

CHAPTER IVMINER BRITISH WOMEN CHARACTERS

The British world in The Raj Quartet is quite substantial, compared to the Indian. It is but natural that this is so, since Paul Scott's primary concern is the exploration of the British predicament in India during the period of the Second World War and of the Quit India Movement. The way in which Paul Scott peoples his British world and gives it a 'local habitation and a name' is remarkable. He evokes the whole ethos of the British life in India by creating not only some major characters but also a host of minor characters — more than a hundred of them — and lends authentic and concrete solidity to the British world in the novel. There is no other Anglo-Indian writer who has created such a substantial British society with its hierarchical systems of civil and military administration, with its missionary, educational and medical personnel — all interacting amongst themselves and reacting to the difficult world outside. The major concrete events they react to are (a) the brutal attack of the Quit India rioters on Miss. Crane and Mr. Choudhari, (b) the Daphne — Hari Kumar incident, resulting in the rape of Daphne and the imprisonment of Hari Kumar, (c) the Teddie-Sarah-Susan episode ending in Teddie marrying Susan. In this section I am going to focus my attention on various categories of British women like (a) wives

and daughters of civil authorities, (b) wives and relatives of military officers, (c) women engaged in or connected with missionary work and (d) women engaged in work in hospitals, and examine the range and quality of the novelistic structure of the British world in The Raj Quartet.

Scott confines his structuring of the British world to the Britishers in the Mayapore cantonment to Pankot Hill station, Mirat, and Ranpur. As far as women are concerned, he presents a number of pukka momsahibs, Mrs. White, the wife of the Deputy Commissioner, Mrs. Poulson, the wife Assistant Commissioner, Mrs. Ethel Manners, the wife of the Governor, (now no more), Mrs. Brown, wife of the station staff officer and others. The wives of the civil officers have a particular pattern of life : They rarely mix with the Indians, they have their clubs, their picnics, their parties, their gossip, their community-solidarity when they feel threatened by external forces. During the war period, they rise to the occasion and form a number of committees:

"Since the war began the English ladies of Mayapore had not been slow to recognise the need and answer the call for committees : knitting-bee committees, troops entertainment committees, social welfare committees, Guides recruitment committees, War Week Committee, committes to direct the voluntary work done in the hospital and the Greenlawns nursing home and by the ladies who had in mind, the

welfare of the children of Indian mothers working on the road extension and proposed airstrip out at Banyaganj and in the British-Indian Electrical Factory".¹

The memsahibs are extremely critical of these ladies who are intimate with the Indians. For instance, Mrs. White openly resents Miss. Crane's hobnobbing with Indians:

"Edwina Crane', Mrs. White said, 'has obviously missed her vocation. Instead of wasting her time in the missions and thumping the old tub about the inequalities of the British Raj and the intolerable burdens borne by what her church calls our dark brethren, she should have been head-mistress of a good school for girls, back in the old home countries".²

It is characteristic of the British women in India to gang together in support of one of their tribe who has got into trouble, without considering the rightness or the wrongness of person's actions. For instance, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Poulson and other stand by Daphne in the Daphne--Hari Kumar episode. "They both thought the girl (Daphne) had been unwise but of course were dismayed by her fate and determined to stand by her".³ Armed with this kind of solidarity the British women are ready to face any crisis in India.

These wives, with their great sense of duty, their class-solidarity, their snobbery and sense of superiority, are

a power behind the British officers who try to rule India as Imperial Masters. Purblind in their vision of reality, lacking in a broad political perspective, these women do not realize the real danger they are in, and their struggle to stick on to power and comfort with a sense of blind optimism is utterly tragic in the new socio-political context. Paul Scott succeeds in conveying this tragic aspect of their 'confused' life towards the end of the imperial regime in India.

CHAPTER IVNotes and References

1. Paul Scott, 'The Jewel in the Crown', The Raj Quartet, (London : Heinemann, Reissued, 1984), p.29.
2. Ibid., pp. 29-30.
3. Ibid., p. 293.