



## SPIRITUAL FIGURES IN GITA MEHTA'S *KARMA COLA* AND RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA'S *HEAT AND DUST*: A CRITIQUE

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### ABSTRACT

Spiritual experience is impartial and non-personal. India is the land of the Sages. For every seeker there is a sage, destined to teach one true enlightenment, which leads him to the path of knowledge. In Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola* the concept of spirituality is represented by various incidents and stories related to Indian Gurus and Swamis. There so called modern spiritual gurus though they speak about Yoga, meditation, sacrifice, non-attachment, Ahimsa etc. yet they themselves do not follow the path of Mukti or Moksha. They like to live "grand life". These spiritual figures are pseudo or real or do they influence the society or not, these issues require in depth study and comprehensive analysis of such characters. The present paper is aimed to discuss Spiritual Figures in Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola* and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*.

**Keywords:** *Spirituality, Fake, Genuine, Pseudo, Profane, Guru, Spiritual Figures.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Generally, it is regarded that spiritual figures abstain from sex, cut all family tie-ups, no possessions, no house, wear little or no clothing and eat little and simple food. Usually they live by themselves, on the fringes of others and spend their days in devotion to their chosen deity. Some perform magical rituals to make contact with gods, practice intense forms of yoga and meditation to increase their spiritual powers and acquire mystical knowledge. In Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola*, Karma lures the imagination of everyone. It as an international spiritual currency. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Lord Krishna teaches the lesson of Karma to Arjun. He says that because one is bound to act. Only action will save one from bondage of action. So it is very necessary for one to perform action. In the *Heat and Dust* Ruth, Praver Jhabvala gives a satirical picture of child, the transformed Christian boy with his meager learning of religious scriptures. He found a guru to give him initiation and to strip him of all personal characteristics and the rest of the possessions including his name Chidananda (his two companions called him Chid). From now on he was to have nothing except his beads and the begging bowl in which he had to collect his daily food from charitable people.

## THE NEO CONCEPT OF KARMA-COLA

Karma is now felt as a kind of vibration and Krishna is a doe-eyed pinup. As options proliferate all over the world, the skill to understand the nature of necessity appears to be diminishing and bondage means something else again. It has accommodated itself excellently to the needs of all those who use it. "I cannot visit London anymore. The Karma there is too heavy for me." says the Iranian hairdresser. "I crashed my car last night. I have bad Karma" says the Mexican student. "That dud's dangerous. He has heavy Karma", says the Harlem drug dealer. "Craps - it is a low Karma game", explains the American gambler's girlfriend. "My daughter is called Rani", says the German mother. "The night she was born in Goa, my friend and his lady had a daughter in Los Angeles and they called her Rani. We have such close Karma." "----- anything goes as Karma ----" <sup>1</sup> Thus, the concept of Karma is a spiritual medicine for the

occidentals and their comeback to a world of reality is on the wings of insanity.

Intellectual dousing in terms: likes Karma or Nirvana can not achieve psychic transformation. Even the novel describes the stories related to the world conference on the Future of Mankind which was attended by all class of people and they discussed the meaning of Karma and significance of moral action. They also applied their minds and learning to the problem of 'Truth, justice and spirituality'. The evening treat at the seminar was a home movie of the Swami's birthday celebrations. The film was thirteen minutes long and showed Swami Mukananda 'being felicitated by the world' on the occasion of his previous birthday. The cameraman had a medium shot of the Swamiji sharing a couch with smiling Bhagwan Rajneesh. Both the world gurus were renowned for their cosmic energy vibrations. When the image of the teachers appeared, people shuddered with pleasure and stretched out their hands, straining to pull out the energy off the scene and into themselves. Beside this world conference, a seven week seminar on Kundalini meditation is being given by Swami Muktananda to respectably gathering, who sit cross legged and patient though the discourses on meditation and long for the Swami's shakti - the direct transmission of cosmic energy from guru to devotee.

## SPIRITUAL FIGURES OF KARMA COLA: PSEUDO OR REAL

In the ashram, the guru was known to be God. Even some of the ashram inmates were aspiring to become God. The novelist described the ashram of such a God and his way of delivering the message: "God sat in a cushioned swivel chair with a blue denim hat on his head and spoke about the revolution. As the discourse gathered momentum it became clear that God was an "intellectual snob". He dropped only the heaviest names, Jesus, Marse, Mahavira and Fritz Perls. His two-thousand-odd devotees inhaled, writhed or listened in an ecstasy of being. This God also talks about the benefit of becoming a vegetarian. It is noted as: "God has convinced us that it's vulgar to kill something in order to feed yourself." <sup>2</sup>

These spiritual gurus do not help their visitor to acquire the tranquility that comes from the



oriental ability to see in a plethora of contradiction in literally mind blowing affirmation. "To go from the monomania of the west to the multomania of the East is a painful business. Like a sex change."<sup>3</sup> Thus, this is an incomprehensible truth for both the East and the West. This resulted in endless rows of soul-questers pouring in from the west into India.

One of mother goddesses also teaches her disciples about the truth, anger and non-violence. She says that one must get rid himself of his anger if he is to understand the truth as anger blinds a man. After all, if a man is obsessed with violence, how will he have time for more important things? One of the ashrams has a special technique for meditation, where the disciples beat each other. They do so to get pleasure from hitting and thrashing. The guru who teaches the technique has been at pains to describe that it is a dangerous meditation and requires great training and self-knowledge before the devotee may safely embark to it.

The gurus' powers were sometimes limited to controlling the bodies of others but not his own. A great number of gurus do not have control over their bodies. Some get irritated if their control occasions too much curiosity. They are regarded the truly holymen, who refuse to make caricatures out the quest. There was such a man in Rishikesh, who lied outside a temple on a bed moved of nails and bits of jagged steel. He was naked, his body was covered with, the ascetic's ash. He had not spoken for twelve years. His body felt some pain and discomfort. He wanted to live alone to meditation on the universal Absolute. His object of gaining control was not suppression but transcendence.

The Sadhus also teach the lessons of the East to the westerners. One of the Sadhus teaches an American - "Learn this from India if you learn nothing else, my son. The flesh is only the battle field, wars are won by the soul. The nature man seeks to understand his nature until he understands nature."<sup>4</sup> "One guru who had stated at a lecture that his disciples must learn love, that they must release the love mechanism in themselves by any trigger available, that they must love him as a father, a mother, a brother, a lover, a husband, to teach knowledge of his God head was thunder-struck when he was taken literally and a young American woman

burst into his room one night screaming, Take me lover! I'm yours!"<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the lure of these gurus is so much that whatever they do, they are cheered and loudly acclaimed. They are spoken of as the spiritual doctors for all mental ailments. Saint recycling instant Nirvana for the timeless speedy world, attering nomenclature, supplementing mantras, levitation techniques and meditation, the healing powers of gurus' urine-rolling eyeballs, the holy ash from supernatural or unnatural gurus are perplexing the age, Indians and non-Indians alike.

### **SPIRITUAL FIGURES OF HEAT AND DUST: PROFANE OR SPIRITUAL**

In the Heat and Dust, Chid came to India with a spiritual purpose. He was attracted by the Holy Scriptures and decided to visit India. On the instruction of his guru, he had set off on a pilgrimage right across India with the holy cave of Amarnath as his ultimate goal. Chid's character is like a religious leader. He gives lectures on religion and philosophy, whereas he practices none of them.

This young man, Chid was attracted to Hindu religion after attending a spiritual talk by a visiting Swami in London on universal love. The Swami talked of love as an ocean of sweetness that surrounded all men and enfolded them in tides of honey. He had melting eyes and a joyous, serene face and the young man and his girl decided to visit India to realize this universal love and India's great spiritual heritage."The young man and his girl had come away from this meeting with such exalted feelings that they could not speak for a long time; but what they could, they agreed that, in order to find the spiritual enrichment they desired. They must set off for India without delay."<sup>6</sup>

This young man, given name Chidananda by his Guru, found impossible to live simply under trees as instructed by his Guru but had to seek shelter at night in cheap hotel rooms where he had to bargain quite hard in order to be quoted a reasonable price. Afterwards he feel ill and was given shelter in the narrator's room. He recovers from his fever but does not want to leave the room - he is too demanding type of character. He expects the young woman to give him food - and he is also hungry for sex. "He is always hungry, and not only for food. He also needs sex very badly and seems to take it for granted that I



shall give it to him the same way I give him my food."<sup>7</sup>

"He has constant erections and goes to a tremendous size, so that I am reminded of the Lord Shiva whose huge member is worshiped by devout Hindu women. At such times, it seems to me that his sex is engendered by his spiritual practices, by all the chanting of mantras he does sitting, beads in hand on the floor of my room."<sup>8</sup> Thus, it is noted that Chid has picked up scraps of spiritual and religious lore here and there, and as he is neither an intelligent nor very educated boy, it has all sort of fermented inside him and makes him sound a bit mad at times.

There is also one more character in the Heat and Dust who reflects the touches of spirituality in his characterization. Maji is depicted as a bedraggled motherly self. She does not possess any spiritual philosophy to proclaim but she offers spiritual touches to observe the pregnancy of the narrator.

#### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Towards the end of the Karma Cola, the narrator said, "I left the ashram because it's so corrupt. The guru never stops playing favourites."<sup>9</sup> He thought that ashram would show him the path of renunciation or salvation. But he found more politics in one Indian ashram than in the whole of the western Hemisphere. He felt sick there. He found that the people who were rich get closer to the guru than those who were poor. Throughout the novel people speak about the Hindu concept of "Karma". It is being realized through instant death ultimatums. The novelist points out that Karma or Nirvana can not attain psychic transformation. The novel represents the concepts of Karma, Nirvana, Moksha and renunciation. But the spiritual gurus in the novel do not reflect these concepts through their characters. Even in A River Sutra, Gita Mehta, through different stories put forward the divergent concepts of obsession, renunciation, desperation, destruction, desire and death related to such figures"<sup>10</sup> Thus, we find that Gita Mehta takes up the true account of the pseudo-spiritual menace that affects the psyche of modern man. The westerners come on for a spiritual quest in India. "But they found nothing of that sort and only destructed their psyche at last rather they encounter with the materialistic gurus and they do not provide them any hope and so they endure

spiritual causalities."<sup>11</sup> Gita Mehta's Karma Cola takes up "the true account of the pseudo-spiritual menace that affects the psyche of modern man"<sup>12</sup>

Ruth Praver Jhabvala's spiritual figures are poor Sadhus wanderers like vendors selling their gods and dishonest as well. Though, they pretend to live in a world of spirituality but their feelings and emotions are earthly. He moved the narrator perhaps to reach a higher place of spiritual consciousness through the power of sex. Even those who came from Europe did not live a sex-free life. Ruth Praver Jhabvala appears to have been influenced by the "spiritual teachings of great saints and sages of India but at the same time she does not spare any moment in criticizing the pseudo spirituality of the fake swamis and the Bais of India"<sup>13</sup> Her characters broadly claims "that God needs love and pure heart"<sup>14</sup> not the mediatory services of fake spiritual gurus.

Spirituality of such fake figures is of no importance for other characters. The study also reveals that these gurus are full of lust and sex rather having blessed with spiritual power. They only offer their deformed 'personality' not their spirituality. They take undue advantages of their asceticism. They exploit the gullible and the knowledgeable alike.

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