CHAPTER-IV

Western Breeze for the East: Set in Authority

*Set in Authority* (1906) is an Indian political novel written by Duncan. The novel has no autobiographical touch and it is written with just political ideas in mind and the novel has a political theme. Michael Peterman in “Passage to Ghoom” opines:

What makes *Set in Authority* so remarkable? Here's a quick list: Duncan's astute control of plot and structure (though few contemporary readers will be much impressed by the too neat dependence upon the double identity of the novel's putative villain); her command of setting and scene in the drawing rooms of fashionable London and at various levels of social organization in India; her mastery of dialogue (at so many social levels); her fine application of satire and irony; and her breadth of insight into the behaviour and motives of the colonial bureaucrats, professionals, and their kind who administer the rural "station" of Pilagthur in the fictitious province of Ghoom. (n.p.)

The novel begins with the news of Lord Thames being appointed as the Viceroy and Governor General of India. He is “to preside over the destinies of one sixth of the human race” (16). This news spread like wildfire in England and Mrs. Thomas, mother of Anthony Andover, fourth Barton Thames was receiving guests and letters, congratulating her and her family. It is pertinent to mention that with congratulations there also came warnings for Thames. “You must warn Lord Thames against overwork, Miss Thame” (3). It has been very well written by Procida that:
The men and women of the British community in India, however, particularly those who administered the Raj as officials in the various civil services, and defended the empire as officers in the Indian Army, understood the imperial questions of the twentieth century as more than merely legislative or constitutional issues that could be resolved by decrees promulgated from Whitehall or Delhi. For them, the personal truly was political. (130)

Like her earlier works on Indian backdrops, the difficulties one has to face in India start cropping up early in the novel. Mrs. Thames is proud of her son, who would be governing India. She tells her friends that Anthony has “extraordinary interest in India” and that “My husband, too, was always wildly interested in Orientals. Anything black Adored them” (4). From the very beginning the readers are made aware of Lord Thame’s mindset and interest. He is an idealist and believes in the reconciliation of the English and the natives. “He thinks, of course, that the only legitimate conquest is the soil, and that we have no permanent business except where we can take root . . . England should govern, and does govern, by moral force” (15). He appreciates Indians’ capacity for loyalty and thus wants to tie up strong knots with the natives of India. It is here for the first time that the quality of being loyal has been attached to the Indians. Lady Thames is interested in his missionary approach towards the natives.

Lady Thames declares, “I shall be delighted to hear that he is wedded to the country” (9). Lavinia, Lord Thame’s sister also confirms of him being an idealist with his own “aims of civilization” (10). The introductory chapter also introduces Miss Victoria
Tring, a friend of Lord Thames who has been thought of being the prospective wife for Lord Thames as she is supposed to be equally competent for Lord Thames.

After two introductory chapters introducing Thames family and the prospects of Lord Thames in India, the story line shifts to India in Pilaghur, the capital of Ghoom province. This Pilaghur is also under Lord Thames administration along with many other provinces. This Ghoom province is ruled by the Chief Commissioner and the author very shrewdly says that “Both the garland and the rein lie upon his neck” (23) as he is the only one responsible for every single problem faced by the Ghoomaties. It seems that the narrator is sympathetic towards the governing Britons as they become an easy target by the higher authorities, who are unaware of the ground realities and the kind of problems the residing English administration has to face in the Indian subcontinent.

There is very vivid description of Pilaghur. The narrator beautifully portrays the landscape and one gets a sort of picturesque description of the same. Pilaghur is divided into two regions. One region belonging to the colonizer and other to the colonized. The one with colonizer has “a parade ground as well as a cathedral and a station club where are tennis courts and the English illustrated papers, and public gardens set with palms and poinsettias, where the band plays twice a week in the evenings after polo” (24). It also has houses of the officials. The Pilaghur of the colonized is crowded. “Out there the multitudinous mad huts are like an eruption of the baked and liver coloured earth, low and featureless . . . The oriental gutter runs along the side, the oriental donkey sniffs at the garbage; there is an all-pervasive oriental smell” (27). This division itself stands symbolic of the divide created among the east and the west. In east also, the place where the western people reside is considered better than the abode of the people of the east.
The scene moves to a dinner party thrown by Ardens and present there are so many guests and dignitaries from the province of Ghoom. They all seem to be very disturbed by the nature and working of the Viceroy of India, Lord Thames. The gathering is of the opinion that their colonial powers have changed a lot and now-a-days the English people donot behave rudely with the natives. Dr. Ruth Pearce asserted, “Our notion of our proper relations with these people does change, doesn’t it as time goes on. . . My great-grandmother used to send her ayah to be whipped. We don’t have our ayahs whipped much now, do we?” (44) General Lemon also “remembered the time when it was the commonest thing in the world for a man to give his syce a good hiding for stealing gram, . . . to hear these fellows spoken of as ‘niggers’” (46). The gathering is against the Viceroy for being one with the natives and against his own countrymen. Colonel Vetechley affirms that “He’s Viceroy of India, but if he were God Almighty there are some things he couldn’t change in this country” (48).

A firmness in the nature and culture of the orient is being granted to India and its countrymen. The occident believes that they cannot change the inherent qualities of the natives and thus there is no scope for the two to intermingle. The ladies present at the dinner were also busy in their daily gossip. They were discussing the rate of mutton and how the mutton-seller extracts different amounts from different officers for the same quantity of mutton and thereby projecting the native seller as an extortionist. Thus there is an English set up in India, busy with their daily affairs and not in need of any kind of morality from their own nationals to affect their way of working and living in India.

The turning point in the novel arrives when Hiria, the ayah of Dr. Ruth Pearce tells her about “taking of the white soldier by the Larrens road. By that road they took
him and all Pilaghr ran to see” (72). Upon inquiring Miss Peace is informed about a double murder that was committed by an English soldier. The ayah narrated that a watchmen Gobind and his wife Junia had been murdered. Junia was having an extra-marital affair with the white soldier and he used to visit Junia in absence of Gobind. Gobind was informed about the matter by his son from his first wife but he doesn’t believe him but later found a burning cheroot in his own home. As a punishment, Gobind cut off Junia’s nose and left his home. Next day he came back because he was feeling very guilty of cutting her nose. As he returned home, the soldier also came unaware of Gobind’s presence there. The soldier was frightened and thus shot Gobind. The crowd gathered after listening to the gun shot and Surat, the son of Gobind tried to catch hold of the soldier but he escaped. Junia also died out of sheer shock.

Hiria also tells that it was after three days of the incident that Surat gathered enough courage to report the matter to the magistrate. “Evil and wrong were plain, inflicted on a helpless and subject household by one of a particularly obnoxious caste of the ruling race” (80). This incident occurred during the rule of Lord Thames who has a very different perspective to look at the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. He wants to create a kind of companionship among the two races and thus wants a stern action to be taken against the white culprit.

This incident is taken up by both the English and the native community. “The vernacular press rang even louder with the claims of equality than the Anglo-Indian newspapers with other considerations in each instance” (81). The natives were a bit relieved to see, “the ‘gorah’ in handcuffs, submissive to the law” (81) and this had become the talk of the town. Everyone was concerned, let it be the colonizer or the
colonized. There were also two kinds of reactions to the killings. The natives were boiling with temper and in the cantonment the murder had official weight.

The Chief Commissioner is also informed about the matter and he deals with it in a proper and official manner but after his office hours, the matter was at the back of his mind. A young assistant magistrate Charles Cox, who was new to India, was utterly shocked and “amazed at the apathy he encountered,” (83) about the matter in his community. It has been ironically stated by the narrator that this Charles Cox who finds some purpose to be in India would be disintegrated after spending some time in India.

Ten years hence Cox will be deploiring the necessity of such things getting into the papers at all, and inclined to the conviction that it would much conduce to the good government of India if there were no papers. This will be the work of time, promotion and responsibility. (84)

Thus the author satirizes the condition of the Englishmen who come to India with a whole lot of dreams and purposes in their mind and end up being inhumane and callous.

For the first time in Duncan’s Indian writing there appears a strong, educated Indian holding the post of District and Sessions Judge. He is Sir Ahmed Hossein. He has been introduced in Mrs. Lemon’s garden party. “He was a Mahomedan civilian, differing, necessarily in complexion and creed from the rest of official Pilaghur” (86) and was the only native to be found in the English society. The difficulty that Sir Ahmed faced in the garden party has been effectively described by the narrator. The hesitation of being part of the other society was clearly seen on Sir Ahmed’s face yet he tried his level best to feel comfortable with all the white officials.
These among whom he had come were not his people; his ways were not their ways nor his thoughts their thoughts. Yet he had to take his place and find his comfort among them. In every eye he saw the barrier of race, forbidding natural motion. He would commend himself, but could not do it from the heart; he was forced to take the task upon the high and sterile ground of pure intelligence. (88)

This Ahmed Hossein is an intellectual and wants to have a chair of Zend at Calcutta. He is economically a sound person as he has a handsome amount of money ready for the purpose. His Parsi friend also offers him twenty-five thousand rupees on the condition that he would engage an Indian as the professor instead of a European, but Ahmed is against it as for him no Indian is competent enough for the purpose of teaching Zend.

Eliot Arden introduced Sir Ahmed to Dr. Ruth Pearce and they start talking about birth and re-birth and after analyzing the discussion Ruth concludes that, “One understands those who are behind one, I suppose, but not those who are ahead of one” (93). This interpretation of life after death can also be applied in the colonial context and can be affirmed with the oriental thinking whereby west being ahead of east has the capacity to understand the east whereas, east being inferior and behind the west does not have the capability of knowing the west. Arden questions Ahmed about life after death and enquired whether all that has been there in the Koran to which Ahmed replied, “The Koran is a good old fighting book . . . but, sir, to which of us in the East is left his religion? . . . I myself am but half believer in my casual creed” (94). Thus there is an
Indian muslim who is a half-believer in his religion and works according to his mental capacities and thinking instead of following set patterns and standards of his religion.

Sir Ahmed is the one who is chosen by the Viceroy to do the justice in the double murder case. The convict in this case, Henry Morgan belongs to Fifth Barfordshire regiment and the regiment held an average record. “They had put in eighteen month’s service in the country, just long enough to give them the usual superficial dislike and contempt for the people, which more than one unlucky incident had aggravated” (98). On the contrary the natives hold a different view. For them “‘gorah’ was a man without authority without money . . . a person of no understanding and much offence” (98). The officials termed the problem of Morgan as ‘black trouble’ and thereby fueling the racial discrimination. They are more concerned about how to get him out of it instead of punishing him for the offence. “Morgan’s deference was the concern of everyman; he was merged in the regiment and his sin, had no more individuality than his uniform” (100). Thus the race came together in order to save an individual. The English side felt it to be bad luck of Morgan, that his case “should come before a sanguinary black nigger” (100).

The judge is termed “nigger” and this terminology itself represents the level of respect being accorded to a District and Sessions Judge in British India, who happens to be an Indian. His erudition and experience hardly acquits him of being a “nigger”. The English were so high headed that they could not tolerate the prospects of an English soldier to be decided by a native judge “ . . . no native of this country can try such a European British subject for his life . . . the law don’t allow’em to do any hanging - any white hanging, be it understood” (101). The narrator makes it clear that the colour of skin
plays its part in determining the social status and the work done by any individual. The white being superior has to be superior and has to have the right of being supreme and the coloured ones do not have any right; what-so-ever, to evaluate and judge their superiors.

The members of the Pilaghur club were also worried about the case and they also felt that race would definitely play its part while giving sentence to Henry Morgan. However there are some like Mr. Cox who “think, you know, Biscuit, that we must expect the people of the country to take an increasing share in its administration as time goes on. We must make the omelet and never mind the eggs” (106). It was however reconciled that “You and I and Sir Ahmed may hang black men but not white ones” (108). This incident of a black judge sitting for the trail of a white soldier triggers the imagination of Mr. Faulkner and Mr. Biscuit to future where, “But our sons may take instructions from Bengali Heads of Departments and look for promotions to Madrassi Lieutenant-Governor. It is written among things that are to be” (108-09). The case ultimately was registered in Sir Ahmed’s court. There was a huge fuss about the issue in both British Indian and the native society but Sir Ahmed was calm and felt that, “the incident was a sign of that new and better understanding based on a complete confidence between the two races, which all good men so ardently desired; and he could not help being proud to figure in it” (110).

Back home in England Lady Thames opines “Nothing rouses British feeling like an attempt to undermine the liberties of British Subjects” (117) and in India the same was being done under the rein of Lord Thames. Lady Thames was herself a liberal and thus supported Lord Thames’ views and believed in equality of whites and the blacks. It is revealed to Lady Thames that verdict has been given by Ahmed Hossien and Morgan has
been sentenced two years of rigorous punishment. It was the first case of its kind under the supreme justice of Sir Ahmed and keeping in mind the kind of relations among the races and the future prospects of the same, he gave this light punishment. Mrs. Tring however doubts the native jury to be bribed in order to get favorable punishment to the English soldier. “Mrs. Tring was to express a few hours later and six thousand miles further west that the District and Sessions Judge had been bribed” (126).

The Postcolonial theory foreshadows the representation of the natives and also talks of the dehumanization of the natives. “The colonized subject is characterized as ‘Other’ through discourse such as primitivism and cannibalism, as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and the colonized . . .” (EWB 118) and here also there is the character of Sir Ahmed Hossain who is a Judge but his character has been doubted by the English and the residing English community. He has been thought of being bribed and is also termed as a corrupt official. Karyn Huenemann in “Sara Jeanette Duncan’s Women Power through Relationships” states:

In *Set in Authority*, the issue at hand is Ilbert bill, through which Lord Ripon intended to give native magistrates in the province the right to try Europeans. The novel investigates the fictional realization of the societal fear. Anglo Indians were concerned at the prospect of a possibly “dishonest” native in a position of life and death power over a European. (123)

As the judgment was given, the English press gave it just a little importance and there was a general feeling of disapproval and the English community wanted an
immediate appeal in the higher courts. Whereas the native paper the *Star of Islam* remarked “our esteemed British contemporaries . . . are flabbergasted. This has taken the wind out of their hats” (122). The native section was feeling victorious over their rulers and thought it to be a step forward towards their freedom from the colonial power.

The Pilaghur club, being the nervous system of the colonial set up, was also teeming with comments. The narrator terms Pilaghur as a body and the club as its heart. There were many members of this club but never in the history of Pilaghur club an Indian was given a membership. The club stood for racial arrogance on the part of the Britons. “The thing had hardly been thought of” (124) but Eliot Arden has proposed the name of Sir Ahmed Hossian and in view of his position no body opposed the nomination openly but they were reluctant to let any native enter their club. “He’s bally native replied Lascelles, another subaltern, with shorter views” (126). Thus even a subaltern was more powerful over the native judge. It proves the natives to be doubly – marginalized. This judge is considered below the rank of a subaltern in the English army.

However, Sir Ahmed was duly elected as a member of the Pilaghur club and this membership of the club made him extremely happy. He was full of gratitude for the chief commissioner, who nominated his name for the club. Sir Ahmed must have felt proud of his own capacities but being a typical colonial subject felt overwhelmed at the gesture of Eliot Arden. In order to express his gratitude for Arden, Ahmed rushed to his office and to his surprise finds a huge scorpion on Arden’s back. Ahmed picks the scorpion and throws it out of the window. Arden wanted him to kill the scorpion but Ahmed proposed his viewpoint of not killing any organism whatsoever. He was a firm believer in goodness and “will not subtract from the life of the world and add to the death. It is like
subtracting from the good and adding to the evil” (130). He has a liberal take upon his religion as well. “I am an individual. I take my religion where I can get it - a little here, a little there. This twentieth century permits that Religion is a world-product; and the time is past, I think, to fight for only one kind” (131).

In course of their conversation they came over the Morgan case and Ahmed was pretty confident that his judgment was very lenient and that Morgan would not appeal in the higher courts. “‘There were many things to consider,’ he said, ‘Better let one man off easily than inflame the passions of thousands’ ” (132). Ahmed wanted to give a “goodball” to all the members but was forbidden by Arden who wanted to throw a party by himself for Sir Ahmed. This inhibition can be interpreted as non-cooperation from the members who may not like to have a treat from the native. They also discussed William Blake and Arden was very possessive towards him and called him “Our” poet. Ahmed Hossain was very sure that the lenient punishment given by him to an English soldier would definitely help the negative feelings disappear between the colonizer and the colonized. He quotes Blake:

We are put on earth a little space

that we may learn to bear the beams of live,

And these black bodies and this sunburnt face

Are but a cloud, and like a shady grove” (133).

Of all the case and the sentence given to Morgan, Hiria is the only one who is totally dissatisfied she felt it to be a very meager punishment for killing and was very
sure that Lord Thames would definitely hang the culprit. She believes that this little punishment would encourage the whites and their behavior towards the natives would become much worse.

The Chief Commissioner arranges a dance party at the club and his guests including Mrs. Lemon and Mrs. Biscuit felt very bad of inviting Sir Ahmed Hossain and felt that Ardens should write ‘to meet Sir Ahmed Hossain’ on the invitation cards instead of a dance party as they felt that Arden was becoming too fond of Ahmed Hossien. Mr. Biscuit also forbade his wife to dance with the native. He is also called the “oriental guest” there by pointing out at the stiffness of the English society and their reluctance to let any native enter into their private sphere. The narrator says “it would really take more than the honored presence of a single native gentlemen to put Pilaghur seriously out of humor with a dance” (137).

The narrator then shifts the focus upon the life of Englishmen in Pilaghur and the narrative says:

What was life in Pilaghur? Work, hard work too upon the unstimulating interests of an alien race, people to whom you must build the bridge of sympathy . . . Inspite of its sterility of atmosphere - one has only to consider forty or fifty human souls of the human average, remote and isolated from the borrowed graces and interests of their own world, planted where they can never take root, slowly withering to the point of retirement. (137-38)
The news of the Viceroy being dissatisfied over the sentence given to Henry Morgan spread in the Province of Ghoom like wild fire. The English press reacted sharply against such kind of behavior from their own viceroy. They termed his behavior as “His Excellency’s mania for interference with the decisions of the courts” (148). The Viceroy advised the Advocate-General, River Finch to look into the matter for his opinion about the case and the Calicut club believed that “Finch’ll squash it” as they felt it very rude on part of the viceroy to open the case once again. However Finch pleased the viceroy by finding some technical anomaly with the case and thus the secretary in the home department wrote to the chief commissioner of Ghoom to reopen the case.

Arden tells Dr. Pearce that he has received “a direct communication of annoyance from the gods” and gods here refers to the government of India. He was asked to move the High Court of Calcutta and let the case be retried. Arden was of the opinion that Morgan should have got much severe punishment but was also aware of the situation that would arise if a harsh sentence would be given to him. He states, “for myself I would rather see him go free then let him incite the storm of race feeling and antagonism that will ravage our relations with these people if the case comes up again” (152).

Arden makes reference to Lord Curzon’s action against a regiment and the consequent reaction against him and was afraid that Lord Thames’ action would also incite hatred and bitterness in the residing English society both towards the viceroy as well as the natives. He is also of the opinion that courts uphold “The high water mark of British justice” (152) and to revoke a case for which verdict has been already given means that the government is not satisfied with the punishment and hopes for a much harder sentence.
Dr. Ruth Peace being an independent and a fair minded woman tells Arden that his decision of not letting a re-trial occur is a result of his very fundamental instinct as the viceroy’s instinct allowed him to go for a retrial and repunishment. Arden defines him to be “a man with a violent conscience and rather short perspective” (155). He felt that this decision of viceroy would make him unpopular and that from being unpopular the viceroy would be convinced that he was right.

In the meantime the news of the Morgan case to be reopened enters the Pilagur club and the press also reports the matter that the chief commissioner was not ready to reopen the case. The general English community was appreciative of Arden’s stand and it was felt that the viceroy has never before suffered a check from his own subordinate. The attitude of viceroy towards equal justice for both the communities (Indian and English) is not welcomed and appreciated by the prejudiced English society. They feel that they must be privileged over the natives on account of their service to the empire and also on racial account. It is however communicated through the paper that the case ‘Emperor v/s Henry Morgan’ would be considered by the chief commissioner and that no official communication has been received from the chief commissioner of Ghoom in this regard and so the assumptions must not be made by the general public.

In all this politics Henry Morgan was reduced to “a name to a bandy, a battle-cry for passionate difference, or a sign for the resolute pursuit of a lofty policy” (164). Faulkner reads the news in the Communique and said to Mr. Biscuit, “To the viceroy in his present state of hunger for capital punishment we were merely inflammatory . . . Clearly nothing but the rope will satisfy Thame” (164). Both the gentlemen were very
appreciative of Arden’s stand but felt that if they would have been in his place, they would not have offended the viceroy, for whatsoever the reasons may be.

Faulkner tells that he heard:

Thames is going to put his back into this. He’s been heard to say that Morgan’s case is the blackest and most disgraceful since the Madras business five years ago, that the verdict was rotten and the sentence inexplicable and that if the thing is allowed to pass he will consider it an indelible stain upon his administration of the country. (166)

Being a liberal person Lord Thames had some ideas in his mind which he wanted to convert into reality but such a liberal and idealist has no space in the colonial set up as they appear as a kind of threat to the English community residing in India. It was a general belief among the resident English that with time they start feeling detached to the Indian set up and start understanding the atmosphere and politics and the ways of living in an alien country. They start developing a kind of filial attachment for one another and a kind of negative feeling for the natives. As observed in earlier chapters the author does not find pleasure to portray such characters as heroes who are in any way favorable or kind to the Indian masses. Neither has it been observed that any Indian character has received over attention or proper description by the author. Faulkner believed that Lord Thames has just spent three years in India and that this little experience could not put him in a position to play with the fate of his countrymen in a colony for almost forty years or so.
The Barford battalion, of whom, Henry Morgan was a member were very uneasy over the matter being taken up over again and thereby wanted to fix a meeting with Eliot Arden and they wanted to raise a toast for Arden’s point of view regarding the reopening of the case and felt emotionally humbled to him. The routine of the resident English society has been highlighted and it is very wittily remarked that “The dear people of England change so little with place or circumstances” (169). They posses set standards and are reluctant to withdraw from them. They had a definite pattern of thinking for the natives and don’t want to deviate from it. Ruth Pearce while talking to Charles Cox, a new comer to India, tells him that “you still bleed with sympathy for the down trodden natives? (71) and when Cox interrogates her about the kind of justice that was done Dr. Pearce replied, “Justice was not done. It does happen so, sometimes, in this imperfect world. But something was done, and for reasons a good deal more important than the adequate punishment of any man, it ought to be considered done finally” (171). Cox was pretty sure that proper justice was not arrived at. His munshi Afzul Aziz tells him that he had enough evidence against Morgan and that the murdered person begged for his life but Morgan very brutally shot him on his head. But Ruth detests his viewpoint and tells him that “the bazaar will be full of evidence the moment it is understood that the Viceroy wants it” (172). Here Ruth is addressing about the colonized country and shrewd nature of the natives. The natives always are at the receiving end in the colonial set up and anyone who tries to make a balance between the two cultures is rebuffed.

Lord Thames was “deeply grieved” over Arden’s stand. Time and again the narrative also shifts to England where a typical English set up and society were. There are so many parties thrown and so many gossips about each and everything. Tea and
gossip was preferred by the ladies in England. There also, this Morgan case becomes the
topic of discussion and Mrs. Tring discloses about her intention to write a novel over this
“soldier tragedy from India” (179).

They were also concerned about the opposition faced by Lord Thames in India
and believe that he should accept the viewpoint of the local Englishmen who are residing
in India. There however are some like Mrs. Sannaway who wish, “we did not exist in
India . . . Nobody can deny that we ought to be wildly interested in it; but none of us are”
(180).

On a Sunday afternoon Mrs. Sannaway throws a party and the party is also taken
over by discussions on the persona and thinking of Lord Thames. However, Mrs Tring,
Victoria Tring’s mother was not in favor of Lord Thames and has no personal liking for
him as well. She hardly found him smiling anywhere. To Mr. Frayley, she described
Thames as;

He’s a cavernous prig, with those black eyes. I have sat through a whole
dinner beside him and never seen him smile. . . He has no spiritual
curiosity. His soul has nothing to give to another, nothing to take from
another. His world is full of people and other things. He is all for what he
must do” (182).

Thus Lord Thames has been presented as an individual with an altogether
different mindset and a very queer nature that is hardly appreciated by anybody but a few
like Charles Cox. Cox, a new comer to India, was taken over by Lord Thames’ point of
view regarding the sentence in the Morgan case.
Cox saw the Army an institution necessary to the preservation of peace, which he nevertheless, for ethical reasons, was compelled to criticize. It was an imperfect institution, an unsatisfactory institution too much given to compromise and for too much to protect Henry Morgan. In fact, it was an institution that was the trouble, and not a single agency at the disposal of the Civil Arms. (190)

Cox is critical of his own army and when he was told about the army men being affected by scurvy in a tropical region like India he enquired cynically “How did you manage to get scurvy?” (193) The army people had invited Arden and other officials for a party but Arden didn’t come up and colonel Vetchley enquired of Mr. Biscuit about the seriousness of the report “that the Government is trying to get round Arden in the Morgan case?” (196) Colonel Vetchley suggests Mr. Biscuit “On any practical ground Thame’s notions are absurd. I tell you you can’t hang a white man for killing a back one in this country. It isn’t in nature. It hasn’t been done for two generations out her, and it’s not likely to be done for ten. The scales don’t balance that way” (197). He also adds that the name of Lord Thames would change as “The Hanging Viceroy” if he would insist upon the retrial and hanging of Morgan.

Narrator has very effectively developed the case in favor of the troops employed in India. They are here as dull as they can be and also states that for higher authorities “the common soldier is a brute, neither more nor less, a brute that kicks punkha coolies with his great heavy ammunition boots! Well, why does he do it with his great heavy ammunition boots? Because they are the only ones he’s got to wear! Regulations don’t provide troops with carpet slippers” (198). It is worth consideration that colonel Vetchley
has very hard view for the natives and for him, “This notion of putting the native on an absolute equality with the European is all Tommy-rot; and I’ll prove it to you. Man for man he isn’t an equal” (198). Colonel Vetchley also talks of one Kala Jong who was brutal enough to kill each and every beast and the fowl and thus was very much sure that the natives are brutes and that it was very wrong on part of the viceroy to have the case reopened for the sake of a brute and insensitive native.

Lord Thames being very sure about his pursuit write a letter to Arden, thereby persuading him to change his stand over the much talked case. Ruth Pearce on the other hand time and again motivates Arden to take his stand on the case. She also informs him about Cox who has his affinities with Lord Thames and that he has collected enough evidence against Morgan from Aفزul Aziz but once again cox’s lack of experience is talked about and it is felt that his character would gradually develop after he spends a considerable amount of time in India. Arden also enquires about the religion of the evidence and it comes to their knowledge that the evidence was a muslim so there is “no rooms for race motive” (204). Arden being well aware of the case thought that there is “a little truth and a great deal of lying, constructive lying after the event, it seems to me. It’s clearly put together” (205).

The description of Eliot Arden’s attitude by Duncan is very convincing as it has been described as “a middle aged attitude, and he was a middle aged man with a film of grey on his hair, a wife and sons in another part of the world, and a post of heavy public responsibility” (206). It was the plight of each and every English official residing in India. Their hair turn grey because of constant troubles they have to face in India.
Eliot Arden is invited, or it can be better understood as commanded, by his Excellency, the Viceroy for a meeting at Calcutta and Arden felt that this gesture on part of the Viceroy is simply to pressurize him so that he would give order for the retrial of the case. In the mean time Ruth Peace is ordered to report at Calcutta hospital and because of this order she defers her plan to go to England for her higher studies. This order provides relief to Hiria, the ayah of Ruth and she felt that “England is too far, missahib; and everybody is very sick in those ships” (214) thereby projecting the arduous journey being taken up by the English people in order to come to and go back from India.

Ironically, the narrator describes about the parties being thrown by the civil societies and the parties were all constant, only the circumstances differ. Parties thrown are described vividly as:

They drank more tea and ate more ices. The pock-marked kitmutgar circulated among them with feverish activity. They chattered as hard as the sparrows, and laughed, which the sparrows could not do; Mr. Cox’s explosion was heard at regular intervals with an unmistakable note of excitement. They were occupied with whisky and soda and iced coffee and fifty different things. (226)

In one of those parties thrown by Mrs. Lamb there has been discussed a very queer offence. It has been told that Mrs. Lamb and Mrs. Biscuit were not at all in good terms with one another and the reason behind this was that Mrs. Biscuit’s terrier “had worried the goat of Mrs. Lemon”. This brings out the possessiveness of the British-Indian society. They are so fond of their stuff that they hardly bother about human relations
when their stuff is at stake and in this case, a terrier and a goat. It can never be said that Duncan was totally blind to her contemporary society. She very effectively brings out the useless trifles and callous attitude of the colonial set up and the way they use to behave within their own set up and the outer world.

The tennis party that is thrown by Mrs. Lemon had all the important officials of the Pilaghur society. Dr. Pearce also appears there and is desperate enough to talk to Charles Cox, who is however interested in playing tennis with Miss Hillyer. Somehow Ruth manage to get hold of Charles and tells him that he has definitely added to the troubles of Arden and believes that “Lord Thames, also, would feel a jolly sight better if he could hang Morgan; but there are more important considerations” (224) but Cox clarifies that “The Viceroy doesn’t want necessarily to hang Morgan; he only wants to get him adequately punished. And it isn’t only his rectitude that’s involved - it’s the honour of England” (224). It is during this conversation with Charles that Ruth comes to know about Arden’s visit to the viceroy.

Misao Dean in A Different Point of View cotes Mathew Arnold’s Culture and Anarchy and discusses about his Hebraist and Hellenie kind of people and states that “Duncan similarly divides her reformers into the Hebraic single-issue reformers and the Hellenic idealist in her novels, portraying the former as ultimately too unaware of his own limitations to be effective” (88). Dean also confirms that Anthony Andover Thames did more harm as he was unaware of history and thus had no objective measure of his own actions, and thereby when he calls Arden to meet him “It involved damage to Arden’s dignity, to his sense of propriety, and to long settled convictions upon certain
questions, not to count his belief in his own experience and so small a matter of his popularity” (228).

Adren finally gives way to Thame’s idea and becomes the medium for the Viceroy’s desires to be fulfilled. People in general were also convinced that the commissioner would definitely scum to Viceroy’s orders and this thing ultimately happens. This yielding to the Viceroy’s commands ultimately shatters Ruth’s and Arden’s platonic friendship. After a lot of ordeal the Morgan case is opened once again.

For the Anglo-Indians, the political situation was more personally critical than to the Viceroy, for whom India was only an official consideration. Similarly for Duncan India is more than just an exotic backdrop for a Victorian social novel. In the end, the Indian setting, the unfamiliarity of the outsider with the intricacies of the Indian culture and the attempt to rule India as if it were peopled by dark-skinned Englishmen, creates a situation from which Duncan’s characters cannot escape. (Huenemann 124)

Press, general society and everyone was in shock especially the English community. There were a few papers in favor of Lord Thames, mostly the native, whereas most of the British papers were against him. Lady Thames was also very much elated on her part feeling that Lord Thames has worked hard to establish equality in the oriental lands. It is pertinent to mention that although Lady Thames talked of equality yet for her names of individuals, especially Indians, do not matter. She was aware of the names of the judges of the revisional bench but forgot some ‘bhai’ in the end. Mrs. Tring
also supports the idea of Lord Thames and believes, “The ideals are gods that demand scarifies. We must not withhold them” (243). It was however revealed that the India office was against them.

Narrator clearly states that “what they thought in London was a matter of great indifference in India. There they were thinking of themselves. When it come to tea duty on sugar bounty, attention was paid, however exasperated, to the home view; but in matters intrinsically Indian the home view was felt to be superfluous” (247). The British Indian society felt that they must always be consulted before taking any kind of decision regarding any administrative issues however they always felt that they were not politically equipped to deal with the ground realities and circumstances what so ever and this realization leads to a sense of marginalization with in the Empire. The same kind of marginalization was felt by Duncan herself as she was the part of a little outpost of Empire that is Canada and she shared the same feeling with the resident English society. Thus “Calcutta was helpless but bitterly angry” (247) over the stand taken up by Lord Thames and their administration back home. To quote the words of Misao Dean, “. . . she portrays the inflexible application of principles drawn from the imperial centre as essentially destructive in . . . Set in Authority” (DPV 102).

The print media took up the issue very seriously and various reports were put up by them. Some reported all this fuss to be created in order to raise the standard of Lord Thames before the natives and to endow him with heavenly qualities of justice and righteousness.
The retrial lasted for about a fortnight as it was very dramatic. Natives felt that Lord Thames was a “new broom and would make a clean sweep of Morgan” (251) and similar thing occurred as well. Henry was charged of willful murder and was sentences to be hanged till death. Duncan remarkably records the reactions of the two parts of the colonial set up. The colonized part celebrated over the sentence given but for the colonizer’s world “it was not only the limit, but beyond the limit” (252) and they would not tolerate it. The officials were burning with contempt however the corporate sector felt very disturbed and thus took up the matter with Shimla authority but a stern no followed from there.

The sentence provoked the sentiments of the Barfords and they were very aggressive towards the natives and would kick them and ask them to “go and tell your ’arf brother. Antony Advover. But most of the things they say are less quoteable” (257). Adding to their resentment, Thames also orders the regiment to witness the act of hanging Morgan and this attitude on Viceroy’s part was deeply scorned by the Barfords and they were very furious and angry over the stand taken up by the Viceroy. They were becoming mutinous and “heat was aired” (293) in the atmosphere. It became “case of collision with natives” (295) and the “British soldiers were charged up in a mutinous condition” (298). The anger “was there, throbbing in the body of them as they stood in their orderly lines, a thing to be felt, and a thing incalculable at another moment, the strange dangerous things that runs one man into the mass and melts the mass into one man” (300).

It was clearly assumed that “there’s the seed of future trouble in it - worse trouble than ever between the soldiers and the native. Anything may happen” (303). The
atmosphere was all charged up and there was every kind of assumptions regarding what
might happen on the day of Morgan’s execution. However all the assumptions and
troubles cease to exist when it is discovered that Morgan committed suicide in the goal.
Parikh and Dhawan accuse Duncan from shying “away from facing a situation head on as
she shows her incapacity for analyzing psychological impact of action” (41).

Taking up Arden, the narrator describes now as one who is least bothered about
anything and has closed his eyes to Morgan case but the sympathies are again gained by
him as he receives the news of his wife’s death due to cardiac arrest in London. Arden
faced a genuine tragedy that is faced by the residents of the west of “strange and sudden
loss” (278). Thus a genuine attempt has been made to justify her stand in favor of an
English official who is in favor of his particular community irrespective of the
circumstances and there by making him a victim of fate. The narrator tries hard to arouse
the deepest concerns for Arden.

Sir Ahmed Hossein also left the Indian situation for England as he was assumed
to be unfit for his duties. “The Oriental mind, under the displeasure of the ruler, takes a
peculiar tone of despondency;” (265) and thus Hossein felt sick after being thrown back
on his decision of a very light sentence to Morgan and thus resorted to England in order
to get some respite. Duncan calls Morgan as “an original instance” and:

. . . the first Englishmen in forty years to suffer death for the murder of a
native of India was a vastly more attractive figure to the popular
imagination than the sixth as even the second would have been. Henry
Morgan became a sacrifice to the unknown god of that –which-we-are-
not-in-the-habit-of-doing, and a thousand voices cried ‘Stop!’ ‘Wait!’

(269)

The suicide by Morgan saved the clashed that would have occurred on account of his hanging and thus Duncan relieved the matter with the help of using the metaphor of rains. The seasons of India have been notoriously described and heat seems to be the only trait of the summers and nothing else. India seems “hottest and emptiest” (291). The rains have somehow managed to get a reputed place in this work of fiction thereby providing relief from scorching heat. The rains washed away the heat and hatred from the minds of the colonizer and the colonized. “Cases of collision with natives disposed off noticeably; and in the certainty of a good harvest the yearly burden of apprehension slipped from the shoulders that carry it” (309).

Towards the end of the novel very dramatic thing occurs. Ruth Pearce comes across Govind in Calcutta, who was known to have been murdered by Henry Morgan. Govind reveals that he has been ordered to live in Chittagong but living a solitary life made him sick and thus he came to Calcutta. Hiria, the ayah of Ruth was also aware of the actual incident and narrated the same to Ruth upon her threatening. It was revealed that some native cultivator was shot by the Guzeratis and Gobind was only badly hurt so they replaced that dead body to Gobind’s and changed his clothes and asserted that Gobind has been killed. Hiria also revealed that Afzul Aziz had a deep rooted grudge against the English regiments on account of Cawnpore incident and thus plotted revenge on them. Ruth reported the matter to Arden but Arden felt that there is no need to reopen the case as it would result in much more trouble. To quote Jitesh Parikh and Vimal Dhawan:
After having failed to take the turmoil within British ranks to its logical conclusion, Duncan ends the novel with melodramatic flourish . . . Duncan ultimately selects this racist angle to reiterate this belief . . . Duncan’s novels too turn out to be propaganda sheets for the cause of Anglo-India. (41)

India has once again received negative publicity where there is much of noise and very less of ethics. A lady after meeting Ruth Pearce from India asserts “Ah, Yes, You have a look of solitudes” (334). Thus India becomes a place where one is destined to be sad and lonely in contradiction to England where there is happiness and a lot of good company. Mrs. Frayley Sambouene also tells Ruth “Your eyes tell me that India is a tragedy. Your beautiful eyes have suffered” (340).

The end of the novel is not however achieved at this juncture. There is another revelation at the end. Henry Morgan, was actually Herbert Tring, Herbert was brother of Victoria Tring who was destined to marry Lord Thames, the person behind the suicide of Morgan alias Herbert. Towards the last chapter Mrs. Tring reveals about Victoria’s decision to marry Thames and it is also in this very chapter it is revealed that Henry Morgan was actually Victoria’s lost brother Herbert. Victoria liked the stand he maintained on Morgan issue being very unaware of the fact that Morgan was her own brother. Ruth has the letter addressed to Victoria from Herbert but she decides not to hand over the letter to her and thus saves the blooming relationship between Thames and Victoria. Michael Peterman in “Passage to Ghoom states, “Set in Authority offers a chiselled diagnosis of the social attitudes that enforce and sustain imperialism, even as
the weight and tradition of English authority are seen to balance precariously above the anti-imperialistic forces that will soon undermine it” (n.p.).

The novel has in its plot the basic trifle between the ideal and the actual and it is the ideal that has been rejected for the sake of actual. The ideal situation, ideal judgment, ideal government were all utopias and hence not suited for India. Although Thames had the plan of making a utopia kind of place in India where there would be equality and justice for one and all but this does not happen. The working of Empire needs actual situations and a very balanced kind of approach so that the English community does not feels alienated. In fiction also an attempt has been made to make the British feel superior and it is does not hold good for Indian set up because of a clear reason on account of the inferiority of the race thereby putting up a typical colonial attitude of feeling superior. It is typical colonial work which has the sole aim to perpetuate the myth of white man’s superiority and burden.