CHAPTER V

A NEW DOMINION
Mrs. Jhabvala's *A New Dominion* is interpreted as a variation on the theme of East-West encounter and as a juxtaposition of Indo-European and American cultures. This novel marks a new vista in her technique. The story is told as a string of episodes with a journalistic touch here and there. She adheres to this technique strictly throughout the novel.

As a matter of fact, *A New Dominion* is again about India, which is puzzling to a Westerner. In this novel the narrator says that India is evocating, inspiring, fulfilling and frustrating at one and the same time. Primarily, it is the story of the three Western girls named Lee, Margaret and Evie, who come to India to quench their spiritual thirst and thereby secure comfort and permanent peace to their machine-ridden souls. To be more explicit they come under the category of seekers.

Structurally the novel is divided into three parts and there are many episodes in each part. Part one is placed in Delhi, which represents the changes that have
been taking place in a modern India which are very curious to the western people. The second part is located in the holy city of Banaras which seems to affect the spirit of the Easterner and the Westerner. Here we find a gradual change, from sophistication to spirituality and holiness. The third part represents RAJASTANI town of Maupur - a symbol of purity and deception of many characters in the novel. These characters not only react to the large panoramic reality of the new dominion but also they react to each other, creating a complex of human relationship which are central to the novel. In this complex of relationships, the west is represented by three girls Lee, Margaret and Evie who are on a spiritual quest in the new dominion. Raymond, a tourist wants to see India. But inexplicably he develops a kind of unbreakable bond with Gopi, a student and with Asha, the sister of Rao Saheb. Raymond's purpose is not like that of Lee and Margaret. He is purely a sight-seer. Raymond fails to come to terms with the spirit of India. To him, she is only a great panorama and a store-house of historical relics.

For Miss Charlotte, India is a country which needs urgent social amelioration, educational reforms and economic security. We find contradictory ideas among the westerners.
Raymond and Miss Charlotte represent the rational, scientific and moral aspects of the culture of the West, whereas Lee, Margaret and Evie represent a kind of dissatisfaction with that culture. The three girls appear to be sick of their affluent and sophisticated society and its materialistic trend, and commercial stodigleness. They love the God men, gurus and saints of India, who are corrupt at heart and conceal it by their sweet and moralistic speech.

Lee's purpose in visiting India is not different from the other seekers. Her very attitude is to lose herself and to find herself in a new atmosphere - that is India.

According to Lee, Margaret "(She) is a very definite kind of girl even her coming here was a definite decision. She did not just drift into it the way I did ... Margaret came here because she had to. It was an active step of revolt against her life at home and her family."¹

From the words of Lee, it is clear to us that she rebels against the nothingness and hollowness of her own culture. She turns to India and to the Swamiji to quench her spiritual thirst and her hunger for self-fulfilment.

All other citations are from this edition.
Further, Margaret tells Lee, "People just don't come any more to India to do good, those days are over. What they come for now is - well, to do good to themselves, to learn, to take from India. That's what Margaret is here for. Above all she wants to be pure to have a pure heart untainted by modern materialism. Of course so do I, that's why we're both here."\(^2\)

The above lines reveal the fact that Lee's somewhat vague in her attitude towards India but Margaret is absolutely distinct in her admiration and in faith towards the Indian gurus and saints. Margaret is in search of a guru who can guide her in spiritual matters. We are told by Lee:

"She has been to the place where Ramana Maharshi lived and died and there she did feel the stirring of the right kind of response, but he is dead and what she wants is a live guru- some one inspire her she says - snatch her up and out of herself simultaneously destroy and create her."\(^3\)


\(^3\)Ibid., p. 27.
The relationship between Lee, Margaret and Evie is ambiguous. But simultaneously they are jealous of one another regarding the intimacy with the Swamiji. The Swamiji has of course a magnetic personality and he could create illusion of hope and bliss through a skillful use of words and pleasant gestures and altruistic facial expressions. The Swamiji is a type as well as an individual. He is the symbol of modern India's spurious godman but actually he has his own ideas about the world. He is as worldly as Asha, as sensual as Lee and Margaret and materialistic as Raymond. Inwardly, he wishes to claim the souls of his disciples to quench his inner urge that is his carnal appetite. He is a moral humbug, preaches the things and could not adhere to what he says. But in the eyes of Lee and others - he is a spiritual guide, mentor for so many people who need spiritual elevation. From Lee's words, we can understand, how the Swamiji is given due respect and regard. While writing to Asha, a dissolute princess, Lee says that Swamiji has greatly influenced and exercised Margaret's view of life and the world: "Margaret keeps saying that her eyes have been opened and that's true but only if you remember that this means the inner eyes and those of course are not only vision but all other faculties
as well as including the very highest faculties we have."  

Having known the greatness of Swami, Lee wants to follow the footsteps of Margaret. She writes to Asha, "It is important for me to do this to reveal everything to him so that I can become the new person he wants to make me and I want so much to be."  

Thus Lee wants to become a new person under the spiritual guidance of the wily Swami and in a moment of mental unrest surrenders herself. A similar experience she gets in a hotel room with Gopi. Gopi wants to enjoy with Lee, but Lee protests.  

Gopi, who is immature and the young could not believe the words of Lee. He is too persistent at that time. Lee feels unhappy for Gopi's mood and his ideas of adultery.  

Of course Lee could not derive any pleasure from the sordid affair with Gopi "she suffered rather than enjoyed while he lay on her top."  Here Lee feels that the union with Gopi, is also a kind of knowing India. Thus Lee accepts  

5 Ibid., p. 62-63.  
6 Ibid., p. 42.
Gopi's ardent desire. While Lee and Margaret seek a merging of their selves with that of the Swamiji, as a symbol of India's heritage mysticism and spiritual glory. Eve is even more intensely identified with what she believes to be the soul of India as embodied in the Swamiji. Eve has an implicit faith in Swamiji's spiritual powers and purity of mind and action. Her faith is further explained in the following passage. Margaret dies in pathetic circumstances in a dark storeroom of a hospital. After her death the question arises whether she is to be buried or cremated. Eve says: "She was a Hindu ......." Becoming a Hindu is not like becoming a Christian you don't have to take formal baptism or anything but freely assent to the Truth within you."7

Thus Eve declares that relationship of the disciple with the guru is the most powerful and strong and it cancels all other blood relationships. Thinking this as their duty, the three girls submit everything they have to the guru - their love, affections, hearts and even the souls. But in turn the Swamiji seduces them, and claims them as his posse-

Jhabvala ironically portrays the nature of the Swamiji. Though he appears to be a spiritual guide, he is a morally degraded and degenerated person of the lowest level. But, at the same time, she seems to admire a few caretakers of the people in the true spirit of human service. One among such is Benu Bai, a spiritual woman, and friend of Asha, she seems to admire the services rendered by Miss Charlotte, a Christian woman. For Charlotte, India is to be ameliorated in many respects on the basis of economic security and by means of educational reforms.

We understand that the Swamiji has lost his godly nature. He runs after sex and money. However, it is more surprising that Lee still feels attracted to him and probably wishes to go back to him. The last scene of the novel, speaks of Lee's decision of going back to the Swamiji.

She wishes to get into the bus and jumps off.

Thus, Lee completely loses herself and she has become a slave to him for his attraction, and for his charm. Not only Lee, Margaret and Evie too have the same instinct towards the Swamiji. The comic suggestion is vulgar enjoyment and pleasure that we have analysed which is built into, the
narrative form. It suggests that Jhabvala constantly adopts a comic mode to drive home her understanding of hypocrisy in its Indian manifestations. And Jhabvala's main 'forte' as a practitioner of the art of fiction is her matter-of-fact realism, which is fused with a subtle irony. For example Lee again and again rushes into similar areas of experience and even at the end of the novel, her predicament, implicit in her capacity to distinguish between simple bodily pleasure and the joy of spiritual union remains as puzzling as ever.

In a comedy of self-deception the Swamiji does not care for the health of Margaret. He wants only her physical body whenever he feels it necessary. The other girls are jealous of one another in claiming the fake Swamiji as their own. That is why the Swamiji cleverly manages the three western girls to fulfil his carnal pleasures. The girls want to seek a new dominion of their own even at the cost of their chastity by submitting to this wily Swamiji.

Lee, Margaret and Evie try to become 'insiders' of the Ashram, a prominent part of the 'New Dominion,' Raymond the rational westerner remains an 'outsider'. Miss Charlotte too is an outsider though she was genuinely involved in charitable work of her mission in India over thirty years.
Although Raymond may be taken as a tourist, his involvement with Gopi has some significance. Although the relationship between the two men may be construed as homo-sexual, it suggests that Raymond would like to be friendly especially with the Indians. He is not unaware of Gopi's adolescent insolence and eccentricity but he tries to be high and does not want the friendship to be spoiled by any unimaginative act.

Asha also tries and succeeds in wooing him. Asha, the widowed sister of Rao Saheb, is essentially sensual and at the same time she is aware of her age. She tells Lee about so many things, her love towards her late husband, and her despair. She lives in a snobish society. She feels bored. She wooed Gopi to quench her physical thirst. When Gopi's marriage is fixed with one of his relatives and preparations for his wedding are in progress, Asha tries to keep him away from this ensuing event. Gopi too succumbs to her coquetry, and at this ambivalent stage the curtain is drawn on their relationship. Failing to find solace in the arms of an immature young middle-class lover, she also turns to spiritual life, under the guidance of Banu Bai. Banu Bai's guidance is also somewhat ambiguous like that of the guru of the three girls. We start from the sophisticated Delhi, and move to the holy city of Benaras and end up in the desert
of Maupur. The basic irony implicit in the novel is that the Western girls are seeking a spiritual India to find their self and solve their problems but India, they experience is the very opposite of what they imagined and visualised.