INTRODUCTION

The British first came to India for purely commercial reasons and established the East India Company in 1600 for setting up their trade. But by the eighteenth century the British commercial power in India became a force to reckon with. The foot-hold thus gained through the commercial enterprise soon transformed itself into a strong political power, given the constant conflicts among the various Indian kingdoms aspiring to stake their own claims over the disintegrating Mughal Empire. The indiscriminate annexation policy of the British East India Company along with other social upheavals brought about by the Abolition of Suttee, introduction of English education which the people thought would undermine their own culture and traditions led to the outbreak of the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. After the suppression of the Revolt an Act for the Better Government of India was passed by the British Parliament in 1858. The Act transferred the
Government of India from the Company to the Crown and hence India became a colony of the British Empire. David Rubin marks, ‘No land has ever equaled India for the fascination it has exerted over the British Imagination’ and to borrow Paul Scott’s own phrase, eventually India became ‘The Jewel in the Crown’. With the extension of the Empire civil administrators and military men accompanied by their womenfolk came to India in large numbers in pursuance of their careers in the Imperial Service.

A whole lot of Anglo-Indian literature has been written in this Imperial period reflecting the socio-historical milieu of the times. The early novels were mostly based on the grossly exaggerated reports of the atrocities on the English women and children during the Mutiny. These novels propagated different myths which were aimed at creating racial distance between the white/ruler and the natives/ruled. Jenny Sharpe notes that the ‘Anglo-Indian literature thus
found its mythic brown-skinned rapist in the rebellion of 1857\(^2\) and Indira Ghose points out:

... one of the main myths of colonialism for which the signifier woman(white) was instrumentalized: the rape myth. This myth—grounded on no evidence—was deployed in the service of colonial punitive measures and gained authoritative status in colonial historiography.\(^3\)

Besides, these texts upheld the civilizing mission of the British and glorified the Empire.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century other different kinds of fiction became popular. These were called the ‘Anglo-Indian domestic novel’ (Alison Sainsbury) and the ‘station romance’ (Indrani Sen). The former featured the domestic life in the Anglo-Indian households while touching upon private issues such as courtship, marriage, children and other relationships. The station romance dealt with the social life of the station particularly the hill-station stories. These novels were mostly written by the men and women who had
the first hand knowledge and experience of the Raj. Indrani Sen remarks:

Clearly, this preoccupation with encoding the life of the community was rooted in a need to make the writing of the fiction in the post-1857 context an act of self-definition, an articulation of self-identity, as well as a prescription of this society’s codes of conduct.

These novels flourished up to the war. While the glorification of the Empire found its staunchest champion in Kipling, the war ushered in a period of serious doubts which affected the Raj. This phenomenon is prominently incorporated in the later Anglo-Indian writings. The decline of the Empire gave rise to the question of the position of the British in India.

The old problem of the British in India – where was Home- became one of the leading themes. Unlike the predecessors, the more recent writers were not concerned with British isolation from England, but rather with their isolation from both England and India...the British found that they could not remain there. At the same time they did not want to go back to England.

During this phase one finds both the pro-Raj as well as the anti-Raj fictions respectively voicing for and against the
British Imperialism in India. Such fiction usually resonates with some historical references for making their point and the most conspicuous being the Mutiny of 1857.

When India got its Independence in 1947 it had a distinct colonial history. Therefore there is so much of the Anglo-Indian literature based on the Raj. While Rudyard Kipling and E.M. Forster write from within the Imperial Age, Paul Scott writes in a reflective vein, depicting and critically examining the English life in pre-Independence days from a post-Imperial space. His works are categorized under the Raj Nostalgia Literature.  

Paul Scott is a distinct anti-Raj novelist. His stay in India as a wartime officer from 1942 to 1945 left him fascinated by the country. He had ‘An Obsession with India’ so much so that a chapter is titled thus by Robin Moore in his book, Paul Scott’s Raj. Scott did extensive research on the history of British India and this lead him to produce thirteen
novels touching on the various aspects of the Indo-British encounter. So he is often called a historical novelist. He made a mark in the field of fiction-writing with his earlier novels and subsequently *The Raj Quartet* in early 1970s but the ultimate recognition came with the publication of his comic masterpiece *Staying On*, which won the Booker Prize in 1977. He died on March 1st, 1978. The first book of the *Quartet*, *The Jewel in the Crown* was adapted to a television serial and shown from January 3rd to April 3rd in 1984. With this, Robin Moore notes, ‘Scott’s admirers increased a thousand fold...For fourteen weeks Tuesday was a stay-at-home evening. It was said that the streets of London were as quiet as they had been during the Blitz.’(Moore, p.1) He further adds that the world, to a large extent has learnt the history of the Raj from the works of Paul Scott. But Scott himself had always affirmed that his novels were not historical pieces. He wrote in his notebook on October 25th 1965 : ‘well it is my obsession to tell stories. Does it matter whether they are true? History is always being re-written.
Once done with a fiction is inviolable. So.’(in Moore,p.172) Yet while examining Scott’s novels one cannot help reading the sociological and historical sub-text underlying his fiction.

What intrigues one is the position of the womenfolk of these colonizers or the women of the Raj - the memsahibs (both married and unmarried). Historically, critics and writers alike have concentrated mainly on the negative qualities in painting her. She is described as racist, idle, materialistic, arrogant and the like. But for many of them the Raj often meant tears, tragic separation from children and husbands and the constant fear of disease and death in an unfavourable climate. The figure of the ‘the white woman as tragic exile’ is often ignored. (Sen, p.28 )

The Anglo-Indian narratives also project India as a means of escaping Britain and its repressive social mores particularly for the young middle-class girls. As E.M. Forster writes in *Passage To India*, India constantly invites -
‘come’. It seemed to promise greater independence and also scope for realization of her desire to participate in public sphere where she could use her time and talent. Unfortunately, in most cases she is disillusioned in the end as she realizes that all her notions of escape from such a society and finding a new milieu for herself were just a dream. Apparently, India was assumed an ideal ground for seeking suitable husbands who would provide lavish aristocratic lives to their wives. In this context, the white woman is ambiguously located in the colonial space. She enters the colony as the ‘fishing fleet’ in search of privileges enjoyed by the ruling race but suffers because of her gender disadvantages inherent in that social set-up.

The British women entered India either through family ties or by marriage. Another reason for women’s emigration from the lower rung of the English society was due to compelling circumstances back home. Many women opted for missionary work as it was considered a more dignified
position than becoming a maid-servant or governess; the only options open to a woman from this class. Another reason for the emigration of British women to India was what Indrani Sen defines as ‘cultural redundancy’ which meant that women became ‘superfluous, surplus or redundant’ because by mid-nineteenth century there were 1050 women to every 1000 men in England as large number of men were away employed in the colonies of the Empire. (Sen, p.4)

Against this social and historical perspective of the memsahib this dissertation will attempt to examine the British women characters in Paul Scott’s The Raj Quartet which includes four novels: The Jewel in the Crown (1966), The Day of the Scorpion (1968), The Towers of Silence (1971) and A Division of the Spoils (1975). Scott weaves fiction out of the history of India ranging from the socio-political upheaval of 1942 to the eve of Independence in 1947. In the last phase of their rule in India, the British were aware that theirs day in this colonial out-post were coming to
an end yet clung on to power till the inevitable happened. The moral spirit and the civilizing zeal had vanished and life for them in India became a vacuity. Scott captures the effect the loss of India has on the Anglo-Indian community, especially the pukka sort. Even more than the historical complexity, *The Raj Quartet* interests one primarily because it is a woman-centered narrative. It has women as the dominant figures in each of the books. These are the British women trapped in the socio-political impasse. Paul Scott is an insider as he was a wartime cadet officer in India from 1942-1945 which enabled him to closely observe the lives of these British women during these turbulent years of the Raj. At the same time he is also an outsider when he recreates their situation after a distance of twenty years or so. The balanced perspective with which he has portrayed his women characters in the *Quartet* can be attributed to this.

In the vast canvas of *The Raj Quartet*, the emphasis is on the female characters particularly the British women.
They include the young, old and middle-aged, either married or unmarried. Almost all these women are fully developed characters irrespective of the space they occupy in the text.

‘...your sex is made, Miss Crane, for marriage or for God...’ says Mr. Cleghorn to Miss Crane in *The Jewel in the Crown*. The proposed study will attempt to examine Paul Scott’s women characters in the light of such patriarchal pronouncements. Some important questions emerge from this. Such as: How do these British women in India behave in such restrictive domain? Do they project any defiance of it, if so, to what extent? How are Scott’s women projected as being intellectual/anti-imperialists as opposed to the widely accepted notion of being emotional/imperialists? In what ways do Scott’s memsahibs differ from the conventional image of the memsahibs in India? These questions will form the bases of analysis of the British women in *The Raj Quartet*. The following are the chapter-wise divisions of the dissertation:
The Introduction very briefly traces the history of the coming of the British to India as traders and finally setting up the Empire. An overview of the Anglo-Indian fiction since the Sepoy Mutiny and the subsequent transfer of power from the East India Company to the Crown is done. The focus all through is on the memsahibs as portrayed in these texts because the proposed study will examine the memsahibs in Paul Scott’s *The Raj Quartet* and attempt to show how they seem to differ from the conventional mode of portrayal.

Chapter 1, entitled *Marriage and Memsahibs* will focus on the marriage in the Anglo-Indian society which followed the broader Victorian ideology. Marriage is the central point of a girl’s life and accordingly her life and education since childhood is directed to achieve an ideal marriage. Further, the women who married the men in the Imperial Service were considered to be contributing towards
the consolidation of the Empire by producing future empire-builders. A memsahib in India was expected to adapt herself to fit into her husband’s career. The focus of this chapter will be to examine how the British women in India negotiate the public and private concerns relating to marriage.

Chapter 2, entitled British Women and Missionary Life will study the plight of the women from the lower rung of the British society who join the Mission in India either with evangelical ardour or under compelling circumstances back home. However, they end up disillusioned because they realize that neither their proselytization nor teaching is relevant in the given circumstances. These women find that they are marginalized by their own people and eventually they not only lose their respect for the Raj but faith in mankind and God too. In the process they also lose their mental balance and die pathetic deaths.
Chapter 3, entitled **British Women in their ‘expanded world’** (Rubin, p. 24) will focus on those British women of the Raj who discover the ‘expanded world’ and try to reach beyond racial barriers. They negate the patriarchal construct of memsahibs as racist, frivolous, stupid and idle. Nor are they merely emotional beings or imperializing agents as are generally shown to be. Rather they emerge as intellectuals and anti-imperialists.

The **Conclusion** (which) sums up the findings of the previous chapters and attempts to analyse the change in the position of the memsahibs in *The Raj Quartet*.

Studied under the various headings Paul Scott gives us a clearer understanding of the lives of the British women in pre-Independent India.
NOTES


2. Sharpe, Jenny. *Allegories of the Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Texts.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p.86. Hereafter quoted as Sharpe.


