CHAPTER SIX

CN CLUSIN
Since the style of an artist is the reflection of his mind, his development can be traced through the evolution of style. Markandaya’s style, too, has not been uniform but shifts and changes as it passes through various novels. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the narrative begins sleepily, as if dug out of the memory. The style is simple, elemental, though occasionally quite poetical. Gone is the lyrical, poetic, passionate outburst of feelings and emotions which characterized the earlier novel; instead, what we have is an almost endless conversation in which each person is different from what he shows himself to be. The style of the former is like cool, clean water from a natural spring; that of the latter like plain tap water, treated and chlorinated. In the former, Markandaya is like a shy, veiled, rural bride, speaking when she has to, concealing harsh feelings and outraged emotions due to modesty and social norms; in the latter, she is like an urban bride, open and straightforward, discussing every issue, defying her husband if need be. In *A Silence of Desire*, her style is simple, sombre and slow-going. There are very few images as if the imagination which was frothing and churning around was subsided now, the incidents brought in to create suspense are not powerful enough. The incident of a photograph in the trunk arouses Damoder’s suspicion and he wants to ask Sarojini about it. The author allows the watch to tick away but the photograph turns out to be that of his wife’s music teacher and Dandekar is relieved. There is a pervading dullness in the entire book as if requiring some blood transfusion. There are no great passages—poetic or rhetorical—which had
characterized her earlier works. It has neither a powerful theme, nor incidents good enough to sustain the narrative. There is no clash of cultures, no one dies, and the simple fears of Dandekar against the Swamy strike as a puny affair.

After the stagnant style of *A Silence of Desire*, Markandaya’s style in *Possession* seems to be rippling. The novel has fresh images. Probably the familiar ground of England and its people have reactivated her creative powers. In *A Handful of Rice*, her style becomes rich, imaginative and adorned. The images are profuse. After *Nectar in a Sieve*, it seems, she has for the first time got the subject of her choice. There are many poetic passages dealing with the ever-increasing dreams of characters. However, the intrusions of the author mar the narrative.

*The Coffer Dams* marks a shift in her style. The language of her earlier novels is simple, pure, effective, and "Cows, even and beautiful, like the Ganga in the plains;" in her later novels beginning with *The Coffer Dams*, its place is taken by experimentation and "a power rich in overtones and undercurrents; gone is the distance of third-person narrative in favour of the stream-of-consciousness technique which plumbs the emotional working of characters in a language that cuts clean and sure as a surgeon’s knife." In *The Coffer Dams*, Markandaya shows more command over English and the style moves gracefully yet effortlessly. Similes and metaphors which were so abundant in *A Handful of Rice* become less in this novel. Due to the subject matter of the novel, which is not very interesting, the style becomes heavy on the readers. *The Nowhere Man* has more of words which do not always clarify
things. Its style, like the man himself, is nowhere near that of *Nectar in a Sieve*, even though images and objectives have quite frequently been used.

In *Two Virgins*, the style is journalistic, probably an experiment in writing dialogues without quotation marks. The repetition of the word ‘said’ a novelty in the beginning, becomes monotonous, tiring and artificial. The whole exercise makes the style uninteresting. Some sensationalism and sexual overtones do not add to the credit of the author. *The Golden Honeycomb* is a concrete example of the maturation of Markandaya’s style—a fine culmination of over twenty years of her writing. Here we have an abundance of dialogues and descriptions as the scope of the book has given the author a sense of freedom. The language, like the subject matter, has a certain majesty in its treatment. At times, the style becomes impressionistic.

In evaluating the contribution of Kamala Markandaya to the Indian-English fiction, it is often pointed out that unlike Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Khushwant Singh, she has not evolved Indian English. The fact which is often ignored in such cases in whether there is really a need to Indianize English. The above novelists, who are cited in support of such a contention, have not always Indianized English. Raja Rao’s language might be Indianized in *Kanthapura* but it is not so in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Anand’s and Bhattacharya’s attempts at Indianizing English are usually confined to dialogues without being extended to description and narration. The Indianizing of English is not always a necessity; it is a desirability only in certain situations and with certain illiterate and rural
characters where neat and pure English may not go well. Uma Parameswaran's views on this matter are worth reproducing:

The simple fact of the matter is that an Indo-English novel need not have an Indianness in its prose style any more than a British or American novel need have some distinctive prose style that proclaims its country of origin. We know that the replicas of the Statue of Liberty sold in souvenir shops at the foot of the Statue are all made in Japan. A tourist is usually disappointed when he notices this. But take away that tell-tale tag and the souvenir is seen to be what it is—a replica of the Statue of Liberty, which landmark he has just visited, and will recall each time he sees the replica. The main point is whether or not the replica is well made. So also with a novel. Prose style is to a novel what the replica is to the tourist who has visited the Statue—an aid to focus on an experience. If it is a model drawn to scale, it has a certain value. If it is a model that only approximates the original proportions but is in itself a piece of art, it has a different kind of value.

Kamala Markandaya's contribution to the style of Indian-English fiction should be seen in the fact that though English happens to be her acquired language, she has made it an appropriate vehicle of her creative writing. In a world where it is fashionable to have an Indian flavour in English, Markandaya continues to be an orthodox perfectionist who maintains the inviolable purity of her language.
Jhabvala's novels and stories are about Indians and Westerners in India. In her first five novels about Indians Jhabvala has mainly dealt with marriage, money, the Indian wife, the Indian householder and the Indian social reformer. The titles of these novels, except *Esmond in India*, indicate Jhabvala's approach. She presents Indians in terms of Indian codes of conduct for businessmen, wives, householders and social reformers. Indian society, for all its progress in science and technology, is traditional to the core. It still works according to the ethical and moral stipulations as expressed in sacred books. Therefore, the Indian girls are to be married in a class and caste to which they belong, the Indian businessmen need have no pangs of uneasy conscience as it is his nature to make more and more money, the Indian wife has to put up with the tyrannies of her husband, the Indian householder must live up to the duties expected of him and a social reformer must continue to work, treating gain and loss alike. Indians accept these codes almost instinctively. Hari in *To Whom She Will* accepts his selfish nature because he thinks it is his fate; Gulab in *Esmond in India* accepts the duties and obligations of a wife as they are defined by tradition: Prem in *The Householder* tries to live up to the traditional role of a householder: and Sarla Devi in *Get Ready for Battle* accepts the philosophy of “treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, then get ready for battle.”

Jhabvala's depiction of the working of these codes in modern times is in terms of the major concerns of the novel like appearance and reality, snobbery, uneasiness, illusions, fantasy and other effects of money and the
dangers of passions which tend to be wilful, imperious and impatient.

All through her work Jhabvala shows a concern for reality. Her characters, on the other hand, are seduced by mere appearance. Amrita feels drawn towards Hari because he seems to be unsullied by the vulgarity of opulence. Nimmi is attracted towards Phiroz because he seems to her to be the quintessence of the modern man. Esmond married Gulab because he thought that her eyes were deep, sad and full of the wisdom of the East. Jhabvala describes her characters’ fascination for more appearance, and their slow disillusionment.

Her novels about Westerners in India show the Western involvement in post-Independence India. In these novels Jhabvala deals with the various reasons for which Westerners come out to India and how their attitudes towards India are conditioned by the nature of their stay in the country and by their native sensibilities. In her novels about Westerners in India Jhabvala emphasizes the fact that Westerners are no longer here as conquerors but as the conquered ones.

In her novels about Indians as well as in her novels about Westerners in India, Jhabvala presents vivid portraits of certain aspects of Indian society. Her area of exploration is the social world and the material of her analysis is manners. To Jhabvala, reality is whatever is external and hard, though it could be gross and unpleasant. She writes the novels of character which are concerned with expressing the modes of existence rather than the images of experience. Her work is devoid of thrills, violence and esoteric elements. Jhabvala is never a mere casual observer of the Indian scene.
She writes mainly about the middle class because this is the class she knows best. She shows a characteristically Western awareness of social problems. Indian critics have said that Jhabvala deals with surficial life, that her characters are static and that her fiction is a monstrous distortion. In fact the very titles of her novels about Indians show that she is concerned with Indian wisdom and philosophy. Though she writes about the middle class society and about Westerners in India, she shows an admirable awareness of Indian problems by and large. She is aware of Indian poverty and of the indifference, callousness and moral squalor that afflict the middle class. She succeeds in presenting the willless, wavering and drifting lives of Indian youth, the bickering and possessive Indian mothers and the rising callous and unscrupulous middle class in post-Independence India. The charge about "static" characters is not wholly untrue. Her characters are definitely static and there is certainly some exaggeration in her depiction of characters and situations. All her characters have exaggerated traits which creates an impression that they are meant to be caricatures. But static characters and exaggerations are necessary for the kind of novel Jhabvala writes. She writes about anti-heroes who are terribly conditioned by their religious, social and economic traditions and oppressed by sweltering heat. Small wonder if they lead false and empty lives. It is not Indians alone who are depicted in this manner but also the English and the Americans who abandon themselves to the weird charm of the East. She takes a group of men and women and describes them as they move from day to day. The boredom of routine life and desperate refuge in ashrams, which promise peace but make life more
complicated, from the bulk of her fiction. Jhabvala adjusts her prose to suit her purpose. Not for nothing is her prose so slow and devoid of poetic embellishments. It is the slow, dull, false lives of her characters described in slow, simple, economical prose which creates a cumulative effect of total futility and aimlessness. Jhabvala has an eye for the ridiculous but she is also aware of the fact, that what is ludicrous on the surface is tragic underneath. Jhabvala’s characters are given just enough definite traits to carry on. Their deeds and adventures, their tragic predicaments, or the rowdy pranks in which they deport themselves are not mere episodes in a literary farrago; these are, unmistakably, pages torn from the daily register of life as it goes on.

A kind of puerility marks the entire behaviour of Amrita and Nimmi, two of Jhabvala’s heroines. A kind of looseness of ‘willessness’ is the hallmark of Hari and Viddi. Greed is the driving passion of Lalaji. Sloth and sloppiness rule the world of Gulab. Sarla Devi is a little too unworldly and Kusum is a little too coquettish. In an article on Dickens, George Orwell says: “His characters are struggling to make their souls, whereas Dickens’ people are present far more often and far more vividly than Tolstoy’s, but always in a single unchangeable attitude, like pictures or pieces of furniture.” Perhaps unchangeability is the cause of the popularity of Dickens’ characters. And so it is with Jhabvala’s. Hari, Viddi, Inder Lal are characters who in spite of their ‘flatness’ leave a lasting impression. “India always changes,” Jhabvala has said time and again. It certainly changes Westerners, though they do not gro. On the contrary, there is a marked diminution in them. Etta, Clarissa and
Judy from *A Backward Place* and Margaret, Evie and Lee from *A New Dominion* might have lived a full life in their countries, but here in India they sink to the bottom of degradation and sloth. Moreover, India changes them much in the same way. So there is always a static pattern of action in Jhabvala's novels.

Jhabvala's fictional strategy in creating her fictional world is to take a central character and build around him or her a set of incidents which are so arranged as to reinforce the validity of the kind of world she creates. Jhabvala's art consists in recreating a typical social context by slow, careful accumulation of details. The details include small actions, dress, decorations, gestures, the words that are used with a special frequency, the choice of food, etc. The massive accumulation of detail leads to the establishment of a cultural identity of the people she writes about. As an outsider, Jhabvala's first business is to know and then to impart all she knows in terms that would make her readers see and hear and feel a lively sense of actuality. Jhabvala fastens herself instinctively on to the truly revealing aspects of life in India. In her first five novels Jhabvala is mainly concerned with the presentation of Indian codes of conduct. In order to do so she plays up certain charactertraits and introduces extreme situations. The situations are so arranged as to highlight the character-traits. They are continuously reshuffled and redistributed to suggest a mode of existence. This strategy suits Jhabvala's purpose because she is not interested in individuals or their psychology. She is interested in social life. A part of her fictional strategy is her art of juxtaposition of highly incongruous
characters. In her novels about Westerners in India, Jhabvala is concerned with various attitudes the Westerners in India adopt towards this country. So she takes up characters that represent these attitudes and brings them together in situations that would highlight their attitudes. But while her characters are busy reaffirming and reinforcing their various points of views, Jhabvala is busy showing how the overall reality of India affects them. In _A New Dominion_ and _Heat and Dust_ Jhabvala employs more sophisticated techniques. _A New Dominion_ uses the combined technique of direct narration, epistolary form and autobiography to present its characters. In _Heat and Dust_ Jhabvala employs the strategy of two parallel stories to distinguish between the temporal and the timeless aspects of life in India.

Jhabvala's distinctive achievement as a novelist lies in the fact that, while Indian writers writing about Indian mores tend to deviate from the British tradition of the novel and evolve a more indigenous form especially suited to Indian life, but not universally acceptable to the Western readers, she works within the British tradition and presents Indian life in terms that would be acceptable to the Western readers. Though an outsider, Jhabvala shows an unusual insight into Indian mores. She sees India in a western perspective. Radha and Uma, the two anxious mothers in _To Whom She Will_ and _Esmond in India_, for example, are presented ironically rather than sentimentally as they would be by Indian writers. What is sentimental for Indian writers is comic to her. The material that would get melodramatic treatment from Indian writers gets ironical treatment from her. She never
allows her Western sensibility to be overwhelmed by the Indian scene.

For over a quarter of a century Jhabvala's novels and stories have been
the Westerners' window on India. Her technical skill, her unusual insights,
hers cool and controlled brilliance and her sustained work have carved for her
a place in the front rank of the writers of the world. Fortunately, she has
started attracting serious critical attention in the English speaking world.

In almost all her stories and novels Jhabvala assumes the role of an
'omniscient' narrator. This is clearly a traditional and natural mode of
narration. In this method Jhabvala tells a story with a perspective, or several
perspectives without, of course, personally getting involved in any of them.
She is present at the side of her characters, in the author's corner of their
scenes; she watches them and comments on their actions, modes of feeling
and thought processes. She is at the centre, but the centre is outside the
varied and overall circles of her creations. She thus seems to be an outsider
For a while, yet she plunges into the small circles, enters the consciousness
of her characters and then describes what she has observed and assessed so
meticulously.

As a European writer, Jhabvala's persistent emphasis upon painting
or describing minute details of apparently unimportant scenes or events is a
significant quality of her art. The western intelligence thrives on
comprehensiveness and thoroughness in the subject under review. As an
artist Jhabvala inherits this western intellectual discipline and projects it on
her fictional canvas. She is also conscious that she is writing for western
audiences who are not familiar with Indian culture or modes, and therefore
her comprehensiveness receives additional impetus. Her area of observation is very wide and she renders all that she observes in a comprehensive coverage. Sometimes this tendency towards reproducing an actual scene is carried to an excessive degree with the result that an Indian reader is almost bored, but the western reader, who is unfamiliar with the scene, is very nearly thrilled.

Jhabvala's world signifies space—the space that is India, the India moulded by her experience and fictional art. Her endeavour, however, should be classified as 'time-art' since the narrative mode of her fiction is conceived in terms of history or a sequence of time. Jhabvala's mode of narration follows the traditional time-span, the individual's or family's cyclic development or decline. The time-dimension in her fictional art is so dominant that her art does not show any substantial spatial development and it is far remote from the concept of space-time polarity as reflected in the novels of Virginia Woolf.