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Traces of Transcendentalism in the Novels of Ruth Praver Jhabvala

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Abstract:

Transcendentalism is a philosophical movement which was started in early 19th century during American literary era. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a key pioneer, put forward the fundamental ideas of transcendentalism including other as Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and Amos Bronson Alcott. In 1820s, Americans were come under depression due to industrialization and hectic life schedules. Transcendentalists founded some separate groups for keeping their individuality so that they got better exposure for their ideas. Their opinions did not match with the current social issues and they tried to be separated themselves from others. It was closely related with the idea of living life like self-centered and self-motivated. Ruth Praver Jhabvala had varied experiences travelling of different parts of world. Many of her novels have close connections with transcendentalism regarding Indian philosophical themes.

Keywords: Transcendentalism, spiritual, Over-soul, travelling and philosophy.

Emerson and Thoreau propagated about solutions in terms of nature as supreme power and individuality of person. They discarded the very idea of Trinity but supported to the Indian philosophical views as if in some sort of acceptance. Emerson asserted on the Over-soul:

All goes to show that the soul in man is not an organ, but animates and exercises all the organs; is not a function, like the power of memory, of calculation, of comparison, but uses these as hands and feet; is not a faculty, but a light; is not the intellect or the will, but the master of the intellect and will; is the background of our being, in which they lie, -- an immensity not possessed and that cannot be possessed. From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all. (Emerson, 1841)

He considered that Indian philosophical idea of spiritualization might be a solution. They discarded the very idea of Trinity but supported to the Indian philosophical views as if in some sort of acceptance. Spiritual experience through the meditation and different tactics of Yogas has always been an object of attraction for western travelers. It is asserted, "Spirituality is way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regards to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be the ultimate" (D. N. Elkins and other, 1988). Western travelers get attracted to India in search of spiritual bliss and life in isolation. It asserts here well:

Many people over the centuries undertook journeys to India. It came under longer, stronger cultural influences from Europe than any other Asian country. More was written about it than any other; more was known about it. Foreign writers (from a number of nations) produced more literature about India than Indians did. Its differences and oddities, so often described, became slightly devalued by time. So did the literature about it. (Jinarajadasa, 1921)



India has a long heritage of spiritual mysteries. It appears splendid and interesting for the world. Basically, India is a country where we can find the cluster of different religions and dogmas. People are mostly religious who follow its various rituals. Many places are the sites of attraction with its peculiar stance and locality. Foreigners visit these places to get knowledge of spirituality and peace of mind and Indian culture which is full of diversities and strange traditions.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala was among the followers of transcendentalist and many of her works indebted to the idea. Some of her characters have the similarities of transcendentalist and it makes clear that it is somehow in the writers' focus for living standard. Hans Loewe, in *The Householder*, is being introduced as a German traveler in India. He comes to India and wants to be acquainted with its culture, religion, meditation techniques and to gain knowledge of spirituality. He says, "So in my dreams what do I see suddenly? I see India. Yes, your marvelous India I see. I see a palm tree and temple. Under this palm tree who is sitting? . . . It's a holy man. What you call Sadhu, Right?" (HH 32). Prem, a protagonist, visits to Hans' house where he finds that Hans has been practicing the different positions of yoga and working on the spiritual aspects for a long time. Having acquainted with spirituality, Hans becomes anxious and over religious. He feels the existence of God within himself. He gets so much spiritually obsessed that he forgets everything other than the actuality of God. He experiences such incredible feelings of spirituality which he cannot express in words. He confesses, "I felt it, God consciousness, I felt Him moving here, here, at the base of my spine! . . . All Eternity is there seen like in a mirror!" (HH 44-45) Being westerner, he is not sure whether he would attain complete spiritual bliss as he speaks in an incongruous manner many times. These attributes of Hans seem to be acquainted with Transcendentalism. He tries to develop his thirst for highest satisfaction i.e. the idea of Over-soul by applying different tactics meditation.

Hans is a character who is being projected in continuous mental trauma and inner conflict. From the very beginning, he keeps himself busy in search of spiritual bliss. He elucidates his feelings, "My thoughts are wild and bad, I cannot control them . . . I try to gather them in one point . . . but - pfutch! They scatter wild like this" (HH 88). He has been trying to concentrate over the situation, but his previous experiences drag him away from spiritual thoughts. Once he cried in agony: "But I have tried – oh, my God, how have I tried!" (HH 46). He came to India to find out such a holy person or sadhu who would explain him well the spirituality. Before coming to Delhi, he wandered in different parts of country to find out such a fellow but in vain. He explains it well when he is talking with Prem, "The sadhus are right one must sit on nails and mortify the flesh . . . It must be mortified so the thoughts will be controlled" (HH 88).

The significance of *The Householder* from transcendentalist point of view becomes clear if we delve deep into the character of Hans Loewe. R. P. Jhabvala's mythological point of view becomes clear in the novel. He arrives at a vestibule of a cinema hall where he finds Prem has already been waiting for Raj, Prem's friend. Prem says that Raj would be there in any moment, Hans finds himself helpless to turn away from the place. His traumatic predicaments compel him to be introduced with Raj. Raj arrives there and they move to another coffee-house where Hans expresses his bliss of joy, "Today we will have such conversation that our minds will fly open and the understanding will come in with a big rush!" (HH 113). Their talk touches to different magnitudes: socialism, domestic problems and materialistic thoughts. He belongs to a

country in which humanity and relationships are subsidiary. Sometimes materialistic concepts lead to disappointment in life. It is because when one thinks about a person who has suffered a lot due to puzzled life of office work or its typical way of living. Hans explains it well, Hans insists on spirituality and peace of life. Hans feels completely disappointed at Delhi because whatever he has been expecting from the city nothing becomes fruitful. So, he decides to go to South India for gaining spiritual bliss.

Chidananda (Chid), "a British man comes to India in search of spirituality" (HD 21), is introduced in *Heat and Dust*. He had made his thoughts for coming India after attending "a lecture by a visiting swami in London" (HD 22). Having come in India, he meets with various sadhus and collects the knowledge on spirituality. He wears the dresses like "an Indian ascetic" (HH 21) and carries "beads and the begging bowl" (HH 23) in his hand for collecting his meals. He starts lecturing on spiritualism as he has gathered a vast experience of wandering and gaining knowledge of spirituality. He makes different tours from North to South in India. His quench for wandering bring him to Satipur where he meets again the Narrator "near the lake and Maji's hut" (HH 61) "groaning" and wailing as he has been "thrown out of the traveller's rest-house" (HH 62). His abrasive behaviour and western conditioning make his life difficult. He searches for perfect satisfaction and peace of mind through Indian philosophy of transcendentalism. He has come from a long way crossing many hurdles to gain the spiritual bliss.

To sum up, transcendentalism in India has is closely concerned with Indian philosophical themes of ancient practices. Ruth Praver Jhabvala's novels are filled with her spiritual studies of mythological books. She has brought together western-eastern philosophical views but rather her more concern is to rely on Indian spiritualism. Like transcendental, her characters come from a long across for gaining peace of mind and his individuality.

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