CHAPTER VII

IN SEARCH OF LOVE AND BEAUTY
CHAPTER VII

IN SEARCH OF LOVE AND BEAUTY

Two years after winning the Booker Prize for _Heat and Dust_, Jhabvala seems to have said "Something I would like to do is combine my three back-grounds;" My European back-ground because it was continental. And then I had an English education. Then I had a 5 year immersion into India. And now I am beginning an immersion to America. So, if I can bring all the influences together, well, that's just fine by me.¹ Her latest novel, _In Search of Love and Beauty_ seems to have its origin in a state of mind outlined in the preceding citation. The novel is in the best comic vein of which Jhabvala is capable. Unlike her earlier social comedies, _In Search of Love and Beauty_ contains within the comic framework certain disturbing implications. In the earlier novels, say for example _A New Dominion_ the force of Jhabvala's social comedy derives itself from the incongruities that are there in a society in transition like the posh society of post independence-Delhi.

In Search of Love and Beauty is essentially the story of a German-Jewish family which was forced to migrate from the continent to the United States because of the Second World War. The Sonnenblick family consisted of an Austrian Industrialist called Bruno and his wife Louise and their daughter Marietta and Louise's childhood friend, Regi. They came to New York as refugees from the Nazi-infested Germany. They found the American atmosphere a bit irksome, but they got used to it very quickly. This acclimatization to the socio-cultural milieu of New York is facilitated by their discovery the OLD VIENNA where people of their background met and talked about their problems. Louise and Regi often met at OLD VIENNA during the early days of their American stay. They were objects of tremendous attraction to the Viennese gentlemen who visited the restaurant. Forty years after their migration to America, their habits did not change although their attitude and appearance changed because of their old age. The following paragraph suggests the comic view of life inherent in the situation:

Forty years later, Louise and Regi still met at the Old Vienna, though not very regularly. Regi lived mostly in Florida now, and when she
visited New York, she did not always bother to call Lousie. But when she did, they usually arranged to meet at Old Vienna, and as before they occupied one of the little tables for two ranged down the centre. And as before, they drew many glances — only now not because they were handsome but because perched among the crowded tables, tale and old and odd, they were impossible to overlook. And Regi, though still retaining the bored manner she had developed for social occasions, was at the same time avidly alert to everything going on around her.  

The contours of the cosmopolitan comedy we have in

In Search of Love and Beauty evolve as dramatic tensions that punctuate the relationship of Lousie and Regi and Lousie's relationship with her daughter Marietta and her grand children Mark and Natasha. But this evolution is somewhat complicated by the relationship of the entire family with Leo-Kellermann who develops into a spiritual guide and reminds us of the Swamiji in A New Dominion.

Leo-Kellermann, also came to New York in the thirties as a penniless refugee. He was introduced to Lousie by her friend Regi as an "Aionis" or an "Apollo." The narrator

informs us that he met Freud and he wrote a play in verse.
At the very outset of the book, we are told that "He shrugged, disposing of Freud. He often shrugged, disposing of things and people; not least of his own talents as they were brought up one by one — as an actor, an analyst, a choreographer, for a short time a political activist—he had done it all, but so far everything was only a stepping stone, a gradual ascent towards those heights that it was his destiny to attain."

It is an irony of destiny that Leo-Kellermann does not cease to play a significant role in the lives of the two women and their kith and kin. His hold on Lousie's family appears to be more complete than his hold on Regi. Lousie's daughter, Marietta develops an inherent aversion to Leo from the start. After an unsuccessful marriage she lives on her own and her growing frustration with her son, Mark and her adopted daughter, Natasha is a variation on the theme of love between Lousie, Regi and Leo. The following passage brings to a central focus the tensions involved in the plot of the novel under consideration:

3 In Search of Love and Beauty, (John Murray, London, 1983), p. 2. All other citations are from this edition.
When her marriage failed, she started a fashion business a line in sports-wear, which became very successful; for in spite of her erratic, high-flown nature, she turned out to be a first class business woman— a talent perhaps inbred in her through her father's line of German-Jewish entrepreneurs, and in turn transmitted by her to Mark. But besides outward activity, she also needed intense inner fulfilment. Leo knew it, and was ready to supply as she did to so many others. Marietta looked elsewhere. Above all— in reaction to her mother, for she had seen where that led—she did not want a lover. She had her son, and that was enough for her, she said; her fulfilment lay in Mark. She added Natasha to him. But still something was missing, and Leo pointed it out to her year after year at Louise's birthday party. And everytime she did that, she turned from him in greater revulsion, but every time also she became more restless. So it was perhaps no accident that it was only a few days after one of these birthday parties that she discovered Ahmed and with him India and the particular brand of fulfilment to be discovered there.¹

The foregoing passage amply suggests the comic theme the novel dramatizes. The words "fulfilment" and "restlessness" and their analogues that punctuate the passage amply demonstrate that restlessness and fulfilment come to the

¹In Search of Love and Beauty, (John Murray, London), p. 22.
surfaces in the lives of business women and entrepreneurs, that live in a world of prudence. As one theorist on comedy says: "In comedy characters typically want to succeed in a prudential world; in the incongruity between their aspirations and their true abilities lies in comedy."  

Louise, Marietta and her son Mark, in spite of their restlessness and urge for fulfilment, are very prudent and pursue their activities in such a way that the material aspects of their enterprises are not allowed to suffer. Marietta's casual affair with an Indian musician Ahmad, makes her visit India a number of times but she returns home after each visit with diminishing returns. Her son Mark evolves into shrewd businessman in real estate business, but fails to find fulfilment in his affairs with good looking youngman. His adopted sister Natasha is unlovable in terms of her appearance, but she has the uncanny power of knowing the emotional tensions in others, and perhaps their origin too. It is in a sophisticated but deeply disturbed and self-centred society that Leo wants to thrive. Introduced to us as an "Apollo" and an "Adonis" with Olympian laugh Leo appears as a character

---

comparable to many to acquire a house, in Hudson Valley where he starts his Academy of Potential Development.

The establishment of the Academy is the climax of Leo's career as a spiritual guide. As we familiarize ourselves with Leo and his methods of spiritual guidance it to becomes obvious that the methods were those of a prudent businessman who likes to make the best of a bad job. That Leo is always restless, in spite of his success, becomes clear when we analyse the implications of his questions to Ahmed. The following passage reveals the issues that Leo's career as a whole brings to the surface in a novel, ironically called In Search of Love and Beauty.

When Leo asked Ahmed about his music "Is it of the senses or of the spirit?" Then Ahmed understood him less than ever. He had no conception of any division between the two, and if he had thought about it, he would have said, surely the one is there to express the other? That was what his music was for—he know this so deeply that he had absolutely no thought or words for it. But Leo was fascinated by this question and probing into it, he evolved a new theory which he tired out in practice, the way he did with all his theories, on his students. For his students were his test-tubes.6

---

Surprisingly enough, Leo's test-tubes are a motley crew with motely problems of sex, drugs, nerves, religion."

His monk's robe, tufts of his grey hair stuck out like a prophet halo, his loping behind one of his disciple, Stephanie, like some great bear and his appearance as a superannuated circus animal. When he was inside his den suggest the transformation of Leo from an Apollo or an Adonis to that of an animal. It is the decline of a character whose aspirations and abilities are at sharp variance. Natasha is the only character in the novel, who could see through the masks of Leo and has aweful pity and sympathy for him. When Stephanie runs away with Jeff, Leo pursues them, and Natasha, who was with him in the car reflects." He was muttering; he was saying "I am going to find her. We'll find her." It was crazy. He looked and sounded crazy. His face was inflamed, his nose swollen, tears were coming out of his eyes and falling down his cheeks on to the steering wheel. He was making sobbing sounds like a baby or a very old man. Natasha was awestruck."

He really loves her," she thought. At the same time this thought depressed her, for it seemed to her that there just wasn't enough love to ground and never would be— not here, not now—with everyone needing such an aweful lot of it?7

---

The foregoing citation tellingly suggests that love is not a commodity that is easily accessible. Natasha seems to be more aware of this than her grand mother, her foster mother Marietta, Mark and even Leo. Moreover, Natasha meets a frustrated woman called Janet in Leo’s Academy. Many psychiatrists and spiritual healers diagnosed the trouble as a passion to search for love and beauty and in the course of her quest she had recklessly entangled herself in one harmful liaison after the other. Natasha, after hearing Janet’s confession, feels “her own feelings— for instance, for Mark—seemed in comparison a very small, still cool.”

As we stated earlier, the only virtue which most characters in IN SEARCH OF LOVE AND BEAUTY have in abundance is prudence. Materialistic to the core and living a cozy and comfortable life, they feel somehow restless and suffer from the illusion that they have not had enough love. In their quest to possess love, they embark on a quest which is more frustrating than liberating. Lousie tells Natasha that Leo simply uses her for his own ends. Most characters in the novel who come under Leo’s spell very easily do get disillusioned. They seem to lack Natasha’s ever relaxed state of

mind. Though she is not physically beautiful Natasha has a sort of beauty, beauty associated with 'Still Cool.' Perhaps it is this quality that makes her the confident of all and at the same time their source of irritation. By a subtle and deft use of the motif of sufferers and seekers, Jhabvala works out the design of her comedy in which the seekers are in search of virtues to which they are absolutely indifferent and the sufferers impose upon themselves emotional tension and pain which do not sustain or make meaningful what they suffer for. In Search of Love and Beauty seems to be ironically suggestive not in terms of belief in love and duty but in terms of the harmless aberrations and delusions that are the lot of those who quest for love and beauty in a sophisticated business-oriented society.