Chapter Three

Historical Background - Anglo-India

The British had come to India as traders, but stayed back to rule the country. Making a humble beginning in 1608, the English East India company over the next 150 years spread its wings far and grew in stature and power. From commercial interests it was but a short and natural step towards developing political interests. It was in 1775, after defeating Siraj-ud-Daulah in the battle of Plassey, that the British really got a political foothold in India. This victory established their sway over Bengal and eventually over the whole of India. After consolidating their power in Bengal, their appetite for territory remained unsatiated. Warren Hastings (1772-85), Lord Cornwallis (1786-93) and Lord Wellesley (1798-1803) indulged in large scale expansion of British rule in India. It was under Lord Hastings that the British rule in India was finally consolidated with the defeat of the Maharattas in 1818. "The year 1818 has been called a watershed in British Indian history for in that year the British dominion in India became the British dominion of India" (Spear and Dyson in Misra1987:16).

The year 1857 is a milestone in the Indo-British encounter when the British completed the task of conquering the whole of India. The revolt of 1857, which almost overthrew the Britishers, necessitated many far-reaching changes. In 1858, by an Act of Parliament, the power to govern India was
transferred from the East India Company to the British government. Benita Parry in *Delusions and Discoveries* (1972) writes:

1857 caused a rethinking. They thought interference with Indian customs and traditions had alienated the land owning classes and the princes; in some areas it had generated hostility in the peasantry. The decision now was to conciliate the natural leadership of old - Indian princes and landlords - and to organize India's modernization through improvements, while avoiding interference with the social system. So the policy of reform was abandoned. But every measure imposed by the British before and after 1857 stemmed from British evaluations of what was necessary for India did interfere with Indian society (13).

In an attempt to bolster the authority of princes and landlords, the British undermined the role of the Indian middle class which was educated on Western lines, and had staked its claim as representing Indian interests. It was the refusal of the British to acknowledge this emerging force that led to the birth of Indian National Congress in 1885. The partition of Bengal in 1905 further enraged this class and gave rise to militancy for the national cause. Resistance against British rule started at this point of time. The Montague-Chelmsford report of 1917 was an attempt to assuage the feelings of Indians by giving them a greater role in administration. When it was implemented in 1921, political feeling amongst Indians had outstripped the concessions (Parry:23). And in the middle of it all, it was the emergence of Gandhi that ultimately sounded the death knell of the British Empire.
The British rule in India has been variously described as a civilizing mission, benevolent despotism, as a divine right to guide and reform a decadent society, or by the much celebrated phrase used by Kipling, "the white man's burden", whose sinister implications are hidden behind innocent phraseology. In fact, the British rule achieved none of the above distinctions. It was a government by conquest, not by consent and in their attempt to save the Indians from their own customs and traditions, the British exposed their true designs. If one is able to rise above the rhetoric and see through the propaganda, the British rule was "hardly the moralistic enterprise it was made out to be" (Parry:10).

The British, cocooned as they were in "European ethnocentrism, Anglo-Saxon insularity and Protestant angularity"(Verghesel986:5), were indifferent to the desires and aspirations of Indians till at least the year of the mutiny, after which India forced itself on British thinking. In spite of contrary views and different attitudes expressed by them, the British were always conscious of their basic objective of perpetuation of their rule in India for the sake of prosperity of the mother country. India was a source of abundant raw material, necessary for Britain's rapidly expanding industrial base and, of course, a ready market for its finished products. The British had to cling to India at all costs. Their response towards India did not emerge from, and was not based on the needs and aspirations of the Indian people. It was determined by the interests and needs of the mother country. The rhetoric of duty and burden was merely a part of the myth to provide moral justification for acts of exploitation and plunder.
Similarly, in the discourse the British produced in India, the Indian reality was not important. The discourse projected the British image of the Indian reality. Pre-conceived notions coupled with a sense of superiority distorted this image to a great extent, and truth became the casualty. One common strain that runs through most Anglo-Indian literature is the reflection of this British self-interest to the exclusion of Indians' needs and wishes. A majority of this discourse deals with the Anglo-Indians, their lives and concerns. It is a literature about the British living in India. It is not about India. India and Indians remained in the background till 1857. It was the mutiny that made the British look up sharply and take note of Indians. As the Mutiny had gone against the British interests, so this notice was mostly negative. The Indians were portrayed as evil, perverts, cowards, traitors, undependable, barbarians etc. whereas the British were heroic, correct, brave, just, capable and efficient. The deciding factor for such an assessment was the same that had been the guiding spirit behind earlier British thinking - undiluted self-interest - camouflaged though it was under various ideologies. Any changes made in the British policy towards India were directly linked to the British interests and gains.

In 1780s, England was moving towards industrial revolution. The industrial revolution had a telling effect on English social and cultural fabric. Udayan Misra, in the The Raj in Fiction(1987), writes:

> The harmonious fabric of old English society suffered a perpendicular cleavage between town and country in the first half of the nineteenth-century but till the last phase of the eighteenth-century this was not so. It was, therefore, quite natural for such
an eighteenth-century England to view India not as an inferior civilization but more or less as an equal one, though quite different one from her own. The idea of British civilization being on a superior level was yet to take shape. But as the Industrial Revolution progressed in England, leading to a total change in the modes and relationships of production, the British attitude towards India underwent a radical change. The introduction of reform measures in India, therefore, must be viewed in relation to the growth of England as a colonial power (16-17).

Thus, it becomes clear that the reforms in India were brought about as a consequence of changes in England.

The pre-mutiny era was dominated mainly by three ideological groups. The Conservative/Orientalists who were active during the period from 1760 to 1820, the Utilitarians and Evangelicals, who held the sway from 1820 to 1860. Although their approach and methodology towards India was different, yet they "were all historically collaborators in the imperial project" (Verghese 1986:3). Jan Morris, in *The Spectacle of the Empire* (1982), writes:

Ideologically, it [the Empire] was a muddle of motives, ideas, myths, pretensions, misconceptions and social attitudes, never unanimous in its intentions, improbably headed by a partnership of the oldest hereditary monarchy and the most venerable parliamentary democracy. It embodied no overriding principle of purpose. Seen in the clearer light of retrospect, even its leftist
aspirations seem illusory and theatrical, and so hard it is to
disentangle its good from its bad, its truth from its deceptions,
that most of us remember it less vividly now as a political
organism than as a sort of gigantic exhibition(10).

One cannot agree with this assessment. There was an unwritten law that the
Britishers followed. Through the muddle and pretensions, there still was an
'overriding principle' that clearly emerges when we 'disentangle its good from
its bad, its truth from its deceptions'. The point, as has been stated earlier,
where the various British thinkers and ideologues converged was - their self-
interest - which was one with the interests of the mother country.

The Conservatives or Orientalists who gave shape to Britain's India policy in the
late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, acknowledged India's centuries old
culture and believed that India should be governed according to her own laws
and traditions. They showed a faith in the existing Indian systems and opted for
minimum interference in customs which had withstood the ravages of times for
centuries. The Utilitarians, who were born out of the throes of industrial
revolution in England, advocated a wholesale change and sweeping reforms
based on Western thought and pattern. They felt that this could only be achieved
by "first demolishing the nineteenth century decadent socio-cultural set up in
India"(Verghese1986:3). The Evangelicals saw the decadent Hindu social
practices as the main obstacle in the path of spiritual and temporal progress. The
Industrial Revolution proved a catalyst:

The Industrial Revolution may be regarded as the prime cause
behind the major shift which occurred in the British attitude
towards India.... As England marched ahead with the Industrial Revolution, the idea of imperial greatness was accompanied by the urge for social and economic change which, in turn, gave rise to the Utilitarian and Evangelical movements (Misra 1987:20).

The Conservatives who did not want that Indian culture should be dismantled in the name of progress or reform were branded as anti-reformists. By the 1820s, the Utilitarians and the Evangelicals propagated the view that reforms were necessary to save India. The era of reforms was accompanied by a desire to expand British influence by extending its territorial boundaries along with the necessity to change Indian society along western lines. The increased influence of the Utilitarians and Evangelicals helped the growth of the imperial attitude which was projected by a strong contempt for all that was Indian. Misra adds:

The moulding force of this imperial sentiment was generated by Britain’s colonial needs. As the British consolidated their hold over the subcontinent, the initial mercantile interest of the company was replaced by the need to permanently possess India as a supplier of raw materials for British Industries. This, in turn, necessitated greater political control over the colony (1987:27).

The jolt that was delivered in the shape of the mutiny had set the British thinking how best to govern India without jeopardizing their own interests. The concessions that were given kept the British interests foremost. To sum up, in the words of Misra:

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Beginning with the Imperial and Conservative moods of the early nineteenth century, British attitudes towards India passed through the Utilitarian - Evangelical phase up to the mid-Victorian period and were replaced for a short while by the winds of neo-conservatism just after the events of 1857 [1858 to 1880]. This was finally taken over by the authoritarian-liberalism of the eighties which put forward the idea of the White Man’s burden. During each of these phases, Anglo-Indian fiction has reacted to the changes in the intellectual climate in England and the effect it had on Britain’s India policy. It is this reaction to the intellectual cross currents in England which may be seen as the connecting thread running through the entire range of Anglo-Indian fiction of the nineteenth century (1987:178).

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The Anglo-Indian discourse was a product of the Indo-British encounter. As indicated in the first chapter, the British viewpoint was tainted by vested interest, their literature too could not escape this bias. The Anglo-Indian discourse is obsessed with the portrayal of the "self" and the "other". As most of the Britishers had come to India with pre-conceived notions of the superiority of the "self" and the inferiority of the "other", they fell in stereotypical depiction of the relationship. Verghese enumerates three aspects of the English colonial consciousness:
Anglo-Saxon racial superiority, European ethnocentrism and British insularity. The one infallible dogma of British imperialism was its belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. England's rise as the greatest colonial power in the nineteenth century, in a way, concretized this myth in the minds of even starving and unemployed workers in Britain.... In pure biological and Darwinian terms, the racial myth gave rise to a racial blood theory with its attendant physical and moral characteristics.... This belief in the blue blood theory is reflected even in the Anglo-Indian literature of the nineteenth century (1986:5).

This self-conscious feeling of greatness and superiority, the need of keeping the English blood untainted led to the isolation of the English. They were opposed to inter-racial marriage. Even social intercourse was on a minimal level. The Anglo-Indian writers dealt with the problem of love between an Englishman and an Indian woman by using a diabolical trick. Verghese points out that "Meadows Taylor who painted idealistic pictures of such unions circumvents the problem by arranging premature deaths for his heroines" (11). The case of an English lady falling in love with an Indian male is ruled out. Sara Jeannette Duncan, in The Burnt Offering, when faced with this situation, turns the Indian into a villain, and then gets him to commit suicide to prevent such a union.

The British as imperialists were involved in social and economic exploitation, but in fiction portrayed themselves as victims and sufferers in the
cause of a civilizing mission. This is how the imperial mission was given an ideological framework, which was duly reflected in the Anglo-Indian discourse.

The cocoon like existence of the British, cut off as they were from the Indians and the absence of social intercourse with the natives gave rise to a sense of exile and alienation. Thus, isolation and its consequences - suffering and boredom - form a major plank of Anglo-Indian discourse.

The Anglo-Indian discourse has been penned not by great intellectuals, deep thinkers or fine sensibilities. "The greater part of the British literature on India, reminiscences, commentaries and fiction was written by Anglo-Indian officials and their wives - the section of British society which identified with the prevailing national beliefs and trusted that their already praiseworthy social order was evolving towards an even higher excellence" (Parry 1972:2).

These writers were not really equipped to deal with and understand the complicated fabric of Indian life, their sensitivities were not sharp enough to analyse the difference they perceived. Their observations were quite superficial, analyses quite shallow - but that was enough for them. Their purpose was to observe the difference between themselves and the natives; to dwell upon the sensational use of exaggeration and the other techniques of selection, rejection and projection, so as to appeal to the ever curious British public, whose sense of superiority would be satisfied by painting the natives as primitives. Brian V. Street, in _The Savage in Literature_ (1975), writes:

> reading of reports on foreign people and the interpretation of them involve the selection of particular, often dramatic features of their lives without regard to the total context which gives them
a 'sense of proportion'.... The representatives of alien peoples in much of the literature were based on now outdated scientific theory and on the limited experience of travellers, many of them unsympathetic to other ways of life. Such descriptions thus tell us more about the Victorians themselves than about the people they purport to describe(3).

Selection of the sensational for portrayal was necessary as another great purpose behind such writing was to make money. Their books would sell only if they wrote something that the large reading British public would lap up eagerly. If the purpose is mercenary, how could they then bother about authenticity. As menfolk would go away to work and social intercourse with the natives was non-existent, those wives who were not necessarily fond of gossip or frivolity, shopping or parties, took to writing to escape from boredom and to fight ennui.

Rudyard Kipling's definition of a memsahib - as the Anglo-Indian woman was called - had caused quite a furore. She was frivolous, vain, flirtatious, adulteress, heartless with a weakness for handsome subalterns. The qualities of courage, resolution, a sense of duty and dedication were, for Kipling, confined to males. Pat Barr in Memshahibs(1978) comments:

[It] is unfortunate that Kipling did not broaden his canvas to include as much diversity of character among them as he developed in his male characters, because it is his stereotyped and superficial version of the Anglo-Indian woman that has remained current ever since as being truly representative of the whole
species.... A few years after Kipling had made his literary name, Maud Diver made a plea for a more sympathetic understanding of the Englishwoman - on the grounds that she was very much a helpless victim of adverse Indian circumstances, and that the 'random assertion' made by Kipling and his imitators about the lower tone of social morality in India was 'unjust and untrue'(197-98).

Pat Barr also gives us a glimpse of the quality of life and the duties that a memsahib had to perform:

[To] bring up a brood of pale faced, reputedly rather spoiled and listless children; to deal with ayahs and wet nurses, cooks and gardeners; to pay duty calls, give supper parties, organize stalls for fancy fairs; to suffer under the remorseless sun of the plains, to escape joyously to the cool air of the hills. Thus, Maud Diver explained, the chapters of the average memsahib's career unfolded - as 'wife', 'mother in exile', 'a hostess and housekeeper'; and she lived through them 'with a heart sobered by experience and self knowledge... till the years of her husband's work are accomplished and it is she herself who must go, leaving the younger generation to tread the same paths and uphold the same traditions after their kind(201).

It is true that the memsahibs did not lead a blameless life; they were frivolous and flirtatious, at times even adulterous, but all said and done the burden of the
white woman in British India was seldom light, and she received little praise for taking it up.

These sentiments are echoed by Saros Cowasjee too. In the introduction to his collection of short fiction entitled *Women Writers of the Raj* (1990) Cowasjee writes:

> It is one of the ironies of the Raj that while Anglo-Indian women have been repeatedly censured by male writers for their lack of sympathy and understanding of India, a gifted few of these very women have provided us with the best insight of the Indian mind and family. The attack on the Anglo-Indian woman pre-dates Kipling.... But Kipling was not wholly critical of Anglo-Indian women; as can be seen from stories like 'William the Conqueror' - a song of praise for those women who helped administer the Raj(9).

Cowasjee puts the onus on Wilfred Scawen Blunt, a poet and publicist, for being the first to launch a significant attack on the *memsahibs*. Writing in his *Ideas About India*, he writes:

> The Englishwoman in India during the last thirty years, has been the cause of half the bitter feelings there between race and race. It was her presence at Cawnpore and Lucknow that pointed the sword of revenge after the Mutiny; and it is her constantly increasing influence now that widens the gulf of ill-feeling and makes amalgamation daily more impossible. I have over and over
noticed this. The English collector, or the English doctor, or the English judge may have the best will in the world to meet their Indian neighbours... on equal terms. Their wives will hear nothing of the sort, and the result is a meaningless interchange of cold civilities(qtd. in Cowasjee1990:9).

Kipling's statement plus the above observation together complete the stereotype of the Anglo-Indian woman. This picture of the memsahib does not do justice to her. It ignores all the positive qualities of her character. Maud Diver pleaded, "India's heroines and martyrs far outnumber her social sinners" (qtd. in Cowasjee:10). The female writers had their own point of view. One can say that there existed two discourses - a male discourse and a female discourse. Each of these discourses had a distinct point of view to convey, as each tackled distinct subjects. "Hunting, soldiering, administration of justice and blood feuds on the frontier" were, according to Cowasjee, male subjects. The men writers valourized duty and chivalry; discussed politics and related matters. There were some special areas which only the women were capable of tackling. Cowasjee feels that their [the Anglo-Indian women's] achievements have not always been fully acknowledged. He claims:

For let it be said outright that the contribution of Anglo-Indian women in the field of short fiction outstrips that of the men.... A factor which gave the woman writers an edge over their male counterparts was their access to the Indian domestic life - to the women behind the purdah. The tragedy of the mute and suppressed Indian women touched them deeply(10-11).
The Anglo-Indian women writers had a distinct female role to play; but there were several who were set to sabotage the role assigned to them by Victorian morality. Further, several of them broke into the supposedly male preserve of subjects. However there was one cause for which all of them campaigned unitedly. It was the woman's cause. All of them staunchly defended the *memsahibs*, and tried to generate some compassion for their plight and understanding for their role. This was the main theme of the female discourse.

Another plank which had the women united in a single purpose was the imperialistic cause. Cowasjee comments:

Almost without exception they remained the staunchest adherents of the Raj. Except for Christine Weston, none of them shared Forster's view that Indians should be treated as equals, or Orwell's ambivalence on the question of Indians governing themselves. They believed in upholding British 'prestige' and could never have agreed with Orwell that the Raj was a gigantic confidence trick.... [Their] conservatism, the most serious shortcoming of the Anglo-Indian women, emanated from the horrors that had befallen them during the Mutiny, and every political agitation on the part of the Indians seemed to raise in them the fears of another mutiny. But their attitude towards India can be attributed in large part to an innate sense of racial superiority from which even Flora Annie Steel [who otherwise was sympathetic towards Indians] was not free(12).
The Anglo-Indian women writers, as has been explained earlier, were seriously concerned with women's cause. Among these also there were two categories. One category consists of those writers who not only took up the cudgels on behalf of the Anglo-Indian women, but showed equal concern for the Indian women's exploitation and suppression. Writers like Katherine Mayo came down heavily on Indian religion and culture which subverted the existence of the Indian women. The second category of writers consists of those who were concerned with the plight of Anglo-Indian women alone. They did not look beyond - to the condition of Indian women. True to the spirit of Anglo-Saxon superiority and British insularity, they ignored the Indian women and concentrated on the hopes and miseries of Anglo-Indian women. One such writer was Sara Jeannette Duncan.

A volume dedicated to the Anglo-Indian women is *The Pool in the Desert* (1903), which contains four short pieces of fiction by Duncan. Set in the backdrop of British India, Duncan portrays the existence of the Anglo-Indian women and their struggle for survival against conventions in a world which annihilates ambition and distrusts individual potential. In her introduction to this volume, Rosemary Sullivan writes:

[Duncan] found the Anglo-Indian set of Calcutta and Simla, where she later lived, impossibly stuffy, provincial and dedicated to an official decorum that was entirely stultifying. Duncan was an elitist and a monarchist. She had no difficulty with the lot of the Indians and the ethics of imperialism (in fact, the social
context of Indian poverty and suffering is virtually absent from her stories). What she did question was the cost to the individual Anglo of sustaining the sterile and artificial facade of British order on the reaches of Empire. This provided the satiric edge to her writing and identified its controlling theme: the moral and creative costs of the failure to realize the full potential of one's talents and emotional needs (1984: X).

Yet Duncan didn't want the British to leave India, and was vociferously against Indian nationalism. Beneath this ambivalence, perhaps, is a feeling of some achievement, otherwise why would anybody waste away one's life for nothing. The achievement, in Duncan's case, could be the attaining of a goal - to move from the margin, the periphery of a Canadian existence to the centre of the British Empire.

Tausky's (1980) comment, referred to earlier, that the real subject of all Duncan's journalism and fiction is "I" holds very true for this volume. The boredom, the aridity of life, the alienation and frustration, the physical exhaustion and emotional starvation delineated in detail emerge from personal experience of living in British India. Silvia Albertazzi in "Sara Jeannette Duncan's Indian Novellas" (1989) writes:

> Here her whole experience in India becomes literature, together with the regret for the loss of a more gratifying life abroad and for the waste of her youth, energies and talents in a cultural desert. Her need of communication and her desire for social
intercourse characterize those pages. Sara tells stories which are first of all about herself - she needs to tell of herself and of her ruined life. Every story is told by a speaker who says; "I" - each story is about the failure of a woman to cope with a peculiar Anglo-Indian feature, the impossibility of living up to the best of her talents and of her human endowments. Sara tries on her stories as though they were clothes, to make them fit to her own character, the isolated writer buried alive in an unbearable Indian town. It is always her story she is telling, with irony and detachment, looking at herself in the mirror of her storytelling (197).

The amalgamation of personal experience with social history is what gives breath to these stories. E. Showalter in her essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1985) comments that it is common in female literature that the writing can be interpreted as a "double-voiced discourse, containing a 'dominant' and a 'muted' story" (260).

The protagonists of the stories "A Mother in India" and "The Pool in the Desert" are very close to Duncan's own outlook and experience. Under the dominant theme of the Anglo-Indian women's frustrations and disillusionment lurks Duncan's disenchantment with her own existence: "In three out of four novellas, the main character is a woman over thirty - actually nearing forty in two of them - who is lacerated by the waste of her youthful energies and wishes in the Indian void. The main problem seems to be that of aging far from the centre of reality and cultural life" (Albertazzi 1998:198).
A "Mother in India" deals with the unique problem of a mother who reunites with her daughter after twenty one years, but feels no maternal instincts. It is a position which would do any modern feminist proud, though it was written at the turn of the century. It is rare to find a woman at the beginning of the twentieth century bold enough to state her stand which goes contrary to the established and expected social conventions. "If we are accustomed to female narratives dealing with 'matrophobia' or 'the fear of becoming like one's mother', we are not used, even today, to reading about mothers refusing their social role in the name of their own independence" (ibidem: 199).

Helena Farnham has to send her daughter to England because the Farnhams were 'sodden poor'. Right at the beginning of the story, one gets a feeling that Cecily was an unwanted child, "but we both knew that it was abnormal not to love her a great deal, more than life, immediately and increasingly; and we applied ourselves honestly to do it" (Mother: 2). The lack of spontaneity and an attempt at propriety is glimpsed when the mother comments: "we were in such terror, not so much of failing in our duty towards her as towards the ideal standard of mankind" (2). When she was just five weeks old, Cecily had fallen so sick that she had to be sent to England.

Sara Jeannette Duncan had given birth to a child in 1900, at the age of 37. Unfortunately, the child died within a few days of the birth. Perhaps this late pregnancy had embarrassed Duncan and influenced the maternal ambivalence she displays, when she comments: "Since an unfortunate [perhaps because it is unwanted] infant must be brought into the world and set adrift" (3).
Such utterances remind Albertazzi of D.H. Lawrence as she writes: "Being herself a woman without strong maternal feelings or any particular attraction for children, she [Duncan] cannot help seeing siblings, as D.H. Lawrence was to point out less than a decade later, as 'anachronisms, accidents, fatal accidents, unreal, false notes in their mother's lives' (qtd. in Albertazzi 1989: 199).

Mrs. Farnham proposes to meet her daughter after four years. And, surprisingly, the milk of motherly affection flows in abundance. Perhaps the intervening period has thawed and mellowed her. "Her four motherless years brought compunction to my heart and tears to my eyes; she should have all the compensation that could be.... My days and nights as the ship crept on were full of a long ache to possess her; the defrauded tenderness of the last four years rose up in me and sometimes caught at my throat" (Mother: 4-5). As she cried, she felt proud. After all, "I was her mother". These appear to be normal motherly reactions.

At last the reunion takes place. "The unforgettable picture of a little girl, a little girl unlike anything we had imagined, starting bravely to trot across the room.... Half-way she came; ...for there she stopped with a wail of terror at the strange faces, and ran straight back to the outstretched arms of her Aunt Emma" (5). Strangely, the mother reacts as if she has been slapped, as if she has been denied what was her due, her expectations explode in her face. Although she comments: "The most natural thing in the world, no doubt"; but her real feelings described later on give a ring of insincerity to this statement. If this is the most natural thing in the world, then why should the mother sit down as "a spectator, aloof and silent... sat impassive, looking at my alleged baby breaking
her heart at the sight of her mother. It is not amusing even now to remember the anger that I felt. I did not touch her or speak to her; I simply sat observing my alien possession"(5). This at least is not the natural reaction of a mother. The fear of the child is understandable, but the pique the mother displays is astonishing. What exactly has the child done to make her angry, and what exactly has Mrs. Farnham done as a mother? And when she is asked to kiss the daughter, as she lay asleep, her reply "I didn't think I could take such an advantage of her"(6), suggests not only a deep hurt but also that the milk of motherly love and kindness has suddenly dried up. "I spent an approving, unnatural week, in my farcical character, bridling my resentment and hiding my mortification with pretty phrases;.... I may have been Cecily's mother in theory, but I was John's wife in fact"(6). To choose between husband and child was the tragic lot of these women, and they knew that they would have to fail either as wife or mother.(Cowasjee1990:13).

Helena's angry response is very immature. Setting aside the mother-daughter relationship; if we look at the situation from the point of view of an adult-child relationship, Helena's reaction can't be accepted as natural or mature. Simone Vauthier in her article "Sara Jeannette Duncan's `A Mother in India"(1984) asks a question. "The fiction explores various possibilities [of mother-daughter relationship] and in the last analysis interrogates us. Are we to regard Mrs. Farnham, who lacks the mother instinct, as an aberration of nature? Or is she woman more or less typical of a certain kind of mother who, for varying
reasons, has not acquired the experience of nurturing? The test makes a straightforward answer difficult"(101).

For fear of feminists, we may say that a straightforward answer is difficult. But it is certain that she fails to act as a mature adult - in this context, it is an aberration. Helena's anger and her going into a shell suggest a feeling of insecurity. She feels she has been rejected by the daughter. But is Helena competing for attention?

This egocentric and callous turn can best be explained from the colonial angle. The mother is the centre of authority, a centrifugal force, which is a typical colonial attitude. The daughter's crying is taken as a rejection, which hits at Helena's colonial mentality, and her exaggerated reaction verges on being petty. The obsession with self is a typical colonial trait. The colonials know how to reject others, they can't cope with the after-effects of rejection. Helena emerges from this encounter as more of a colonial and less of a mother.

When Cecily is 21 years old, Helena and her husband come to take their daughter back to India. On the voyage back, Helena comes across her old friend Dacres Tottenham. When she introduces Cecily to him, he is amazed. He comments how Helena had never mentioned her daughter, as if she were a skeleton in the closet. Dacres notices Helena's indifference towards Cecily and comments on the lack of sympathy Helena shows towards her daughter. "My dear boy", replies Helena, "I have seen her just twice in twenty-one years! You see, I've always stuck to John".

But between mother and daughter - I may be old-fashioned but I had an idea that there was an instinct that might be depended on(13), persists Dacres.
"Probably", retorts Helena, "Men are very slow in changing their philosophy about women. I fancy their idea of the maternal relation is firmest fixed of all".

"We see it a beatitude!" he cried" (14).

Dacres insistence that Cecily deserves some sympathy gets the ultimate reply from Helena: "I find the young lady very tolerable, very creditable, very nice. I find the relation atrocious…. I would like to break the relation into pieces", I went on recklessly, "and throw it into the sea…. One grows fastidious at forty - new intimacies are only possible then on a basis of temperament -" (14). "How awfully rough on the girl!" opines Dacres, to which Helena’s answer is: "That consideration has also occurred to me… though I have perhaps been even more struck by its converse"(14).

Helena’s views once again reaffirm the first impression that her callous and cold behaviour is a result of a colonial egocentrism which makes one so absorbed in oneself so as to render one incapable of appreciating the other person’s feelings or sentiments. No doubt, the situation has been rough on the mother too, but is she demanding compensation from her daughter? The daughter’s show of love and affection is not accepted by the mother. She groans. A mental block seems to exist in Helena. She has her preconceived notions and refuses to budge, or even extend a hand forward for friendship or understanding. Rather, she spurns the proffered hand of her daughter in this direction. Does the mother really understand?
Cecily is simpler and predictable. Does that make her a moron? Helena doesn't use the word 'moron' but one keeps getting the feeling that that's exactly what she thinks of her daughter. And yet, ironically, the daughter does not prove predictable.

Another question that this censure of Cecily raises is about being brought up in England. Cecily's aunts were foolish, her education didn't do her any good, she has no life or qualities in her - is this an indictment of life in England? It only shows growing up in England with unattached ladies is equivalent to courting disaster. Or is this an example of losing one's sense of balance in order to cater to one's preconceived notions?

Although Helena confesses she hardly knows Cecily, yet she is too sure in her assessment of her and predicts confidently "She was the kind of young person... to marry a type and be typically happy"(19). She watches Dacres courting Cecily with amused detachment, as, once again, she is sure that Dacres has more sense than to fall in love with Cecily due to compassion. Then the detachment gives way to alarm. She is sure that this union can't succeed, because Dacres is too fine a person and Cecily lacks an appreciation of finer things. She sets out to save Dacres from committing such a folly.

Helena treats her daughter almost as a rival, when she discourages Dacres by stressing Cecily's mediocrity. Simone Vauthier observes:

Though she thinks she is actuated by an unselfish motive, she unwittingly reveals more egocentric motivation when she confides that her concern for Dacres was "mingled more with anger than with sorrow",... But her confession of her wish to be rid of her
daughter may well seem to us to mask another feeling, another "shock" at finding herself completely displaced in her role as a queen. The image of her daughter as a double that endangers her self-integrity and freedom or as a mask of herself, is much more revealing than she is aware of (1984:102).

Helena is proved right in her judgement of Dacres but, ironically, absolutely wrong about her daughter. Cecily turns out not to be a type who will marry typically and remain typically happy. After the Dacres affair she refuses to marry. "He had given her a standard; it might be high, but was unalterable.... To know that men like Mr. Tottenham existed, and to marry any other kind would be an act of folly which she did not intend to commit" (Mother: 39).

This is an unexpected ironic twist, as "the daughter applies to herself standards that her mother used against her on behalf of Dacres" (Vauthier 1984:102). As the mother is the narrator, the story is told from her point of view. But as she is egocentric and callous, the dice is loaded against the daughter from the beginning and an objective judgement of Cecily becomes difficult.

The story ends ironically in a final reversal of roles. Cecily, who has refused to marry, is "permanently with us", is mothering her mother, an emotion she has never received, but instinctively possesses. "The irony of the reversal is one of the ways in which the text seems structurally to criticize the protagonist, while hinting at the complexity of the mother-daughter
relationship" (ibidem: 102). But, as the title suggests, the story is not simply an individual case history; it was common for the Anglo-Indians to send their children to England, which often led to "the emotional dislocation the story explores" (Tausky 1980: 228). It was the socio-economic pressures that had initially led the Farnhams to send their daughter to England. The inherent tragedy of an English mother in India cannot, also, be ignored.

Poignancy of alienation is a favourite Anglo-Indian theme. Cowasjee comments: "More painful than the initial separation is the alienation that follows" (1990: 17). Duncan presents an individual case history framed in the Anglo-Indian socio-economic reality. Two discourses seem to coalesce, "her personal story and Anglo-Indian collective history" (Albertazzi 1989: 198). Tausky sums up the story thus, "The responsibilities of being an imperialist's wife, the no less binding dictates of Anglo-Indian social custom... and the flinty, uncharitable individual personality of Mrs. Farnham all seem to be implicated in the development of this 'Mother in India'" (1980: 229). Duncan holds the circumstances responsible for the monstrosity that Helena Farnham seems to commit or reflect. Behind the facade of being a victim, one senses definite Anglo-Indian instincts of being self-centered and superior.

"The Pool in the Desert", the title story of the volume, is another attempt by Duncan to project an anti-conventional or a feminist stance. Carole Gerson, reviewing the book for Canadian Literature, writes: "Similar to the way Duncan goes against the grain of traditional sexual stereotyping by depicting a non-maternal mother in the first story, she challenges a social convention by
sympathetically recounting a mature woman’s love for a younger man who is also the son of her best friend” (1985:105).

This story has been badly mauled by critics. From the mild - “Some of this story’s subtlety is lost in its overwrought style, as Duncan tries too hard to capture the special qualities of her heroine” (ibidem:105) - to the strident Tausky commenting that the story seems quite without merit, "The Pool in the Desert" is the worst prose Sara Jeannette Duncan ever wrote (1980:227). Tausky quotes the Spectator reviewer who condemned the book as ‘morbid’ (i.e., morally suspect) and plaintively inquired, "What has Mrs. Cotes done with her inimitable gift of humour?” (1980:226). The answer is supplied by Tausky himself: "What Mrs. Cotes does with her heroines (as in His Honour and a Lady and The Path of a Star), is to manipulate the plot so as to allow them to escape with their virtue intact, but with their sinful intentions clearly evident" (226). Talking about the volume in general and this story in particular, Tausky had earlier commented:

the atmosphere of cynical flirtation which was popularly associated with Simla is the background to all of the stories.

[Although only two out of the four stories are set in Simla.] The Title seems to refer to the temptation offered by a romantic relationship, a temptation made more appealing by contrast with the barrenness of Anglo-Indian life. In three of the stories, characters toy with the idea of embarking upon relationships
which in some cases are merely imprudent but in others are immoral even by the indulgent standards of Simla(226).

Kipling had criticized certain characteristics of the Anglo-Indian women. The female writers took upon themselves to defend and excuse these, thereby charting a different course and presenting an alternate discourse within the ambit of Anglo-Indian writings.

"The Pool in the Desert" is another example of emotional dislocation. Seen from a woman's point of view, it is a woman's attempt to revitalize her life and recapture her youth in an infertile and sterile frontier outpost of British India. Judy Harbottle, a married woman has a fling with a much younger subaltern, Somers Chichle, who is her friend's son. In a place where people have become 'sepulchres of themselves', Judy accepts Somers 'as the contemporary of her soul if not of her body'. She neither wins nor loses, but in her dignified struggle one sees the emotional trauma that Anglo-Indian women experienced. It was a scandalous thing for a married woman to have an affair with an unmarried young man. Her husband dies in a battle, leaving her free to indulge in her love-affair without any immorality involved. But at the last moment she decides against it, she doesn't take the plunge. Here, one is reminded of Tausky's comment that the characters toy with the idea of embarking upon immoral relationships; Duncan however manipulates the plot so as to allow them to escape with their virtue intact, but with their sinful intentions clearly evident. There is another angle to this situation. The story is a strong rebuttal of the commonly held notion that many Anglo-Indian women
deserted their husbands to make merry with young subalterns. Duncan, in a quiet tone and with ironic understatement, projects the woman's point of view - a point of view mainly absent in fiction by men writers of the Raj (Cowasjee 1990:21). Duncan, here provides justification for the acts of omission and commission indulged in by the Anglo-Indian women. They should not be maligned without going into the context, the complete situations in which such unconventional acts are committed.

The story is set in Rawal Pindi, which is described as a "rather empty landscape of life in a frontier station" (Pool: 164). Judy Harbottle comes to the station after having gone through a marriage in a very peculiar circumstance. Robert Harbottle's first wife was odious. She detested her cousin Judy Thynne, who was a young widow at that time. Mrs. Harbottle saw the devil in an innocent friendship. She filed a case for divorce, but put a strange condition. If her husband wanted his freedom, he should have it only if he marries Judy. Judy marries Robert more out of a sense of duty than out of love.

Added to an indifferent marriage is the sterile life of British India. "There is no dignified distraction in this country", she complained, "for respectable ladies nearing forty" (173). When she meets her best friend Anne's son, Somers, perhaps a distraction appears on the horizon. Her dormant emotions are stirred, and a new life and youth is injected into her. "She was telling me", says Somers, "that people in India were sepulchers of themselves, but that now and then one came who could roll away another's stone" (170). Somers appears to be the 'one' in this case. In-spite of having fallen in love, Judy can sense the folly of her action, and does try to get out of it. She, like the
narrator and the boy's mother, is conscious of the middle-age morality and conventionality. Judy plans an escape and convinces her husband to take a furlough for eighteen months. Once they go for such a long duration, the affair will be forgotten and the dust will settle. "She [Judy] stood for a moment quivering in the isolation she made for herself; and I felt a primitive angry revolt against the delicate trafficking of souls that could end in such ravage and disaster. The price was too heavy"(182).

The narrator overflows with sympathy for Judy, because, this was not an easy decision. "Everything in me answered him", Judy says, and adds, "His spirit came to mine like a humming bird"(182). On the other hand, the boy's mother is equally upset. How can she forget the age difference, and think him to be "the contemporary of her soul if not of her body"(179). "And do you know if the thing were less impossible, less grotesque; I should not be so much afraid?"(179-80).

Then, fate intervenes; the furlough is cancelled. And, in the failure of her escape lies the victory of her love. She throws caution to the winds. When they decide to elope, it is a challenge thrown by the individual spirit to the stifling social concepts and traditions. But fate intervenes again, and here in lies Duncan's weakness as a writer. Instead of plunging headlong into the problem, she plans an escape which avoids the problem. The narrator plays a trick on Judy; and as if she were the agent of the Destroyer, she doesn't tell her of the imminent departure of the regiment, taking Somers along. She delays Judy's
departure till the time the regiment leaves for the front. Thus both the elopement and the scandal are avoided.

Although Robert dies in the battle, Judy decides to take the honourable way out. Being freed of her husband, she leaves India to go back to her previous life in Chelsea. Judy had made an unappreciated sacrifice in giving up her world of art for the sake of marriage. Given a second opportunity to make such a choice, Judy decides not in favour of love but of her talent (McKenna 1980:254). In a letter to Anna, she explains, "Somers will give you this, and with it take back your son.... And if you wonder that I can so render up a dear thing which I might keep and would once have taken, think how sweet in the desert is the pool, and how barren was the prospect from Balclutha" (Pool: 189).

Judy had abandoned "in pride a happiness that asked so much less humiliation". And what a high cost she had to pay. This side of the picture was totally neglected by the male writers. It was impossible for a woman to live up to the best of her talents. Duncan's sympathies lie with Judy, who becomes a victim of the narrow mindedness and parochial conventionality of Anglo-India. The rigid standards of Anglo-Indians are attacked because these exert an unwholesome influence on individual lives, especially of women.

Isobel McKenna (1980) finds two themes in the story, one old and one new. Duncan, she says, displays a surprisingly bold and broad attitude towards divorce - which was still considered scandalous. Such charitable views would not have been acceptable in Canada, much less in Elgin. The problem is complicated by Judy's artistic talent which is stifled by a marriage, particularly in India. Any gifted woman would feel trapped in the cultural desert that was
India. The Anglo-Indian society was very rigid in allowing their women to pursue interests 'outside its confining limits', which, along with being cruel to women is an unnecessarily narrow view. Ignorance, if not downright stupidity can be blamed and this blame must be made known. To Duncan, it was humiliating that a woman could be forced to choose between a pursuit of her talent and marriage. "The Pool in the Desert" points out the unnecessary and false position of women who must give up life giving sources of the pool of creativity and settle for something much less.

The title of the story also refers to the temptation offered by romantic relationship, made more appealing in contrast with the barrenness of Anglo-Indian life. This temptation is not confined to this story alone; it refers to the volume, where, in three of the four stories, such relationships are pursued. Anglo-Indian women writers are joined by modern women critics in defending the role of women in Anglo-India. Like Isobel McKenna, Carole Gerson(1985) also comments that these stories can easily be read as glimpses into social history, showing the life of ornamental boredom to which the wives and daughters of higher officials were condemned. Denied even traditional maternal activities because their children have been sent to England, the women are reduced to a trivializing whirl of teas, dinners, gymkhanas and flirtations. The true (male) artist is able to get out before he sells out, (this is the theme of the story "An Impossible Ideal") but no such escape is available to the women.

"The Impossible Ideal", the only story with a male protagonist, is a story about a genuine artist, who is stuck in the philistine society of Anglo-India.
Withstanding all temptations of a good marriage and a comfortable life, he escapes in time and preserves his integrity as an artist. Although the stories have the theme of love, society, art and women, the purpose, the real theme linking all the stories is a quest for happiness. It is the illusive happiness that everybody is trying to pursue achieve in the sterile Anglo-Indian society. Whether it is Helena in "A Mother in India", Judy in "The Pool in the Desert", or Ingersoll Armour of the "The Impossible Ideal", they all try to reach out to something concrete in their lives, which would make them happy. This may be Duncan's own quest, who felt she was like a caged bird in India and was gasping for breath. Ingersoll Armour seems to represent Duncan's own frustrations, as she felt cheated of all opportunities of leading a fuller and more meaningful existence. Duncan writes: "A human being isn't an orchid; he must draw something from the soil he grows in" (Ideal: 87). This is the saddest sentence Duncan ever wrote, writes Marian Fowler in Redney (1985). It is the final cry of pain after writing The Imperialist, the bitter fruit of her own experience, and the death knell of her own secret myth: the belief that being an orchid, beautiful and poised and rare, she and her art could flourish anywhere (Fowler: 261). The four stories in the volume "suffer from great dollops of coincidence and romantic twaddle; following as they do on the heels of The Imperialist, they amply demonstrate how much harder it was for Redney [Duncan] to create so far from the soil in which she had grown most, and how the aridity of India's cultural desert could shrink the silver pool of her creativity" (ibidem: 261-62). In portraying Ingersoll, Duncan was portraying herself. "By choosing India as her permanent setting, Redney had unwittingly arrested her own growth towards
wisdom and that unique vision of the world which every great novelist must have" (ibidem:234). Having lost his true identity in the jungle that is Simla, Ingersoll escapes from India, keeping his sanity intact, leaving the prospects of a comfortable life behind. Unfortunately, Duncan could not escape, for she was a woman. Her quest for true happiness remained aborted.

Carole Gerson feels that in this story native India is used symbolically. The refusal of native princes to pay for commissioned portraits because the artist had painted them black, which shows he refuses to flatter them, and the awarding of the Viceroy's gold medal to uninspired, "conscientiously painted" piece of local colour both serve as parables of the fragility of the artist's integrity in the shallow world of Simla society (1985:105).

In the story Simla is described as a wilderness; "set on top of a hill, years and miles away from literature, music, pictures, politics, existing like a harem on the gossip of the Viceroy's intentions, and depending upon amusement on tennis and bumble-puppy" (Ideal:52). It was a comfortable retreat in the lap of the Himalayas, "where deodars and scandals grow" (41). It is a cultural wilderness, "a waste as highly cultivated as you like" (41); and there is a "conspiracy of stupidity" in the social life that exists in Simla.

For the narrator and Dora Harris, the artist Armour comes as a breath of fresh air. His unconventional behaviour, and perhaps a freedom of expression conveyed through his paintings, brings a sense of joy and beauty into the drab life Dora was leading till then. She becomes ecstatic when she says: "people like Mr. Armour are the people I value most. Heavens, how few of them there are!
And wherever they go how the air clears up round them? It makes me quite ill to think of the life we lead here - the poverty of it, the preposterous dullness of it" (63).

The transformation of an innocent and unpragmatic attitude into a business - like and conventional approach makes the narrator uneasy. Both the narrator and Dora act as patrons, he being their find. When Armour gets the Viceroy's gold medal for a painting which had only "accuracy of detail", they felt unhappy. Armour had forsaken his natural talent in order to be acceptable, saleable. This act of compromising one's talent for acceptability is, mercifully, short-lived. Armour realizes how difficult it will be to stay in India and kill his conscience for the sake of popularity. He escapes, leaving behind "the possibilities of marriage, social position, assured income, support in old age" (97). The real artist (a male) is able to run away, to escape, but this freedom is not available to females; they are 'trapped in an unappreciative environment'; their plight is pathetic.

The "impossible ideal" of the title seems to be the effort all three major characters make to reconcile the stratified Simla society with the freedom an artist deserves. It also means that in a system which discourages art and applauds mediocrity, it is impossible for a sensitive soul to achieve self fulfilment. Success and recognition can only be achieved after sacrificing one's ideal and talent at the altar of popular taste.

Armour does achieve success, but the two sensitive souls, the narrator and Dora, are aghast at the compromise he makes for acceptability. When he goes away, these two feel relieved and happy. Armour ultimately realizes the
folly of his compromise, and in his rejection of position and comfort in India is reflected true artistic spirit.

We see Armour both objectively, as a good hearted but corruptible (susceptible) young man, and subjectively, through the idealizations of Dora and the narrator Philips. For Dora, he is the imaginative artist Simla has hitherto lacked; for Philips, he is more important as a symbol of liberation from the bondage of bureaucratic thinking (Tausky 1980:230-1). Thus, his ultimate flight from India is an act of liberation which will not only save his integrity, but will also give him happiness, the elusive quality which the sensitive Anglo-Indians lacked. If Ingersoll Armour cannot stay in Simla in order to fulfil his destiny, Anglo-Indians like Duncan also see no scope for achieving their artistic ambitions. One is reminded once again of Albertazzi's apt comment that Duncan is always telling her own story, with irony and detachment, and looking at herself in the mirror of her storytelling.

"The Hesitation of Miss Anderson", the last story in the volume is a piece of hack writing. It is an example of writing for the sake of writing, when you have nothing original to convey. It is an unnecessary effort, except for giving Duncan an opportunity to criticize Simla society and pinpoint some Anglo-Indian traits.

The story is so full of melodramatic twists and turns, far-fetched manipulations of the plot and crude coincidences; one feels that it has been written just to make some money. Madeline Anderson, of New York, is engaged to marry Frederick Prendergast, when a Miss Violet Forde comes to
New York from England. Seeing that Frederick has been swept off his feet by Violet, Madeline breaks her engagement. Frederick marries Violet, but within a year is involved in some financial irregularities and is sentenced to ten year term of imprisonment. Within a week, Violet sails for Europe and after a few months her death is announced in the papers. Madeline feels guilty of having allowed Violet to spoil Frederick's life, visits Frederick in the prison, and continues to visit till he dies six years later. Freed from her responsibility, she decides to take a holiday and reaches Simla where she develops a soft corner for Colonel Horace Innes who is awaiting his wife's arrival. Horace hints at his wife's indifference to him. When the wife comes, who else could it be but Violet! The situation is clear to Madeline: "Frederick Prendergast had been dead just seven months. Colonel Innes imagined himself married four years. Violet Prendergast was bigamist, and Horace Innes had no wife" (Hesitation: 122). She feels within herself a sense of power and is full of joy. When Madeline thinks the situation to be so melodramatic and vulgar, she says, "In a story I should have not patience with it" (123). But it does happen in the story, and indeed tries our patience.

Horace likes Violet in spite of her indifference to him. Madeline resents that "the man she loved was loyal to his own mistake, and the formless premonition that he might continue to be" (127).

Madeline doesn't inform Violet of Frederick's death. When she finds Horace in love with her, she doesn't hesitate anymore, and writes all the details of Frederick's life and death to Violet. Unfortunately her letter doesn't reach Violet who has already left Simla, leaving behind a letter for madeline
explaining that "Captain Drake and I have determined to disregard 
conventionalities, and live henceforth only for one another .... I no longer care 
what you do about letting out the secret of my marriage to Frederick 
Prendergast. I am now above and beyond it.... As I never have been Colonel 
Innes's wife, there can be no harm in leaving him"(157).

Miss Anderson sends a telegram informing Violet of Frederick's death 
and writes: "Your letter considered confidential if you return. Prendergast left 
no will"(158). But she is aghast to know that not only has Violet married Drake, 
but has also staked her claim to Prendergast's money, thus getting one hundred 
thousand pounds in the bargain. However, there is a happy ending for Madeline 
too; she marries Colonel Innes.

Duncan doesn't miss the opportunity to once again expose Simla and 
what it symbolizes. Remote from the rest of the world, "to arrive officially at 
Simla they [the Anglo-Indians] have had to climb in more ways than one" (105). 
Madeline, who is an American, finds the 'matter of precedence' ridiculous. Her 
reaction to India is best described in her own words:

I am living in a boarding house precisely under the deodars and 
have 'tiffin' with Mrs. Hauksbee every day when neither of us 
are having it anywhere else. And I've been told the original of 
'General Bangs', 'that most immortal man'... you remember, 
don't you, the heliograph incident.... It really happened! and the 
General still lives, none the worse.... Quite half the people seem
materializations of Kipling and it's very interesting but one
mustn't say so if one wants to be popular(105).

Innes, Miss Anderson's companion, is aware of the flippant tone of
Simla, but he insists that underneath this tone lay tragedies, if one sees deep
enough. Duncan's concern for the plight of the Anglo-Indian women is reflected
when he says: "It's not fair to ask women to live much in India. Sometimes it's
children, sometimes it's ill health, sometimes it's natural antipathy to the place;
there's always a reason to take them away"(107). He further asserts that "time
does the rest, time and the aridity of separation"(108). Still, Madeline insists: "I
believe there is more cheap sentiment in this place than the other kind"(108-09).

Though this story is set against the Anglo-Indian background, it is
different from the others in one respect. It deals with a favourite theme that
Duncan repeats in many of her novels - the juxtaposition of the new-world-old-
world syndrome, symbolizing America and Britain. The ending of the story
shows the best type of American (Madeline) and the best type of Englishman
(Innes) get married, a metaphor for the kind of political union Duncan discusses
in the The Imperialist. The old world is wearing out and needs the injection of
blood from the new, thus combining the best of both(McKenna1980:264).

This group of short stories, which was written probably just after The
Imperialist, presents a sharp contrast between the two societies. In comparison
to India, the Elgin of The Imperialist is a fertile pond, characterized by social
flexibility and a vision of the future, while in relation to Canada, Anglo-India is
an arid, stifling desert. On the one hand, Duncan's Canada vibrates with
youthful vigour and promise, it is also naive and innocent; the decadence of
Anglo-India, on the other hand, gives her opportunity to explore sexual intrigues and unconventional attitudes which would astonish even the open mind of Advena Murchison (Gerson 1985:104-5).

Unlike Kipling there is a total absence of Indians in these stories. This is an example of the Anglo-Indians' obsession with themselves. Although the setting is Simla, the real India is missing. From the lofty heights of Simla, Duncan's characters venture only occasional glances at "the real India, lying beyond the outer ranges, flat and blue and pictured with forests and rivers like a map" (Ibidem:104). They prefer a view untainted by reality. The collection *The Pool in the Desert* turns out to be a cry of anguish, a lament on the hardship and sacrifice, along with being a defense and glorification of the Anglo-Indian women by a writer who, it appears, is also a victim. India is all negative, all distress, all suffering, a cultural desert, a philistine society, arid, stifling, sterile, where ultimately things stop making sense. In her short stories, more than elsewhere, Duncan's heroines accept this truth, trying to oppose the chaos and absurdity of life in India, and strive to live up to the best of their cleverness and talents (Albertazzi 1989:201).

If India was all this, why did these women stay on in India? Why did they still favour a continuation of the Empire and were hostile about handing over the governance to the Indians? India had definitely much more to offer than these women would care to admit. The power, the importance, the money, the comfort, the servants, the prospects - all the facilities which the Anglo-Indians (the majority incidentally belonged to the British middle class whose existence in
England was not very comfortable) hankered after were conveniently ignored when they painted the picture of hysterical Britishers, as if they were caught in a trap in India. The hypocrisy is quite apparent.

Duncan herself came to India of her own choice. She stayed long enough to become aware of the shortcomings that India suffered from. She left India with her husband for good. But then she came back again, because her husband had got a job in Calcutta. Did she come back only for the sake of her husband? She was so fiercely independent and career-conscious that nothing could have stood between her and her ambitions. Yet she chose to come back to the aridity and the stupidity of India.

Isobel McKenna opines that though Duncan was critical of Anglo-Indian society, she did enjoy some of its aspects such as the amateur theatre in Simla and most important, she was able to have a number of servants which meant that beyond some supervision, she had no household responsibilities. This leisure enabled her to devote all her energies to writing.

The aim of Anglo-Indian writing was not to project the truth, the reality. Its basic purpose was to perpetuate the myth of white man's superiority and the white man's burden. Reality would have distorted the image of martyrdom and invalidated the stance of the suffering English. Duncan was a Canadian, her basic inclinations were not British. Yet the prejudice, pettiness and self-importance of the Anglo-Indians was adopted by Duncan without any qualms of conscience. Perhaps when it was white English against the black Indians, the Anglo-Saxon race and the white skin took precedence over everything else.
Duncan was not simply a defender of the Memsahibs in India. She had broken into the supposedly male preserve of subjects when she focussed attention on the plight of the Anglo-Indians, especially on the difficult task the British administrators were performing in India. Consequently she became a defender of British imperialism too. In the process, her feminism was replaced by racism. Duncan's this transformation is discussed in the last chapter of this dissertation.