CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

"History is always being re-written. Once done with a fiction is inviolable", Paul Scott once wrote (Moore 172). Scott thus establishes that fiction is more relevant than history for the reader who wants to 'feel the truth'. G.M. Trevelyan, the famous historian has attributed certain qualities to history writer which are equally applicable to the novelist also. Satya Brat Singh quotes: "He will give the best interpretation, who, having discovered and weighed all the important evidence available, has the largest grasp of intellect, the warmest human sympathy, the highest imaginative powers" (Ruby Wiebe, Paul Scott and Salman Rushdie 146 - 47). Writing fiction as history involves an effort to discover the thought expressed in it. This discovery naturally gets perfection in novels because the subject is one to which the historian's techniques, however refined, may not be able to do justice. Thus, writing his own sort of history in a manner never attempted in Anglo-Indian fiction, Paul Scott is
conveying and relating history, exploring at every level possible in a novel the possibilities of transcendent history.

For the inquisitive readers of history, Scott's fiction provides a portrait of events in India during the 1940s which no formal history can provide. Scott writes mostly about Anglo-India in the final years of British rule during and after the Second World War. His novels aim to recreate on a grand scale the political and human clashes between British and Indians during this period. While writing his novels Paul Scott is acutely aware that he is working within a framework provided by history and this awareness is one that is also imparted to the characters in Scott's work. Donald Hannah also notices the time consciousness of the author and his characters:

Like their author, they too live and work and have their being within the confines drawn by an historical context. All of his characters are conscious, to a greater or lesser degree, that they are living at a time when a whole epoch of imperial history is coming to an end and are aware of the ways in which this directly affects their thinking, their behaviour and their actions as a consequence. (Dirty Typescripts 157)
Thus many of his characters, namely William Conway, Barbie Batchelor, Guy Person etc. know that they are living within history, know that the British are coming “to the end of themselves as they were” (*Scorpion* 4).

Despite the fact that Scott is providing an account of the events and personages usually marginalized by formal history, he is also forced by the process of selection and omission. The author’s dilemma is aptly put by Robin White, the fictional deputy commissioner of Mayapore in *The Jewel in the Crown*. In his words to make the preparation of any account a reasonable task the writer “would have to adopt an attitude towards the available material. The action of such an attitude is rather like that of a sieve. Only what is relevant to the attitude gets through. The rest gets thrown away” (*Jewel* 381). What has got through the sieve is the fabric of Scott’s fiction which does evolve a sort of collective and representative truth about the decline and fall of the Raj through an integration of so many views of events and affairs.

One may conclude by asking what role such literature plays in interpreting colonial history. For one, it allows imaginative extensions of a problem located in the political context. The problems faced by such characters as Mohammed Ali Kasim, Seyd Kasim, Teddie Bingham, John Layton, Ronald Merrick, Hari Kumar, Barbie Batchelor, William Conway, etc. give the author a chance to provide external evidence about
the functioning power structure. Such presentation augments the discourse of history providing various systems of signification. Paul Scott is in multiple ways experimental in his treatment of time, his manipulation of point of view, his varying forms of narration – yet in the end it all serves to bring out his fictional histories which are not only remarkable literary artifact but also with a luminosity of insight rarely evident in the historian, evoke for us the intricate moral decay that presaged the end of the Raj as well as the poor imitation of the new Sahibs after the Raj. Through his narrative methods and devices as well, Scott replicates, thwarts, and questions several conventions of the writing of history in an attempt to reach a different understanding or view of history, which is ultimately less limiting than others. Ironically he attempts this through story, demonstrating not only the kinship of history and story, but the ability of stories like his to convey truths usually held to be only within the realm of the historian. David Rubin has aptly observed this remarkable contribution of Scott:

In his treatment of the final days of the Raj, Scott has . . . presented a striking justification of the novel genre . . . as opposed to what is generally called history. His fiction, nourished by a remarkable objectivity and honesty and served by a highly original and refined novelistic skill,
explores universal human potentialities and destinies for which history can provide only a deplorably inadequate record. (*After the Raj* 156)

Scott presented the worst aspects of the Raj mainly through the character of Ronald Merrick. It reflects in the victimization of Hari Kumar, the harassment of INA soldiers, postponement of Indian independence and the high-handed dealing of the native population. Above all the worst of the Raj exhibited in the betrayal of their own people. The Raj, as a group had no interest in or means of fostering and encouraging members to flourish as individual persons. The Raj with its public face neglected interior vitality:

It was mirthless because it was irresponsible, and irresponsible because its notion of responsibility was the notion of a vanished age. The trouble was, . . . that in India, for them, there was no private life; not in the deepest sense; in spite of their attempts at one. There was only a public life. (*Scorpion* 145)

The Raj virtues, lauded by Kiplingesque and liberal historians, are revealed by Scott as imaginary, rather than exposing the vices they are shown for what they truly were. demons, masquerading as angel faced
carved in the dark. Merrick is proof that a single human being’s dark and tortured psyche can destroy himself and others. This psyche is in part formed by the exclusionary myths of race, sex and class, making Merrick a fitting symbol for the demise of the Raj. Merrick’s murder, coincides with the release of India from British rule, shows how individual and national destinies are intertwined. The closet crumbles, until he lies quite literally “exposed”, strangled and hacked to death in his bedroom, no longer sheltered in that “mansion without doors or windows” in which one tries to hide the truth and to hide from it too; whether that truth be one of private desire or of the very foundations of British rule.

Similarly in the dramatization of the frustrations experienced by the princely states and the helplessness of the British in keeping their country’s old pledge to them, Paul Scott is highlighting the end of the colourful, romantic and grandiose British Empire and the end of the proud magnificent princes who had nursed the illusion of staying forever. The crumbling of their illusions is resulted from the “bloody-minded game of divide and rule” (Birds 179) played by Whitehall, which on the one hand nurtured a modern democracy in British India and on the other supported the autocratic princes and the final betrayal. The consequences of all these actions remain even in 1964 leaving William Conway having an unhappy married life in the consumer society of post-war Britain, with
no Empire left to govern and his childhood friends Krishi and Dora leading useless lives in independent and mutilated India. Thus Scott’s fictional works incorporate specific political aspirations in British history and the shattering of them on the political as well as personal levels. The story of the princes is a bold analysis of the British-India encounter resulting in the inglorious retreat of a tired race. However, Scott is very particular about presenting another picture of the princes, who in the conventional account of the historians appear merely as extravagant and pompous. Mirat, the princely state in *The Raj Quartet* has been pictured as a virtuous state. It is a deliberate presentation by Scott. In the author’s opinion, many states would have been like Mirat, if they were all well advised and had progressively minded rulers. Conventional history has not given proper attention to these princes who were democratic and liberal minded. Thus Scott is presenting a revisionist history which subverts the official view and offers a critique of authority.

Paul Scott has taken a bold and different approach to the INA problem, which is also the result of the wrong and contemptful treatment of Indians as individuals. To find out the truth of the relation between the British officer and the Indian soldier, Scott goes behind the relationship of individuals to explore those deeper and underlying assumptions on which the Raj was based. It is there that he searches for an explanation
for the ultimate failure of the Raj mission. Quite probably the officials of the Raj never sufficiently grasped the degree to which Indian loyalty to them survived. In Merrick’s opinion there was only the relationship between conqueror and conquered. But in reality it was a concept of loyalty which expressed itself in all aspects of the Raj: the relationship between district officer and peasant, army officer and sepoy, memsahib and servant, missionaries and those they sought to convert. The historian Max Beloff captures well the inherent paradox:

Paul Scott does convey the full tragic significance of the combination between a sense of duty and sense of permanent alienation from those to whom the duty was owed . . . . There was a sense of helplessness as British notions of Self-rule and Democracy were turned against the British ‘guardians’. (The End of the Raj 66-67)

In choosing to describe the story of the INA, the most sustained act of ‘treachery’ in the history of the Indian Army, Scott deliberately chose events which tested and exposed the claims and frailties of Indian loyalty to the Raj, to its salt. The story of the INA proves how hopeless it was on the part of the Raj to try and insulate its new educated Indian elite from nationalism.
The departure and demise of the Raj is given a final twist in Scott’s “continuing critique of the negative effects of imperialism on India” (Srivastava 282). The story of exile, cultural confrontation, acquisition of power—all these get concretized in the predicament of the Smallleys who outlived their country’s political conquest. In their predicament history and psychology converge, because the individual adjustments in their lives were being done against the backdrop of colonial history. In his portrait of the Bhoolabhoys Scott is probably up to the mark. Without caricature Scott depicts the crassness, mediocrity of spirit and desperate materialism of the new commercial class that have been haunting independent India. Ultimately the various contradictory tensions within the construction of “Englishness” at the weight of external, historical pressures upon it, are dramatized in the dissolution of a psychological coherence that occurs throughout and after the Raj.

Rather than write simple historical novels, Scott questions the tyranny of history, specifically the writing and creation of history, emphasizing its similarity to the writing of stories or fictions. Several of his characters, most notably Barbie Batchelor and Guy Perron, are very conscious of the part that history, and attitudes to history, play in the demise of the Raj, and the future of India. Even specific historical events like the Quit-India Movement, the formation of INA, the betrayal of
princes etc. are discussed in detail and are fictionalized, combined or telescoped so that the line between 'real' history and the story Scott is telling becomes blurred. In his fictional creations, mainly *The Alien Sky, The Birds of Paradise, The Raj Quartet* and *Staying On*, Scott is trying to provide an alternative view of the history of the imperial relationship between Britain and India, claiming that he wants to dispel and uncover the "conspiracies of silence" (*Writing* 156) that have shrouded British imperial history and blinded the British to knowledge of India.

Creating a sense of totality is a primary temptation of the historical novelist (Lukacs 42), though Scott's fictions are not historical novels in the usual sense. They are, of course, memorable for their ability to recapture the shock of history on individual lives, to transform abstract historical lives, to transform abstract historical fact into a rounded representation of human experience. By concentrating on the coincidence of certain dates in his version of history, Scott establishes a cyclical view of history, especially connecting his fictional events with actual historical ones. For the renewal of the past by the heat of imagination Scott follows a narrative technique similar to that of other postcolonial writers. It is the delicate figuring in the novel of the complicated and imperceptible process by which memory and reliving, insight and hindsight, history and the present moment, are fused and transformed into illumination. The
significance and repetition of certain dates is sometimes connected upon explicitly, sometimes not. The events in *The Raj Quartet* occur between 1942 and 1947, although there are many references to Anglo-Indian and Indian history which enormously increase the span of time actually covered. A quick survey of the dates Scott concentrates on reveals that he uses international crises, specifically the two world wars, as focal time periods. The significance of Barbie’s death on August 6, 1945, the date of the Hiroshima bombing has already been discussed. Edwina Crane awakes at 4 a.m. on August 9, 1942 which is also the time and date of Mahatma Gandhi’s arrest (*Jewel* 51). The assault on Edwina Crane and Daphne Manners also occur on August 9. Captain Leonard Purvis is sent to India on the same date which coincides with the bombing of Nagasaki in 1942. August 9 again gets importance on which Perron finally leaves India (*Jewel* 654) and thus the quartet closes on the same day it opened five years earlier. Similarly May 7 is the date of Germany’s surrender to the Allies in 1945. This date gets prominence in the fiction by announcing Daphne’s death and Parvati’s birth in 1943 (*Jewel* 91).

Paul Scott’s this way of presentation in *The Raj Quartet* anticipates another ‘epic’ creation of the subcontinent, *Midnight’s Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie. Although *The Raj Quartet* is narrated from a present time of 1964, it tumbles dramatically and inexorably towards midnight of
August 14 – 15, 1947. Similarly Saleem Sinai’s birth on the midnight of August 15, 1947 and his son’s birth on June 25, 1975 – the day of proclamation of Emergency in India, also exhibits how individual and national destinies are intertwined. April 13, 1919 has great relevance in the history of the subcontinent being the Jallianwallah Bagh day and on this very day Adam Aziz in *Midnight’s Children* reaches Agra to start his new married life. The formation of the Midnight’s Children’s Club in 1957 is coincidental with the partition of the State of Bombay. May 27, 1964 in the history of India marks a great day of irrevocable loss by the death of Jawaharlal Nehru and in Rushdie’s fiction, this date anticipates the death of Adam Aziz.

Indeed Scott’s novels expose an Empire that was cold, exploitative, self-serving, and irresponsible. Despite its anatomizing of a corrupt Empire, it finds in the imperial past a value now lost – value of a particular vision of the Empire, which according to Scott, some servants of the Raj like the Manners, the Laytons, Barbie Batchelor, Edwina Crane etc. held and which, if more had adhered to might have changed Britain and India for the better.

The conception of Indian life in Paul Scott differs from that in writers like Rudyard Kipling, Maud Diver, Flora Anne Steel and even E.M.Forster. Scott scrupulously avoids dwelling upon the basic
incompatibility between the East and the West and instead attempts at finding out the similarity through comparison and contrast. In his fictions Scott attempts to tackle the problem of governance of India in the face of a large subjected native population, which was never a concern to Kipling and only obliquely touched upon by Forster. Kipling’s crude justification of the Empire adversely affects the literary quality of his work. Similarly Forster’s account of the Raj seems limited – limited by the fact that his India, like Kipling’s remains essentially abstracted from history. Moreover, neither writer spent much time thinking about what made the Raj the way it was or about what its consequences were; neither had the sense of historical development and change necessary to chronicle the growth of imperial consciousness. Scott, by contrast, is a sensitive writer to depict the marriage between the ruling race and the non-white ruling classes in India. In Scott’s opinion, the British mission in India or the marriage between the East and the West failed because the British remained alienated from the native masses. In *The Towers of Silence* Barbie Batchelor reveals it when she compares Mabel’s transplanted English roses, which had flourished in Indian soil because they accepted what was offered, with the English, whose God did not follow them to India because they had remained aliens. Barbie tells them: “‘You are now native roses’, she said to them. ‘Of the country. The garden is a
native garden. We are only visitors. That has been our mistake. That is why God has not followed us here’” (273).

However, Scott’s literary judgment is also one which attracted severe criticism by writers like Saiman Rushdie. In his article ‘Outside the Whale’, Rushdie found an opportunity to criticize Scott’s presentation and suggested that Scott was nothing but a pale copy of E.M. Forster. Though the quality of Scott’s writing does not work on the level of greatness of Forster’s, his achievement is not too far short of Forster’s and he does not always suffer by comparison with him-for instance on the question of scale. In the words of Goonetilleke The Raj Quartet “should be considered, not as a novel dealing with India like Kim or A Passage to India, but as a historical novel in which the author has transmuted contemporary history into fiction” (Images of the Raj 139).

Paul Scott was fascinated by history and its process, the ways in which we acknowledge the past or try not to, but he refused emphatically to be classified as an historical novelist. In Scott’s own opinion “a historical novel is a novel concerning a period during which the author did not live’” (Moore 172 - 73). Thus we may say that Scott is a modern novelist deeply interested in the society in which he lived. Michael Gorra calls him a postcolonial writer, in his concern with what Empire has left behind, in the way he pursues its consequences into the realm of culture,
because "the postcolonial also assumes that . . . a space has been cleared into which something new may come, and that its concern lies as much with what comes after empire as with the anticolonial struggle itself" (Gorra 6). Scott's foundation for constructing his novels is history itself, which he poured through the sieve of his own mental attitudes. Scott "studied the history of British India and attempted to pass that history through the selecting mechanism of [his] own experience and recollections" (Writing 123).

The major problem for Scott in fact and fiction, past and present, is the actual business, rebarbative and mysterious, ironic and upsetting, of living with other people. In the twilight years of the Raj Scott saw people, both coloniser and colonised, as anguished, vulnerable, destroyed, struck with a special kind of tragedy which engulfs men and women in the cross currents of major political upheaval. The images Scott evokes and makes use of in telling the story of the Raj's decline are drawn from his own emotional involvement in the period. He is demonstrating the irrational working of human feelings within a rigid social framework, which comes as near to history as fiction can approach. But in the end, however fiction may deepen our understanding of the past, we read Scott's stories not only for history but as artifice. Paul Scott is, therefore, not presenting an historian's view but bringing to his major achievement
a remarkable combination of an historian's meticulous concern for documentation and an imaginative recreation of factual truth. The result is a stunning portrait of a people and a place no formal history can give.