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Paul Scott
A Study of The Raj Quartet

A Thesis Submitted

By

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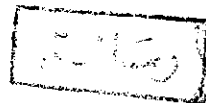
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Preface

The object of this thesis is to present a critical study of Paul Scott's masterpiece *The Raj Quartet* (1966-1975). Amongst all other British writers interested in Anglo-India, Paul Scott is the only British writer who dedicates all his novels to India. His literary contribution belongs to the sixties and the seventies, a time when a general feeling of nostalgia for Britain's lost glory spread. Britain was one of the most powerful, imperial powers over the past centuries and the word Raj denotes Britain's long reign over India which represented the brightest jewel in the British Crown. Britain and India had gone through a long relation of subjugation, then violent revolt on the part of the Indians and enthusiasm, then complete disinterest on the British side. Paul Scott is not interested in portraying this eventful and ambivalent relationship of love and hate, but he cares primarily for the results of this "imperial embrace" as he prefers to define it. Scott tells the story of the last years of the British rule in India, the dissolution of the empire and the effect of this decline on the British people both in England and in India. This is achieved through the delineation of an intricate web of complex characters all are involved with the Raj either directly or indirectly. This is done within the limits of a historical background as closely possible as could be to the actual historical reality.

There are two main reasons for the choice of this particular subject for my M.A. thesis, one is personal and the other academic. The personal reason is because I lived

a considerable part of my childhood and adolescence in India. Living in such a vast and peculiar country for almost ten years left a strong impression to the point of almost considering India my second home. The academic reason is closely related to the personal one. My interest in India continued and I decided to study Scott's *Raj Quartet* as there were a very limited number of researches on this subject. Most of the researchers interested in Anglo-India focused on Forster or Kipling, but Scott got very little attention. Books analysing Scott per se were quite few and most of the articles were obituaries as he died at a young age. His literary talent was recognized when on his death bed, he received the Booker Prize in 1977. He died in 1978.

(The thesis falls in four chapters and a conclusion. The study is a content analysis which explores Scott's viewpoint on many of the Anglo-Indian issues and evaluates *The Quartet* in the context of the last days of the Raj. The thesis also places *The Quartet* in the tradition of Anglo-Indian writings by surveying previous and subsequent works on the subject.

Chapter One begins with a short summary of the beginnings of the British-Indian history and the events that led to the formation of the East India Company which is considered the beginning of Britain's exploitation of and monopoly over the Indian resources. The chapter goes on to trace the historical events right to the day of India's independence when England was shorn of her jewel. The second part of the chapter discusses the image of India in British literature through the analysis of a number of

images which dominated the Anglo-Indian works like the image of the White Man's Burden, the Sahib and the Native, racial discrimination, the image of the Indian and the Man-Bap issue.

Chapter Two gives a quick presentation of Paul Scott, the man and the novelist. His viewpoints concerning the Indian issues he prefers to tackle in his novels are discussed in detail. Also, an analysis of Scott's novels which he produced prior to *The Quartet* is rendered and a line of development is traced to show how these novels led to the writing of *The Quartet*.

Chapter Three deals with the historical reality in Scott's *Quartet*. Critics differ over the categorization of *The Quartet* as to whether it belongs to the genre of historical novels or not. Scott's definition of a historical novel is surveyed so as to show that Scott firmly denies that his *Quartet* fits the criteria of a historical novel. By giving a short summary of the events of *The Quartet* and relating them to the actual historical happenings, a definite picture is rendered as to how far *The Quartet* conforms with the actual reality.

Chapter Four is dedicated to the analysis of the web of human relations in the novels through a detailed scanning of the characters involved. A comparison is held between *A Passage to India* and *The Raj Quartet* to show how far Scott has continued with the Forster tradition, in terms of the different recurring images in both the works and whether they developed in *The Quartet* or followed a different

direction. Special emphasis is laid on the issues of friendship between white and black, sentiments of love and the image of rape through an analysis of the characters concerned. In this chapter, I tried to show how these human relations led to, and were affected by, the decline of the Raj.

Scott wanted to recreate the Anglo-Indian experience of the forties with all its minute details, its historical events, its social types and relationships. He repeatedly announced that he adopted the last days of the Raj as his metaphor of life, and I also believe that his deep feelings of guilt and shame made him write *The Quartet* as a tribute to a country he loved and to a nation he respected and felt partly responsible for forming a major part of their modern history.

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor Professor Radwa Ashour for her unswerving guidance and to my parents, husband and sister for their constant support and help. I also thank my friend and colleague Sherin Mazloun for her encouragement.

Chapter One

The Image of India In Twentieth Century British Literature

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The word "Raj" denotes the imperial British domination of the Indian subcontinent. The Raj revival, the Raj comeback, the Raj revisionism imply nostalgia for Britain's lost glory; it also reflects the dilemma of liberalism in the middle of the twentieth century:

The liberals were most involved in enunciating a critical view of imperialism, in Parliament, in journalism and political writing... It looks as though Britain is also seeking a new definition of liberalism. (Goontilke 1-2).

If the policy of imperialism is to be defined without the use of twisted words it would mean nothing more than the furthering of commerce and the extension of economic dominance over other countries with one major aim in mind: investment of capital to gain profit and more profit.

In 1500 Britain had a rural population and two main sources of wealth; an enormous wool production and a strong cloth industry. It did not possess the powerful navy which it developed later nor did it have considerable political or military power. By the end of the sixteenth century British commerce was growing, overseas trade was flourishing, and the policy of industrialization was implemented in almost all fields .

The industrial revolution affected almost everything; politics, economy, military strategies and daily life patterns.

Profit was the stimulus which motivated everything, and since profits are formed out of the difference between the cost of the product and its market price, the urgent need for cheap labour and raw materials was necessary. The opening of new world-wide markets was needed and, hence, the rapid growth of imperialism. Therefore, the evolution in Britain's economy from self-sufficient agriculture to sea-voyages and trade, to industrialization, to colonialism and imperialism was a natural progression.

In one of his speeches, Winston Churchill, one of the exponents of imperialism, compared imperialism to a rhinoceros, difficult to define but recognized at once, if charged into a room (Giddings 1). Imperialism has its own literature and in almost all the languages, but my primary interest here is fiction written by British novelists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century who were interested in India as a primary subject for their inspiration. This literature is an outcome of the long, strange and eventful relationship between the British and the Indians. This kind of literature gives the reader an image of India under the British rule. It also reveals a picture of the British away from home and their actions and reactions towards India and the Indians.

Nearly all of the writers who wrote about India were either officials of the British forces or wives of those officers. In short they all came as imperialists or servants of the empire. However they discovered in India an experience of a lifetime and that is why this kind of literature is still relevant to the reader even after imperialism has long been gone because it throws light not only

on the colonizer and the colonized, but on life in general.

D.C.R.A. Goontilke in his book *The Images of The Raj* tried to find an answer to the question why the British artist turned to the developing countries for inspiration:

It is probable that the quality of life in developing countries enabled the writers about the Empire to invest their works with remarkable multiple significance. The humanism of the Indian background sharpened their own humanistic attitude to the imperialist ethos.

(Goontilke 2).

E.M. Forster, in a comment on his masterpiece *A Passage to India* believed that there was something permanent about it. In an essay entitled "Three Countries", he said that: "It's... about the search of the human race for a more lasting home, about the universe as embodied in the Indian earth and the Indian sky." (Heine(ed) 278).

Regarding the same issue, Paul Scott (1920-1978) the only British writer who made India his sole business announced in one of his speeches that he not only found the period of 1942 in Anglo-India "lively and dramatic," but it also helped him to express the fullness of what he believed and his feelings about the world he lived in :

Why don't I write books that illustrate the world live in, the world from which Imperial India has disappeared?... Walter Allen has very usefully defined the novel as an extended metaphor of an author's view of life... so... my proper answer to the question... Because the last days of the British Raj are the metaphor I have presently chosen to illustrate my view of life.

(Reece(ed) 119).

Being away from home for long periods of time made the writers acquire more insight into the self and the other. When Graham Greene was asked in a television interview why he chose a setting so far from home to write about, he said that that enabled him to see the English character in a setting which was not so protective to them, where they spoke a little differently, a little more openly. (Greene 674).

Even Rudyard Kipling (1856-1936), the spokesman of imperialism with his contribution of the most valuable one-sided record of the Raj in its hey-day, wrote a poem to the Indian city of Bombay in which he glorified the city and intensified its moral worth. He said :

Mother of cities to me
But I was born in her gate
Between the palms and the sea
Where the world and streamers wait
Her power is over mine
and mine I hold at her hands.

To the city of Bombay (1894) (Thangaraja (ed) 1)

The preposition 'in' in the phrase "But I was born in her gate" denotes that the city embodies him with its sea and palms.

None of the early writers came to India on a personal basis. They were all 'sent' there on political, economic and "civilizing" missions. None of them came under the pretext of "enjoying" their newly-found treasure, the landscape and the luxury that was scarce in England at that time, and then was attracted to India and, hence, started writing. They were all "there" and they happened to be gifted writers, a rich India was naturally their

theme, with variations of course according to the era in which one wrote.

Kipling was born in India, went to England for his education and returned back as a journalist. Forster was the Private Secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas State Senior. Leonard Woolf was a civil servant. George Orwell was born in India and came back as a policeman in the Indian Imperial Police to spend his training period in Burma. Paul Scott also served as an officer cadet.

Their attitudes varied each according to his own time and personality. All of them, however, focused on the Northern part of India. Although the British were stationed all over the subcontinent and the South is extremely rich in its landscape and cultural heritage, but I think the extreme weather conditions of the South with constant humidity, heat and rain played an important role in this context. Queen Victoria advised the first English invaders who went to India that if they wanted to conquer India they had to conquer the Indian climate first.

Another element which unified the early writers was the India they pictured in their books. In the works of minor novelists like William Knighton and William Arnold and also in the early works of Kipling, Indians rarely appeared as fully realized characters though in actual life they may have had a more active role. In much of the early fiction they appeared as cooks, bearers, ayahs (maids), fakirs (mystics), thugs and thieves. In his preface to a collection of short stories about India, Paul Theroux wrote:

It is not the pink, princely India-silks and incense,
temples and ceremonials. This is the India of demons

and civil servants, burdened white men and frenzied natives and frenzied white men and burdened natives.

(Theroux 9)

The events in those early novels ranged from blood feuds to fatal misunderstandings, violent sudden deaths, hacked off heads, stings of poisonous centipedes, hangings and starvings to death. The writers of those novels whom I will later refer to as Anglo-Indians were less interested in portraying Indians than in portraying their own lives in India along with their reactions towards the Indians if they happened to be passing by.

However, this was the case with the writers who lived in India but those who pictured India from far-off places wrote about the rich extravagance and the lavish luxury. This particular image of India was reflected not in the novels written about India but in novels with usual European settings and characters 'charmed' by the 'fabulous Orient' with

... precious stuff and stones, tigers, elephants, howdas, hookas, umbrellas, palm trees, palanquins, and gorgeous princes of brown complexion sitting on carpets with their slippers very much turned up at their toes.

(Dickens 88)

In *Vanity Fair*, W.M. Thackeray (1811-1863) wrote about the arrival of Jos Sedley from India which provoked Betty Sharp to have visions about her life in India in which:

She had arrayed herself in an infinity of shawls, turbans, and diamond necklaces and had mounted upon