

l to those produced by it, and at worst
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Writing

owly and builds quickly in the story. In
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ys to Ratih about her response to the
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p. 49)?

alan says, "The hour of prayer," (p. 51)
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RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA



Myself in India

Born in 1927 in Cologne, Germany, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala emigrated with her family to England in 1948. After receiving her M.A. from Queen Mary College in 1951, Jhabvala moved to New Delhi, India, where she still lives and writes today. In that same year, she married C. S. H. Jhabvala, an Indian architect, and began her career as a full-time writer of short stories, screenplays, and novels.

Jhabvala's first two novels, Amrita (1956) and The Nature of Passion (1956), deal with the "absurdities arising from the juxtaposition of Eastern and Western ideals," in critic Patricia Hodgart's words. Jhabvala has been described as the best Anglo-Indian novelist writing today. She writes from within the extended Indian family structure and, as the following essay reflects, of her personal struggle between traditional Indian passivity and the Western need to act.

The essay "Myself in India" introduces a collection of short stories entitled How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories (1976). In it we see the long-term intercultural encounters and collisions of the author who, through marriage and choice, permanently trades her European past for a world as stunningly different as India.

Before you read "Myself in India," write about a time in your life, if there was one, when you lived a long time in another culture or place. What stages do you recall in your adjustment to your new surroundings? What differences between your old patterns and assumptions and those of the new setting were most difficult to handle? In what ways were you able to adapt? In what ways did you fail to adapt? What do you remember most fondly about the experience now?

I have lived in India for most of my adult life. My husband is Indian and so are my children. I am not, and less so every year.

India reacts very strongly on people. Some loathe it, some love it, most do both. There is a special problem of adjustment for the sort of people who come

today, who tend to be liberal in outlook and have been educated to be sensitive and receptive to other cultures. But it is not always easy to be sensitive and receptive to India: there comes a point where you have to close up in order to protect yourself. The place is very strong and often proves too strong for European nerves. There is a cycle that Europeans—by Europeans I mean all Westerners, including Americans—tend to pass through. It goes like this: first stage, tremendous enthusiasm—everything Indian is marvellous; second stage, everything Indian not so marvellous; third stage, everything Indian abominable. For some people it ends there, for others the cycle renews itself and goes on. I have been through it so many times that now I think of myself as strapped to a wheel that goes round and round and sometimes I'm up and sometimes I'm down. When I meet other Europeans, I can usually tell after a few moments' conversation at what stage of the cycle they happen to be. Everyone likes to talk about India, whether they happen to be loving or loathing it. It is a topic on which a lot of things can be said, and on a variety of aspects—social, economic, political, philosophical: it makes fascinating viewing from every side.

However, I must admit that I am no longer interested in India. What I am interested in now is myself in India—which sometimes, in moments of despondency, I tend to think of as my survival in India. I had better say straightaway that the reason why I live in India is because my strongest human ties are here. If I hadn't married an Indian, I don't think I would ever have come here for I am not attracted—or used not to be attracted—to the things that usually bring people to India. I know I am the wrong type of person to live here. To stay and endure, one should have a mission and a cause, to be patient, cheerful, unselfish, strong. I am a central European with an English education and a deplorable tendency to constant self-analysis. I am irritable and have weak nerves.

The most salient fact about India is that it is very poor and very backward. There are so many other things to be said about it but this must remain the basis of all of them. We may praise Indian democracy, go into raptures over Indian music, admire Indian intellectuals—but whatever we say, not for one moment should we lose sight of the fact that a very great number of Indians never get enough to eat. Literally that: from birth to death they never for one day cease to suffer from hunger. *Can* one lose sight of that fact? God knows, I've tried. But after seeing what one has to see here every day, it is not really possible to go on living one's life the way one is used to. People dying of starvation in the streets, children kidnapped and maimed to be sent out as beggars—but there is no point in making a catalogue of the horrors with which one lives, *on* which one lives, as on the back of an animal. Obviously, there has to be some adjustment.

There are several ways. The first and best is to be a strong person who plunges in and does what he can as a doctor or social worker. I often think that perhaps this is the only condition under which Europeans have any right to be here. I know several people like that. They are usually attached to some mission. They work very hard and stay very cheerful. Every few years they are sent on home

leave. Once I met such a person—her first home leave after being overseas—does it feel like to go back after staying so long? She didn't understand. It is import to me—how to adapt oneself to India—didn't mean a thing to her for in view of the things she sees around her own sensibilities are best forgotten.

Another approach to India's basic problem is the approach favoured by most Europeans: their belief in reincarnation. If this is true, always the chance that in your next life you will be a consoling thought for both of you. On pilao can do so with an easy conscience. It is a privilege by his good conduct in previous lives. With some degree of equanimity find a way to be *he* who will be digging into the earth outside the door with an empty stomach. The door is not open to you if you don't have a mission. And if you don't accept, then what? You must go away and go to a place where even a dog and a home fit to live in. But even a dog must live. Having once seen the sights in India, people must live out their lives, not just to be in again.

None of this is what I wanted to do in India. But I could not do so because I am who comes here has to live. I have to find an agreeable way. I shut all my windows, I have an air-conditioner; I read a lot of books, I am a master of the novel. All the time I am aware of animal of poverty and backwardness. But rather, one does pretend, but retributive. One blinds and never turns off the air-conditioner. People are not meant to shut themselves out from nothing outside.

Now I think I am drawing near to something that is wrong: I am not happy. It is my own fault. I should go out more often. All right, so I am not a doctor or a social worker; then the only thing to do is to go out of sight and turn to others. There is so much going on. The winter is a time of music and dance recitals, visiting En-

and have been educated to be sensitive is not always easy to be sensitive and where you have to close up in order to get through. It goes like this: first stage, Indian is marvellous; second stage, everything Indian abominable. For the cycle renews itself and goes on. I have I think of myself as strapped to a wheel sometimes I'm up and sometimes I'm down. Usually tell after a few moments' conversation to be. Everyone likes to talk about or loathing it. It is a topic on which of aspects—social, economic, political, coming from every side.

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the best is to be a strong person who plunges into social work. I often think that perhaps no Europeans have any right to be here. I am usually attached to some mission. They come. Every few years they are sent on home

leave. Once I met such a person—a woman doctor—who had just returned from her first home leave after being out here for twelve years. I asked her: but what does it feel like to go back after such a long time? How do you manage to adapt yourself? She didn't understand. This question which was of such tremendous import to me—how to adapt oneself to the differences between Europe and India—didn't mean a thing to her. It simply didn't matter. And she was right, for in view of the things she sees and does every day, the delicate nuances of one's own sensibilities are best forgotten.

Another approach to India's basic conditions is to accept them. This seems to be the approach favoured by most Indians. Perhaps it has something to do with their belief in reincarnation. If things are not to your liking in this life, there is always the chance that in your next life everything will be different. It appears to be a consoling thought for both rich and poor. The rich man stuffing himself on pilao can do so with an easy conscience because he knows he has earned this privilege by his good conduct in previous lives; and the poor man can watch him with some degree of equanimity for he knows that next time round it may well be *he* who will be digging into that pilao while the other will be crouching outside the door with an empty stomach. However, this path of acceptance is not open to you if you don't have a belief in reincarnation ingrained within you. And if you don't accept, then what can you do? Sometimes one wants just to run away and go to a place where everyone has enough to eat and clothes to wear and a home fit to live in. But even when you get there, can you ever forget? Having once seen the sights in India, and the way it has been ordained that people must live out their lives, nowhere in the world can ever be all that good to be in again.

None of this is what I wanted to say. I wanted to concentrate only on myself in India. But I could not do so before indicating the basis on which everyone who comes here has to live. I have a nice house, I do my best to live in an agreeable way. I shut all my windows, I let down the blinds, I turn on the air-conditioner; I read a lot of books, with a special preference for the great masters of the novel. All the time I know myself to be on the back of this great animal of poverty and backwardness. It is not possible to pretend otherwise. Or rather, one does pretend, but retribution follows. Even if one never rolls up the blinds and never turns off the air-conditioner, something is bound to go wrong. People are not meant to shut themselves up in rooms and pretend there is nothing outside.

Now I think I am drawing nearer to what I want to be my subject. Yes, something is wrong: I am not happy this way. I feel lonely, shut in, shut off. It is my own fault. I should go out more and meet people and learn what is going on. All right, so I am not a doctor nor a social worker nor a saint nor at all a good person; then the only thing to do is to try and push that aspect of India out of sight and turn to others. There are many others. I live in the capital where so much is going on. The winter is one round of parties, art exhibitions, plays, music and dance recitals, visiting European artistes: there need never be a dull

moment. Yet all my moments are dull. Why? It is my own fault, I know. I can't quite explain it to myself but somehow I have no heart for these things here. Is it because all the time underneath I feel the animal moving? But I have decided to ignore the animal. I wish to concentrate only on modern, Westernized India, and on modern, well-off, cultured Westernized Indians.

Let me try and describe a Westernized Indian woman with whom I ought to have a lot in common and whose company I ought to enjoy. She has been to Oxford or Cambridge or some smart American college. She speaks flawless, easy, colloquial English with a charming lilt of an accent. She has a degree in economics or political science or English literature. She comes from a good family. Her father may have been an ICS officer or some other high-ranking government official; he too was at Oxford or Cambridge, and he and her mother travelled in Europe in pre-war days. They have always lived a Western-style life, with Western food and an admiration for Western culture. The daughter now tends rather to frown on this. She feels one should be more deeply Indian, and with this end in view, she wears handloom saris and traditional jewellery and has painted an abnormally large vermilion mark on her forehead. She is interested in Indian classical music and dance. If she is rich enough—she may have married into one of the big Indian business houses—she will become a patroness of the arts and hold delicious parties on her lawn on summer nights. All her friends are there—and she has so many, both Indian and European, all interesting people—and trays of iced drinks are carried round by servants in uniform and there is intelligent conversation and then there is a superbly arranged buffet supper and more intelligent conversation, and then the crown of the evening: a famous Indian maestro performing on the sitar. The guests recline on carpets and cushions on the lawn. The sky sparkles with stars and the languid summer air is fragrant with jasmine. There are many pretty girls reclining against bolsters; their faces are melancholy for the music is stirring their hearts, and sometimes they sigh with yearning and happiness and look down at their pretty toes (adorned with a tiny silver toe-ring) peeping out from under the sari. Here is Indian life and culture at its highest and best. Yet, with all that, it need not be thought that our hostess has forgotten her Western education. Not at all. In her one may see the best of East and West combined. She is interested in a great variety of topics and can hold her own in any discussion. She loves to exercise her emancipated mind, and whatever the subject of conversation—economics, or politics, or literature, or film—she has a well-formulated opinion on it and knows how to express herself. How lucky for me if I could have such a person for a friend! What enjoyable, lively times we two could have together!

In fact, my teeth are set on edge if I have to listen to her for more than five minutes—yes, even though everything she says is so true and in line with the most advanced opinions of today. But when she says it, somehow, even though I know the words to be true, they ring completely false. It is merely lips moving and sounds coming out: it doesn't mean anything, nothing of what she says (though she says it with such conviction, skill, and charm) is of the least importance to

her. She is only making conversation to make conversation. And so it is a lively conversation round the bonfire. I really feel strongly about but but about. This applies not only to this instance, when they talk oh so smart of Godard and Beckett and ecolé. They know Modern India to be about it: but though they then themselves, they are not conditions of foreign experts whom they have fully aware of India's problems and arguments for and against nationalization. It is as if they were talking for debate—an abstract subject—their feet.

But if I have no taste for the conversation, else is there? Other Indians don't have the whole conception of such a life is in so far as they hate to be alone. These groups are clan-units—it is together and enjoy each other's company; each other's company is different together; there are long stretches. From time to time there is a little commonplace everyday subject such as a troublesome neighbour. There is one's wits against those of others: people around and enjoying the meal. There is actually something of a course and certainly holds more Westernized Indians. It is also more one to be absolutely relaxed in mind just to feel, to *be*. I have in fact enjoyed. But there is something in me that I can't just *be*! Suddenly I jump up. I want to do something terribly different. *Critique of Pure Reason*. I feel tempted to wake myself up. Anything to prevent the bog of passive, intuitive being. I feel this way.

Of course there are other Europeans myself. For instance, other women. People suffering from

Why? It is my own fault, I know. I can't have no heart for these things here. Is the animal moving? But I have decided to write only on modern, Westernized India, Westernized Indians.

An Indian woman with whom I ought to have any I ought to enjoy. She has been to an American college. She speaks flawless, easy, with an accent. She has a degree in economics. She comes from a good family. Her husband is some other high-ranking government official, a bridge, and he and her mother travelled abroad. They always lived a Western-style life, with Western culture. The daughter now tends to be more deeply Indian, and with saris and traditional jewellery and has a tilak mark on her forehead. She is interested in money. She is rich enough—she may have married a rich man—she will become a patroness of the arts. She is on summer nights. All her friends are Indian and European, all interesting people—she is surrounded by servants in uniform and there is a superbly arranged buffet supper and she is in the crown of the evening: a famous hostess. The guests recline on carpets and cushions, under the stars and the languid summer air is sweet. Pretty girls reclining against bolsters; their heads tilted, stirring their hearts, and sometimes they look down at their pretty toes (adorned with bangles) from under the sari. Here is Indian life with all that, it need not be thought that it is a Western education. Not at all. In her one may see a woman who is interested in a great variety of topics. She loves to exercise her emancipated mind in conversation—economics, or politics, or philosophy, or a related opinion on it and knows how to hold her own. I could have such a person for a friend! What a life together!

I have to listen to her for more than five minutes. She says is so true and in line with the most common sense. She says it, somehow, even though I know it is entirely false. It is merely lips moving and making a sound, nothing of what she says (though it is charming and charming) is of the least importance to

her. She is only making conversation in the way she knows educated women have to make conversation. And so it is with all of them. Everything they say, all that lively conversation round the buffet table, is not prompted by anything they really feel strongly about but by what they think they ought to feel strongly about. This applies not only to subjects which are naturally alien to them—for instance, when they talk oh so solemnly! and with such profound intelligence! of Godard and Beckett and ecology—but when they talk about themselves too. They know Modern India to be an important subject and they have a lot to say about it: but though they themselves *are* Modern India, they don't look at themselves, they are not conditioned to look at themselves except with the eyes of foreign experts whom they have been taught to respect. And while they are fully aware of India's problems and are up on all the statistics and all the arguments for and against nationalization and a socialistic pattern of society, all the time it is as if they were talking about some *other* place—as if it were a subject for debate—an abstract subject—and not a live animal actually moving under their feet.

But if I have no taste for the company of these Westernized Indians, then what else is there? Other Indians don't really have a social life, not in our terms; the whole conception of such a life is imported. It is true that Indians are gregarious in so far as they hate to be alone and always like to sit together in groups; but these groups are clan-units—it is the family, or clan-members, who gather together and enjoy each other's company. And again, their conception of enjoying each other's company is different from ours. For them it is enough just to *be* together; there are long stretches of silence in which everyone stares into space. From time to time there is a little spurt of conversation, usually on some commonplace everyday subject such as rising prices, a forthcoming marriage, or a troublesome neighbour. There is no attempt at exercising the mind or testing one's wits against those of others: the pleasure lies only in having other familiar people around and enjoying the air together and looking forward to the next meal. There is actually something very restful about this mode of social intercourse and certainly holds more pleasure than the synthetic social life led by Westernized Indians. It is also more adapted to the Indian climate which invites one to be absolutely relaxed in mind and body, to do nothing, to think nothing, just to feel, to *be*. I have in fact enjoyed sitting around like that for hours on end. But there is something in me that after some time revolts against such lassitude. I can't just *be*! Suddenly I jump up and rush away out of that contented circle. I want to do something terribly difficult like climbing a mountain or reading the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I feel tempted to bang my head against the wall as if to wake myself up. Anything to prevent myself from being sucked down into that bog of passive, intuitive being. I feel I cannot, I must not allow myself to live this way.

Of course there are other Europeans more or less in the same situation as myself. For instance, other women married to Indians. But I hesitate to seek them out. People suffering from the same disease do not usually make good

company for one another. Who is to listen to whose complaints? On the other hand, with what enthusiasm I welcome visitors from abroad. Their physical presence alone is a pleasure to me. I love to see their fresh complexions, their red cheeks that speak of wind and rain; and I like to see their clothes and their shoes, to admire the texture of these solid European materials and the industrial skills that have gone into making them. I also like to hear the way in which these people speak. In some strange way their accents, their intonations are redolent to me of the places from which they have come, so that as voices rise and fall I hear in them the wind stirring in English trees or a mild brook murmuring through a summer wood. And apart from these sensuous pleasures, there is also the pleasure of hearing what they have to say. I listen avidly to what is said about people I know or have heard of and about new plays and restaurants and changes and fashions. However, neither the subject nor my interest in it is inexhaustible; and after that, it is my turn. What about India? Now they want to hear, but I don't want to say. I feel myself growing sullen. I don't want to talk about India. There is nothing I can tell them. There is nothing they would understand. However, I do begin to talk, and after a time even to talk with passion. But everything I say is wrong. I listen to myself with horror; they too listen with horror. I want to stop and reverse, but I can't. I want to cry out, this is not what I mean! You are listening to me in entirely the wrong context! But there is no way of explaining the context. It would take too long, and anyway what is the point? It's such a small, personal thing. I fall silent. I have nothing more to say. I turn my face and want them to go away.

So I am back again alone in my room with the blinds drawn and the air-conditioner on. Sometimes, when I think of my life, it seems to have contracted to this one point and to be concentrated in this one room, and it is always a very hot, very long afternoon when the air-conditioner has failed. I cannot describe the *oppression* of such afternoons. It is a physical oppression—heat pressing down on me and pressing in the walls and the ceiling and congealing together with time which has stood still and will never move again. And it is not only those two—heat and time—that are laying their weight on me but behind them, or held within them, there is something more which I can only describe as the whole of India. This is hyperbole, but I need hyperbole to express my feelings about those countless afternoons spent over what now seem to me countless years in a country for which I was not born. India swallows me up and now it seems to me that I am no longer in my room but in the white-hot city streets under a white-hot sky; people cannot live in such heat so everything is deserted—no, not quite, for here comes a smiling leper in a cart being pushed by another leper; there is also the carcass of a dog and vultures have swooped down on it. The river has dried up and stretches in miles of flat cracked earth; it is not possible to make out where the river ceases and the land begins for this too is as flat, as cracked, as dry as the river-bed and stretches on for ever. Until we come to a jungle in which wild beasts live, and then there are ravines and here live outlaws with the hearts of wild beasts. Sometimes they make raids into the villages and they rob and burn and mutilate and kill for sport. More mountains and these are very, very

high and now it is no longer here is Mount Kailash on which human skulls. Down in the plain here—they are doing something see. They are killing a boy. They into the foundations dug for a quite naked except for ash smear over the foundations, to bless a

I am using these exaggerated ideas of India—the idea, the sensation one must escape, and if one can be found. And I think it is not themselves compelled to seek relief. Here perhaps less than anywhere life, is all there is for us, and something more satisfying becomes whether religion is such a potent it the other way round—is life so turned elsewhere, there is no in the fact remains that the eyes of true that God seems more present. I wake up at 3 A.M. to the sound of song; and then at dawn the temples are blown, and there is the smell of that are placed at the feet of smiling the Lord Krishna has been reborn somewhere in Madhya Pradesh. Of meditation and one of them may cashed your cheque just a few days are turned up and he is in ecstasy. widows who skip and dance about they are Krishna's milkmaids. At proportions—so much larger than incredibly beautiful, an unflawed night, that it is difficult to believe the bounds of human comprehension.

I love listening to Indian devotions from a well; and the emotions to understand because the imagery of God is always shown as the beloved in a way ("I wait for Him. Do you when I hear such songs and all my thing I have been fretting about is this promise of eternal bliss in this and feel that everything is good. U

listen to whose complaints? On the other side visitors from abroad. Their physical pleasure to see their fresh complexions, their clothes and I like to see their clothes and their artificial European materials and the industrial world. I also like to hear the way in which these different accents, their intonations are redolent of home, so that as voices rise and fall among English trees or a mild brook murmuring from these sensuous pleasures, there is also something to say. I listen avidly to what is said about new plays and restaurants and changes of subject nor my interest in it is inexhaustible; but India? Now they want to hear, but I am sullen. I don't want to talk about India. There is nothing they would understand. After a time even to talk with passion. But I myself with horror; they too listen with horror. I can't. I want to cry out, this is not what I desire, the wrong context! But there is no time to take too long, and anyway what is the point? I fall silent. I have nothing more to say. Away.

Room with the blinds drawn and the air-conditioner of my life, it seems to have contracted and in this one room, and it is always a very small room. The air-conditioner has failed. I cannot describe the physical oppression—heat pressing down on the ceiling and congealing together with time and again. And it is not only those two—weight on me but behind them, or held in front of me which I can only describe as the whole of the world in hyperbole to express my feelings about India which now seem to me countless years in the past but in the white-hot city streets under a scorching heat so everything is deserted—no, not deserted, in a cart being pushed by another leper; the vultures have swooped down on it. The river at cracked earth; it is not possible to make a road begins for this too is as flat, as cracked, as the desert for ever. Until we come to a jungle in the hills are ravines and here live outlaws with the intention to make raids into the villages and they rob the villages. More mountains and these are very, very

high and now it is no longer hot but terribly cold, we are in snow and ice and here is Mount Kailash on which sits Siva the Destroyer wearing a necklace of human skulls. Down in the plains they are worshipping him. I can see them from here—they are doing something strange—what is it? I draw nearer. Now I can see. They are killing a boy. They hack him to pieces and now they bury the pieces into the foundations dug for a new bridge. There is a priest with them who is quite naked except for ash smeared all over him; he is reciting some holy verses over the foundations, to bless and propitiate.

I am using these exaggerated images in order to give some idea of how intolerable India—the idea, the sensation of it—can become. A point is reached where one must escape, and if one can't do so physically, then some other way must be found. And I think it is not only Europeans but Indians too who feel themselves compelled to seek refuge from their often unbearable environment. Here perhaps less than anywhere else is it possible to believe that this world, this life, is all there is for us, and the temptation to write it off and substitute something more satisfying becomes overwhelming. This brings up the question whether religion is such a potent force in India because life is so terrible, or is it the other way round—is life so terrible because, with the eyes of the spirit turned elsewhere, there is no incentive to improve its quality? Whichever it is, the fact remains that the eyes of the spirit *are* turned elsewhere, and it really is true that God seems more present in India than in other places. Every morning I wake up at 3 A.M. to the sound of someone pouring out his spirit in devotional song; and then at dawn the temple bells ring, and again at dusk, and conch-shells are blown, and there is the smell of incense and of the slightly overblown flowers that are placed at the feet of smiling, pink-cheeked idols. I read in the papers that the Lord Krishna has been reborn as the son of a weaver woman in a village somewhere in Madhya Pradesh. On the banks of the river there are figures in meditation and one of them may turn out to be the teller in your bank who cashed your cheque just a few days ago; now he is in the lotus pose and his eyes are turned up and he is in ecstasy. There are ashrams full of little old half-starved widows who skip and dance about, they giggle and play hide and seek because they are Krishna's milkmaids. And over all this there is a sky of enormous proportions—so much larger than the earth on which you live, and often so incredibly beautiful, an unflawed unearthly blue by day, all shining with stars at night, that it is difficult to believe that something grand and wonderful beyond the bounds of human comprehension does not emanate from there.

I love listening to Indian devotional songs. They seem pure like water drawn from a well; and the emotions they express are both beautiful and easy to understand because the imagery employed is so human. The soul crying out for God is always shown as the beloved yearning for the lover in an easily recognizable way ("I wait for Him. Do you hear His step? He has come"). I feel soothed when I hear such songs and all my discontentment falls away. I see that everything I have been fretting about is of no importance at all because all that matters is this promise of eternal bliss in the Lover's arms. I become patient and good and feel that everything is good. Unfortunately this tranquil state does not last

for long, and after a time it again seems to me that nothing is good and neither am I. Once somebody said to me: "Just see, how sweet is the Indian soul that can see God in a cow!" But when I try to assume this sweetness, it turns sour: for, however much I may try and fool myself, whatever veils I may try, for the sake of peace of mind, to draw over my eyes, it is soon enough clear to me that the cow *is* a cow, and a very scrawny, underfed, diseased one at that. And then I feel that I want to keep this knowledge, however painful it is, and not exchange it for some other that may be true for an Indian but can never quite become that for me.

And here, it seems to me, I come to the heart of my problem. To live in India and be at peace one must to a very considerable extent become Indian and adopt Indian attitudes, habits, beliefs, assume if possible an Indian personality. But how is this possible? And even if it were possible—without cheating oneself—would it be desirable? Should one want to try and become something other than what one is? I don't always say no to this question. Sometimes it seems to me how pleasant it would be to say yes and give in and wear a sari and be meek and accepting and see God in a cow. Other times it seems worth while to be defiant and European and—all right, be crushed by one's environment, but all the same have made some attempt to remain standing. Of course, this can't go on indefinitely and in the end I'm bound to lose—if only at the point where my ashes are immersed in the Ganges to the accompaniment of Vedic hymns, and then who will say that I have not truly merged with India?

I do sometimes go back to Europe. But after a time I get bored there and want to come back here. I also find it hard now to stand the European climate. I have got used to intense heat and seem to need it.

Questions for Discussion and Writing

1. Why does Jhabvala say that all of her moments are dull? What is the relationship between her dull moments and the adjustment she makes to the horrors of India? What does this dullness have to do with the retribution she writes about for those who shade their windows against misery?
2. Why do the words of the emancipated, Western-educated Indian woman ring "completely false" (p. 56) in Jhabvala's ears? What does the author's response have to do with her European background?
3. Explain the "something" within Jhabvala that prevents her for very long from just sitting around, from just *being* (p. 57).
4. What cultural differences and dilemmas permanently separate Jhabvala from India? Why does India forever threaten to swallow her up? What is it about India that draws her back when she leaves?
5. What paradoxes does the essay teach us about being a permanent resident from the West in a land like India?
6. In what ways does Jhabvala's essay convey the difficulties and challenges of being honest as a writer?

Born in Eatonville, Florida, at Howard University and University. She once claimed red light, but escaped punishment. In this same way, Hurston captures the highlights of her life, even the yearning for the past. Contemporary writer Alice Walker (1978) and her autobiography (1978)—her own models for her work—capture the highlights of her life, even the yearning for the past.

Folklorist, novelist, anthropologist, and all-around black woman, Zora Hurston, who went to the South to study, she really wanted to learn: ancient rituals, customs, and the lives of the people. Zora, of the sandy-colored skin, who escaped poverty and had a sharp eye for the main chance. Zora, who left the South to study, went to root doctors from the South. I am. I want to learn your secrets. Zora, who had collected the secrets of the South. That Zora. And having found that Zora, she found that Zora of varied treasure, I was in luck.

Hurston's study of anthropology and racial groups: "Light can be seen in the dark."

*Walker, Alice 1983. "Saving the Life of the World." Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.