CHAPTER XI

SUMMING UP
Literature can be a valuable evidence for the historian in many ways. In the study of British relations with India it is particularly valuable.

-Allen J. Greenberger

The subject of history is the life of peoples and humanity. To catch and pin down in words— that is to describe directly the life, not only of humanity, but even of a single people, appears to be impossible.

-Tolstoy

The Indo-English encounter generated, over many decades, a large number of creative responses. The range, both in matters of content and attitudes is indeed very wide. The landmarks of the twentieth century include Forster's A Passage to India, the long series of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala culminating in Heat and Dust, and Christopher Isherwood's A Meeting by the River, just to cite a few. Paul Scott's The Raj Quartet is perhaps the only sustained effort to come to grips with a very crucial part of India's struggle for independence, the last one, beginning with Quit India movement of 1942.
The author's task was indeed formidable: a whole subcontinent was rising against an alien rule under the leadership of the best of men. For a representative of this alien rule, to keep his cool, his discretion, his balance, his judgment, and to view the unfolding of history, to create fictional characters on a large canvas, to lend the touch of authenticity of history to the events and the people without deviating from the truth of art and the truth of imagination would be a challenge not easily acceptable. Paul Scott accepted the challenge with *The Jewel in the Crown* and brought it to a completion in *A Division of the Spoils*, sparing enough energy to add a sweet coda to it, *Staying On*, seems a feat well-performed.

The historical framework here works well. It is a sympathetic treatment of the problem of Anglo-India. He does it by simply restating the familiar political and social dilemmas in the light of total human situation. The novels give a picture of Englishmen in India, especially in their last days, a subtle portraiture of few Indians and a fascinating study of the problems of the forties. They record with insight an Englishman's impression about the last days of the Raj. The writer stands apart, and views English officials and their wives,
Hindus and Muslims, in their human littleness against the mighty background of the clash of creeds, races, sentiments, prejudices and resentments that is India. This nonpartisan stand enables the novelist to transcend the racial prejudices and attain an aesthetic detachment that accounts for his sterling integrity of vision. Again it is this integrity that has ensured validity of his vision. The facts of history do not pin him down to the mere immediacy of vision. Far from it he visualizes things beyond the horizon of the present moment, the fact that after nearly three decades of independence the crises that intensified the tragic decline, not merely of the Raj, but of this mighty subcontinent persist: communal riots, class wars, linguistic discords, rampant corruption and the wholesale division of spoils - all that has come to stay, only indicate the validity of Paul Scott's vision. If his novels, in a sense, turn out to be a cry of protest against the humanity uprooted, the cry is not confined to the frontiers of his fiction alone, sadly it has been echoing in the corridors of time.

For India in Paul Scott's novels more than a mere milieu or setting, is a protagonist. Its ancient glory seems to have been lost amongst the ruins of its
present fall and decline. And we have a veritable wasteland. The British Raj grew up like a vast banyan tree. In Paul Scott's novels we see, not merely, the fall of the tree, but also the rot that struck at its very roots, and it is these rotten roots which not merely destroyed the tree, but also damaged irrepairably the soil in which it grew.

Paul Scott's imaginative recapitulation of history should recall Tolstoy's similar - and of course, much greater - effort. Tolstoy's concern was that momentous part of the Russian history, Napoleon's invasion. Paul Scott's is the final stages of the disintegration of a powerful empire in a large country. Paul Scott cannot afford to take sides. His material would not allow it. He has to be an observor only. To find Paul Scott turning to some of the methods of Tolstoy, is therefore reassuring. Like Tolstoy he allows his people to speak without much intervention, through action, that is, dramatising the thought-content itself, thus showing their psychological development. The whole complex of reality thus comes through. In Tolstoy various characters react in various ways to the attack of the French army on Russia. So is the case with Paul Scott's characters who react, in a variety of ways, to World War II, the INA, Quit India movement and Indian
independence. This helps the reader to visualise the important social problems and the movements of the epoch directly. This is the popular experience of history. Against the background of the dramatic events of 1942-47, the diverse characters struggle to understand the nature of the relationship between Britain and India which was breaking up before their own eyes.

The reader feels moved by the portrayal of Quit India movement and the huge explosion of the tragically interlocking passions released by the division and freedom of the subcontinent. Here history becomes a large imposing scene for purely private, intimate and subjective happenings along with the general life of the people. The imposing scene presents a concrete and complex world with details of human behaviour and conduct. The novels have all the complexities and intricacies of life including customs and institutions. The fate of the masses is reflected in the fate of the chief characters. The effect of historical incidents is felt in the private lives, both in the outward transformation of life and the inner change of social and moral behaviour. Even non-historical incidents have specific qualities of the age. They have a connection
with the specific events of the time. The rape of Hiss Manners, Teddie's death, Ahmed Kasim's murder and Merrick's murder are related to historical incidents. These incidents have a casual connection. They occur in an atmosphere of necessity. Individuals are seen under the shadow of historical events. But the incidents like the murder of Merrick and Bibighar rape are beyond the rationale of a historian. There are many such events in the novel - Robin White receiving hospitality from an unknown Indian woman; (Robin White remarks about that incident, "I felt that I had been given back my humanity by a nondescript middle-aged Indian woman."(1)) Miss Crane's car being blocked by hooligans, Hari Kumar's washing at the tap, Sister Ludmila Smith helping the poor, happen outside the dragnet of history. It is the novelist who throws light on such incidents. By putting such incidents in the historical context Paul Scott superimposes history on non-historical material. So these novels tend to be both historical and political and hence the novelist's vision is conditioned by history and politics as well as by humanism and imagination. His is what Lionel Trilling calls "liberal imagination" that accounts

1 The Jewel in the Crown, p.347.
for the breadth of his vision.

In fact so great is the genius of Paul Scott for entering into the skins of his characters - be they arrogant Englishmen like Merrick and Reid, nationalist Indians like M.A. Kasim and Sayed Kasim, liberal white men like Robin White, Lady Manners, Miss Manners and Sarah, the crafty Pandit Baba, the simpleton Barbara Batchelor, residents and the lower luminaries of the Raj - that they come to life in the novels. The Raj Quartet becomes a monumental, intricate and encyclopaedic history of people in India from 1942-47. The characters are the flesh and blood variety. They reveal certain fundamental truths about themselves and the world in which they are involved. Through them we see how degraded the Englishmen in India had come to be. He depicts the shallowness of their professions and practice. At the same time he does not forgive the Indians for their diabolical character, sloth and conservatism. He holds the balance evenly between the rulers and the ruled. There is no hint of prejudice, idealistic or imperialistic, as his portrayal of the Raj and its people is noncontroversial. It requires courage of a rare kind to write such novels. He shows an enormous magnanimity about the depiction of the problems of the Raj. The Raj Quartet and The Birds of Paradise
as historical novels are in many ways true pictures of the time and the people. They can be taken as historical and political documents offering a master key to public events of 1942-47. The historical "framework" (2) can be corroborated from historical sources also. And there lies the difference between the work of Paul Scott and a host of other writers of Anglo-Indian fiction. About the historical framework Paul Scott's documentation is so complete that one is inclined to accept the conclusions without doubt. But, in no case should Paul Scott's novels be read as historical novels only. They are not merely essays on real politik. The reader does not miss the notes of the dirge of the empire.

The Raj Quartet is more than a mere imaginative, academic study of the complexities of inter-racial and intra-racial relationships. Its beginnings are obviously in the writer's own experiences, but it extends to a full, wide coverage of almost every conceivable aspect of the sweet and the sour and the bitter of such relationships. The exploration is of almost encyclopaedic proportions. The Raj Quartet and the coda are the fruits of long broodings and meditations upon the characteristics of races, individuals, institutions, ironies of situations, turnings of events, quirks of fate and so on.

2 A Division of the Spoils, p. 599.
A not very unusual event in the Bibighar Gardens set in the unusual circumstances of an unprecedented challenge to the empire; the challenge of Quit India movement initiates a chain reaction enveloping all that subsequently happens, explaining all that went before. This incident is used by Paul Scott to trigger a series of incidents and guage the feelings of hatred, ill will of the whites towards the coloured people; and the surging resentment of Indians against them. Like the refrain of a lyric poem it echoes again and again with slight variations. There the readers visualise once again the Indo-British encounter crystallised in the form of a sexual encounter: once again because it is there in Forster, in the form of a suspicious of rape; and it is there in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala who came after Paul Scott in Heat and Dust, in the form of a seduction. The affair in the Bibighar Gardens symbolises the brutal embrace of the empire. It is a sterile affair. What actually happens in the delineation of this incident that the roles have been reversed, as it happens in a dream.

The Raj Quartet, structurally is a spinning out from this centre as well as a continually going back to it, a complex of a centrifugal and centripetal movement. Obviously, the Raj novels are a complex of narrative
techniques too. The modern novel has shown how the standard 'third person narrative' can be adopted, without losing the advantages of omniscience, to the effects of a first person narrative. The subtle shifting of the points of view - which can be detected by a careful reader, though not very easily - is the standard ploy of this mode of the adaptation of the third person narrative to the first person effects. These shifts vary according to the principal performers in any given incident.

To this psychologically achieved authenticity are added the documentations of diaries, interviews granted to the chronicler of all these events, a visit to India, the letters, the cartoons, the write-ups in the newspapers and the like: all props of historicity, the flavour of the contemporary politics. As Max Beloff puts it:

> Of those writers who have attempted to distil the last years of the British in India in fictional form, the most successful is undoubtedly Mr. Paul Scott. One cannot read Paul Scott's quartet of novels without being moved; and what is the sense of studying history if it is not to move one and to widen one's moral sensibilities? His achievement is on any count a major one. (3)

But, Paul Scott's The Raj Quartet is an historical novel with a difference. Guy Perron, who is one of the "conscious" characters in the novel, is a historian, "who has had experiences thrust upon him", and he not only suffers history but also tries to understand it. The novel depicts

---

3 Max Beloff, 'The End of the Raj; Paul Scott's Novels as History', Encounter, May, 1976, p.70.
history as well as offers a new meaning of history. History, according to the western understanding, is one thing and according to the Indian experience quite another thing. Here what is history to the west is a tragic reality to India. British empire was to them a most glorious chapter of their history, but to us it was a yoke, a disgrace bringing untold suffering and exploitation. The sad thing is that whereas in the English mirror there is now no Indian reflection, but in the Indian mirror the English reflection may be very hard to get rid of, because in the Indian mind English possession has not been an idea but a reality; often a harsh one. Paul Scott could easily see this dichotomy, and in an absolutely non-partisan way he depicts it in *The Raj Quartet*.

The novel, it seems, presents this confusion of ideas caused by the British contact. India did not have 'the sense of history' before this contact what happened in Bibighar Gardens is a perfect symbol of what happened in India afterwards. In India history does not progress in a linear fashion, but in the British India it does. Daphne Manners' remarks are significant in this context. "What happens when you unsex a nation, treat it like a nation of eunuchs? Because that is what we have done,
isn't it?" (4) The Bibighar affair is a sterile affair and it could breed only hatred and mutual mistrust. It also exposes the British idea of justice:

a white robot which can't distinguish between love and rape. It only understands physical connexion and only understands it as a crime because it only exists to punish crime. (5)

In the story of the decline and fall of the empire he not only tries to explain the "cycle of inevitability" but also symbolically "Siva dancing. The dance of creation, preservation and destruction. A complete cycle. A wholeness". (6)

Paul Scott has devoted his major work of fiction to India. In these novels he has selected historical method. The last days of the Raj is the dominant theme. Historical events form the background to the lives of his people. Not only has he shown the transitional period of history - from the Raj to independence - but he has also tried to explain man in a historical context.

History in his novels becomes a "mass experience" as the novels are not only the tales of the characters

4 The Jewel in the Crown, p.427.
5 Ibid., p.453.
6 The Jewel in the Crown, p.152.
that are portrayed but of many who lived in that period.

He has avoided real historical figures but the lives of his people are moulded by historical forces. It is observed how history directs human lives. He has fused fact and fiction - a combination of history and humanity. The people, the movements and the setting have a ring of authenticity. The readers are impressed by the atmosphere and ethos of the Raj with its eccentricities and snobbery, its racial prejudices, and the false sense of "white man's burden". At the same time the novels transcend the historical situation to depict universal human nature. In fact Paul Scott attempts to study various characters in a situation of crisis. There the writer probes the human mind with a rare insight and produces a remarkable variety of effects ranging from grim humour to stark terror and tragic irony. It is not only a history but also an artist's imaginative record of the sensibilities of the people who lived in that era. The Raj Quartet has been described by The Times Literary Supplement as an "elegy on the decline and fall of the Indian empire". But it is also a sociological study of the collapse of the "idea" of the Raj. The documentation of the process of the disintegration of the
Raj focuses on human activity - man's dreams, hopes, illusions and aspirations, the situation of the ruler and the ruled, the barrier of race, religion and class.

Paul Scott's India novels must be judged on the twin counts of historical and cultural representation. There will always be subtle differences between an avowed historical novel and a contemporary work of art which treats historical events of recent past as its content. The blending of the truth of art with the truth of history has ever been a tricky thing. If that same history happens to be rather contemporaneous, the risks of misinterpretation would be considerably greater.

The fusion of fictional characters and real events is supposed to be a way out of minimising the risks of writing authentic novels on contemporary history or the history of the recent past.

For Paul Scott, the problem of representing India in all its diversities and complexities only compounded the other problem of creating a world of imagination on the canvas of the recent past. Perhaps he could succeed in both or neither. The created people represent humanity. They are something more than symbols, transparent mediums for the social and biological urges that are working through them. His delineation of the character of the
policeman, Merrick, is a triumph. Merrick is the "hollow man" of the empire and his hollowness conveys that element of illusion which is fundamental to the Anglo-Indian connection. The few families and persons who dominate The Raj Quartet - Laytons, Kasims, Manners, Kumar and Merrick have their individuality, and some of them have instincts and passions that destroy them. They also represent social forces whose conflicts of will and aspirations, hate and love, lead them inescapably to the destinies inevitable to their natures.

What Barker said of Sir Walter Scott would seem to be true of any historical novelist worth the label. To Paul Scott the description seems to be most eminently applicable, within limits, of course, not by the handling of more or less contemporary history:

His mind overflowing with memories as fresh, and vivid as if he had lived through the experience himself, and as sure as a contemporary of all the points of manners, social conditions, sentiments and opinions distinguishing the period from any other. This was the first essential of historical fiction as he conceived it. The next was a sufficiency of human figures, the common herd and a sprinkling of the exceptional, the odd, the outlandish, suited for the comedy of humours, but all recognizably the offspring of that age and no other... and last was the problem how to mobilize these ample resources; the plan of action the story, the plot.(7)

Paul Scott first came to India in 1942 and then came back again and again. With his unusual insight he felt India's pulse. He loved India but he is not an Indophil. He is well conversant with every aspect of India - the Raj at work, poverty, wealth, political demonstrations, the heat and dust, the beauty, the hospitality, the princes, people, culture and history. He did not attempt to comprehend the spiritualism and mystery of Indian people as E.M. Forster did. In his novels there are no nameless horrors, mysteries, caves and muddles as they are in A Passage to India. Paul Scott's novels offer a better and frank perspective of Indian politics and history than A Passage to India. At the same time his judgements are marked by an unfailing sincerity.

For a long time the English speaking world had been looking at India through the works of Rudyard Kipling. They had been fed on the offensive and offending jingoism of Kipling. After Kipling and E.M. Forster no British novelist has been able to capture India admirably well in all its diversity, confusion and chaos as Paul Scott. He has exploded the myth of "white man's burden". One is inclined to believe that The Raj Quartet's chief value is in exemplifying a new attitude to empire.
Certainly it is the first "great human document" about the fall of Indian empire. It is a vast documentary epic in which those zephyrs of history the rulers and the ruled - the men and women of the time - live and move and have their being. So one can simply say that Paul Scott's novels are clearly a sociological and historical interpretation of human actions.

For integrity of vision, for sincerity and authenticity, the only predecessor of Paul Scott is E.M. Forster. But Forster's vision and interest of India came to be limited only to one of his novels, A Passage to India, which is a political and not an historical novel. But Paul Scott's major creative interest was India. His interest is not merely political but also historical. It is this combination of history and politics culminating in a profound human document that we have in Paul Scott's The Raj Quartet. Paul Scott uses the form in which the whole society is involved, where the moral life is seen in terms of manners and mores. The sweep is vast like that of War and Peace. Paul Scott's novels are a distinguished contribution and appreciation of manyfaceted Anglo-Indian and Indian life.

Paul Scott's vision has tragic dimensions but it is not the vision of defeat and despair. Man is shown
helplessly suffering under the impact of historical necessity and inevitability. Space, time and history forge a kind of unity which make these novels parts of some epic story of the destiny of man as it were. Paul Scott's vision of India corresponds to the reality, seems obvious enough. That a reader would at least so think is seen in Philip Larkin's - one of the judges for the Booker Prize - reflection on Staying On:

Of all the books I read, Staying On was, simply the most moving ... Staying On covers only a few months but it carries the emotional impact of a lifetime, even a civilization.

 Likewise, Max Beloff goes for a big unqualified yes to all the questions that he asks while reviewing A Division of the Spoils:

Has he succeeded in making Britain's retreat and partition of India that followed it ... more directly intelligible than these events might otherwise have been to us? Can he convey both what these events meant to those affected directly by them and their wider significance? Has he succeeded - where many Indians argue that E.M. Forster failed - in apprehending Indian feeling about relations with the British? (8)

It seems that Paul Scott was satisfied with the fruits of his effort. On receiving the Booker Prize for Staying On he remarked, "I have finished with India for ever. It just needed some little veledictory thing".

---

8 Max Beloff, 'The End of the Raj; Paul Scott's Novels as History', Encounter, May, 1976, p.70.
Unfortunately Paul Scott is no more. It is merely a matter of literary speculation as to what images of free India should have kept on emerging out of the pages of his fiction had he lived longer with his interest in India not abated. For here was a novelist whose vision of history was not unrelated to his vision of life, both of which went to the making of the novelist's vision in him. It does not mean that his was a nascent mind, for he had maturity and depth very rarely to be found in any contemporary historical fiction. Here is the imaginative recreation of history which should have pleased even a Toynbee, that a vision so profound should have been snapped at its finest, is a sad chapter in the history of the post-war novel.