CHAPTER III
IMPERIALISTIC PERSPECTIVES IN THE NOVELS OF
EDWARD J. THOMPSON

3.1 Introduction

Though the Anglo-Indian fiction became known in the mid-nineteenth century, it held its title only in the twentieth century. The Anglo-Indian fiction properly emerged with Rudyard Kipling and later the interest in India grew in Britain after the Indian Mutiny, and the foundation of the British Empire. M. K. Naik in his Mirror on the Wall (1991) confined the term ‘Anglo-Indian Fiction’ to the British writers only. He says:

Anglo-Indian fiction may broadly be defined as fiction by British writers in which British or occidental protagonist operates mostly in an Indian setting (though the scene may shift to England occasionally), and interacts with Indian and other British or occidental characters” (3).

Anglo-Indian fiction, in general, is the product of the British writers’ response to the experiences in India – experiences which are sometimes, imagined by them and sometimes factual. Most of these writers were civil servants, army officers and their wives, who were in India in their professional capacities. They chose to remain aloof from the Indians out of their racial prejudices. As a result, they were utterly ignorant of the Indian tradition and culture. Most of them came to India with the prejudices built into them by uniformed writings of historians like James Mill who had never visited India. Yet, we can see that a few
writers of them did come out of the confusion of prejudice and ignorance and tried to understand India and the Indians. Edward Thompson was one of them who appreciated Indian social and cultural milieu and lamented on the distorted relations between the British and the Indians.

Edward John Thompson has been deliberately ignored as an Anglo-Indian novelist in spite of his solemn and compassionate appraisal of the Indian situation during the 1920s. Thompson had a long and notable connection with India as a teacher of English in Bengal and his Indian novels, especially his trilogy on the Indian theme. *An Indian Day* (1927), *A Farewell to India* (1931), and *An End of the Hours* (1938), develops a confident attempt to heighten cross-cultural understanding, keeping in mind the condition of the Anglo-Indians in India.

Thompson notices the political aspects of the Indian problem and puts in a strong case for India’s freedom. For him, lack of mutual understanding is the main reason of unrest between the two races but he is unable to point out how this could be determined with the framework of the Empire and he almost abandons the endeavour in indignation, as Vincent Hamar, a judge and a major character from *A Farewell to India*, says:

You and I know already that this Indian job has ceased to be worth the infinite bother it has become and all the hatred and lying and misery it brings along. They are not our race, they don’t think our thoughts. Why the devil were we ever tied up with them and sent revolving on the same wheel of destiny? I half believe the ‘bhuts’ will decide that our time is up (280).

Thompson wrote novels, poems, plays, histories, essays and polemics; his variability may be estimated from the sample of Indian
novels of his published works. His novels prove him an excellent master of rhetoric who brought on an extensive emotional scope and an eloquence and virtuosity of style. They also help him to convince his readers that his motive was proper and his explanations viable, by showing the lack of bigotry in his attitudes and the flexibility of his sympathies and the competence of his judgments. Through his writings he requested the British rulers to make atonement for the unfairness they had done to Indians, to guide and support them with love and compassion instead of bureaucratic contempt.

Thompson was the part of those who opposed the British government policies and also assaulted the Anglo-Indian attitudes and conduct and tried to interpret Indian grievances to an indifferent British population. He not only questioned but rejected the concept of Empire in later years. But during the time of his active participation in British-Indian politics, his analysis of British rule in India did not come to hold with a critique of its imperialist entity. Besides, while Thompson showed anger at British attitude of superiority and driven by the indignity to which Indians are subjugated, while he rejected British claims to be executing a racial mission and respected Indian demands for self-determination, he remembered a commitment to the Empire:

Not a few Englishmen are reluctant to let India go, not because of the tribute foreigners believe us to draw from it, but for the entirely unpractical reason that it has fired our dreams, and the best of our manhood has gone into her service (279).

Thompson, like Forster, has his focus on the heart of the matter but lacks to have a way out. Moreover, his books pronounce like extensions of political discussions without the touch of art that would make them
novels. However, his encounter with India is realistic although charged with unpleasant realization of the hopelessness of the situation. His alienated heroes, who find themselves confined in the hostile but lovable land, emphasize a significant aspect of modern man’s empirical anguish.

Benita Parry’s *Delusions and Discoveries* (1972) treats Thompson in some detail but it lays stress on his expository writings and tries to measure the impact of these on his novel *An Indian Day*. Touching lightly upon the other novels, she concludes about the trilogy:

> These are loosely structured around his lament for warped relations between races and his search for a value inhering in the British-Indian encounter (180).

Shamsul Islam devoted a full chapter to Thompson in his *The Chronicles of the Raj* (1979). Islam studies *A Farewell to India* in some detail but neglects the analysis of Thompson’s overall achievement.

Sujit Mukherjee’s discerning article *A Prisoner of India* (1971) offers an effective analysis of Thompson’s Indian novels emphasizing his sympathy for Indians.

Apart from these studies there have been some brief notices of Thompson’s Indian and non-Indian fiction. M. K. Naik’s *Mirror on the Wall* (1991), implies that it is Thompson’s sense of dishonour and repentance at the robustness and an overwhelming attitude of the Englishmen in India that cost them the Indian Empire.

From the account of the major body critical comment on Thompson’s novels, it is evident that although he has successfully attracted many Indian critics, he remains overlooked because of the lack of any detailed consideration of his major concerns. Therefore, the
present study tries to explore the nature and efficiency of his unbiased and uninhibited colonial as well as imperial consciousness.
3.2 THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MEDAL: The Theme of Atrocities

3.2.1 Introduction

The political circumstances prevalent in India during the early 1920s had a tremendous influence on Edward Thomson. He was much affected by the Jallianwala bagh massacre and the justification of General Dyer by a substantial number of British and Anglo-Indian public. He watched with anxiety the increasing support for the Extremists in the Indian National Congress and the participation of the Indian masses in the non-cooperation movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. The Other Side of the Medal is an effort on part of Thompson to understand the reasons for disaffection of Indians with British rule- their growing irreconcilability with the British.

At its core The Other Side of the Medal is an endeavor by Edward Thompson to challenge the history of the 1857 mutiny as represented by the British historians. Its main objective is to convince the British to recognize the Indian side of the story. The histories of the mutiny by British writers had centered on the theme of atrocities committed by the Indians on the British and the heroic victory of the British. Thompson puts forward the view that this prejudiced one sided representation of the history of the 1857 mutiny has had an extremely bad influence on the relations of the British and the Indian people. The irreconcilability of the Indians has been fueled by this injustice done to the Indian side by the British historians in their representation of 1857. It goes on to expose in detail the atrocities committed by the British during the 1857 mutiny.

The book was written by Thompson to criticize the British representation of the history of the mutiny. He was aware that a considerable number of Indians were of the view that the Indian side had
been wrongly represented in the histories. Thompson was also aware that no native Indian could speak against the one-sided rendering of the history of 1857 in a colonial situation. In the Preface he says: “The book sets out matters that no Indian could or perhaps should, set out, and I believe that it will change the attitude of every Englishman who reads it to the end” (5).

However, in the Preface to the second edition, Thompson mentions that his book was well received by his countrymen in India, even though earlier some of the Christian leaders in England had expressed reservations about the timing of the book and expressed concerns that the book may do more harm than good as the political condition in India was extremely explosive and volatile. He says:

My countrymen in India have been generous to this book; and when journals of strongly British traditions of the Lahore Civil and Military Gazette and Allahabad Pioneer welcome a statement as long overdue, the nervousness of Christian leaders in England who wrote privately expressing their deep sympathy, but doubting if the time was ripe and if the book would not “do harm” harm in India is seen to have been unnecessary (5-6).

3.2.2 The Indian Hatred for the British

In the first chapter of The Other Side of the Medal, entitled ‘Indian Irreconcilability’, Thompson describes the feelings of the Indians for their British rulers in the early 1920s. He says that the hatred for the British is no longer limited to the Brahmins or Upper caste but has also gripped the masses of the country. He challenges the assumption of British scholars that it is only the Brahmins in India who are disaffected. Apparently, the
The popularity of the Non-cooperation movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi had an impact on Thompson. The participation of the general masses in the movement must have worried Thompson. He thus searched for the reasons for this spread of British hatred among all Indians. The reason provided by Thompson in his book appears to be surprising and simplistic. Thompson holds that the memories of ‘bloody suppression of Mutiny’ in the Indians and the fact that the British had “succeeded in imposing its version of events on the whole world” responsible for the growing hatred among the Indians for the British. He then provides the antidote which may reconcile the Indians to British rule- they must be allowed to put forward their version of the history of the 1857 Mutiny. If they are not allowed to do so, it may increase their resentment and make them more resistant. According to Thompson there is no scope for reconciling the Indians unless, the Indians are permitted to conciliate the ‘unavenged and unappeased ghost’ of the 1857 mutiny.

The first chapter of *The Other side of the Medal* entitled ‘Indian Irreconcilability’, grapples with the problem of the spread of ‘actual hatred of the British name’ far beyond upper-caste politicians: “the discontent with our rule is growing universal”. Thompson’s answer is simple, probably simplistic: the memories of the bloody suppression of the Mutiny among the Indians, aggravated by the fact that “one side has succeeded in imposing its version of events on the whole world ...” From “Bihar to the Border the Mutiny lives, Thompson declares, ‘an unavenged and unappeased ghost’” (Sumit Sarkar, *Edward Thompson and India* 108-159).

In this connection, Thompson says:
When one side has succeeded in imposing its version of events on the whole world, when one side controls history or the press, then underground bitterness becomes something too poisoned and ferocious for expression (*The Other Side of the Medal* 26).

Further he says:

Indians are not historians; and they rarely show any critical ability. Even their most useful books, books full of research and information, exasperate with their repetitions and diffuseness, and lose effect by their uncritical enthusiasms. Such solid highways to scholarly esteem and approval as indexes and bibliographies are almost unknown to them. So they are not likely to displace our account of our connection with India. They are not able to arrange their knowledge so as to gain that first essential towards a favorable judgment, a hearing. But if they know that our account of certain enormously important events is unfair— and how can they help but know, being so sensitively concerned with them?— their failure to set their knowledge forth will only deepen their resentment (27-28)

### 3.2.3 Partial History of the Mutiny

Edward Thompson criticizes the British historians’ attitude towards the Indian Mutiny. In this book he objects their partial depiction of the Mutiny.

The interpretations of our history books, in the case of many events they challenge. But in one case they rarely challenge them openly because the deeds are too recent and too bitterly felt by both sides,
and because the English interpretation of them is too firmly established for easy displacement. This case unfortunately is that of one episode when we really were guilty of the cruellest injustice on the greatest scale. If we desire to eliminate bitterness from our controversy with India, we certainly have to readjust our ideas of this episode - the Mutiny. The Mutiny hardly stirred South India, and still does not deeply affect its thought. But there are many things, besides this fact, that have kept racial feeling and discontent from attaining in the south the intensity which marks them in the North; and it is in the North that the buried volcano is threatening to burst its way out, and it is from the North that seismic shocks are spreading all over India. Right at the back of the mind of many an Indian the Mutiny flits as he talks with an Englishman - an unavenged and unappeased ghost (29-30).

In the chapter ‘Shadows of Mutiny’, Thompson proceeds to show the other side of the 1857 Mutiny, as believed by the Indians. He challenges a number of falsehoods created by British scholars and exposes the gaps in their narratives, which they had left on purpose. Though he has not used any primary historical source material, he has effectively marshaled quotations from a number of secondary sources and supported his arguments. He criticizes the view held by some British scholars that “the Mutiny was in no sense a national revolt” and exposes how the British historians neglect the question whether the movement was popular or a real war of independence or merely a military mutiny in their writings. Thompson makes a telling analysis of the fact that the British historians had been uncritical in their writings, presented a totally one-sided interpretation, and used prejudiced evidence to impose their version of history of 1857 on the world. He exposes the many incidences
of atrocities committed by the British on the Indians during the mutiny. Thompson also exposes the fact that sporadic incidences of atrocities committed by the British continued to take place even after the Mutiny. Thompson’s central argument is that the memories of these atrocities still haunt the common Indian. Moreover, their bitterness against the British has increased because they have not been allowed to express these memories. The resentment of the Indian can be hoped to be assuaged only if the British themselves look at the reality of the Mutiny- accept the fact that during the mutiny cruelty and atrocious behavior was the feature of both the sides- Indian as well as the British. Thompson argues that unless the British historiography of 1857 mutiny is changed and the Indian version is given its due place, the resentment among the Indians will continue to grow and spread. To limit the resentment among the Indians, the British need to correct the distorted images of the mutiny and stop glorifying the mutiny.

Thompson tries to invert British historiography about the Mutiny in this chapter. Using quotations from a number of books on the Indian Mutiny, he shows that the views of the Indians regarding the causes and nature of the Mutiny were different than those held by the British. He counters the myth perpetuated by the British historians that the “Mutiny was in no sense a national revolt”. With the help of the following quotations in the book Thompson shows how the colonial historians had neglected and refused to tackle the question whether the mutiny was had a popular orientation or whether it was a real war for independence: “No other episode of first class importance has been treated so uncritically or upon such one-sided and prejudged evidence” (32).

Further he says:
For in the world’s history the uprisings of slaves against their masters stand out, a record of suffering and devilish cruelty on both sides. …Terrorism wars with terrorism; still the stronger side issues its bulletin to the world (36).

And next he maintains:

But in English histories that veil, though drawn over the excesses of our own infuriated forces, has not been drawn over those of the infuriated mutineers. It is necessary that we should look, once, clearly and finally, at the side which has been hidden from ourselves; then we shall understand in part what madness is working subtly in the Indian mind to-day (38).

Execution by blowing from guns was a punishment that the East India Company inherited from the old Mogul Empire, whose successor and continuation it was. It was by no means the worst thing it took over. Thompson goes on to describe the horrors of the punishment inflicted by the British on the mutineers:

The Mutiny, as I have said, means little to South India. Nor does it as yet mean a great deal to Bengal, though every year it is meaning more. But from Bihar to the Border the Mutiny lives; it lives in the memory of the Europeans and of Indians alike. It over-shadowes the thought and the relations of both races… Because of the Mutiny a great fear broods over the European community in India and from time to time, on very slight provocation leads to an outcry from “energetic people” for immediate martial law (86).
There can be no doubt that the dramatic and heightened fashion in which the Mutiny has been pictured to us has been responsible for deeds that would have been impossible to Englishmen in their right frame of mind:

I am not going to say much about the influence of the Mutiny and its memories on the Indian mind. Any reader with imagination can guess. When two nations war, any amount of bloodshed in battle is forgiven and forgotten. But when one side sets itself up as a tribunal, and takes upon itself the wholesale use of the gallows and firing squad, then it does something that is not forgiving or forgotten while the generations last (119).

According to Thompson,

There are only two ways of assuaging this bitterness: let us close all schools and colleges, put down with heavy penalties all learning to read or write, and as far as we can, banish all thinking and discussion, every sort of education; or let us face the things that happened and change our way of writing about them (121).

3.2.4 Atonement (*Prayaschitta*) for Atrocities

Thompson’s answer to the problem is represented in his word ‘atonement’. Thompson says that the Indians do not need political reform to give them a larger share in the governance of India or even Self-government or Independence. The conclusion of his book is that what the Indians need atonement for the injustice is done to them during the mutiny. According to Thompson the English and the Indians can have a cordial relationship only when England makes *prayaschitta* (atonement)
for its atrocities and the brutal suppression of the mutiny by admitting their mistakes and correcting the distorted history of the mutiny. In the conclusion of his book Thompson transfers his own thinking on to the Indians. In fact, in the early 1920s a large number of Indians had become interested in political reforms and had demanded a larger share in the governance of the country. Many had also demanded independence from British rule. It is indeed doubtful how many Indians wanted ‘atonement’ in the sense meant by Thompson.

Though *The Other Side of the Medal* is indeed a significant text that reflects liberal British perception about colonial India in the period between the two world wars, it stops short of advocating the independence of Indian people from Colonial rule. Thompson represents the liberal imperialist who wanted to preserve the colony of India within the British Empire. In fact, it can be said that *The Other Side of Medal* is imperialistic in the sense that it urges that India can be retained in the British Empire only if the British make an ‘atonement’ or magnanimous gesture for the mistakes in 1857 and correct the colonial historiography of the mutiny.

In this connection Sumit Sarkar in his book *Writing Social History* remarks:

Significant here, and obviously so is the dubious transfer of Thompson’s own assumptions to the Indians, a substantial and growing proportion of whom had become interested by the 1920s in ‘larger measures of self-government’ or even independence and not in any atonement or ‘magnanimous gesture’ from their rulers. Very significant, too, is the centrality of the deeply Christian
concept of atonement in Thompson during these years: Atonement (108-159).

Thompson concludes the novel with the awareness of atonement with the following concluding lines:

There is no commoner word on Indian lips today than atonement. England they say has never made atonement; and she must do it before we can be friends. The word in their minds is the Sanskrit *prayaschitta*, usually translated atonement: but its meaning is rather a gesture. It is not larger measure of self-government for which they are longing, it is the magnanimous gesture of a great nation so great that it can afford to admit mistake and wrong-doing, and is too proud to distort fact (131-132).

To sum up, given in light of the confused amazement it aroused in British circles, *The Other Side of the Medal* does appear as ‘a crusader against British imperial policy’. It has made Thompson seem most politically anti-imperial novelist.
3.3 AN INDIAN DAY

3.3.1 Introduction
Edward Thompson’s Novel An Indian Day has a setting of unrest caused by the Indian national movement, which had become intense as a consequence of the partition of Bengal. On the other hand, the novel chiefly concerns with the problem of acceptance and non-acceptance of India and the Indian people by the British rulers in India. The novel introduces the life of the British rulers in the district of Vishnugram (a fictional town) in the Bengal state. Vishnugram is a miniature India introduced by Thompson, where sober Englishmen venture to reach an agreement with the Indian socio-political situation and the Indian population around them.

In this novel we come across the two types of English characters who represent two different views about Indians and the Indian political situation. One type belongs to the administrative policy-making group i.e. the English bureaucracy, and the other is the British in their private capacity – the educationists and missionaries. The novel bestows Thompson an opportunity to evaluate and condemn the attitudes and the conduct of the English bureaucracy and at the same time introduce patterns of human relationship with the Indians through the characters such as Findlay and Alden.

An Indian Day is evidently the story of Vincent Hamar, an English officer in the judicial branch of the I. C. S. cadre. The novel opens with Vincent Hamar’s joining as District Judge at Vishnugram. Hamar is transferred from Suriganj to Vishnugram by way of punishment for acquitting the Indians blamed in the case of revolting against authority. To Hamar,
His experience had knocked him aslant from sympathy with official lines of thought, and he was hungering for an existence that had a real hold on the land where it was passed (An Indian Day, 6).

It implies that as a colonizer, Hamar is ready to change himself. Though he is a bureaucrat, he is not like other British rulers like Major Henderson and Lt. Warren, who are always ready to criticize India and the Indian people out of utter snobbishness and ignorance. For Lt. Warren Indian people are “all niggers” and Major Henderson “spoke of Indians, and of everything Indian, as if their presence on the planet distressed him physically” (13).

Vincent Hamar is received by Nixon, the police Superintendent of Vishnugram and his wife. Hamar also meets Robert Alden, an educational missionary at the college, his wife Frances and her sister Hilda Mannering, a charming young lady. But Hamar was not eager to make friendship with Alden because Alden is recognized as “an enthusiast where the people of the land were concerned, their thought and life” (26).

Hamar knew that people like Robert Alden were considered to be, “good-hearted but wooly in their thinking” (26).

It is interesting to observe that the other Englishmen thought about Hamar the same. In the beginning, his attitude towards the Indian Collector, Kamalakanta Neogyi, was also different and reserved. But in the course of the novel, Hamar gradually changes himself. It is Hilda Mannering, who plays an important role as an agent of change in his life. Hilda herself is in ambiguous mental condition about remaining in India.
But her relationship with Alden and Findlay compels her to think that there must be something more to be learned and understood about India. Alden and Findlay both have sincere fondness and respect for India and the Indian people. Findlay takes up a famine relief work, and starts a number of relief centers in Vishnugram. Hamar also contributes with Findlay selflessly and began to unlearn the manners of his bureaucratic behavior and thinking. Hilda Mannering herself is undergoing change and also joins Findlay’s mission. Hamar develops healthy relationship with Kamalakanta Neogyi, the Collector, who is a good administrator but he too has problems of working the so-called reforms applied by the British rulers, and confronts the corrupt superior officers like the Commissioner Deogharia and his own lustful and cunning countrymen like Raja of Kendudi.

Thompson also introduces the English characters like Fergusson and Tomlinson, the M. P. of the liberal party, who are corrupt in their own ways and play a significant role in tragic relationship between British and Indians. The novel also notifies the revolutionary activities and the issue of Indian nationalism and race relations. Such socio-political issues are concerned within the novel in the discussions between characters. These discussions in this novel take place between Robert Alden, Findlay and Jayananda Sadhu (who is supposed to be shaped on Shri. Aurobindo). Jayananda Sadhu was an I. C. S. officer, but resigned to participate in the Indian political movement. Later he gave up all worldly ties and began living the life of an ascetic. He exhibits Indian point of view but he also regards liberal English officers and the Englishmen like Alden and Findlay. Alden and Findlay are both non-conformist missionaries. Findlay is open-minded in the sense that he tries honestly to appreciate Hindu religion and customs. He does not like to generalize about India and the Indian people as the English bureaucrats generally do.
Both Alden and Findlay are not characteristic missionaries. They do not attend the ‘spiritual consolation’ sermon of the Bishop of Burra Sappur, who has come on a short visit to Vishnugram. They share their contribution to the view of C. F. Andrews, about whom Hugh Tinker in *The Ordeal of Love* (1979) states:

The new angle of vision obtained by seeing questions partly through Indian eyes drew Andrews into a movement … this was the so-called sympathy or fulfillment movement, which viewed Indian religion as providing the seed bed for Christianity. The movement placed great emphasis upon the words of Christ: I come not to destroy but to fulfill. Hinduism was not to be destroyed by the efforts of the Christians in India, but was to be fulfilled – transformed sublimated – in union with Christ. … The missionary advocates of the sympathy school were almost all non-conformist or evangelicals (34).

Alden and Findlay, in this respect, are mouthpieces of Edward Thompson. They both dream of the coalition of India and England through Christianity. They would like to achieve an appeasement of the East and the West and turn the British Empire into a Commonwealth in which all member nations would enjoy independence. Thus the novel *An Indian Day* makes a case for conciliation of the East and the West.

### 3.3.2 The Imperial undertones in the Novel

In his expository writing Thompson had often criticized the English administrators for their established opinions about India and the Indian people. He considers it as the ‘group policy’ of the British rulers and also makes it clear in the novel through some English typical
characters such as Major Henderson, Lt. Warren, Mr. Nixon, the police officer and his wife. This group mentality includes the prejudices possessed by the English people against the Indians, their ignorance about the Indian history and culture, their intolerance with the Indian climate and the Indian way of life, their culture. As an active participant in the Indian socio-political situation, Edward Thompson was always aware of these problems of unrest between English-Indian relationships as rulers and ruled respectively.

3.3.3 The Hateful attitude towards India

It should be noted that one common complaint frequently held against India and the Indians by the Englishmen and women is that India is a land of evil. It is the ‘group mentality’ of the English rulers which one finds mirrored in the fiction of Kipling and afterwards. In An Indian Day Hamar, who is shifted to Vishnugram, is told: “Vishnugram? A rotten hole. They haven’t got a club, there’s an Indian Collector, during half the year you can’t get a four at a bridge” (4).

A place is good and passable if there is company of English people. The Indian Collector, as an authority, is another disqualification of the place. If there is no English administrator, a place is ‘miles from any decency’. This prejudice of English people against Indians in service is very common and permanent. This evil attitude involves Indian population also. In the presence of Indians with their superstitions Major Henderson is vexed: “You will never get me understand these people. … They don’t like you shooting monkeys. And peafowl you mustn’t touch” (10).
The narrator of the novel also says: “He (Major Henderson) spoke of Indians, and of everything Indian, as if their presence on the planet distressed him physically” (13).

It is quite interesting to observe that the narrator in *An Indian Day* invariably weakens this kind of harsh criticism against India by making some favourable observations on behalf of the English rulers. For instance, he tells us that Henderson, nevertheless, “bought every book about India, read largely about Indian history, customs, religion, even literature, he patiently went on pilgrimage to even the lesser sites,” (13).

This clearly shows that instead of his grudges he loves India very much.

### 3.3.4 The hateful attitude towards Indians

It must be noted that the British rulers generally came in contact with the Indians who were educated and who served in the government offices and army as subalterns. Anglo-Indian fiction is full of such examples of scornful and contemptuous references to these Indians, who were treated as niggers. While commenting on Suriganj, the narrator who is an alter-ego of the author, tells us: “It was a place of half-baked babus, cringing, insolent, seditious, wholly unprimitive except in their personal habits and sanitation …” (P: 8).

Here Indians, particularly people from Bengal, have been ignorantly maltreated by the Anglo-Indian writers in their novels. They were abused not because they spoke English, dressed like the English but they were Indians with their personal habits. Moreover they were ‘cringing, insolent and seditious’. Lt. Warren would not like to
accompany Indian people in the first class railway compartment they occupy. He disdains: “There are some niggers in the only other first” (P: 9).

Though the narrator, here, masks over it saying that only the English army men and the less educated Englishmen scorned the Indians as niggers, this was not the fact. The height of imperial attitude is seen when even the Eurasians were treated as niggers by the English people.

### 3.3.5 The scourge of prejudices against Indians

The British rulers reared a number of prejudices against Indians. They assumed that Indians and particularly Bengalis were seditions and impudent, cowards and submissive. Such opinions were successfully transmitted from one generation to the other. The newcomers from England who joined the civil services in India were previously informed about the Indians and their features. For example, Hamar, a characteristic English bureaucrat, tells Major Henderson: “And nowadays every European believes that all Indians have bombs in their dhutis somewhere ….” (16).

Lt. Warren thinks that Indians sitting in the first class compartment are not faithful to their government if they deny vacating the compartment for a British administrator. However, Hamar himself notices how unaware and illiterate Englishmen like Warren were noticeably prejudiced:

He saw now what he was up against … utter confusion of thought, a miasma of prejudice, false history, second hand report, memory of personal annoyances or fancied slights (17).
Hamar also was not away from prejudices. Once he directly asks Alden: “Do you think the people of this country will ever become Christian – the better classes I mean?” (61).

The orthodox missionary, Jack believes, “… their minds are so dark” (P: 62), expressing indirectly that they can hardly be taught a decent religion like Christianity. The prejudice among the orthodox Christians that the Indians have an ordinary mind and they have a religion which befits their mind was also very popular.

The feeling of disdain about the educated Indians was also common among Englishmen. Douglas, the principal of the college, for example, showed contempt against the educated Indians. Similarly, bureaucrats like Nixon also believed that the government was wasting money on the education of the Indians and did not make provision of money for the maintenance of officers’ accommodation. This official complaint against the Indians is procreated on account of their religious beliefs as well as their superstitions.

Indians have no gratitude is one more popular prejudice leveled against them in the novel. Hamar, who is worried to learn that Hilda Mannering wants to return from Darjeeling to work for the famine-stricken Indian population, outbursts and says:

What! let her kill herself for a lot of black people! … There isn’t one of them who knows what gratitude is! You can slave and slave - and they just go on cursing you! (117).

In spite of that, Alden safeguards Indians pointing out that whatever the English officers do is their job, for which they need not expect gratitude
from Indians. “Orientals were naturally lustful and evil” (P: 44) was another commonly held prejudice against the Indians.

These prejudices held consciously or unconsciously appear to be responsible for the common unrest among Indians against the British rule.

3.3.6 Feeling of contempt against Indian Nationalist Movement

Many British officers like Lt. Warren utterly hated the Indian Nationalist Movement. For Warren a simple solution to the movement was:

A dozen rounds from a machine-gun, a few executions, and everyone would be happy again. And yet we went on talking, and, what was worse, letting these blighters talk (15).

Major Henderson and Lt. Warren both are shocked to learn that Hamar was one “…who let off those swarajists scoundrels…” (15). For them Hamar suddenly becomes ‘anti-British’, ‘a traitor’. Hamar himself, on the other hand, condemned Alden for his sympathy and duty for the Indians.

Here Thompson provides a brief look at British political view in the narration of the visit of the British politician Sir Tomlinson. Tomlinson intends “to build up India on really sound British lines” (P: 226). He is a shallow politician received by lavish dinner party and praises thrown on him by Deogharia, the Anglicized Indian officer. But Tomlinson makes very clear what the British official line in general was.

3.3.7 The anti-imperial aspects in the novel

In An Indian Day Thompson introduces two main English characters, Alden and Finlay as well as one Indian figure, Jayananda Sadhu, who represent Indian side. Alden and Findlay both are the
representatives of liberal Englishmen who sincerely felt positive for India and in their authoritative or personal position tried to help India and the Indian people. For instance, when a British missionary scorned the Indians, Alden suddenly reacted by saying:

You get to see with their eyes …. I know how vexing they are, in ways enough. But we never shake free from our herd-morality, any more than they do; and we go on judging them because they’re not first rate Englishmen in dark skins. I suppose it’s a question of different ethics. They hate many of the virtues that we praise; and we hate many that they keen on. We seem to them incredibly rough and rasping; and they seem to us worms. We’re both right - by our own standards (123).

As far as the English female attitude towards the Indians is concerned, being a sensitive lady, Hilda Mannering realizes:

How galling must be this alien domination, to Indians of any pride. Even in the Christian community, she had learnt, a sensitive nationalism was awake; …. Even if there were only a hundred Indians who were free from all servility and sycophancy, then there were a hundred who suffered shame and humiliation inexpressible (124).

In reality there were number of nationalist Indians disturbed due to the foreign rule, who were considered to be misdirected and uninformed even by sympathetic people like Alden. In the weapon-smuggling matter Alden receives an opportunity to interpret the essential difference
between the English and the Indians. While explaining the matter, he says:

We think first, second and last, of doing our job; our favourite virtues are justice, firmness, integrity. To us mere kindness, as such, is weak sentimentality. But Indians don’t give a bean for our cardinal virtues. To them any sort of harshness seems infinitely worse than the worst lapse from absolute justice (254).

This obviously shows that Thompson’s anti-imperial characters like Alden also make a requirement for the British virtues and offers allowances for the poor natives for not holding them.

At the habitat of Jayananda Sadhu Alden, Hamar and Neogyi have a meeting with him where they discuss on the difference between the English and the Indians. Alden complains against the Indians that they pretend to be highly moral about violence. He is also distressed that the English are held responsible for every minor thing. When Jayananda Sadhu asks him what disturbs him most in Indian people, Alden replies:

Backbonelessness … they wash their hands and cringe, instead of behaving like men. No. I think I’m more annoyed yet by the way they keep bragging. Your people never forget if a foreigner praises you. You still quote some silly thing that was said in 1826 by a fool of a major who didn’t know a word of any Indian tongue …. And yet considered himself entitled to say that Hinduism was a far deeper and finer religion than Christianity – and this at a time when you were burning a thousand widows a year in Bengal alone! …. And then a number of silly European and American women you quote (277).
Here Alden, who is regarded as the second self of the author, thinks that Indian people boast like this because, “You are a new firm, and you’ve got to bounce and swank and advertise. We’re old-established; the world knows what our goods are ….” (278).

On the other hand, when Alden asks Jayananda Sadhu what annoys him most in the British rulers the Sadhu replies:

Your nobly moral airs. The way you have persuaded yourselves that the Empire is just a magnificent philanthropic institution, disinterestedly run for the sake of an ungrateful world. That’s where your brag comes in (278).

Here in Jayananda Sadhu’s judgment it is seen that what is incorrect with both is the subsidiary opinions.

To conclude, the final message of An Indian Day is that of mutual understanding between the two communities and the scrutiny of them unsound interpersonal relationships. Of course there are the typical Anglo-Indians like Major Henderson who always see India in a bad light. They think that every Indian is a seditionist. But all these traditional views of the Englishmen are not those of Thompson himself or his major characters who are refreshingly free from stock phrases. In this way the novel An Indian Day may be artistically less impressive but it is more convincing as a real picture of India during colonial period. Moreover, Thompson writes about a very puzzling period in Indian history – the Rise of Nationalism and the polemics of the whole issue of imperial upheavals and above all the ironies of East-West encounters.
3.4 A FAREWELL TO INDIA: A Political Novel

3.4.1 Introduction

A Farewell to India (1931) is Edward Thompson’s yet another important novel from his trilogy of Indian novels on the theme of destiny of the British colonizers in India made unstable by the rise of nationalism, the beginning of which is emphasized in the earlier novel of the trilogy, An Indian Day. In this novel Thompson tries to present the picture of extreme political confusion and polarization that continued during the 1920-30 in India.

The setting of the novel is once again Vishnugram, the village already depicted in An Indian Day. In both the novels same major characters are depicted with some minor additions. Therefore, it is possible to delineate the development of these characters from one novel to another. This will set up an uninterrupted focus on the related matters in connection with both the novels.

Robert Alden, one of the major characters and the mouthpiece of the writer himself has taken charge of the local college of Vishnugram as the principal. The novel begins with the description of a school function where Alden is the chief guest. During the function Alden is thinking of the disturbance caused by Independent students’ Association. Some of the students of the Association have already been suspended from the college for their alleged involvement in violence and nationalistic activities. Alden cannot understand why the native students are resorting to violent means when they can talk openly about their demands. He cannot cherish the idea of achieving freedom through violent means. Alden’s mind is full of deplorable thoughts when he becomes conscious of the fact that the days of British dominance in India are over and they will have to quit India. Realizing the situation he speaks to himself that now “The boot
was on the other leg. Education was on sufferance, and imperious and reckless Nationalism ruled the stage, jerking his students back and forth like puppets” (*A Farewell to India* 42).

Though Alden enthusiastically discusses for peaceful relationship of India with England, he realises that the English rulers have to quit Indian land. He expresses his feelings to Hilda Mannering:

There is something elemental in this land, tat’s in revolt against us. … The age from time to time, in one hand or another, gets sick of a certain people, and gets rid of them. It isn’t reason; it isn’t even the sword that kicks them out … the age is tired of us, and wants a change. I guess it’s going to have one (117).

Here, with reservations Alden is proclaiming abdication of the British Raj. The town of Vishnugram and Alden’s college in it constitute India, which is now being influenced by the nationalist movement turned violent. Alden finds it highly difficult to fight with the violent activities carried on by the student’s association.

As a matter of fact, *A Farewell to India* is a political extent interspersed with the personal lives of the English people like Alden, Findlay and others. As a result, the imperial underpinnings in the novel manifest from the passionate political talk between Indian characters like Jayananda Sadhu and Dinbandhu, the self-proclaimed extremist selflessly working for the union between all types of Indians on the one hand and the non-authoritative Englishmen like Alden and Findlay on the other.
3.4.2 The depiction of British sense of superiority

In the beginning of the novel, Thompson’s ironical narration of the prize-distribution ceremony at the school shows us Englishman’s derision and disdain for the English language used by the Indian people in the function. Here Alden does not want to lose an opportunity to show the ineffectiveness of the Indian officers and their weakness for engaging in self-praise. In all the three novels of the trilogy Alden is always reported to be considering the Indians light heartedly and comically. Behind his paternalistic attitude and ridiculous laughter there is British sense of superiority. In the novel, the English characters shown to be approving with the Indians are either judges watching Indian behaviour and passing judgment on it, or they are the victims of the tricks of the unpleasant Indians. It is one reason why even the competent Indians like Neogyi feel awkward and undergo inferiority complex in the company of the English people.

This shows that though Thompson is believed to be advocating the Indian cause, his characters are not free from their sense of complacency and superiority. Jayananda Sadhu who is an Oxford educated is the only Indian with whom Alden feels to be on the same academic or intellectual level. All other Indian characters introduced in Thompson’s novels are far too inferior, superficial, comic and depraved. Alden gently remarks about Jayananda Sadhu that “By a bit of judicious buying of souls we might keep the Raj going for another century” (23). Though it shows a respect for Jayananda, it also exposes British attitude to Indians. Similarly, it is commonly held belief that Indians are weak and incapable for material jobs. Mayhew, the police officer has recruited some Indians for the job of policing. But Alden mocks at them reflecting to be “large, heavy-footed” (25) meaning incapable in their duty of protecting the premises. Mayhew
also cries out: “What else do you expect them to be? If you are set down in a lot of damned cowardly Bengalis …” (25).

Alden tries to defend the native people, for he says “They are not cowardly” (Ibid) but next moment he modifies his statement saying, “They are liable to panic, which is not the same thing” (25). This indirectly asserts that only the Englishmen are suitable for the physical jobs and Indians are incapable of dealing with security of their country. Such assumptions held by the characters like Alden disclose the imperial attitude at its worst.

3.4.3 The pretention of goodwill towards Indians

Many British colonizers thought that they were sympathetic towards Indians by managing the Indians affairs. In one situation, Alden himself feels like boasting about how he is carrying on generous task in India,

… he was never able quite to forget that he was a gentleman giving away all he had for folk who had no earthly sort of claim upon him and were quite incapable of knowing what they were receiving … (164).

Further he believed that

The English had shown India strength, patience, fortitude, fairness. But for all the magnificent philanthropy of their service, whether in ruling or in preaching they had not shown over much of this (164).
Though Alden is not a military or administrative officer, he many a times refers to the power of the English nation, and hints that the British can easily check the nationalist insurrection in India. He is helpless to forget that he is colonizer and ruler. In the novel he sounds a false note for all his sympathy for Indians. Here one doubts how Thompson could hope to form a healthy friendship between the people of India and England if his alter ego in his fiction boasts about goodwill to Indians and pampers in self-praise for his mother country.

### 3.4.4 Towards the impaired political environment

It was British rulers’ prejudice as well as their foolish hope that the whole Hindu and Muslim communities were hostile to each other. They did not take the Indian National Movement in a sincere manner. They instead felt annoyed and mocked at it. When both the English and the Indians came face to face, there is passionate debate on the Indian political matters. For example, while propounding arguments Alden says:

… there are two choices ahead of you folk. You can steer India into peaceful partnership with the rest of the Empire, or you can enter on the path which you think has always led to independence and glory before – tat of assassination and guerrilla warfare (79).

On this observation, Dinbandhu hurls back with wrath:

Peaceful partnership! Your condescension is your worst insolence of all!” and further he includes: “And we say, Better rivers of blood than a nation with its soul in chains! (79).
On this retort of Dinbandhu, Alden blames that the Indian nationalist movement is conceded to be “captured by boys whose minds are in the popgun stage” (25).

Alden’s indignation and restlessness with the extremist Indian leaders is related to his intimate relationship with India. Like him, many Englishmen in India did not want to divide connection with India and abandon. But this relationship they wanted to construct with the Indians was hardly on terms of equality. Alden observes the role of British people in India as the rulers. The qualities he assigns to the Englishmen, he finds missing among the Indians. According to him Indians are not suitable to govern India or confront the decisive situations. Similarly, the Christian missionaries like Findlay are much worried about the ‘Suddha movement’ (bringing the converted tribal folk back to Hindu fold) and also annoyed to see that the Hindu religious procession was deliberately taken by the Church road halting and shouting.

The British rulers believe that there is a cardinal difference between the thinking of the Indians and themselves. For example, Hamar notices that in the matters of justice, Indians depend on the facts while the English believe in the evidence. As Alden mentions in An Indian Day, the Indians are believed to have different ethics. Alden would like the Indians to receive quietly a dominion status within the British Raj. Even Findlay precisely indicates how a modest Indian thinks about the Empire. He succinctly points out: “I know how decent Indians feel about staying in the Empire. It must be the way Non conformists feel about coming into the Church of England” (92).

Christian missionaries like Alden and Findlay took their organizational work with devotion. But they were distressed to see that the Indian people did not care for it. They were annoyed with political
involvement by the Indians in the workings of the educational institutions. Alden, for example, becomes angry with the trustees when they propound temporary suspension of the meeting to condole on the death of one Indian member. He angrily remarks: “Hang it all, are we never going to do any work?” (159).

To this one Indian lawyer who is one of the trustee answers: “What work, when beloved motherland is perishing?” (159).

This Indian point of view was often condemned by the Englishmen. They thought that the Indians were hypocritical and sluggish.

On the other hand, Alden presents a long list of mistakes committed by the British rulers. He says that England must do Prayaschitta (atonement) for the wrongs they have done to India. They always treated Indians as an inferior race. In spite of this liberal attitude Alden cannot agree with the Indian demand of Purna Swarajya. He would like to protect their Indian connection by detaining India within the Empire, providing her a dominion status. This shows that for Thompson, the Empire means internationalism with British rule at the central place. According to him, the Indian demand of Purna Swarajya was a narrow nationalism. He even attempted to impose this idea on Jawaharlal Nehru, who regretted it in his autobiography:

We are told that independence is a narrow creed in the modern world, which is increasingly becoming interdependent, and therefore in demanding independence we are trying to put the clock back. Liberals and pacifists and even so-called socialists in Britain advance this plea and chide us for our narrow nationalism,
incidentally suggest to us that the way to a fuller national life is through the ‘British Commonwealth of Nations’” (Nehru, *An Autobiography* 419-20).

Thus, as a political novel, *A Farewell to India* successfully catches all the anxiety, the hectic activity, the thrill on the Indian side in the days of the rise of nationalism and also the trouble, the nostalgia, the panic and sadness in the English camp. It is creditable on the part of Thompson that he does not take any sides. He blames both, the British and the Indians.
3.5 **AN END OF THE HOURS**

3.5.1 **Introduction**

*An End of the Hours* (1938) is the final novel of Edward Thompson’s trilogy of Indian novels. In this novel he records his impressions of India when he visited this country in 1937. As in the prior two Indian novels, it is the everlasting, inherent India which is shown to be protesting itself against British imperial dominance. In the Preface to the novel, Thompson confesses that, although the book is not autobiographical and the opinions expressed are not necessarily his own, “some of the things seen and heard and thought in a thirty years’ experience of the matters with which it deals” (*An End of the Hours*: Preface) have passed into the novel.

Of all the three novels *An End of the Hours* is the most shapeless and pondering novel. In the novel there is an account of Alden going out into the forest in moonlight and has a sight of Rani of Jhansi riding by with her soldiers, prepared for battle “her face scarred with the marks of old volcanic hatred” (*An End of the Hours*, 254). This imaginatively formed picture constitutes that the British dream of Commonwealth would come to worthless. The three friends, Alden Findlay and Jayananda Sadhu meet after a period of five years. In the meeting Jayananda Sadhu tells that he was forever a nationalist. Further he tells Alden that it is time for the British rulers to quit India. He says: “They have no right of perpetuation and the English have lasted long enough” (268).

Belonging to the ruled community Jayananda Sadhu cannot remain at a distance from the nationalist movement. The struggle between the British rulers and the Indians is inevitable.
Findlay dies in the company of his friends, Jayananda Sadhu and Alden. He is the only Englishman in all the three novels who could ascend above the ruler-ruled relationship, above nationalism and imperialism, and reach the position of sainthood. Findlay alone becomes known as a moral hero of all the three novels. According to Thompson, in this conflict between the ruler and the ruled, it is the ruler who has to make atonement, which Findlay carries out in his own distinct way.

3.5.2 The theme of justification

Of all the Anglo-Indian novelists it is possibly Edward Thompson who thinks most powerfully on native feelings. In the novel John Findlay, as he lies dying, revokes regretfully how, “when we came to India we thought we were shaping our own lives and minds. And you remember how full of plans and dreaming we were” (281).

Now he realises how those plans have gone astray, and those dreams have been ruined. Even though Findlay has found peace in Indian atmosphere, he has had to face some frustration. But he remains quiet as he peacefully meditates over the end of the Empire:

…the days of our pride are nearly finished and our race is about to come to judgment”; and the generous-minded would have to look “extenuating circumstances and to find out the ways in which our pride had – well, some – justification (125).

An End of the Hours is pervaded by the feeling of loss by death, of decay and perforated dreams. The British rulers are conducting as if they had already withdrawn their rule, as if they accepted the battle as lost. Alden here defines the now outmoded desire of a mission to India as a
Widening of the bounds of peace, beginning with an Empire which was at rest within herself, and a source of confidence to every other decent purposed nation, and, last of all, the whole world awake to its common humanity and all nations at peace at last! Each following meekly a Westminster model and precedent and Great Britain leading them all into the millennium (247).

Perhaps how unachievable such desires are is stressed when adjusted against the observation which Alden has of the perplexed contemporary world. Alden deplores the changes but is vital against unchanging, sluggish India under British rule where narrow and self-satisfied prejudices are replaced for thought; compared with the doubt and skepticism dominating imperial attitudes, the British in India be satisfied with “primal simplicities, on which the Empire is built” (5).

In fact Alden is a Christian activist, a man of Western values, strenuous and efficient and always interested in social and political affairs. But his craving for spiritual investigations brings him to Eastern religion and thought. His idea of Christianity which he develops as a ‘God’s effort’ is adequately general to involve some aspects of the Indian aspirations. He thinks that Christianity has apparently failed to grow in India and admits that Christianity is not a merciful religion whereas Hinduism is full of pity. Alden intimates to Findlay that Christianity has failed to appeal to Indians, but when faced by the particular ways in which Hinduism does in fact accommodate its believers’ various needs and activities, he is contemptuous.
3.5.2 The feeling of atonement

Alden is aware of the wrongs done to the Indian people by the imperial British rulers in treating them as inferiors but his real anguish lies in having to acknowledge his own failure as one of the Empire’s serving part. Alden’s dwelling in India on the passing of the Empire taken as memorable:

What was once passion and wrath and misery and pride was becoming an historian’s tale. It was platitude, and so well known and so little worth remembrance, even by oneself. Yet so appalling when you felt it in this remote Central Indian silence and tangle. Enough to make the heart stand still at the futility and tenuity of this life which you symbolized and shared. Alden’s Indian days were all but over, and he knew well that not even in history would there be a tiny plot left for his name (109-110).

The British rulers realize that the sign of their presence will cease to be in the days to come. Their existence in India will be like a sea wave which came and left to moisten the bank of Indian history. The British also admit that their systems they settled were not all agreeable, but instead, according to them, these systems will possibly help to emerge a new land. According to them:

The systems we have placed upon her are every day becoming like leaves whose sap is dying out in the twig that joins them to the tree. It used to trouble me, until I saw that a new life was forming within (263).
Thompson’s work could be called imperialistic in the sense that it is embodied obviously in the work. It is evident from the above that *An End of the Hours* deals with the time when India was on her way to self-rule. Thompson refers the situation as:

England has given up Empire already. She has finished within herself, and wants only to be allowed to linger out her days in coma. And of course everyone else knows it (127).

Here the situation that worried the British rulers was how the Empire should depart with honour. The rulers were spirited enough to admit guilt. They would accept inferior faults, but they wouldn’t say that the entire system of colonization was a big mistake.

All the English people living in India during their imperial dominance admit that their ruling system is dying out. They think: “Our own British-Indian system, so carefully, tightly wrapped about with ‘safeguards’ and ‘regulations’, an equilibrium of check and countercheck, this was also dying out from the land” (109).

This fact can be followed back to the time when the Indians began to struggle for their self-rule.

Here Thompson recognizes that his motive is defeated. In *A Farewell to India* his spokesman, Alden, confesses to Mayhew: “We neither govern nor misgovern. We’re just hanging on, hoping that the Last Trump will sound “Time!” and save us from the bother of making a decision” (*A Farewell to India*, 151).

Exactly Hamar at the end of the same novel realizes that:
This Indian job has ceased to be worth the infinite bother it has become, and all the hatred and ling and misery it brings along. They’re not our race, they don’t think our thoughts. Why the devil were we ever tied up with them, and sent revolving on the same wheel of destiny? (280).

Naturally, Thompson’s trilogy of Indian novels invites natural comparison with Forster’s *A Passage to India*. Thompson’s Alden and Forster’s Fielding both pronounce their authors’ words. But Forster’s Fielding is not political while Thompson’s Alden cherishes extreme political views inherited from his creator. Forster’s Fielding treats Indians impartially, while Thompson’s Alden cannot forget that he is a reformer carrying on the white man’s burden of providing a service to ungrateful Indians. Forster’s Fielding comes to the conclusion that reconciliation between the two communities is impossible as long as the British keep injuring the self-respect of the Indians and the Indians foster ill will against the British. But Alden chiefly looks for a political solution to this problem. Like Thompson, he thinks that a dominion state within the Empire should solve the problem alone. He also emphasizes the need for spiritual re-orientation of the British so that they would not look at Indians as mere barbarians. But this seems only for the sake of discussion, for the need of maintaining India in one way or another within the Empire. However, at many places Alden shows huge sympathy for the Indians and states requirement of looking and feeling things from Indian standpoint.

To sum up, it can be obviously stated that the Indian novels of Thompson provide an overview of the East-West encounter giving incisive analysis of the imperialistic attitudes of the British rulers. The novels trace the conflation of the British attitude and Indian National
struggle. The novels entail a deconstructive interrogation of the contemporary socio-cultural constructs of imperial nation, nationalist history and historiography against the backdrop of East-West encounters.