploration of the theme of East-West relations that affirm Aziz's prophetic remarks in A Passage to India: "We shall drive every blasted English into the sea, and then,'... 'you and I shall be friends".

Ruth Jhabvala sets half her narrative in 1923—a year before the publication of A Passage to India—at a point of time when British rule in India had already spanned two centuries. Yet the British residents of Satipur, like their counterparts of Chandrapore, maintain the old divisions between the ruler and the ruled in the same spirit of racist superiority that served as their predecessor's protection against the ever-present threat of submergence in a lower culture. The "old India hands" of Satipur whose "experience went back several generations" claim that they know all there is to know about India, but are actually still perplexed and repelled by the country in which they live. They believe that their only chance of survival in it lies in a meticulous fulfilling of their imperial obligations which presupposes a scrupulous adherence to the line separating the white from the native and an unswerving faith in the rule of the white. Such a faith has, inherent in it, the seeds of restriction and immobility. By taking away his right to rule, the representatives of the
Raj restrict and thwart the Nawab of Khatm's natural movement on the path of an inherited tradition, once fiery and dominant but now reduced by them to a bare nothing—the name of his kingdom Khatm being a symbolic one meaning exhausted or consumed. But it is not the native alone who is affected. Faith in her ruling power inherent in the blood of the white and the necessity, therefore, to preserving it from contamination by the native, exert restricting influences on the European who is open to his Indian experience and determines his position in the hierarchy. Thus, the "pukka sahibs"—the I.C.S. officials and political agents—who uphold and enforce the separatist ideal occupy positions at the top of the system while right at the bottom are the despised lower castes who have forgotten their racial superiority and given themselves over to India.

The officials at the top of the hierarchy is Satipur rise to their imperial obligations Dr Saunders, Major Minnies, Mr. Crawford and Douglas Rivers strive hard, each in his own way, to preserve British rule in the district and by implication all over India. They share an in expressed confidence that it was by the efforts of men like themselves that the empire was built and that it is by such that it is being extended and preserved. The women, too, believe that they have a role to play in the maintenance and preservation of British rule even though, for all practical purposes, their contribution lies in little more than an identification with the cause and a willingness to live the regulated life
of the memsahib in India. Dr. Saunders runs the British hospital in Satipur according to the high standards of strictness and cleanliness that mark the British administration in India. He also sets the moral tone of Satipur and guards it closely. Major Minnies suppresses his innate admiration for the Nawab and struggles against the unpatriotic feeling that the British administration brings out the worst in a strong and forceful character like the prince of Khatm. He strives, instead, to keep him in strict order in accordance with the dictates of Simla.

Crawford represents the type of ideal Britisher extolled by literatures of the first phase of expatriate writing, and is everything that Douglas has the potential for the aspires to be. It is this image of Douglas—the text-book image of the best type of Englishman in India—that Olivia falls in love with and marries.

However, the men and women who embody all that is best in the British community are transformed into dull in Heat and Dust. Jhabvala recognized that the social immobility enforced by the politics of British rule demoralized the ruling race just as much as it oppressed the subject race. Jhabvala’s point of view does not come through in the omniscient narrator’s voice. Her moral stance is transmuted into those of certain characters who are either victims of the system or stand outside it.

That the novelist’s stance approximates to a denigration of a culture governed by the separatist principle is suggested within a few
pages of the book by her depiction of the fate that overtakes Mrs. Saunders in India. The breakdown of Mrs. Saunders' physical and mental health and her morbid fears and complexes are attributed, not so much to the harshness of the India environment as to the fact of there being something wrong in the system in which she is trapped. Mrs. Saunders complains of the heat and filth of Satipur and lives in constant terror of being raped by her native servants, yet she never goes up to Simla where she can escape the pressures of her environment for a good many months in the year like the other memsahibs. This refusal to leave Satipur cannot be put down to a devotion to her husband. It is the manifestation of an impulse for exclusion that may be self-generated or fostered by her environment. There is a suggestion that she is a misfit in her community, mostly because of her incapacity to make a successful life for herself on the right side of the dividing line, but in part at least owing to her origins: "...no one ever said this outright but they were not the sort of people found in the Indian services". In fact, it is her second class status in her community that has, on the reader's conviction, provided the impetus for her physical and mental decline. A creature of excessive sensibility, Mrs. Saunders finds herself incapable of meeting the demands of her life in Satipur. Isolated from her community; neglected by her husband, and deprived of the joys of motherhood, she grows lonelier, more hysterical, and more violent with each passing year in India. Victim of
a narrow divisive code, she clings passionately to those very dividing lines that threaten to poison her existence.

Another character of sensibility and equally a victim of the system is Harry who stands at the opposite end from Mrs. Saunders in his relationship with India. Possessing a keener awareness than hers, he recognizes that his sufferings in general and in India in particular stem from the restrictions imposed by the superior public-school Englishmen who run the administration in India: "They’re the sort of people who’ve made life hell for me ever since I can remember", he remarks of the officials in Satipur Harry’s love for the Nawab whom he sees as the ideal anti-type of the public school moralists makes him hate the Raj and its coercive tendencies. He recognizes that there is no basic difference between the way his countrymen treat Indians and the way they treat a member of their own tribe who does not conform. In reaction, Harry flouts the dividing line and firmly entrenches himself in the Indian camp. Though he experiences that joys of true friendship it is only temporarily, for through Harry’s experience Jhabvala affirms the Forsterian conviction that inter-racial friendship cannot be sustained in an Imperialistic set-up. In fact, certain striking similarities between the two have led critics to suggest that the character of Harry is based on that of E.M. Forster’s Brij Raj Singh points out:
... devotion, his longevity, the fact that he has a mother in England to whom both he and the Nawab write, and his frank acknowledgement that he hates the Imperialists just as he hated his public school, where he was constantly bullied, all parallel events in Forster’s life at the Dewas court; and this parallelism is Jhabvala’s way of acknowledging the debt that Heat and Dust, as indeed all novels of India written by non-Indians owe to Forster.¹

Cronin suggests that the character of the Nawab of Khatm is based on that of Maharajah Tukoji Rao III and that the reason for the latter’s sympathetic attitude becomes clear after a reading of Heat and Dust.

It is true that the Nawab views Olivia’s pregnancy largely in terms of a revenge on a race which believed that the secret of leadership lay in the English race. In a society that frowned on inter-racial unions and rejected the Eurasian, the Nawab gleefully looks forward to the birth of his half English child: “Wait till my son is born, he said; then they’ll laugh from the other side of their mouths”. But there is more to the Nawab’s feelings for Olivia than his use of her as an instrument of revenge. Olivia undergoes an abortion to save her community from shame. But her action, though it frustrates the Nawab’s revenge, does not drive them apart. She is forgiven by the Nawab but not by the Empire builders.
Confronted by Dr. Saunders, she escapes to the Nawab and is permanently separated from her own people.

Cronin's assertion that the Nawab uses his "devastating" personal charm as "the last available weapon of war" fails to convince for even the Harry Nawab relationship admits ambiguity. The Nawab coaxes, pampers and uses his influence over Harry quite shamelessly, but how much of it stems from malice and how much from genuine involvement—the involvement that prompted him to take Harry with him to Paris in this first place—is not clear.

This rejection is embodied on Olivia's fate. Of all the characters in *Heat and Dust*, it is Olivia who upholds the ideal that following the dictates of the heart in preference to those of the intellect is more conducive to acceptance and sympathy. Endowed with an exquisite sensibility that is denigrated by Major Minnies as "an excess of feeling", her heart trembles in response to the sorrows of others, irrespective of class, race, colour or even legitimate claim to sympathy. Thus, she is as sensitive to the suffering of morbid, vitriolic Mrs. Saunders and to that of one who stands totally outside it; the Nawab who organizes riots, associates with dacoits and hates the British.

The young, beautiful and delicately bred Olivia begins her life in Satipur with little knowledge of the line that separates the ruler from the ruled. Her initial mistakes of understanding, common in a new-
comer to the system, provide a good deal of amusement to the seasoned old sahibs and memsahibs.

No one is alarmed at her behaviour, for there is no doubt in anyone's mind that she will eventually, like the others preceding her, "come to feel about India the way we all do". But Olivia, unlike the regulation heroine, does not learn after a few false starts, how to develop into a pukka memsahib. Her doubts, deepened during her stay in India, as to the worth of this metamorphosis render her incapable of conforming to the pattern of behaviour expected of her. She gets involved with the country and its people, thus alienating herself from her own community. Her story ends not with a tearful reconciliation with her husband but with an ignominious flight with a native ruler.

Olivia's white and golden beauty may symbolize "all that is worth fighting and dying for" for the Empire builders, but she herself shares none of their convictions. In the face of Indian reality the time-honoured concept of the Ideal British attitude to India shows up as pompous and unworthy and, in the final analysis, irrelevant. Olivia resents interference with native customs on the arrogant assumption of a superior culture. "Who are we to interfere with anyone's culture especially and ancient on like theirs?" She declare at the Crawford's dinner party. Her comment on the Nawab: "He's just like.... One of us" and her acceptance of his statement that they are fundamentally more alike than she and Mrs. Crawford, for example, indicate a Forsterian recognition of the innate
unity of races. It is a grave comment on the consciousness of the British in India that this absence of parochialism in Olivia is described as “something rotten” by Dr. Saunders and by Major Minnies as a “weak spot” often found in the finest people but one that aliens, need to guard against since “it is there that India seeks them out and pulls them over into…. The other dimension”. So fundamental is the separatist consciousness in the British community that even bright, practical Beth Crawford “did not allow herself to speak about Olivia until many years—a lifetime had passed”, after Olivia threw in her lot with the East:

Beth knew where lines had to be drawn, not only in speech and behaviour but also in one’s thought…..Beth felt that there were oriental privacies mysteries—that should not be disturbed, whether may lay within in Palace, the bazzar of Satipur, or the alleys of Khatm. All those dark regions were outside her sphere of action or imagination as was Olivia once she had crossed over into them.²

She pushed that thought aside: it was unbearable”. The deeper his immersion into the system, the more hopelessly narrow-minded and unimaginative Douglas becomes, and the more the mouths the platitudes of his community the more greatly he is estranged from his sensitive, artistic wife. Douglas is conceived by Ruth Jhabvala as stoical, idealistic and striving for perfection. Locked, within the Imperial system, however, his striving is reduced to a painstaking identification with those
who rule, exploit and patronize India, and his ideal of perfection that of becoming a great colonizer and administrator. Douglas' pipe becomes, in Olivia's eye, the symbol of officialdom in India:

Douglas had finished his breakfast and now lit his morning pipe. He puffed as it as slowly and stolidly as he had eaten. She had always loved him for these qualities—for his imperturbability, his English solidness and strength; his manliness" He can't even get me pregnant. She cried 'Must you smoke that dashed pipe? In this heat?'

Heaslop, he "highly respected his superiors and set great store by their good opinion of him" he makes a deliberate point of receiving the Nawab's congratulations with cool indifference. Olivia, with her keen unjaundiced eye and her heart full of the sensibility that is so astonishingly lacking in those around her, perceives and resents the arrogance and condescension of her husband and his fellow British in India. When they bring their unshakeable faith in the moral superiority of their race to the discussion of the Suttee at Crawford'

Dinner party Olivia is appalled. She notices that "not only did they keep completely cool, but they even had that little smile of tolerance, of affection, even enjoyment that....was beginning to know well; like good parents, they all loved India whatever mischief she might be up to". In reaction Olivia is pushed to defence of the custom and is
suspected by an irate Dr. Saunders of having been influenced by “that bounder Horshma,” a traveling M.P. who “had passed through the district the year before and had put everyone’s back up”.

Yet Olivia had not come out to India on a mission of friendship and understanding or even, like her step grand-daughter, out of a curiosity to find out the truth about the country her people ruled. She had been in the beginning only a pretty, frivolous young woman in love with her husband and determined to enjoy her life in India. Far from stripping herself of her cultural accessories like the narrator of the novel, her first action on moving into her bungalow had been smother it in “rugs, pictures, flowers” and to write to her sister: “We’re beginning to look slightly civilized”. In her pretty drawing-room with her black and white prints, her Japanese screen, her yellow charis and lampshades, Olivia had lived the life regulated for her arranging flowers and playing the piano. Though bored and lonely, she was completely oblivious of the natives around her; of her servants who padded around on naked feet, and of the millions who lived beyond the Civil Lines of Satipur. The limitations of her personality at this stage are suggested by her delight at the splendours of the Nawab’s dinner arrangements and the naivete of her conviction that “she had, at last in India, come to the right place”. Olivia starts going out with the Nawab and then to him at the palace at Khatm. And after a few visits, she discovers something curious— that she was getting to know the real India and to love her well, even her
heat and dust—the two most dreaded opponents of the British in India:

Although the way was so hot and dusty, the landscape utterly flat and monotonous, Olivia learned to like these morning drives. Sometimes she glanced out of the window and then she thought well it was to so bad really—she could even see how one could learn to like it: the vast distances, the vast sky, the dust and sun and occasional broken fort or mosque or cluster of tombs. It was so different from what one knew that it was like being not in a different part of this world but in another world altogether, in another reality.\textsuperscript{4}

Fundamental change in her vision: “This power of seeing, really seeing, was something new to her. It was as if this land, so far from her own, had jerked her awake, pulled the veil of ignorance and indifference from her eyes, making her look, see, as she had never done before.” Endowed with a similar vision, Olivia loses her wave length with her own people and, filled with a strength quite unknown to the earlier Olivia, resists the pressures that exact conformity and courageously places her personal instinct above the instincts of the herd. Her spiritual successor’s estimate of her fifty years later is a valuable comment on the way India changed Olivia:

I still don’t think there was anything very special about Olivia; I mean, that she started of with any very special qualities.
When she first came here she may really have been what she seemed; a pretty young woman, rather vain, pleasure seeking, a little petulant. Yet to have done what she did—and then to have stuck to it all her life long—she couldn’t have remained the same person...\(^5\)

"India always changes people", the objective narrator declared at the beginning of her story, suggesting that her statement holds good for both eras. In Imperial India, as we have seen, normal healthy young men and women were metamorphosed into insufferable snobs and separations or, as in the case of Olivia, seduced from their community and claimed by India. Independent India, too, as depicted in the 1975 section, changes her aliens in one way or another. But what the narrator testifies, through a depiction of her own fate side by side with that of Olivia’s, is that India’s capacity for assimilating her aliens was considerably eroded in the separatist context of British India.

Olivia had given herself over in the spirit of surrender advocated by Sudhir Banerjee as the only approach to which India responds. She had cut herself off from her own people, had never gone back to England, and had even desired cremation after death, but was not seep into the mainstream of Indian life as was Judy and the narrator of Heat and Dust. Her destiny, unlike theirs, did not encompass the joys of physical affinity with India. While theirs is alive with movement and teeming with possibilities, hers is frozen and immobile. Olivia’s life in
India in a little house standing "quite by itself on a mountain ledge" has held for her only a supreme, if picturesque, isolation.

In Heat and Dust Jhabvala shows that the two English heroines of the novel lack moral realism. They become victims of illusions generated by their liberalism and their sensitivity. They are carried away by their generosity. Therefore, they do not understand. Olivia admits that she does not understand India but she is not deterred from responding to the country unreservedly.

Five main themes, each of them closely connected with the other four and explored through an extremely skillfully managed series of parallels, run through Heat and Dust. The first of these examines the experiences of Europeans in India, using flashbacks 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 Ruth Jhabvala has suggested as being an inevitable part of the experience of living in India. The narrator, an Englishwoman 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 Rivers, both before and after her elopement in 1923 with the Nawab of Khatm, is at 'stage one' when she matter of factly accepts the sick and deformed citizens of
Satipur as part of the 'landscape', and notes without further comment that her share in the bathroom facilities of her lodgings include 'the little sweeper girl who is attached to them'. Olivia is at 'stage one' herself, when she casually accepts the idea that

there's always something like that going on in the quarters.

Someone dying or getting born or married.⁶

**Heat and Dust** is a remarkable work of art because it artistically portrays the processes of change, the processes of 'becoming' of two English women' and one of them, the young narrator, acknowledges this meaning fully in words which seem to be the heart of the matter:

India always changes people, and I have been no exception. But this is not my story, it is Olivia's as However, the reader knows that 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.⁷

**References**

4. Heat and Dust, p. 85
5. Heat and Dust, pp. 59-60.
6. Heat and Dust, pp. 129-30
7. Ibid., p. 02