CHAPTER 1

EARLY PHASE NOVELS:

JOHNNIE SAHIB and THE ALIEN SKY
JOHNNIE SAHIB

*Johnnie Sahib* was Paul Scott’s first novel. It was sent to seventeen publishers before Eyre & Spottiswoode accepted and published it in 1952. In spite of so many early rejections it met with literary success. Scott was in his early twenties when the Second World War started. England mustered him in and soon he was on his way to fight the Japanese in the East. During the War he stayed in India for most of the time which eventually captured both his intellectual and emotional interest. In course of his writing career, he started uniting the dry facts of history with fictional characters and thus gave shape to his masterpieces. His successful intermingling of historical account with imaginary characters was the result of his own active participation in the actual happenings. Right from his first novel, Scott exhibits his narrative interest in history which was to remain with him throughout his literary career.

An eponymous novel, *Johnnie Sahib*, is centered on its charismatic protagonist Captain Johnnie Brown and the air supply company for which he worked during the Second World War, when the American and British troops swept through Burma to Mandalay. Situated in the border area of India and Burma, during the period of March 1944 to March 1945, the story is divided into five parts — Comitarla, Pruilli, Tamel, Pyongiu and Mandalay respectively. The air supply unit at Comitarla is shown to be managed by a Major under whom Johnnie Brown and rest of the team — Jim, Moti Ram, Ghosh, Scott, and Jan Mohammed worked. The novel captures the struggle for leadership and
supremacy, both, at the international level (World War) and at the level of the unit. The Major’s resentment of Johnnie is the mainstay of the story, wherein the individual differences, hostilities, and guilt are brought out effectively with the help of related episodes. Paul Scott focusses upon the historical data of the war situation, power, politics, expansionist designs, treaties and trade-offs and skilfully weaves them into the narrative.

Paul Scott in *Johnnie Sahib* has primarily focussed on the Second World War from the British-Indo perspective. The novel is set against the backdrop of Wingate’s operation in Burma during 1943-44, a major military operation of the British in the Second World War. The beginning of the World War II is considered to have hastened the end of the British Empire in India; in fact of accelerating the process of Britain’s decline as a world power. At that time the imperial government found itself facing a difficult situation because of the rising political strength and intent of the Indian National Congress. Politically motivated and hungry for freedom it (Congress) was ready to seize the maximum benefit from the moment. Britain’s interest and participation in the war to safeguard its own political interests was not possible without the involvement of the Indians. Thus, the Congressmen found the time opportune to lay down their terms and conditions: the British were to grant to India the right to self-determination in return for India’s support of providing additional military man power to the British Army. Britain thus found itself in a ‘do or die’ situation. In the course of the novel, the writer has also made use of a story
of a lost expedition during the Second Great War; the formation of Chindits – a special force trained in Commando methods of warfare, the beginning of the airdrops by the air supply company to Orde Wingate’s Chindits, behind the Japanese lines in Burma. The Chindits led by Orde Wingate, a British army officer with a vast experience of war situations played a major role in the Second World War. He was the creator of special military units in Palestine in the 1930s and World War II:

The Chindits were the largest of the allied Special Forces of the Second World War. They were formed and led by Major General Orde Wingate DSO. The Chindits operated deep behind enemy lines in North Burma in the War against Japan. For many months they lived and fought the enemy in the jungles of Japanese occupied Burma, totally relying on airdrops for their supplies.

There were two Chindits operations into Burma, the first in February 1943 Operation Longcloth, consisted of a force of 3,000 men who marched over 1,000 miles during the campaign. The second expedition, Operation Thursday, in March 1944 was on a much larger scale. It was the second largest airborne invasion of the war and consisted of 20,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers with air support provided by the 1st Air Commando USAAF. Tragically their leader, General Wingate, was killed a few weeks later after the launch of Operation Thursday. (Chindits)

Paul Scott in the delineation of the characters of Johnnie, Major and Colonel Baxter has given expression to his creative genius. The novel is informed with factual details of an air supply unit as Scott himself had worked in one such company while serving his nation during the war. This
autobiographical aspect lends authenticity and validity to the historical facts used by him. The narrative design of Johnnie Sahib has taken cognizance of all these historical details and created characters who actively participate in all these happenings. The role of the air supply company has received special focus from the writer to foreground its significance in context of the war scenario. The air supply unit had provided the Chindits (operating deep behind enemy lines in North Burma) with water, food, arms and ammunitions for many a months, and played god to their weakening morale.

Badiger, describes the plot of the novel thus:

... set in the border area of India and Burma like, Comitarla, Prulli, Tamel, Pyongiu at the end of the Second World War. The timeframe of the narrative is of one year – from March 1944 to March 1945. In the third – person narrative technique, Scott tells the story of thwarted love and irresponsibility of Captain Johnnie Brown, a charismatic but irresponsible liberal – progressive sahib. The name ‘Brown’ implicitly suggests Johnnie’s paternalism – his love for the Indian orderlies. Being an ‘odd man’ in the places of war – the subject of indignation and claustrophobia, he often goes out on leave to escape from the tight schedule of military work given by his Major. The narrative moves from place to place as the convoy goes onward and onward. (10)

The book opens at Comitarla, where Colonel Baxter has arrived for the inspection of the air supply company and is received by Scott, the head of Section 2. There is a probability that Paul Scott has used this name (Scott) deliberately, to authenticate the historical fact because he himself had worked in an air supply unit. Though he has not developed the character of Scott but
implications are there that he has tried to represent himself through this character.

The very first page of the novel introduces the readers to the war-like atmosphere. The dialogues and description of the surroundings highlight the negative effects of the clash of the super powers that had engulfed the whole world. Paul Scott focusses upon them to detail the impact of the war in the life of everyone, so much so that its effects could be seen everywhere and on everything:

Scott was explaining something, but the Colonel hardly listened, contented to give himself up to the care of this shabby, tall, thin officer and be led by him across the burning airfield towards a snub-nosed fifteen-hundredweight truck drawn up in the shade of some trees behind a sheltered bay. (Scott, Johnnie 7)

The description of the burning airfield – the result of some bombardment or attack during the Second World War brings to life a scene of active battle front. The ongoing war was at its height in the year 1943 – fighter planes, crashes, bombs and bombardments, barren lands, desolation, loss of life and hope had become the norm of existence. While moving out of town and towards the air supply company they (Colonel and Scott) witnessed “... the grey houses and beaten-down gardens that had once belonged to rich merchants, departed now for the comforts of a more peaceful India” (9). This fact throws light on the actuality of the prevailing conditions of the 1940s when people wanting to live
in safety and security of the interior lands (the only non-violent places) had to evacuate their homes and abandon their properties.

During the later part of the Second World War, Assam had become the scene of intensive war activities of the Allied forces. However, the advancing Japanese army towards India was halted due to the battle of Nagaland and Manipur. This was to be the culmination point of the war going on in the eastern part of India. This fact has been highlighted in the narrative by alluding to the invasion on Assam by the Japanese. Colonel Baxter realized that Japan in its expansionist programme was desperate to invade Assam. He makes mention of this important historical fact when talking about the air supply companies and commending on the importance of the work done by Scott and his team.

*Johnnie Sahib* — set against the backdrop of British Imperialism and informed by the Raj phenomenon, takes into context the colonial assumptions and relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. In the course of the novel, the very process of India’s colonization comes into consideration and interrogation; what had initially began as an economic venture and enterprise, eventually translated into political expansion and territorial consolidation by the British:

Situated as it was on the Bengal Assam railway, Comitarla had become, like Comilla further to the south, a mildly prosperous trading centre in peace-time. Of that Baxter knew nothing, but he guessed that war had also brought its reward to local contractors, for everywhere amid the green fecundity of grass and glistening leaves, jostling
against the stone houses and temples, and lined along the banks of the water tanks were the locally constructed bamboo huts known as bashas, and in these as well as in the requisitioned houses were signs that the army had taken over and established itself with an air of ownership, erecting signboards, festooning telephone cables through the trees which lined the metalled road. The soldiers he saw walking in the town were predominantly Indian, but here and there were British and African and occasionally, as a reminder that war is transitory, a dhoti-clad, cycle-riding civilian. (Scott, Johnnie 9)

The above details advert to the historical fact of the very process of India’s colonization; the East India Company had arrived to dominate large mercantile areas of India but gradually with its administrative prowess and British military power succeeded to become India’s ruler. Due to the imperial patronage, the Company was successful in the expansion of its commercial trading enterprise and flourished till the end of the Raj period.

Britain entered the Second World War in order to wrest political advantage for itself. This resulted in extreme hardship and sufferings for the natives. Though the war was a transient affair, yet its impact and repercussions on India/Indians were going to be severe and long-lasting. Thus in 1939, when the Viceroy of British India informed the world (without consulting the major nationalist leaders) that India had declared war, it escalated in worsening the relations between the Muslim League and Congress, because the League was supporting the war on Germany. This did much to affect the internal politics of India. The Indian parties were vexed with the attitude of the British government which underpinned its aggressive tactics. They realized that
Britain's participation in the war was only to protect and further its own imperialist interests.

Colonel Baxter was happy that he was sent to Comitarla as it happened to be a place that "gave an edge to life, a spice, a tang" (Scott, *Johnnie* 10). As a military man he could construe its significance:

... as it must have been during the last few months ever since, in April, the Japs had crossed the border between Burma and India and threatened Kohima, held Imphal to siege. This town he knew had played its part in what had become known as the Imphal Flap.

In the Second World War, the Battle of Imphal had been the turning point in the Burma campaign along with the Battle of Kohima. Scott imparts historical details to his readers (giving us an insight into Baxter's reflections as he is excogitating about things) about the Japanese crossing the border between India and Burma, the oppression of Kohima by the Japanese, the surrounding, blockading and capturing of Imphal. Thus, he contributes more historical information about the Great War - the prevalent situation of the year 1943-44, and the political scenario of the 1940s. While intruding upon the consciousness of Colonel Baxter, the readers are privileged to learn more about the war front:

The focal point of the war had become the airfields of Bengal, and Baxter felt himself moved suddenly to excitement; for what sort of a soldier would one be, he asked himself, if one did not embrace new techniques enthusiastically? 1944 was the year of confidence; 1942 the year of dismay.
Paul Scott digs into the history of the times and connects with the perspective of the Allied Forces so as to familiarize the readers with significant political negotiations and historical turning points. The year 1944 was considered “the year of confidence” by those who subscribed to the notion of violence and destruction in warfare and championed the use of force in invading and occupying lands indifferent to it becoming the deadliest conflict in history. Though the war was proving to be lethal and pernicious, it was hailed as positive because it was efficacious for many nations like United States of America. However, 1942 has been called “the year of dismay” because the Japanese wrested Philippines from the U.S., forced the British to withdraw its forces from the Indian Ocean and advanced towards Australia. Thus, during the year 1942, Britain was going through a bad phase on the international front and in a counter move to protect its imperial design, status and power, it had no choice but to involve India in the war.

Colonel Baxter was a man of action who belonged to that group of men who were ever enthusiastic with the ideals and spirit of army life. While moving on the metalled road with Scott, he did not pay heed to what Scott was saying because he was enthused by his own thoughts about the army: “This place smells of the army,” he told himself. ‘The army’s my life, and this is where I ought to be’” (Scott, Johnnie 10). That there were unaccountable lives, disillusioned or wrecked because of war(s) never crossed his mind. History has been witness to the fact that wars, battles and conflicts instill disillusionment
and detachment for people recruited in the army. Political strategies, negotiations and intercessions have allowed fighting men (soldiers) to be sacrificed in the name of nationalism, patriotism and loyalty. Wars have been prolonged for political reasons and gains with no efforts to put an early end to them. Paul Scott has painstakingly depicted this feature by hinting how the people who worked in air supply companies and army, tried to alleviate the strains and pressures of war by engaging themselves in trivial activities. Scott, Johnnie, Major, Jim – all of them have been shown occupied thus. There are references in the novel to their visiting brothels in order to lessen the tensions of warfare.

In *Johnnie Sahib*, the novelist has recreated the war scene to interrogate its significance. World War Second was fought over differences left unresolved after World War First. The world was at war and military conflicts were being staged for vested interests, for occupation of land and for power and prestige. However, it (war) had a totally different meaning for more than half of the world, (soldiers) who were fighting on the front. They existed in a state of perpetual gloom and despair. World War II caused heavy casualties, taking a heavy toll of life and property. The outcome of the war was disastrous. It generated feelings of anguish and alienation. The First World War was thought to be ‘the war to end all wars’ but the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, worsened the political conditions, escalated violence and destruction, and thus annihilated the basic beliefs and values of the people. With no dearth of
arms and ammunitions, honour seemed in killing and destroying. The very meaning of existence seemed to have undergone a change. It was a world sans value for life and people. Devoid of humane reflection it brought grief all around. Paul Scott has projected such a point of view through Jim:

He looked away. The emptiness was always there, like an abyss. The abyss was not bridged by a loose comradeship supposedly brought to life by war. That was a half-truth, the result of groping round the edges of thought. The need for companionship was always there; and the abyss was always there to be bridged. War only stripped the camouflage so that, in the holocaust, a man could see all that was worth keeping, all that was worth saving from destruction. (Scott, *Johnnie* 41)

Contrarily, the reflections of Havildar Dass help the reader to survey the important 'verifiable situation' of the war, that once all is well at the war front and that no threat loomed anymore, one could look forward to peace and rest. Such were his thoughts as he along with Moti Ram, Jan Mohammed and others was busy folding the panels of the parachutes – a routine job:

For a year they had worked hard. Recently there had been no sleep for sometimes two or three days at a stretch. But now the big battle was over. Johnnie Sahib had said so. The relief of Imphal in far-off Manipur was imminent (that had been Nimu’s expression, and Dass only half-understood its meaning); now the air supply company at Comitarla could rest, and go on leave, and do all the things which were good and comfortable . . . (15)

The novelist has allowed into the novel a plurality of voices – Colonel Baxter, Jim, Havildar Dass – to capture the meaning and significance of war
and its consequences for different people. Imphal, the state capital of Manipur in the north-eastern part of India was coveted by the Japanese but the British had been victorious in the Battle of Imphal. By the summer of 1943, British forces had begun to dominate the war. Situation was under their control and in their favour. Therefore, Johnnie’s announcement to his subordinates that the big battle was over, brought relief to the tired personnel of his unit. In the course of fulfilling an order of a dropping to the army men fighting in the jungles, he is accompanied by Jim Taylor, a new officer. A casual query of Johnnie as to what had Jim been doing before joining the Comitarla supply company makes him introspect thus:

What had he been doing? There had been nothing until now, nothing really to remember except boredom and an infinite stretch of meaningless days spent in the scorching sun of India. Lahore; Ambala; high, cool messes with silent bearers grouped round a morose Colonel for whom the war could only mean the remorseless shelf of neglect; a dying-on-the-feet, out of date and limited by tradition and experience. The war had never reached the cantonments, and to set down in one, by reason of war, had had its own irony, its own hopelessness. (Scott, Johnnie 38)

In the novel, Scott has so blended the political and historical facts, data and details that document the reality of war, its cause and effect that they help to propound the authorial intention as well as keep the narrative interest alive. A significant narrative ploy is of the Major ordering Jim to take over Johnnie’s job. His belief was that Jim could manage well in Johnnie’s leave of absence. However, his dislike of Johnnie prevented him to understand that
temperamentally both men were very different from each other. The Major, 
realized as well as resented Johnnie’s successful style of working. His was an 
ego clash with Johnnie. While talking to Jim, he had indirectly referred to 
Johnnie as “a disrespectful dope” (Scott, Johnnie 38). Thus, Johnnie’s leave 
gave him the opportunity to hand over the responsibilities of the whole unit to 
Jim, which was to march towards Imphal and return to Comitarla at night. 
Though Jim took over the job but he could feel Johnnie’s presence. The 
orderlies resented the change and were not happy under him and behaved 
arrogantly in Johnnie’s absence.

The move of the air supply unit to Prulli under the leadership of Jim to 
drop ammunition and other supplies to the American bombers which had 
arrived for bombardment reflects upon the war mindset:

‘The Americans,’ thought the major as he stood watching them with 
Jim besides him, ‘do things with style – like Johnnie.’ The lumbering 
Dakotas of the English and Canadian Squadrons would come in well 
spaced, at decent intervals; but now the sky was loud and heavy with 
bombers circling the field, one touching down almost before the one it 
followed had decently taxied to the end of the runway and off on to 
the loading apron. Drawn up at the side of the road were the first half-
dozen lorries that carried ammunition loads. The Mitchells bunched 
and grouped close together and opened their bomb-bays with an air of 
grotesque hunger. (60)

The above details verify the fact that the American forces were effective 
Enough in defeating the Japanese and limiting their breakthroughs. By mid-
summer of 1942, they had successfully halted the advancing Japanese as well as destroyed their troop convoys; thus preventing further attacks from them.

When Johnnie came back to Prulli after twelve days of leave, he saw at the other side of the strip, “six or seven American bombing planes” and was informed by the airmen that they were, “‘Mitchell bombers . . . doing an ammo lift into Imphal’” (Scott, Johnnie 82). Annoyed and puzzled, he sat down on his holdall and surveyed the surroundings. “There was a flat, dead greyness about Bengal that struck him anew, a greyness which seemed to seep into the green of leaf and tree” (83). The war like atmosphere had permeated into every little thing around them. Later, in the office of the Major, Jim heard Johnnie angrily exclaiming:

‘And isn’t that just like Delhi,’ Johnnie was saying. ‘For years they turn up their noses at the whole idea of supply by air and then when they see it’s the thing of the future they invent it up all over again and pretend nobody’s ever thought about it but themselves. Then they stick in a staff organisation over our heads – over our heads mark you – and we’re supposed to be told how to run air supply by a set of half-baked bloody staff officers. It makes me bloody sick.’ (88)

Johnnie’s resentment was against the staff set-up that was coming to take over (them). It would have its own rules and regulations. This was unacceptable to him. He had lived his life on his own terms and conditions and firmly believed that there was no need of any staff set-up to regulate them. They had always handled their job successfully:
'Now that it's a success?' Johnnie stood up. 'Only now? What about Wingate? What about the Arakan, Imphal? The whole damn shoot? We ran it then and we can run it again. Christ! How you blokes can sit there...'

(Scott, *Johnnie* 89)

Johnnie wanted Colonel Baxter to remember the work that they had carried out successfully at the time of Wingate Operation, Arakan and in Imphal. He was not ready to be controlled by anyone other than his own self. He knew very well that whenever all of them worked together, be it in Imphal, Arakan, or the Wingate, they were always triumphant. His unit worked for him and not for any war or capturing of a territory. It was his command that they followed, even if it was the middle of the night, "... The war for them begins and ends in what Captain Brown does, what he says and how he says it" (102). They did not need the staff to regulate them. In the course of the same conversation, the Major tries to pacify Johnnie thus:

'Because of what I’ve said, about things having a habit of not going along in a straight line. You’ve constantly got to be adjusting yourself, even your views, to meet certain situations. You’ve got to be flexible. I suppose it boils down to one fact, Johnnie. That there’s only one loyalty that matters. The loyalty to yourself. And it’s the most difficult of the lot, because it often means that other loyalties look as if they’re going by the board.’ (104)

This adjunct on loyalty to one’s self allows the writer to look into India’s colonial history and explore yet another reason for the success of the Raj in the sub-continent. Paul Scott here posits his own theory on faith/loyalty. Had Indians been loyal to themselves and their motherland, then the English
would not have been able to subjugate and rule over them for about two hundred years. The Raj had prospered because of the loyalty of Indians towards them. The present instance of Nimu and Moti Ram speaks of the fact. They were loyal to their “sahib” and could lay down their lives for him. They fought against each other to win Johnnie’s heart. But the need of the hour was to stand united and fight against the alien ruler. Through the examples of these two characters, Paul Scott makes an ironic comment on the loyalty of Indians towards their foreign masters. The whole air unit was devoted and loyal to Johnnie; had they (Indians) the same feelings for their motherland, India would have become independent long ago.

From this point onwards as the narrative moves towards conclusion, it draws heavily on the factual details related to the Second World War in context of British-India’s involvement in it. It takes note of the prime factor of the Japanese army being assailed back from the Indo-Burmese border, and the Mitchell operation (for which the ‘staff’ had come to regulate the air supply company) also being terminated. Later with the Major’s return from leave, the unit was informed to move to south of Imphal to Tamel (the scene of the last part of the novel). The Tamel section once again brings out strongly, the impact of the ongoing war and reinforces the element of destruction and desolation thus:

Below Imphal the road to Tiddim passes through the village of Tamel; and at Tamel the fighter strip had been converted into a bomber strip. Now, in October, with the grey drift of the monsoon giving way to the
bright sunshine, an army of bull-dozers, pioneer troops and local coolie labour had invaded the airfield and already changed it beyond recognition. A tarmac runway stretched for two thousand yards, eating into the fields that had been farmland before the war came. Around the runway a circular road was being cut; and on the isolated hill which commanded the aerodrome tents had grown like white mushrooms. At the southern end of the runway a wide area had been levelled to make a communal loading and parking bay for the transport planes of the Dakota Squadrons. (Scott, Johnnie 119)

As the novel comes to a close, the readers are informed about the activities and movements of the characters who were important pegs in the narrative structure. Johnnie goes to Imphal for a brief period and wishes to return to Marapore. Both Jim and Colonel Baxter arrive in Tamel. Johnnie’s men, Moti Ram, Ghosh, Jan Mohammed continue to defy Jim’s orders. In Pyongiu, Baxter too realizes that nobody could manage Johnnie’s section. Jim continues to feel that he had betrayed Johnnie, the burden of his guilt always torturing him. He was convinced that he had failed in his attempt of managing Johnnie’s section properly. Later when Ghosh and Jan Mohammed, (Johnnie’s orderlies) die in a plane crash in Mandalay, he holds himself responsible for that too. He writes a letter to Johnnie but never has the courage to post it. He finally realized that the section had always belonged to Johnnie and never accepted him in his stead. At the end, the readers are informed that Johnnie was in Ambala, and was happy. He had decided to stay and work there.

The novel also explores Johnnie Brown’s affair with Nina, an Anglo-Indian nurse who decides to leave him. When Jan Mohammed, speaks about it
to other people in the cantonment, Nimu remarked: "In war-time, all is saying goodbye" (Scott, *Johnnie* 15). The Second World War had caused a number of people to break relationships and forced them to leave their close ones as there were no other options. The negative impact of war on everyone and everything is brought out very strongly in this context. Johnnie and Nina were in love with each other, but the ongoing war affected their commitment and relationship. He was not in a position to be committed to any long relationship. Their love was "businesslike" (20). Both of them knew that there had to be an end. Nina was aware that once she left Comitarla she would not see Johnnie ever again. In the novel, Paul Scott delves into the Eurasian question by detailing the background of Nina’s parenthood. She is the daughter of a Scottish father and an Indian woman:

> When the Japanese came to Burma she and an old school-friend had made their way to Calcutta and there she had been whisked by American troops, promiscuous and gum-chewing, into the night-life of Chowringhee; dancing at the Grand Hotel in skirts absurdly short, the powder on her face and arms too white for the pigment of her skin.

This gives an insight into certain historical facts related to the people of mixed ancestry. Socio-political factors forced Nina and many more to migrate from their country to another. But even this move did not mitigate her humiliation and suffering. As a Eurasian, it was her lot to suffer. The Anglo-Indians were subjected to various kinds of insults at physical, mental, and emotional level; this included slavery and sexual exploitation. During the war their situation simply worsened. In *Johnnie Sahib*, Nina becomes the epitome...
of all Anglo-Indian girls who “... on account of inferior birth and [their] pretences and aspirations of the typical Anglo-Indian woman of the day (sic) took pride in being the sexual companion of a white male” (Badiger 15).

Paul Scott in his attempt to replicate the details of the Eurasian situation has probed their very psyche and delineated their plight and predicament. The Alien Sky deals with this subject with more thoroughness and exactitude. The Eurasians felt a sense of superiority and pride in being partners of the English and considered the Indians as inferior to them; though ironically, they themselves were denied respect in the British social hierarchy due to their mixed identity. Nina had met Johnnie at a British General Hospital in Comitarla, but as India could not provide her the happiness and love she desired, she wanted to return to Burma. Her Indian experience with the English left her with scarred memories of fear, suffering, pain and repentance. Paul Scott has given voice to the Anglo-Indian issue through the Johnnie - Nina affair. The Eurasian question was a very important aspect of the Raj scene as well as of narrative interest to the writer. Hence, right from his very first novel Paul Scott has posited his concern.

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 course of the
Skilfully, 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 to 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.

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THE ALIEN SKY

Like his other novels, *The Alien Sky* (published in 1953), too, is concerned with the problems associated with the Indian nationalist movement and struggle for freedom. The period depicted in the book is the eve of independence as the British prepared to withdraw from India. The book offers a fragment of the panorama of the British imperial history - its connection with India - the Raj period, focusing on the imperial decline in India and the machinations of the Empire. It largely plays up the problems of the colonizer and the colonized as the British dominance was coming to an end. The novel works upon multiple aspects of the Raj history - the plight of Anglo-Indians during the last years of India's gaining of autonomy, the question of Partition that would result in the creation of two separate states i.e. India and Pakistan, ceding of the princely states, rise of All India Muslim league under the leadership of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the worsening of Hindu-Muslim relationships on the question of transference of power. The story covers
significant historical ground when it explores the possible consequences of the Partition on the people of the subcontinent. In fact, history is witness to the Partition as being one of the largest displacement of people in the twentieth century; a climax within a pattern of recurrent violence in the name of religion, land and power. The characters act and react in accordance to what is going on in the background. Paul Scott has hinted upon the blood-soaked history of India as a result of the Partition. The backdrop of the novel takes into cognizance various aspects of history that inform the narrative on political, social, religious and emotional fronts.

The mood of the novel is both grim and solemn; set in the twilight period of the Raj, the dissolution of the British Empire was a reality. The British who had exploited the economy of India and politically subjugated it to its own imperial designs was in the 1940s up against a radically changing political landscape. Paul Scott, explores the impact of such a situation on the psyche and life of different characters in the book. The days of the British were numbered in the country. Harriet Haig, a British woman is the symbol for English people who considered India as her home. For people like her, England had become a distant memory, they wanted to stay and spend their last days in India. She says, ""... England's not home and I'm afraid its beauty is only memory for me. I've got rather used to India and so I'm staying"" (Scott, Alien 33). This sentiment reminds us of the Smalley couple of Staying On, who, too realized that their destiny was in India, even after India's independence. They
were like Harriet Haig, the residue of the colonial times, its displaced exiles in
post-colonial India. During the Raj period, they had been at the centre of
imperial rule, but in the post-colonial set up they would be pushed to the
periphery of the political-social hierarchy, leading an absurd and defunct life of
insignificant beings, similar to that of the Indians during the Raj period. Here,
Paul Scott posits a postcolonial question. He challenges the English to think of
the colonial experience of the natives, their sufferings; how they suffered being
treated as ‘other’ in their own homeland.

The character of Gower in the novel underpins the problems and details
associated with the imperial rule and the colonial set-up. He is a masterly
creation of Paul Scott to help understand the colonial assumptions and
subterfuge; to offer a critique of political issues and attitudes. Caught in the tide
of political change of the 1940s, he stood to lose all that he had gained over the
years. Indians despised and loathed him as he was English; these were the
people for whom he had set up a farm at Ooni. He had spent a long time
“learning to understand” India, however, everything “changed as quickly” as he
“understood it” (Scott, Alien 85). Everything turned against Gower because of
an article he wrote in Marapore Gazette – to accept the creation of Pakistan
with joy in heart. The conversation between the Indian journalist Gupta (a
Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh man who later took over Gower’s job) and
MacKendrick displays the level of hatred and bitterness the Indians had in their
hearts for the British. The natives desired to acquire their rights by uprooting
the colonizer. Gower and people like him were no more needed in India. Gupta tells MacKendrick that if “... Hindus regret Pakistan then equally the Muslims regret its size and lack of any corridor between its two isolated areas...” (Scott, *Alien* 61). He also makes it clear that India’s problems belonged to Indians only and that they would never accept solutions offered by outsiders (foreigners). They would not tolerate the interference of the Europeans in their politics and religion anymore. Here, Paul Scott gives voice to the need for recognition by all, that the Indians wanted to be accepted as a “nation among nations” (63). Every act would be returned in kind – good for good but bad for worse. The colonial relationship had stretched to its limits by the 1940s and it was clear that the time had come for the British to quit India. India and Indians had decided their fate (independence), the deal had been made with the British government and Lord Mountbatten – the last Viceroy of British India was giving shape to it by “formalising with impressive documents” (61).

The character of Major Milner, a war-time instructor at the Officers’ Training School highlights the reason for failure of the British in India. While conversing with Joe he says:

“... We lost the Indian Empire when we introduced Matriculation or whatever bloody thing it is they fail every year. We’ve taught ‘em to read and write a la bloody Whitehall so’s they can write our marching orders. Evolution. Matriculation. Same thing.” (20)

Later in the novel, Major Milner tells Judith Anderson, a Eurasian woman, that how the Indians had replaced him with an Indian in his position. He, like all
other English, had never expected that the native – the negative, the dark opposite of the European would be strong enough to take their place. The happening acts as a marker of the inevitable – the end of the colonial rule. Similarly, Foster, the police officer who interrogates Steele because he had mistakenly killed Bholu, also displays the typical mentality – contempt, derision and indifference of the colonizer (British) towards the Indians. While talking with Steele and Gower he comments:

“No. Between you and me I don’t suppose there’s a soul who cares a fig for Bholu, but it might suit somebody’s book to whip up feeling against you. We don’t want that either. We want a quiet life, this last month or two, don’t we?” He grinned. “Leave things as quiet as we can. Forlorn hope. But there’s no reason why we shouldn’t give them another example of the incorruptibility of British justice.” (Scott, Alien 234)

He had come to investigate the matter because he, like all other Englishmen, wanted to prove the fairness, honesty and uprightness of the British to the Indians; to justify till the end (white man’s burden) their role and superiority as the strong, rational protector.

The handing over of political power in August 1947, marking the end of the British dominance over India was to generate great insecurities for the people – English, Indians as well as the Anglo-Indians. The Anglo-Indians were people of mixed Indian and British ancestry (as discussed earlier). They were detested by the Raj and were derogatively referred as “Eurasians” by them. During the 1940s, the Eurasians formed a significant portion of the
minority community in India. In the context of India’s independence, their community felt insecure and the majority of them wished to stay in India. Caught in the whirlpool of illusionary dreams and identity crisis, they had nowhere to go but to stay in India. Both the British and Indian societies rejected them as offspring of a mixed union. During the imperial rule, the Anglo-Indians had always identified themselves with the British and committed themselves to the glory of the Crown, thereby arousing the hostility, anger and distrust of the Indians. They believed themselves to be superior to Indians, the blacks; whereas in the social hierarchy they were placed even below the natives (Indians) by the British yet they remained loyal and devoted to the Raj:

Prejudice against miscegenation being as strong among the Indians as it is among the British, the Eurasians, the mixed progeny of both, found themselves in a most unhappy position and tried to compensate for the consequences of their existence between two hostile worlds by identifying more and more with the British. But ironically, the more the Eurasians attempted to identify with the British, the stronger became the need for the latter to repudiate them. (Narayanan 87)

The fictitious Marapore of *The Alien Sky* depicts the wide social circle of the British and the Eurasians: the protagonist Tom Gower, his Anglo-Indian wife Dorothy Gower, Cynthia Mapleton, Harriet Haig, Judith Anderson, and Major Milner. All of them were afraid of what the future held for them – they had so much to lose in the wake of India’s independence and at the end of the imperial rule. However, the plight and predicament of the Anglo-Indians was
the worst as they seemed to belong to nowhere. Dorothy Gower was in a
dilemma about her future because of her mixed identity. Her problem reminds
us of Victoria Jones of John Masters’ *Bhowani Junction*. She also like Dorothy
was in search of her identity; the indeterminacy of their roots made them
vacillate between the English and Indian identity. Dorothy’s relationship with
her husband was both troubled and unhappy. When he planned to go back to
England, she refused because she feared that her carefully guarded secret of
being an offspring of mixed birth would be revealed.

Cynthia Mapleton in course of her conversation with Joe MacKendrick
about the Anglo-Indians reveals the extreme dislike and contempt that the
English had for them:

Different names, same gravy, as Robbie used to say. The results of
mis-directed passion. My dear! They’re quite laughable. I’ve known
some, black as your hat, who try and pull your leg they were born and
raised in some respectable London suburb . . .” (Scott, *Alien* 35)

Harriet Haig observes, “‘They’re only like that because both we and the
Indians treat them so abominably. They’re made to feel like social pariahs’”
(36). The “they” brings out the ‘otherness’ of the Eurasians and their situation.
The conversation that took place between MacKendrick and the two ladies
gives us an insight into the stark realities of the chi chis (Eurasians), and their
existence. Their mixed ancestry spoke of debased liaison, thus subjecting them
to ridicule and insult on every possible occasion.
Polyphony of voices is made use of to express views on the subject of India’s Partition (before it was to become a historical reality). Scott has used it as a strategy to add to the narrative perspective of the novel. Everywhere among the Indians was a sense of jubilation that India was soon going to be independent of its colonizers. A joy born of the united efforts of all Indians to achieve their freedom. Yet, this joyous moment was to eventually end in a separation, a painful divide in the form of the Partition of India and Pakistan, one of those unfortunate events that was to change the course of history forever:

During Partition and its aftermath, an empire came to an end and two new nation states were forged from its debris. This ‘operation’, which is often described using the metaphors of surgery, was far from clinical. Partition played a central role in making of Indian and Pakistani national identities and the apparently irreconcilable differences which continue to exist today. . . . Partition, then, is more than the sum of its considerable parts – the hundreds of thousands dead, the twelve million displaced. It signifies the division of territory, independence and the birth of new states, alongside distressing personal memories, and potent collective imaginings of the ‘other’. (Khan 9)

The birth of two nations was an inevitability that the people of the subcontinent had to face. This division of one country into two, a political measure was done on the basis of the religious divide of Hindus and Muslims. It was a major aspect of India’s independence struggle which was to leave its imprint on the psyche of the nation as well its people. The dismembering of the nation was
one of the worst happenings for the people of the sub-continent after the Second World War:

The violence which preceded Partition was grave, widespread and lethal. After 15 August 1947, it took on a new ferocity, intensity and callousness. Now militias trawled the countryside for poorly protected villages to raid and raze to the ground, gangs deliberately derailed trains, massacring their passengers one by one or setting the carriage ablaze with petrol, women and children were carried away like looted chattels. (Khan 128)

In *The Alien Sky*, Bholu – Mac Kendrick’s servant (representative of other Indians in a similar situation) reveals the trauma he was undergoing in the name of Partition. His family was in Lahore:

Now, it was June. In August the British were going and in Lahore the long knives would be out. Each day spent fruitlessly in Marapore was like a thrust of the knife into his own flesh. He hated Marapore. He had hated Calcutta too. Only his need of money, his family’s need, kept him at MacKendrick’s side. In Calcutta he had collected his few belongings together against the moment that would be ripe for absconding. (Scott, *Alien* 15)

Lahore and Amritsar were the two major cities that were affected the most by the Partition. They became the war zones which were left only with bodies, burnt wood and debris of buildings. Though there had been riots in the past, but the violence of the 40s was uncommon in its magnitude and severity. Bholu dies in the novel but his character indirectly throws light on the want of the common people of India to be united with their families. In the name of the division of the country, there was turmoil and chaos all around which was to
have devastating effect on both India and Pakistan. Partition was a cataclysmic event which was to lead to a great genocidal violence all over the country. It claimed many lives in the riots and left thousands homeless in their own land. Earlier there had been a general feeling that the Partition would be a temporary affair and Pakistan would reunite again. However, the creation of the two nations instead of forging relationships brought instead – violence, hatred in its wake that acerbated the relations between the two countries forever.

Vidyasagar, the young athlete, zealously believed like other patriotic Indians that independence would change the fate of India and its countrymen forever. On Sports day, he and his group humiliated Gower with the banners to quit India. An event that draws heavily on the historical data of the 1940s in the form of nationalist struggle and resistance. Indians were becoming aware and enlightened about their rights and duties towards their motherland. In 1942 the Quit India resolution was launched against the British colonial masters. It demanded the immediate egress of the British from the country. The Indians were now openly fighting against the British authority and giving expression to anti-colonial resistance:

But out of the tumult a procession was forming. It uncoiled itself slowly from the maidan like a serpent: Vidyasagar, borne by two youths, behind them the banner with the inscription India for Indians, behind that another banner, Back Up Fair Play (this, in English); then youths with Gandhi caps perched jauntily, whitely on black-haired heads, all manner of youths, laughing, gesticulating, engaged
uproariously in private jokes in the midst of public endeavour. (Scott, *Alien* 54-55)

In course of the novel, Gower accepts the failure of the British in not understanding India. He asserts that British were at fault in not trying to comprehend the needs of the nation and its people which they had ruled for almost two hundred years.

The liberation struggle had spread to every corner of the country, men, women, and children – all alike had one aim, to free their motherland from the chains of slavery. Later in the novel, Vidyasagar’s act of killing Steele to avenge the death of Bholu is seen as an act of patriotism. Euphoric about India’s gaining independence and proud of his own achievement and contribution towards the fight for freedom, he is unafraid of the future. When warned by Gower, he replies with defiance: “‘You are wrong, Mr. Gower. It will be many days, many weeks, many months, before the trial takes place. By that time the British will not be here, and I will have justice’” (255). Every Indian like Vidyasagar was living for the day to see his country free. Thousands of expectations and countless dreams were connected with the day of independence, when India would be for Indians.

The formation of All India Muslim League in Dacca (1906) was an important turning point in the history of modern India. Paul Scott has highlighted this aspect of Indian politics by mentioning Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a key figure in the political drama of Partition. An abortive attack on him at the
Imperial Hotel in Delhi where All India Muslim League was holding a conference, has been made a point of reference in the novel. The assault was an indicator of the cognizance of the growing power and significance of the League as a substantive political body to play a role in the politics of modern India. The novelist also introduces us to the Khaksars, a term given to Moslem fanatics; it was thought that they had executed this attack because they believed that Jinnah had let them down “by not insisting on a corridor” (Scott, *Alien* 192). This hints at the difference of opinion, disagreement and disunity that existed among the Muslims regarding the creation of Pakistan. Though Jinnah was the leader of Muslims but he did not enjoy the support of them all. It was this discord, divide and disharmony among the Indians that had given the British the chance to colonize and rule over India.

At this political juncture both the Hindus and the Congress were uneasy with the growth of Muslim League. The League saw Congress as its political adversary and as its opponent. While Congress had declared itself to be equal for all, irrespective of religion and region, the League openly acknowledged being the representative of all Muslims. Thus, it was the Muslim League versus the Congress – the two parties’ struggle for power in a sovereign Indian state which eventually led to the Partition. None among was ready to actuate on the fundamental question of transference of power. The incident of the attack depicted in the novel is a narrative ploy to mark and gauge the factors –
political, psychological, social leading to the inevitable happening — the Partition.

While fighting for independence, India was combating two enemies — firstly, the imperial ruler and the uncertainty of gaining independence for the motherland and secondly, communal disharmony. During the colonial rule the British made the best use of communal discord (the Hindus and the Muslims) by sowing the seeds of suspicion between them. Their policy of ‘Divide and Rule’ was to their advantage. This strategy was to keep the tension, hostility and enmity alive between them. They successfully played the communal card in using the religions in shaping the political history of modern India.

Scott has also dealt with the subject of the accession of the princely states in context of India’s gaining of independence and the Partition which left the princely states in a lurch:

In 1947, when Britain decided to quit India, the native princes of India, the five hundred and odd Rajas, Maharajas, Ranas or Nawabs, were brought to a sudden realization of their anomalous position. Their treaties with the British monarch which had sustained their illusion of safety, now stood abrogated. Along with the British rule, their rule had also come to an end. (Narayanan 67)

The princely states were left with three options — to remain independent or to accede to either of the two dominions, India or Pakistan. In case of acceding they had to surrender all their ruling rights and sovereignty. They would have no authority or liberty to take their own decisions as part of their agreement to
integrate with India in 1947. However, in lieu of their ruling rights, they would be entitled to the Privy Purse, an allowance provided for the private expenses of the princely states. This was an act against all precincts of fairness and justice:

The extensive territories of princely states alone, covering well over a third of India’s total territory, meant that these territories, their wealth and populations, mattered to the future of the subcontinent even if the leaders of the Congress and the League only came to recognise their real importance late in the day. The lack of resolution of the princely state question by the time that the Partition plan was decided added immensely to the confused interpretations of Indian and Pakistani statehood and, ultimately, to the scale of Partition violence. Some decided to hold out and retain their old borders and try for independence while others hoped to reconfigure, merge and link up with kinsmen to create new states. (Khan 98-99)

In *The Alien Sky*, the plight of Mr. Jimmy Smith – the Maharaja, depicts the hapless and helpless state of all the royalties/princely states at the time of independence. While talking to Harriet Haig, his governess, he tells her that he was planning to go to Delhi because history was being written. By history, he meant the final transference of power to India, declaration of its freedom from the British, as well as the future of the princely states vis-à-vis the autonomy of his own state. But Jimmy Smith could not raise his voice against it, as he like the other princes had been a trustworthy ally, extending his unflinching support to the British. He feels betrayed as he was not involved in the plan of transfer of power. He is full of anguish due to the loss of his rights, a pawn in the
hands of the British with no authority for himself. Abandoned by the British, powerless to assert in the new political scenario, the Maharaja expounds his views to Harriet Haig thus:

“Pakistan and India are not ends achieved. They are beginnings created by an effort of —” he paused, his chubby, small-boned hands waving in circles as though a word could be shaped by their play — “by an effort of will. I quote our Mr. Gower of course . . . When he applauds Pakistan he is applauding this evidence of a will exerted, not a political achievement.” He smiled. “I suspect our Hindu friends here fail to see that.” (Scott, Alien 79)

Harriet Haig knew that Jimmy had the ability to rule but once he acceded to the Indian dominion, his identity was lost. Bereft of authority and ruling rights he would not be able to do anything as it proves to be in the story — he is unable to provide a job to Gower in Kalipur. As Cynthia Mapleton says: ""There might not be a Kalipur by the time the Government’s finished dividing India up into little pieces”" (140). Kalipur stands as a paradigm for all the existing states which eventually were to meet the same fate. It was becoming abundantly clear that the British had decided to split India into small fragments before leaving it. Alwar, Patiala, Faridkot, Bahawalpur were some of the states which had wanted to remain sovereign and create a kingdom of their own but failed due to lack of support, and infrastructure – political, financial and defence.

The consequences of the Second World War, too, are shown to have impacted the lives of the characters in the novel. Dwight, MacKendrick’s elder
brother who had an affair with Dorothy died in the war in the Pacific. Had he
been alive, she would have left Tom and gone with him and their existence
would have taken a different turn. The war took a toll of millions of lives and
completely changed the course of their existence as it did in the case of
Dorothy. Cynthia Mapleton, a British widow whose husband died in the War
(while returning to Mandalay) did not pity his death. Instead she was content
that her husband died in Burma during the Second World War – before the end
of the British rule in India. The end of the colonial rule was for them – a loss of
pride, honour and dignity. While talking to MacKendrick she says, “...But as
I was saying to Harriet a little while ago, in a way I’m glad he did. All this
would have been the end for Robbie” (Scott, Alien 33). She wanted to leave
for Kenya (to become a memsahib there) as there was nothing left for her and
the British in independent India. Her character expresses the sentiments of
almost all the English people of British India. They had played a definite part
in colonial India. Their identity and role as of the colonial master would not
allow them to accept any other reality. With the collapse of their political and
commercial enterprise their lives seemed to have come to a mundane end.

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
Musharraf highlights the historical experience of subordination (natives), power politics, assumptions of superiority 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.
Works Cited


