Chapter – V

Fictional World of I. Allan Sealy
Irwin Allan Sealy, born in 1951 in Allahbad, Uttar Pradesh, School in Lucknow went to La Martiniere School in Lucknow and then to St. Stephen’s college Delhi University for his further studies. He has worked in Canada, the USA, New Zealand and Australia. He is underrated writers in India. His creativity and his genius of detailing is visible from his very first novel *The Trotter Nama: A Chronicle* (1988), which is magical account of seven generations of a dynasty His second novel *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar* (1998) is in totally different style where description finds at its best. It appears as if the writer of this is not Sealy himself. He is the author of two other works *The Brain Fever Bird* (2003) and *Red: An Alphabet* (2006).

Allan Sealy has bagged the Common wealth Best Book Award in 1989 and The Sahitya Akadami Award in 1991; and the Crossword Book Award in 1998. He likes to live away from publicity and in solitude in the Himalyan foothills of Dehradun

Anglo Indians are described as:

In its most general sense Anglo – Indian refers to any tangible or intangible entity with both British and Indian Provenance or heritage .... The term “Anglo – Indian” is sometime used in west more broadly to describe people who have mixed Indian and British ancestry…. to add to the confusion. The term was also used in common parlance in Britain during the colonial era to refer to those who were of British descent, but were born and
raised in India, usually because their parents were serving in the colonial administration or armed forces…. (Wikipedia)

With the passage of time people of mixed British and Indian descent were initially referred as *Eurasians* but now commonly referred to as *Anglo Indians*. The history referred is during the British rule in India British soldier and officers married local Indian girls and had Eurasian children. But gradually British females started arriving in British India in large numbers in early mid 19th Century and so the intermarriage became common till 1857 Rebellion. After the 1857 movement Eurasians were neglected by both the British and Indian Population in India Over generations Anglo – Indians married with other Anglo – Indian s and formed their community with its own district culture. Their cuisine, dress, speech and religion further separated them from the majorities they established their own school systems. The started their social clubs and association so as to perform distinctly their dances and rituals on christens and Easter.

During the independence movement they were not trusted and they faced hostility from Indian nationalists. Their position during independence was difficult they were loyal to Britishers so the issue of identity crisis encrypted in this community. In search of *home* most Anglo – Indians left the century in 1947 and migrated to the UK, or elsewhere Commonwealth Nations. The migration continued till 1990’s. At present there are estimated to be 80,000 – 1,25,000 Anglo Indians living in India in the metropolis.
Nirad Chauduri, the famous critic and novelist, in his novel *The Continent of Circe* puts Anglo-Indians in the category of half–castes who are genetically so, and the anxieties and fears they perceive in the country of many minorities are solidified by the so-called majorities and other minorities usurping on them. And these anxieties and fears are voiced in the novel of Allan Sealy *The Trotter Nama: A Chronicler*.

I. Allan Sealy’s *The Trotter Nama* is literary extravaganza which is a huge, funny fictional chronicle spanning 200 years, seven generation of a family the novel is dedicated to all: *The other Anglo – Indians*.

After the publication of the book it created a kind of debate about the identity of the Anglo – Indians. It narrates extraordinarily the story of the clan from its glories founding in the 18th century by a French mercenary officer. It also narrates the vicissitudes they had to suffer in the 19th century and it’s sadly shrunken present state. They are the follower of Christianity and so they need to be branded as Christians but still they are struggling for their true identity. By now they have come to be regarded as having a separate identity even by the Indian constitution. It the 21st Century there has been resurgence in celebrating Anglo – Indian culture in the form of International Anglo – Indian Reunions and in publishing books on Anglo – Indians.

To describe the mixed parentage of children born to India mothers wedded to Whites; Warren Hastings, the first governor general of British India had coined the term *Eurasian* Brithisers considered them half-caste or eight –
annas whereas Indians considered them outcaste and so their position remained worst. And often suffered from a crisis of identity.

Such issues and many more are described in *The Trotter Nama: A Chronicle* by I Allan Sealy. His professed intention was to write a comic epic in prose of the minority community in India to which he belongs. In order to give it a realistic note to this book the author draws detailed knowledge of Lucknow.

This novel seemed to be inspired by G.V. Desani and Salman Rushdie. In mock – epic style the author very intelligently combines history with fantasy the real with the imaginary. Its structure is very ambitions it brings together a vast variety of characters in diverse situations raging from the ludic to the somber, from pleasant to pathetic. The narrative crosses all the boundaries and describes the lives of the hybrid characters. The central narrative is dazzlingly embellished by everything from advertisements and recipes to couplets, table-talk, elegies and knowledgeable digressions. It sometimes turns satirical, poignant but due to its imaginative genius it is very impressive to read.

In the title *The Trotter Nama: A chronicle* the author seems to point out the identity issue – Trotter means a person or animal that trots, (according to Collins English dictionary) where as it means one who moves about briskly and continually (according to Babylon English dictionary) Nama is the word which describes a family – saga. It refers to the Indian heritage of creative writing like Akbar Nama, Babarnama etc. Here perhaps the author seems to print out that as being a trotter who is centrally moving from one place to the
other and having a long line of offspring to follow identity remains uprooted. There is no permanent root with which they can identify themselves. Like the old *Namahs* that figure the grand historical figure. Sealy’s *The Trotter Nama: A chronicle* is full of historical figures like Justin Aloysius, the Great Trotter, officer and inventor. Funnily it is dedicated to *the other Anglo–Indian*.

The description of the first trotter’s birth is very humorously presented:

> He is born on the twenty first June, 1719. So far from being premature, as the historians’ version has it, he has spent ten months in the womb and arrives in the fullness of things A glistering gtobe he great the world, like all great man from Akbar to Zoroaster with laugh. (TN 1999: 113)

Sealy’s characters are based on historical figures from his community. The great French ancestor’s vision sitting in the toilet mixes history with fiction. Claus Martin, a real life character form the history of East India Company is also sketched in the initial page through the Character of Justin Aloysius, the Trotter. In the year 1800 when he died he has supposedly left legacy of Rs. 40 lakhs to establish the La Martinere Schools in Lucknow, Culcutta and Lyons in France. As a war hero, a trader of guns and indigo, a learned man of books and a creator of museum he has amassed great amount of wealth. He also demonstrated a hot-air balloon to the people of Lucknow in 1785. When he died he left a will which was very much confusing for his seven mistresses. The great Trotter’s personality is designed on this character. The
Trotter of the novel has four wives named Sultana, Fardia Wilkinson and Indio Planter’s daughters Elise (known as Jarman Begum) and Rose Llewellyn. The cover page of the book very vividly suggests the great flight of the great trotter;

The basket was capacious, it might have hold forty chicken or twelve dogs or mangoes without number. Instead there were besides a rug and the cushions; a spyglass, an astrolabe, and horolge, an horoscope, a barometer, a gypsonometer, one hundred and forty meteorological instruments, four sheets of writing paper of the great Trotter’s own manufacture and bearing his watermark, an inkhorn, three pens, two carried doves and a partridge in covered dish. There was also a skin of iced water. (TN 1999: 20)

While reading the novel variety of descriptions one some across like recipes of variety of food, really – race like rallies flowing over a singular and seemingly worthy topics and much more. This is the art of story-telling adopted by Sealy.

Grounding in Indianness and Indian Culture and philosophy is very clearly visible in the following description.

No, an egg is an noble thing consider its shape; there is the sunya, the zero from which all tings spring to which all things tend. Consider its colour; there is the whiteness of the sun, of
cows, of milk, of pure ghi, of goddesses, of all good things. An egg is blameless. An egg is smooth hairless and unbegotten it is firm, it is fragile, it is flow less, it is just fine. Pure – Brahmins are mistaken; more, they are envious of us egg – Brahmins But at least they respect the bird that brings forth this wonder. They would not take its life. Can such a bird be plumped for slaughter its male muscled for sport? (TN 1999: 50)

Even one can assess this description as a community’s efforts of registering, the question of their identity in the big sprawls of the east west affairs right from the early centuries to the present period. This form is best suitable for a chronicler.

Historically speaking the Anglo Indians was mostly recruited to the post in the services of high echelons of powerful kings. In an episode The Battle of Giants in the south (after Firdausi), Sealy describes the great Trotter who fought fearlessly and fired the last ball into the sky. Due to this all the Maratha soldiers flee except one.

He stood his ground, the son of Sultana, till struck down from above he lay upon it clay his Pillow. Faint Breath, He Cried; Father; and at once the Great trotters’ brow was ploughed with the fled – furrows of consternation, for he knew that voice (TN 1999: 221)
Another example of intermingling of history and fiction is in the story of great warrior Mik. Mik lost his one arm in the battle and returns home with hope of gaining legacy. But he found that not only he but some other from Europeans and Indians are deserted by law. The question of racial discrimination or identity comes again. Mik chooses Charles as his apparent heir. Rose looks after this child. Mik was fascinated by Rose, the beautiful, young, first adopted by the Great Trotter. To describe Mik’s cavalry Sealy writes:

Who else, people asked, would scorn marksman by leading a cavalry charge in a white seersucker jacket with arose at his heat? Who could lance a boil at a gallop? Who trim moustaches with two strokes of his saber? One man: Tartar Sahib; He was known by the rose as Gulabi – Trotter, and in time the fearsome men of Trotters’ Horse came to be called form their tunics, the Rose Boys. (TN 1999: 229)

The character of Charles is extra ordinarily described as a romantic boy. He is a painter when he goes to collect brushes paints and color form the market he got confused. His beloved Bulbul is a free spirit. The name itself suggests her characteristics she is full of life playing with buffalo girls and the kite makers. Her playmates called her: ‘dongli, or two – in one, because her real further had been a foreigner’ (TN 1999: 281 – 82)

The Trotter’s family is further expanded through the marriages of Justin’s widows, Farida and Elise. Farida marries to Henny Louis Vivan Fonesca –
Trotter. The widow Elise (Jarman Begum) marries Yakub Kahn who finally achieves his ambition and becomes the Ice –Manager. Jacob Kahn the son of this union grows up to be an activist, fights for the rights of his community with the imperial powers. He goes to Westminster with a petition which is discussed and passed in Parliament but no action is taken for several more decades. This racial discrimination is borne out of the prejudice for the sons of the fathers who remained loyal to the East India Company throughout their life. The history of their bravery during the Mutiny and the bravery of the Anglo-Indians is recorded. A critic here notes that:

‘La Martiniere, Lucknow has a rather romantic history. During the rising of 1857, the first revolt against British rule, the school was occupied by the rebels and was the first point to be assaulted by the advancing British troops suffering extensive damage. The sixty- eight boys and eight staff of the school help defend the Lucknow Residency’ (Couto 1996: 213)

As evident in the history the off springs of the Anglo-Indian have to face racial discrimination. With the advancement of opportunities and transportation the fair sons and daughters of the Eurasian were sent back to England for higher education and those who looked like mother’s side remained in India. Neither the English nor the Indians considered them as theirs. From the late 19th Century the British Empire attached those black offspring in the services like engineers and supervisors to build the past and telegraphs, canals, waterworks, railways, mills etc. One such character named Pearl in the present novel makes her fortune in Hollywood and
sustains her impoverished family in Calcutta. The gradual decline and degeneration of the community come till Sealy reaches the sixth and the seventh generation narratives. They are mentioned as Diasporic narratives. Sealy details this decline from high profile jobs of engineers and supervisors to lower grade jobs in railways posts and telegraphs and also the low lying police force. These generations’ are called as eight anna bits and four anna bits and touch of the tar. So they migrated to the other Commonwealth Nations for better prospects but unfortunately there also they suffered from racial discrimination. This conflict is very well defined in Marris’ Blabber:

As head of a dwindling community Marris was harsh on Packers – and Leavers. “Go and become bus –conductor in London if you want” he warned “But don’t come crying back to me” Or he might scoff “Melbourne is all very well, but can you get mangoes there?” He favored the Nakhla dasheri Personally” (TN 1999: 16)

Maria Couto in this regard pointed out that directly or indirectly the interest of the community is mentioned in the Chronicler:

Anglo – Indian began to Strengthen a common identity of purpose and to express them in the proliferation of organization… The work of Ricketts, Derozio, Kyd and others encouraged Anglo –Indians to lobby as a district group for their human rights. The most active in the early part of this century (20th) was Sir Henry Gidney who died in 1943… He worked
tirelessly for the welfare of his community and attended the Round Table Conference in 1930…. Like Skinner he insisted on his birthright as an Anglo-Indian (1996: 213)

In *The Trotter Nama* the community emerges as a protagonist. Through the seven generations of Trotters the origin, struggle development, degenerations and declines are discussed in front of the readers. It also shows their commitment towards the land of their belonging. Their commitment is more towards their mothers (India) and less towards the false arrogance of their fathers (British). There are deeply rooted in the philosophies of this country and its fate.

Sealy’s *The Trotter Nama* is placed in line with G.V. Desani’s *All About H. Hatter*. It is both elusive and immortal – reports of its death are usually proved to be exaggerated though it has only a handful of readers in each generation who respond to the slightly manic history of the Great Trotter and his seven generations of family.

In 1988, when this novel was published I Allan Sealy was compared with Hogarth and Joyce and a leading Indo-Anglican writer. London Magazine praised its effusiveness, calling it an extravaganza and the Chicago Tribune described it as richly imaginative. Sealy himself recalls that his book was

Published abroad but its reputation was made at home…. Where the foreign reader was quite baffled the local reader was
delighted. Indian critics rescued what the foreign press had ignored or written off (TN 1999: Preface)

In other words, The Trotter Nama, stands at a crossroads. This nama is truly considered as the last true successor to H. Hatter and Midnight’s Children with a few expectations.
Reference


(The subsequent references to the novel The Trotter Nama: A Chronicle are mentioned in the body of the chapter, abridged as TN)

Website

www. Wikipedia.com