HISTORY AS A NARRATIVE PRINCIPLE IN THE MAJOR NOVELS OF PAUL SCOTT

ABSTRACT
OF THE THESIS
SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
Doctor of Philosophy
IN ENGLISH

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ALIGARH (INDIA)
2013
ABSTRACT

History connects us with our past. It is concerned with the recovering of the facts that deal with the bygone days. All that is preserved or remembered of the past, and which is especially in written form that helps in interpreting past events involving human beings is known as history. The record or account of past events and developments is often chronological in approach. These records contain dates, events, episodes, and incidents etc., which help us to figure out what happened and how specific events and cultural developments affected individuals and societies as a whole.

The past cannot be considered as dead or inactive because in one way or the other, it is still influencing and negotiating with our present world. We cannot regard history as something purely objective, rather it can be perceived as a series of events and phenomena that are correlated, interpreted and envisaged by the historian through his point of view. Therefore, history is an unending dialogue between the past and the present, where past helps us in the understanding of the contemporary world. When history is blended with the narrative, it gives birth to historiography.

Historiography is a body of historical literature that attends to – how we study, process and transmit history to the world. It is a tool in the hands of a writer that helps him to imagine and reconstruct the past by dwelling upon the records of the past. It takes into account the aim of the author who is writing
history, the various sources used by him and verifies their authenticity. This 
means that it does not only accept the content but also traces the sources that lie 
behind it. It aims at unearthing the logic of production of history in context of 
literature. Writers dealing with historiography go beyond historical enquiry; 
ythey widen the historical context in order to create historical sense. For those 
writers/authors of literary texts (read fiction) who see a symbiotic relationship 
between history and literature, history does not remain a backdrop or a setting 
in their writings but permeates the textual practice; it is embedded in its context 
beliefs, culture, power structures; thus the literary text becomes bound by the 
prevailing conditions — political, historical and cultural considerations. One 
such writer whose novels are shaped and informed by the circumstances and 
discourses specific to a particular era of history (colonial India especially the 
last decades of British Raj) is Paul Scott — a Post Modern British novelist. As a 
novelist he has explored and presented India under the colonial rule. He has 
foocussed his authorial attention on some powerful historical events of the 
twilight years of the Raj, so as to reflect upon the colonial experience and map 
an insightful picture of colonial India. From the beginning of his career, he was 
preoccupied with the idea of history which was to develop and become an 
integral aspect of his writing/novels.

The story, background, idea and technique of Scott's novels are 
confederated with history. His historical mode of thinking assigned a central 
and basic significance to his fiction because of his creative treatment of it. The
uniqueness of his art lies in the fact that his emphasis is not only on Indian history, but along with it he provides a universal dimension to it through his liberal humanistic outlook.

Scott’s novels dealing with history are an attempt to present a record of the experience of the Raj; the culture of imperialism; the Indo-British politics through the lives and situations of his fictional characters. They study the different aspects of the last years of British rule in India. His books present his own views about colonization, imperialism, racism etc. He not only gauges the politics of imperial India but takes into consideration the impact and consequences of the Second World War on India vis-à-vis Britain’s participation/involvement in it.

Through the force of historical events and circumstances and powerfully evoked characters, Scott has given ample evidence of the political, social, cultural as well as religious background of India through which he makes his meaning clear and explicit. While traversing the path of writing historical fiction, his creative process calls attention to the underlying structure of the textual narrative. One can identify the strand of history as it interacts with the other elements of the narrative to create ‘narrative cohesion’. Thus the narrative/tale of his novels is the actual sequence of events as they take place whereas the outline/artifice consists of the historical events as they have been presented so as to construct a detailed framework that can be adapted/related to the narrative perspective/action/setting.
Scott as a novelist had set for himself the enormous task of capturing through his fiction the political drama of the demise of imperialism in India. The last decade of British Raj was to provide him with the framework for his fictional/historical purpose. However, while encapsulating the political situation of the period, he has also presented the society of the 1940s, in order to bring alive the culture of imperialism. In doing so he has given expression to various emotions of love, hatred, fear, sympathy, compassion, jealousy, dignity, behaviour and sacrifice through his characters (both Indian and English) – Aunt Shalini, Hari Kumar, Daphne Manners, Tom Gower, Dorothy Gower, Mohammed Ali Kasim, Count Dmitri Bronowsky, Sarah Layton, Miss Edwina Crane, Miss Barbie Batchelor, William Conway, Ronald Merrick, Brigadier Reid etc.

Paul Scott has given an insightful picture of India's encounter with the British Raj in its struggle for freedom. The discussed occurrences/events are that of the Second World War, Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, Indian National Movement, Quit India Movement, Indian Independence, Partition of India and creation of Pakistan. Against the significance of these real historical happenings he has posited fictitious and imaginative events in course of his novels so as to help the readers to come to a clear understanding of history, leaving no room to question the historicity of the texts.

A prolific writer with thirteen novels to his credit, Paul Scott's literary career has been divided into three phases (early, middle and last) which are
illustrative of his development/growth as a writer. This categorisation is significant in context of the present study too, as the novels selected for analysis (from each phase) help to emphasize as well as trace the growth of Scott’s sense of history; the close link he forged between history and fiction as well as how history was for him a stimulant to inspire his creative genius and evolve the artist in him. Each phase of his literary career is imbued with his love for history (colonial history) which finds a creative expression in the novels of that period of writing.

The present study aims to take up all those novels of Paul Scott which provide a historical reading. It examines how Scott mediates a relationship between history and fiction to give expression to his ‘historical impulse’ and probes how the details of historical events and happenings are invoked by the novelist in order to lend authenticity to his ‘imaginative reworking’ of history, his ‘engagement’ with history. The novels selected for this study are *Johnnie Sahib, The Alien Sky, The Birds of Paradise, The Raj Quartet* comprising four books – *The Jewel in the Crown, The Day of the Scorpion, The Towers of Silence* and *A Division of the Spoils*. These novels have been examined wherein the plot, story, characters, actions, ideologies, situations – all hinge upon history.

This research study consists of four chapters along with the introduction and conclusion. The Introduction offers the readers a concept of history and defines historiography in order to provide a proper context for the
understanding of Scott’s major novels. It tries to go beyond the existing criticism on Paul Scott so as to bring into focus the historical reading of the selected novels.

Chapter I deals with *Johnnie Sahib* and *The Alien Sky*. These novels belong to Scott’s early phase of writing. *Johnnie Sahib* is an interesting novel, set against the background of the Second World War. The setting is detailed with military movements and operations, and typical scenes of camps, hospitals, barren fields, roads and convoys. Paul Scott began his writing career with this book. His love of history and interest in India – the sub-continent is amply evidenced in the course of the plot. Skillfully, he has structured into it, historical facts and details of World War Second as well as the plight of the Eurasian community. The facts of history inform and intervene in the lives of the characters that they become a living reality. The book displays his concern for the native Indians, the Eurasian community as well as for the whole world which was caught in the vortex of the Second World War.

In *The Alien Sky* the imperial attitudes, aggressive tactics, machinations and subterfuges all come for an exposé in the structuring of the novel. Rumours, gossip and facts are intermixed in order to create an image of historical reality. The novel exposes the British ideological disguises and suppressions to uncover the historical and political conflicts and designs. It highlights the historical experience of – assumptions of superiority, subordination of natives, power politics, and imperial decline. Paul Scott in
course of the narrative has significantly posited the effect and affect of India's freedom, and Partition on different people with varying aims and ambitions. Their plans, actions and reactions were the result of the political turbulent situation of the country. All of them had certain objectives related to the last days of the British in India. Every aspect of political, social and cultural history has been thoroughly researched, explored and kneaded into the plot/structure of the novel. The historical factors inform, control and dominate the life of all the characters in context of the happenings, issues and problems that signified the period.

Chapter II deals with *The Birds of Paradise* which belongs to his middle phase of writing. The novel is a fine blend of fictional details with the history of British India. Set against the principal background of Princely (states of) India, the time period covered is from 1919 to 1961 as the narrator tries to recreate his past from the images of memory as they come to him since the moment of his birth in India in 1919 to the time he revisits it on a sabbatical leave in 1961 and settles down at the island of Manoba - a lonely man. In retrospect, William Conway reminisces about the course of his own life where the major portion of his life is related to that of the history of colonial India. A broad spectrum of historical details inform the narrative, thereby highlighting the history attendant to the colonial rule, especially that of the princely states, the policies of the Raj and the ultimate fragmentation of India into the
dominion of India and Pakistan. The inherent symbolism of the title *The Birds of Paradise* lends an artistic beauty to a well documented historical narrative.

Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet* belongs to the last phase of his writing career. The first two novels of the *Quartet*, i.e. *The Jewel in the Crown* and *The Day of the Scorpion* have been analyzed in chapter III. The historical background of *The Jewel of the Crown* analyzes and inspects history by dealing with a range of characters related directly or indirectly with the ongoing political happenings/crises of the times. The Edwina Crane episode and the Bibighar incident help to posit the love-hate relationship between India and Britain, between white (ruler) and black (ruled). The novel focusses on the cursed relationship of an inter-racial love affair between Daphne and Hari Kumar and the consequences of the Bibighar happening — Daphne's rape by six Indian men. The primary events are told through different narrators and the story moves forward against the backdrop of Quit India Movement of 1942 which was the result of the failure of Cripps Mission.

*The Day of the Scorpion* documents the growing political pressures and tensions during the last days of British India. Amidst these tensions, the Bibighar incident is commented upon and analyzed from different perspectives of a wide range of characters. The incident signifies the growing mistrust, hostility and intolerance between the ruler(s) and the natives. Other than this, the Indian National Movement is depicted as having become an indomitable
force working towards India’s independence. In the novel, Scott has with great accuracy and remarkable perceptiveness recreated the spirit of the time.

Chapter IV deals with the last two novels of the Quartet, i.e. *The Towers of Silence* and *A Division of the Spoils*. *The Towers of Silence* is the shortest book of the Quartet. It serves as a medium to give uniformity to the plot of the Quartet by working out details omitted in the earlier novels and collating them with the present narrative. It reads as a critique of author’s criticism of the colonial attitudes and policies implemented by British against the Indians. The novel explores the growth of INA and the worsening of the political situation during the 1940s. Subhas Chandra Bose, the founder of Indian National Army (INA), fighting for the cause of his country’s independence is depicted as a great threat to the British Empire with his extremist views. By focussing on the role of the memsahibs of Pankot and their decadent life style, the book comes out as a social document of the then scenario. *The Towers of Silence* presents the crumbling edifice of the Empire, as its illusions slowly disintegrate in wake of the political upheavals in the twilight years of the Raj.

*A Division of the Spoils*, the longest book of the Quartet takes into cognizance the historical details of Britain’s withdrawal from India, transfer of power, Partition and the violence and bloodshed that took place in the year 1947. It also conjoins the events discussed in the earlier three books. With this novel, the tale of imperial embrace is brought to a ceremonious end. The British retreat from India created innumerable complexities, both for the ruler
and the ruled. This quagmire has been presented in the final book of the series. The fictional details once again have been excellently amalgamated with that of history. Historically/chronologically the book covers the period from the time of Germany’s defeat in May 1945 to the independence of India in August 1947. The novel helps the readers to penetrate through the deeper layers of meaning of Raj phenomenon and hence gauge the death of the Raj. The story that started with The Jewel in the Crown focussing on the rape of Daphne Manners and the violent attack on Miss Edwina Crane ends with A Division of the Spoils, detailing the dissolution of the Empire. The novel along with the earlier books thus gives an insight into the culture of imperialism and Indo-British politics that comprised the Raj (history) through lives and situations of its many characters.

The Conclusion offers in brief the finding of this study and explains how history is an undeniable aspect/principle of Scott’s narrative art. How history inspired him to give structure/shape to his major novels. Scott’s prose facilitates a subtle negotiation with history and gives expression to the ‘historical impulse’ so much so as to draw implicit parallel between historical reality and fiction. The discussed novels suggest how the last phase of India’s colonial history worked as a stimulant for Paul Scott and helped him to project reality (historical facts) masterfully blended with his fiction.