CONCLUSION
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After 1975, Ruth Jhabvala published comparatively little fiction. Four novels—*In Search of Love and Beauty* (1983); *Three Continents* (1987); *Poet and Dancer* (1993); *Shards of Memory* (1995);—and several short stories make up the entire body of her fictional output to date. The decline has been qualitative as well. Ruth Jhabvala herself admitted to Paul Grimes: "Obviously I've lost my subject", and to Lyn Owen: "...and all my work seems to end up being about parasites and perverts."¹

Two distinct concerns mark the writing of this period. One is a hangover from the novelist's old theme of India feeding on the vulnerable alien. The other—also derived from her explorations of the European's aspirations in India—centres on the breakdown of the natural order that is fast becoming a feature of the West. These two concerns exist that is fast sometimes independently and sometimes together, in her fiction of this period. An effort to combine her three backgrounds—European, Indian and American²—is also perceptible, particularly in her novels. "a Very Special Fate,"³ written soon after Ruth Jhabvala's departure from India, is the story of an Englishwoman's self-imposed exile in India following a recoil from the West. Like her predecessors Daphne and Evie, Nancy
Tennyson had come out to India in the wake of what she believed was a spiritual call but what was in reality a passionate infatuation with a spiritual charlatan. Her fate is taken beyond theirs in the fact that thirty years after Dr Mohanty’s death Nancy, the sole survivor of the vast throng of disciples that had believed in Synthesis Unlimited, is still in India guarding the decaying centre in Cooch Nahin.4 The extent of Nancy’s personal synthesis with India, however, is far from encouraging to the Western aspirant:

*She just went n living by herself in the house she had rented for the Movement....She was a strange sight there ... but the people of the town seemed to have got used to her, and even the children no longer ran after her.*

(“A Very Special Fate,” p. 27).

In “*A Summer by the Sea*” the two themes are even more perceptibly blended. Ruth Jhabvala’s comment on the degeneration that has set in, in American life, is contained in the depiction of perverse sexual and emotional relationships that are taken for granted by the younger generation. The life of a group of young men in an isolated cottage in “*A Summer by the Sea*” resembles that of secluded women in an Eastern hare. Strifes and jealousies rejections and favouritisms had once centred around the blond and beautiful Boy—the husband of the narrator
Susie. Then Hamid, a handsome Indian, comes into their lives and becomes the cynosure of all eyes. A born predator and parasite he feeds on the gullible Americans even more ruthlessly than Gopi fed on Raymond in *A New Dominion*. As a result of the life he leads, Boy’s natural instincts have been eroded to a point at which he genuinely believes Hamid, who is a gigolo and a pervert, to be a descendant of a line of famous saints who have handed their sainthood down from generation to generation. Susie’s irrational love for Boy has drained her of all resistance and rendered her insensitive to humiliation. Susie’s mother Bea, who stood foe the natural order, is finally drawn into Hamid’s web. In the final scene, Hamid makes it clear that he is indifferent as to who makes up a couple with him—Boy or Bea. The tussle between the son-in-law and the mother-in-law ends with both realising that to keep Hamid each must endure the presence of the other.

“Parasites,” published a few months before “A Summer by the Sea,” exposes the rapacity and the predatory tendencies let loose by the breakdown of tradition in American society. In this story, Ruth Jhabvala brings together a group of people who, out of their varying needs in the strange world in which they live, reach out to and feed on one another. Paul and Annette make a living
out of rich, mentally undeveloped Stella who, in her turn, depends upon. Annette for her personal fulfillment.

Annette and Paul hate each other and use each other at the same time. Stella’s niece, Dora, loves Paul and looks upon Annette as a rival not only in love but in her position with Stella. Dora’s mother is eager to get into the dying Stella’s good books and save the money from going to Annette. In the final scene, it is the meek and self-effacing Dora who turns out to be the most cunning and vicious of all the parasites in the story. After cleverly leading Annette to an emotional state in which she openly rejects Stella in favour of Paul, Dora telephones her mother to come. By the time the latter arrives, paul, has left Annette and is seen ministering to the dying Stella,

“Commensurate Happiness,”\(^7\) “Grandmother”\(^8\) and Expiation”\(^9\) are unusual in this that they stand outside Ruth Jhabvala’s two main concerns in this phase of her literary career. In the first two stories, the novelist attempts to establish the weight and power of ancestry in determining modes of living and thinking. Marie of “Commensurate Happiness” will suffer the trauma that comes from loving “not wisely but too well”\(^10\) that was her Grandmother Jeanette’s life-long experience with her cousin and husband Otto. And Jeanette consciously relives all her old frustrations in her anticipations of Marie’s with her cousin
and affianced husband Hughie. In the story “Grandmother,” the grandmother motif recurs over and over again indicating the inheritance and aspirations of the different characters. Minnie’s identification with her warm, volatile Jewish grandmother is at the root of her alienation from her stolid Gentile-like husband Sam and daughter Sandra, and her spontaneous love for Ralph. Ralph fulfills Minnie’s need for the son she had never borne—“the beautiful Jewish boy of her dreams” (“Grandmother’, p. 59). Yet Ralph is not a Jew. His Muslim grandmother has endowed him with his dark good looks and the Oriental subtlety and sensitivity that is continually contrasted by Minnie’s with Sam and Sandra’s clumsy barges into her consciousness. Minnie and Ralph find each other compatible and this compatibility is obviously attributed to the common elements in Judaism and Islam. The grandmother motif recurs again in the declaration of Ralph’s criminally inclined friend that his grandmother her mother is not happy at the prospect of her coming grandchild. The truth is that Minnie sees in Sandra’s child a continuation of her husband’s line with which she is totally out of sympathy.

“Expiation”—a story set in the intra-Indian context—is based on the famous kidnapping-cum-murder case which ended with death sentences for the perpetrators, Ranga and
Billa. The points of similarity lie in Sachu-alias-Billa’s light eyes, his family’s hatred of him and his boasting of his crimes; Bablu-alias-Ranga’s loving elder brother; the kidnapping and killing of a military official’s child; the stolen car and the traveling of the two culprits incognito in railway coaches. There are some fictional elements as well. The locale of the story is not Delhi but the town of P-(possibly Panipat) in Haryana; the kidnapping and the murder are of a boy and not of a brother-sister team. The perpetration of sodomy by Sachu on the boy and the use of the roller skates for symbolic effect are fictional additions to the Billa-Ranga case.

In the entire body of Ruth Jhabvala’s fiction, this is the only work in which an exploration of the criminal consciousness seems to be the novelist’s sole purpose. Although the story is told by a man who is sympathetic to the two boys, they are nevertheless, depicted in animal terms. Sachu’s colourless eyes reflect his tigerish lust to main and kill. Bablu’s pointed teeth and red tongue and palate are like those of a dog’s which will follow his master with an instinctive loyalty. Thus Bablu steals, kills and goes to the gallows for Sachu’s sake. Something of the same quality is sensed by the reader in the narrator whose love for his brother Bablu remains steadfast through all the events of the story. Bablu’s attack on the narrator’s wife changes his
feelings for her (he can no longer enjoy his marital
privileges), but his feeling for Bablu remain unchanged.
After Bablu is hanged, his brother carries a load of guilt
which, he believes, he can cast off only with his death.

With ‘Farid and Farida,”11 Ruth Jhabvala returns to
her old theme of Indian spiritualism as it affects its
devotees, particularly those of the “self-deprecating
countries of the West” for whom Indian ness is
“synonymous with every kind of natural and spiritual
superiority” (“Farid and Farida,” p. 40). The hollowness of
this concept is exposed in the adventures of the charming
socialite Faida who, after failing in every other kind of
business, sets up as a Holy Mother and, emboldened by her
success, plans to launch a World Movement with the
successful businessman Sunil as her manager and financier.
Sunil, in turn, see in Farida the means of expanding his
already extensive business empire. This, however, is not a
complete statement of the theme. The assimilative
character of India is hinted at in the way Hinduism and
Islam are blended in the people’s faith in the little sacred
town that houses Farida’s ashram. “Allah and Ishwar were
equal here and no one questioned which of them was
responsible for the mountain peaks rising against the
immaculate sky” (Ibid., p. 41). Again, the purely physical
Farida’s fake holiness when she herself wants to “go down
go back” (Ibid., p. 50) to wealth and fame, throws upon Indian spiritualism a measure of ambiguity.

This aspect of Indian spiritualism is embodied once again in Ruth Jhabvala’s novel In Search of Love and Beauty. Set in and around New York during the Nineteen Eighties, though moving back and forth in time over a span of fifty years, the story follows, in the main, the lives and aspirations of a family of German Jewish immigrants—Louise and Bruno Sonnenblick, their daughter Marietta and their grand-children Mark and Natasha. Although their lives are closely involved with those of other Jewish expatriated in the old clannish way, a sense of displacement haunts them, leading each in a special way to engage in a quest for a meaningful experience of life. The head of the family, Bruno Sonnenblick, has no part in this quest for like his predecessor Otto Woolf in “A Birthday in London,” he continually mourns his lost world and allows himself to go into a decline. Nor has Natasha, for whom alienation is an acceptable way of life. But beautiful and emotional Louise yearns for the love and passion that her effete, elderly husband cannot give her and is, as a consequence, caught in a relationship with the charismatic Leo Kellerman that lasts a lifetime but fails to fulfill her. Her daughter Marietta, whose impressionable years were passed under the shadow
of her mother’s fascination for Kellerman, is on a quest of beauty—not love, for “that aspect of love was for her embodied in Leo and was detestable” (ISOLAB, p. 65). She cultivates the arts not for personal expression or ambition but “to forge herself into an instrument....through which everything that was beautiful could pass” (Ibid., pp. 64-65). Her son Mark, inherits her love of beauty and pursues it, but for him it is only part of a quest for identity that drives him into relationships with those who are more closely linked with the land in which they live. The fact that all these relationships are homosexual is a pointer to Mark’s excessive alienation. Something of Dr. Ernst’s fascination for the Indian in India is mirrored in Mark’s choice of his partners:

And more and more it was these sorts of boys, or as he imagined them, whom he chose for his closest friends: fair, wholesome, Anglo-Saxon, from simple families from somewhere within the heart of the country; so that in being with them, he also felt he was acquiring a greater share of something—a landscape, a country, a way of being—that he longed for but only half possessed. (Ibid., p. 49)

Mark, Marietta and Louise all come, at some point in their lives, under the spell of the self-proclaimed psychospiritual therapist Leo Kellerman. But there are other
aspirants to Love and Beauty in the novel. Generations of American youth “proliferated into such complicated personalities that they could no longer manage themselves” feel the need to “hand themselves over to someone else, someone stronger” (Ibid., p. 37) and find an answer in Leo who has all the makings of a fake Swami. In fact, it is Ahmed’s unspoken comment on the inseparability of the physical and the spiritual in India that acts as Leo’s exposure to Indian philosophy and opens up what the novelist calls his Tantric phase. Such a philosophy is invaluable to Leo, for within it he can reconcile his sensuality and ego with his pretensions of offering spiritual food to his impressionable disciples. During this Tantric phase, Leo conducts certain physical experiments on his students at the Academy of Potential Development. In a masterly bit of understatement, the novelist indicates the psychological pressures that impel the new generation to suffer the trauma of Leo’s experiments:

Not all of them could rise to the rigours of these experiments; although willing to transcend themselves, for some of them like those pale, highly strung girls of good family—their limitations, or inhibitions, were too rigid to be overcome without severe psychological strain. These weaker students fell by the wayside, but Leo had expected that: it was
one of the risks involved in his game of higher evolution. (Ibid., p. 76)

Something of Swamiji’s efforts to break the of Lee in order to remake her, and his ruthless playing with Margaret’s life is also sensed in this passage. Ironically, once again, India or Indian spiritualism is seen to be victimizing the misguided alien even in his own country. His vulnerability, however, springs—and Ruth Jhabvala makes this amply clear from his sense of displacement in a disintegrating culture.

Leo’s manipulation of Louise, Mark, Marietta and his disciples is not, however, the last word on Indian spiritualism in In Search of Love and Beauty. In the final analysis Leo too, unlike the Swami in A New Dominion, is caught up in a quest embodied for him in Stephanie but going beyond her. The last scene shows Leo driving crazily through snow and mist with Natasha beside him, ostensibly in search of Stephanie, but also perhaps on his own journey to the Point which, he had explained to his disciples, was the culmination of Man’s highest physical and spiritual experience.

The Rawul’s cult in Ruth Jhabvala’s next novel, Three Continents admits no such ambiguity. Set in Long Island; England and India, the novel is a straightforward account of the physical and psychic manipulation of two
typical "last-of-the-line scions of a once-prominent and money making American family" (TC, p. 137) by a group of Indian smugglers posing as launchers of a World Movement. The mockery of internationalism that is offered by the figure head, the Rawul, is obvious to the least perceptive reader but not to the gullible Westerners who are caught in the grip of their own delusions.

"In which direction is Western youth heading?" is a question that Ruth Jhabvala had raised, peripherally, in "A Very Special Fate," "A Summer by the Sea" and In Search of Love and Beauty, following her discovery of America. In this novel, the exploration is conducted to the exclusion of all precious concerns. She believes America, as she told Laura Shapiro, to contain the essence of the West—"the civilization of Europe.... [being] somehow crystallized here."15 Thus, her comment on American youth is extended to that of the West in general.

In a state of reaction against his parents' way of life "not belonging anywhere, not wanting to settle anywhere....and not knowing what to do next" (TC, p. 259) the seventeen year old Michael meets his fate in the person of the devastatingly handsome Crishi—the ringleader of the gang. "The young need...a future, like the middle aged need to recover the past that didn’t come up to expectations" (Ibid., p. 258), the novelist observes in the
voice of Anna Sultan. Unfortunately, all roads lead to the three mesmerizing charlatans from India in Three Continents. The beautiful predators that had brushed past Dr. Ernst in India have now claimed the world. Michael confuses his physical and spiritual bondage to Crishi with “’Om, the real thing” (Ibid., p. 17). Harriet, negative and totally without a will, drifts into Crishi’s web in Michael’s wake. Rupert is held by an irresistible fascination for the Rain that makes him accept any kind of humiliation at her hand. Even the supremely efficient and intelligent Anna Sultan cannot escape Crishi’s magnetic pull, though she is fully aware of the fraud that passes in the name of Movement. Shards of Memory,\textsuperscript{16} also set in three continents—in New York, Hampstead and Bombay—explores the effects of a mysterious and charismatic spiritual leader on four generations of white Americans. Like all her earlier gurus, barring Leo Kellerman, the “Master” is of Eastern extraction as is evident from his pewter coloured, slightly slanting, partially hooded eyes. And like his predecessors, his power over his disciples is total.

Published two years earlier, Poet and Dancer\textsuperscript{17} is set in Manhattan’s émigré community and focuses on the strange and passionate intimacy that develops between two cousins. This intimacy, with its lesbian under currents,
proves fatal for Angel who has taken upon herself the mission of protecting the mentally imbalanced, self destructive Lara. *And this truly is what a perfect lover must always do*, Angel had underlined in a medieval text, *utterly and entirely despoiling himself of himself for the sake of the thing he loves; and that not only for a time but everlastingly. This is the exercise of love, which no one can know except he who feels it.*¹⁸ With such a view of love it is no wonder that Angel’s attachment to Lara, stronger than reason, pushed her into taking her own life.

A central concern in all Ruth Jhabvala’s writing after 1975, then, is the vulnerability and helplessness of Western youth in the face of a stronger personality. Why does Angel allow Lara to manipulate her the way she does? Why do Harriet and Rupert not assert—even after they grasp the truth situations? What is it in their culture that drains youth of all resistance? Ruth Jhabvala does not answer these questions, but in a revealing passage in Three Continents she etches the death of Western civilization:

*It was a long underground ride, anonymous and ghostlike, as though I had just died and didn’t know where I was bound for and neither did the other people who got in and out as the doors slid open at the stations; there was an unending stream of them,*
all smelling damp as if in their grave clothes.
(Ibid., p. 166)

Twelve years before writing this passage, Ruth Jhabvala had undertaken a real journey from India to America in order to escape the alienation that India had wrought for her, and in the hope of being assimilated in the mainstream of Western life. Now she confesses, in Harriet’s voice, that she does not know where the stream is taking her and neither do her fellow Westerns. Judging from her fiction and recorded statements of the last twenty two years, she has found loneliness, neurosis and lack of direction where she had hoped to find her roots. Incapable of accepting alienation as a way of life Ruth Jhabvala is, perhaps, like the “fickle woman” she declared she was, getting ready to “change countries” once again in the hope of acquiring a life pattern that promises stability and meaning. The impulse to move out of America, Ruth Jhabvala believes, will come from within. “One just has to go on—learning, being—” she declared in her “Testament,” “throughout however many twenty year stretches in however many different countries or places actual physical ones or countries of the mind—to which one may be called.”20
REFERENCES


2. "Something I would like to do is combine my three backgrounds" Ruth Jhabvala told Patricia Mooney. See Patricia Mooney, "Another Dimension of Living, "Newsweek 31 October 1977, p. 52


4. The literal meaning of Cooch Nahin in Hindustani is "nothing."


18. Ibid., p. 7.

and Lyn Owen, "A Passage from India to America,"

*op. cit.*