

The Coloniser Colonised: A Reading of Paul Scott's *Staying On*

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ABSTRACT

Among the Anglo-Indian writers who narrated the historical developments happened during the struggle for independence of India, Paul Scott enjoys a very unenviable position. Scott's *The Raj Quartet* is a historiographical narration of the impacts of the relation between England and India. In this masterpiece work the demise of British India is traced through the fortunes of an enormous cast of characters who respond to these problems of personal identity in a variety of ways. The events of the novels extend over a period of five years from the 'Quit India' motion of the All-India Congress Committee in August 1942 to the preparations for partition that followed the British retreat in August 1947. Scott's award winning and final fictional contribution, *Staying On* (1977), a different work written in the background of free India, is a wonderfully comic and deeply moving novel. The protagonists of the novel Mr Tusker and Mrs Lucy Tusker represent the British men who opted to continue in India when their people left India. They experience the modern India ruled and controlled by the money minded and profit seeking brownsahibs where the former colonisers are totally insignificant and irrelevant.

KEYWORDS: Colonialism, Historiography, British Raj, Brown Sahibs, & Independence

1. INTRODUCTION

British colonialism in the Indian Ocean region has been a matter of serious discussion in many a number of Anglo- Indian novels. The Anglo- Indian writer Paul Scott (1920 – 1978) is an outstanding literary contributor who has written several novels based on the historical outcome of *British Raj* in India including his masterpiece works *The Raj Quartet*. For the inquisitive readers of history, Scott's fiction provides a portrait of events in India during the 1940s which no formal history can provide. Scott writes mostly about Anglo – India in the final years of British rule during and after the Second World War. His novels aim to recreate on a grand scale the political and human clashes between British and Indians during this period. However, Scott's final fictional work *Staying On* (1977) is an entirely different work. Written in the background of free India, *Staying On* is a wonderfully comic and deeply moving novel. In *Staying On* Scott describes the new history of India, twenty-five years after independence, with all its comic strength and its sophisticated documentation of the new Indian class structure. This novel's principal claim on the readers' attention arises from the extent to which it makes the reader care about the fortunes of the people in it.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Despite being the author of thirteen fictional creations, Scott took a long time for academic recognition. However, of late, critics began to give due importance to him. Francine Weinbaum's *Paul Scott: A Critical Study* is an authoritative reading of Scott's novels. She discusses Scott's central idea as about love that had been thwarted, on the political as well as interpersonal levels. K. Bhaskara Rao's *Paul Scott* is good for basic information about the Indian background. Similarly, Jacqueline Banerjee's *Paul Scott* is a reevaluation of Scott's earlier novels and the significance of *The Raj Quartet* as one of the major works of twentieth century.

3. AIM OF THE ARTICLE

This article narrates Paul Scott's last fictional work *Staying On* in the historiographical context. The work is a satirical presentation of the white man in India after independence. The predicament of the former colonialiser as colonised is highlighted in the article. The study attempts to foreground the boomerang experienced by the Europeans who unfortunately decided to stay on in the former colony while the lucky ones left with whatever they gained.

4. DISCUSSION

During the days of British raj the white men ruled the roost and the natives unquestioningly and inarticulately suffered. Independence gave Indian an opportunity to question and even to counter attack the helpless white men who stayed on. After independence colonialism has taken a new turn and in a very real sense what the natives have done is to replace a clear white colonialism with a rather murky brown colonialism. Paul Scott's *Staying On* is a different novel which shows that the game of imperialism continued even after the departure of the colonialists. The white sahibs had retired to the pavilion and the brown sahibs had taken the field. Most of the accoutrements of colonialism stayed in place but they were tarted up with a few new artifacts from indigenous culture. There were no more foreign countries for the native rulers and men of power to colonise, so they set about colonising the unorganized and the former colonialists.

Paul Scott's *Staying On* is an evaluation of free India and at the same time a tying up of the historical interpretations that he started in *The Raj Quartet*. This novel is set in 1972, when India is governed by Mrs Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter. Even after twenty-five years of native rule, or in the postcolonial world, the continuance of colonialism in a different form is quite disturbing. Anti-colonialism is no doubt, inevitably and irrevocably affected by the values of colonialism.

Scott's last fictional work has a double satiric target, the anachronistic Smalleys, who still exemplify the worst traits of the Raj, and the powerful Indian middle class which also embodies these traits, providing a particularly unpalatable example of the legacy of British imperialism. The protagonists in the novel are Colonel Tusker Smalley and his wife Lucy Smalley. Tusker and Lucy, on retirement from the army, instead of shaking off the dust of the country from which their government had been ejected, have deliberately elected to 'stay on' in India, and have chosen Pankot, a place rich in memories for them both and blessed with a cool and healthy climate in which to spend their last days.

Pankot has undergone traumatic changes during a quarter-century after the departure of the Raj. In a way, the Smalleys have altered too, in keeping with their changed fortunes and diminished expectations. Now they are mere "mere remnants of Empire, stranded in an independent India where they have become the pathetic debris of history" (Brandt 201). The Smalleys live in The Lodge, the decayed annex of the ancient Smith's Hotel, with their servant Ibrahim who comes from a family that had long served the British sahibs and who understands their ways. The Smith's Hotel is part and parcel of their lives. They had been there during Tusker's military life. As history turns around, the Smalleys now carry on a running battle with the hotel's elephantine proprietress Mrs Bhoolabhoj whose subdued husband Mr Bhoolabhoj is the colonel's friend and crony.

Mr Bhoolabhoj was for years the manager and had maintained the goodwill of Smith's before Lila bought the hotel and married him. She is "ownership" while he is only "management". Mr Bhoolabhoj is devoted to Smith's and fond of the colonel, whereas both the hotel and the occupants of The Lodge are obstacles to Mrs Bhoolabhoj's secret plans. She wants to join the syndicate which has built Pankot's new five-storey hotel, The Shiraz, to demolish Smith's and to erect in its place a concrete-and-chromium palace which will attract tourists with modern tastes. Disregarding her husband's strong protestations, Mrs Bhoolabhoj issues an eviction notice to the Smalleys which causes a coronary attack to Mr Tusker, turned to be fatal, leaving Lucy alone hopeless and homeless.

Once independence was declared, most of the British community decided to go back. Those who remained did so for a variety of reasons. A few chose to stay on for they had been away too long, they no longer had any foothold in England and would be exiles there upon their return. Some remained in India to serve in the army of the newly independent nation; and some others stayed because they realized the money they had and the pensions they would be entitled to would not keep them in the same comfort in England as in India. Tusker has his own reasons for staying on:

I know for years you've thought I was a damn fool to have stayed on, but I was forty-six when Independence came, which is bloody early in life for a man to retire but too old to start afresh somewhere you don't know. I didn't fancy my chances back home, at the age, and I knew the pension would go further in India than in England. (*Staying On* 229)

Those who stayed on had to confront different kinds of problems in India. Politically they no longer belonged to the elite ruling class, historically they had cast their lot with a race with whom it was difficult to integrate. But Tusker has already established an undetachable relation with India:

I thought about this a lot at the time and it seemed to me I'd invested in India, not money which I've never had, not talent (Ha!) which I've only had a limited amount of, nothing India needed or needs or has been one jot the better for, but was all I had to invest in anything. *Me.* (229)

Tusker's own investment reflects the investment of so many British families who lived and worked in India, who were born here or died here. They had quite literally, invested their lives in the country. As Ralph Crane puts it, "Tusker and Lucy, as pukka sahib and memsahib, are representative of thousands like themselves" (*Inventing India* 155).

In the story of Smalleys, Paul Scott portrays the hill station Pankot in the throes of a new birth during the crucial period of Indian history in 1972. The Bangladesh War is just over and Indira Gandhi is concentrating on expunging India of corruption and nationalizing banks, mines, etc. Against this backdrop of rapidly altering scenario the Smalleys are zealously protecting their racial identity as they are the last representatives of the colonial British. "Through Tusker and Lucy, Paul Scott extends the theme of failure of the Raj to bitter aftermath of its disgrace" (161).

A new elite has replaced the Raj. Rose cottage, the official residence of the Colonel, was an embodiment of the elite position they enjoyed in the past. This dominant palace is now owned by a Mrs Menektara and "crammed with priceless carvings and statuettes that make it look as if they've raided a Hindu temple" (*Staying On* 108). Scott's final literary work suggests a period of transition in his reconstruction of the end and aftermath of the Raj's influence in India, as some of its last representatives fade away and their demise is symbolized by the fate of Smith's Hotel shrunken beside the Shiraz. The change in Pankot is visibly demonstrated by the brand – new Shiraz hotel, dwarfing the old fashioned comforts of Smith's, with its five-storey elevation and its vistas of glass and concrete.

Since Independence, the fortunes of the small hotel have moved with the fluctuations in Pankot's popularity, but they now seem to be drowning in a tide of progress:

This had been the pattern since the days of the *raj*. After the *raj* went here had been bad times, good times; near disastrous times, times of retrenchment, times of ebullient hope as Pankot waxed, waned again in popularity. But for Smith's now it all seemed to be coming to an end. (7-8)

Similarly, Lucy and Tusker find themselves low down in the post-independence Indian hierarchy.

The Anglo-Indian community which has deserted Pankot has been replaced by a new brown race of sahibs and memsahibs of international status. The new race was represented by the Tusker's employers in the pharmaceutical company he joined after his retirement from the army- people like Sigrid Poppadoum, a tall Swedish beauty married to "prickly little Indian husband . . . who could steer government contracts the way of Feibergerstein and Smith, Brown and McKintosh" (212). Now, in 1972, they are represented in the Smalleys' personal lives by members of the new Indian entrepreneurial class like Mrs Bhoolabhoy and Mr and Mrs Desais, the emerging Indian middle class of wheelers and dealers who "with their chicanery, their corrupt practices, their black money, their utter indifference to the state of the nation, their use of political power for personal gain were ruining the country or if not ruining it making it safe chiefly for themselves" (94).

Presenting the Shiraz as the centre point of change and conspiracy, Paul Scott has set the new hotel in a fictional historical context. This "modern monstrosity" attracted more people up than ever before: "people in government, in commerce, the idle rich, the busy executives, and now even film stars and directors from the Ranpur Excelsior Talkie Company" (8). Now this symbol of fast changing postcolonial India is frequented by the Srinivasans and the Desais along "some American tourists" (74) and the Japanese who discuss international problems. To this midst, Mrs Bhoolabhoy, accompanied by "a gang of Mafia-type Indians" (75) comes for her business conspiracy to take over Smith's in order to raze it to the ground and extend their own monstrous building. Raj arrogance has now been replaced with Indian corruption in the shape of Mrs Bhoolabhoy, "that man-mountain of peccancy" (Eva Brann 186), manager proprietor of the old Smith's. Now she wants to be the part of the consortium, owners of a chain of hotels, in different parts of India. Many of this new breed of commercial sahibs were Western Punjabi destitutes, now making money:

All the businessmen concerned in these enterprises had come from the Western Punjab in 1947 when it became part of Pakistan at the time of Independence and Partition, and had arrived in India penniless, they said. Mrs Bhoolabhoy's first husband was believed to have come from there, having 'lost all' in the riots between Muslims and Hindus. (*Staying On* 14-15)

Against this fast-growing syndicate, the Smalleys' grim attempt to hold on to lost certainties are miserably crushed down. Most poignantly, the Smalleys are like Smith's beside the towering Shiraz; small, insignificant, expendable, looked-down-upon by the pukka elite:

Watching them, Lucy realized that nothing had changed for *her*, because there was this new race of sahibs and memsahibs of international status and connexion who had taken the place of Generals and Mrs Generals, and she and Tusker had become for them almost as far down in the social scale as the Eurasians were in the days of the *raj*. (213)

The readers here notice the miserable situation of the former coloniser. They enjoy little security or superiority through their English identity now. Time and change have brought the Smalleys to a rather insecure old age. Even their being specimens of a superior race is not going to save them. Lucy recalls their tedious existence in postcolonial India with her "white skin which day by day, week by week, month by month, year after year, [she has] felt to be increasingly incapable of containing [her], let alone of acting as defensive armour" (108). The representatives of the previous *raj* are now totally helpless. According to Bhaskara Rao, Tusker's "past Raj connections and white skin are no longer the valid passport to the world of privilege" (*Paul Scott* 139). The Smalleys are incapable of meeting even the routine expenses of housekeeping. Lucy's "long-ago-shoes" and old bag have been exposed by the "treacherous sunlight" (*Staying On* 175) of modern India. In face of such harsh realities of the present, Tusker and Lucy fondly cling to their illusions of love, youth, marriage, race, social status and – Tusker engages himself in the writing of the history of Pankot and Lucy being lonely, is lost in the pursuit of her long-accustomed hobbies – of going to the cinema, getting her scanty grey hair regularly blue-rinsed, and dancing to the music of her old favourite songs. "They still feel", writes Danny Colwell, "they have to conform to a stereotypical imperial image of the 'white man' abroad, although it is beyond their means, and in an India that has moved on" (*I am your Mother* 232).

Although Scott gently satirizes contemporary India by portraying the couple's association with the Indian middle class ironically steeped in the values of the British Raj, he also acknowledges the enduring bond that exists between England and its former colony. But by the inversion of the ruler and the ruled, the Indo-British relation has been overturned. "The Smalleys," writes Francine Weinbaum, "whose name suggests their diminished circumstances as well as Britain's diminished position as a world power, are living a life of genteel poverty that contrasts sharply with the gaiety and wealth of their Indian friends" (*Critical Study* 192-93).

The Smalleys are no longer of the privileged class. The full impact of the change is felt by no one more than by the Smalleys. Lucy herself accepts: "I have had rather a sad life" (*Staying On* 79). They have made different investments in India, but in each case the new India has let them down. Now this withered survivors of Pankot have risen to the statue of a tourist attraction for American tourists who wanted to see "old-style British": "After the Taj Mahal, after the rock temples of Khajuraho, after Elephanta, after Fatehpur Sikri, after the beach temple at Mahabalipuram and the Victoria monument in Calcutta, the Smalleys of Pankot" (*6).

The imperial rulers of India have now been degraded to a very pathetic situation. What is more intolerable is that Indians like Mrs Bhoolabhoj are out for revenge. When on the Smalleys' account Mr Bhoolabhoj tries to soften "ownership", she flares up: "What they can afford or not afford does not interest me. It is no concern of mine. When *they* ruled the roostour concerns did not enter their heads. It is tit for tat" (191).

The heaviest blow is the public insult in the dining room of the hotel over the trivial matter of the loan of a pair of garden shears. Mrs Bhoolabhoj flatly dismisses Lucy's pleadings:

'I suggest we discuss this elsewhere and at some other time, Mrs Bhoolabhoj. I am in the middle of my lunch'.

'I am not discussing it. I have not time to discuss trivial matters. I am simply saying that the shears must be brought back. I have more important things to do than argue about shears'. (221)

The entire scene is witnessed by two Indian men who see that "their own old humiliations were being adequately paid for by new" (221). "The Smalleys' stature", to quote Jacqueline Banerjee's apt words, "never high, has shrunk almost to nothing" (*Paul Scott* 75). Having to undergo humiliation is much more painful to Lucy, but she accepts her condition with a mild stoicism. With the British having left India, not only is their claim for superiority annulled, "they even denied the chance to survive as respectable citizens", writes Manjusree S. Kumar (*Search for Identity* 37).

Lucy understands that the colonial paradigm has been replicated by the brown elite and the international jet-set tycoons in India with Mrs Bhoolabhoj at its base and at its peak people like the Desais, "who had been nothing,

were now as rich as Croesus and marrying their daughter into the family of a minister who himself had become rich by putting a price on his department's favours" (*Staying On* 94-95).

In the postcolonial India, Tusker is not only the dethroned ruler but also a clown to entertain the natives. Colonel Menaktara's Holi party witnessed Tusker's clownish performances:

There he was, in the garden of the oldest and most beautiful bungalow in Pankot,
a gesticulating clown, coloured from head to foot and giving a performance that was not so much attracting attention as forcing laughter from the immaculately dressed and well-behaved Indians whom he was haranguing, or telling some unseemly story to. (174)

Now Tusker is the clown who entertains at parties, who speaks his own comic language. Tusker's antics represent an overturned world because, for Scott, the status of the Raj's representatives in India has been inverted.

The final blow to the shrunken status of the Raj is conveyed by the act of rejection symbolized in the letter written by Mrs Bhoolabhoy asking the Smalleys to vacate the rooms they have rented. The crude letter, composed like "a warrant for the execution of an old friend" (233) by Mr Bhoolabhoy, giving the dreaded news, is tantamount to deportation, proves fatal to Tusker who has just been on the mend after an illness. Along with Tusker, Mr Bhoolabhoy who is a victim of the system, treats the letter as a warrant for his own life-long imprisonment: "He would spend his remaining years like a little dog at Lila's heels, panting after her all round India and perhaps beyond the black water, wagging his tail, until she decided it was time to have him put down" (233).

5. CONCLUSION

The loss of the Empire and the consequences of eviction are the two major themes of *Staying On*. The Smalley's' eviction from Smith's parallels the end of the Empire and the effective eviction of the British from India. The death of Tusker similarly mirrors the death of the Raj, or the closing down of the old order, and the fate of Lucy left alone "amid the alien corn, waking, sleeping, alone for ever and ever" (253).

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