

CHAPTER - IV

ISLAND :

In the foreword to the second edition of Brave New World Huxley says : "... If I were now to rewrite the book I would offer the Savage a third alternative. Between the utopian and the primitive horns of his dilemma would lie the possibility of sanity."¹ In Brave New World Huxley leaves human beings with the unpleasant choice between the insanity of extreme Reason and the lunacy of superstitious Primitivism. A decade later Huxley criticized himself for having failed to suggest the third possibility - that of the decentralized, free society, where industry is minimized and man is liberated to pursue the life of time by the illumination of eternity. Peter Bowering says, 'In Island, Huxley offers a real alternative, another utopia, in which science and technology would be used not to enslave man but to further his salvation.'² Here he wants to give a kind of fusion of the mystical contribution of the East with the technological improvements of the West. Island is Huxley's last work in which he attempts to make the best of both the worlds. If Brave New World is regarded a technocratic hell, Island is, as Dr. Sisir Kumar Chattarjee says, 'a step

forward in his excursion into the future to find peace, happiness and a complete philosophy of life.'³ Huxley imagines man at his sanest and most admirable in Island.

Island is a utopia, a futuristic fantasy, depicting man's achievement of perfection almost in all fields of life. This remarkable fantasy has, like Brave New World, close associations with reality. As in his earlier dystopia, here, too, he starts with present-day reality and after performing a fantasy-leap builds up another parallel world and concretizes it by working into it all kinds of details. Let us take, for instance, the family system in the island of Pala. The Palanese family system is conceived of as without the tyrannies of family life. It is a system where 'mother' is identified with a set of functions. The perspectives of the narrative world are not reversed as in Brave New World but modified, idealized and perfected in the light of the author's philosophy of life. According to Huxley, family system has its justifications only in its role in the nourishment and development of children. The system must be flexible - The children should be free to seek homes for themselves according to their likes and needs. So Huxley conceives of MAC - Mutual Adoption Club :

'Whenever the parental Home Sweet Home becomes too unbearable, the child is allowed,

is actively encouraged - and the whole weight of public opinion is behind the encouragement - to migrate to one of its other homes.'

'How many homes does a Palanese child have?'

'About twenty on the average'.

'Twenty? My God!'

'We all belong,' Susila explained, 'to an MAC - a Mutual Adoption club. Every MAC consists of anything from fifteen to twenty-five assorted couples. Newly elected brides and bridegrooms, old-timers with growing children, grand parents and grand-grand-parents-everybody in the club adopts everyone else. Besides our own blood relations, we all have our quota of deputy mothers, deputy fathers, deputy aunts and uncles, deputy brothers and sisters, deputy babies and toddlers and teenagers.'⁴

Huxley introduces through ^{the} MAC an altogether novel idea. His fantasy operates on the basis of 'anti-expected'. The idea of a child rotating itself through some families and the idea of a deputy mother or father are an unexpected modification of the family system.

Similarly, the Palanese education system also is conceived of as a modification of the most ideal ^{system} of the existing systems :

'We begin,' said Mr. Menon, 'by assessing the differences. Precisely who or what, anatomically, biochemically and psychologically, is this child? In the organic hierarchy, which takes precedence - his gut, his muscles, or his nervous system? How near does he stand to the three polar extremes? How harmonious or disharmonious is the mixture of his component element, physical and mental? How great is his inborn wish to dominate, or to be sociable, or to retreat into his inner world? And how does do his thinking and perceiving and remembering? And what about his blood-sugar? What about his breathing? Does he show signs of having a talent for music, for mathematics, for handling words, for observing accurately and for thinking logically and imaginatively about what he has observed?.....' (pp 201-2)

Huxley describes the process of assessing the differences among the children very minutely. It is an ideal process by which a complete examination of a child is done. Once Huxley enters the world of fantasy he tries to maintain consistency throughout.

In Palanese schools, children are taught short-cuts to memorizing, calculating, thinking, but ~~the~~ fantasy here works within the framework of probability and

verifiability. 'Sex, too, gets a similar realistic-fantastic treatment. Sex in Pala is rational; it is recognized as a major force in human life. The young are given proper sex-education :

'It was evident that boys and girls sleeping together were as completely to be taken for granted as going to school or eating three meals a day-or dying.' (p.251)

The fantasy is a rationalization of the probable and not that of the improbable. The perspectives of our narrative world are not contradicted, but modified in a slightly surprising manner. Sex is idealized, glorified, and thought of as a 'maithuna', as a way to enlightenment.

'.....the future Buddha won't have to leave home and sit under the Bodhi tree. He'll have his Enlightenment while he's in bed with the princess.' (p.251). The grown-ups in Pala are advocated 'Maithuna'. It is a part of school syllabus:

'Maithuna is also something else.....
.....Remember the point that Freud was always harping on The point about the sexuality of children. What we're born with, what we experience all through infancy and childhood, is a sexuality that isn't concentrated on the genitals; it's a

sexuality diffused throughout the whole organism. That's the paradise we inherit. But the paradise gets lost as the child grows up. Maithuna is the organized attempt to regain that paradise!
(p.79-80)

One of the most striking practices in Pala is its wide spread use of artificial in semination to protect its inhabitants from hereditary diseases and to improve the race.

In Pala, there is no established church. The religion here is a mixture of Shiva-worship and Tantric Buddhism. The Palanese religion stresses immediate experience and deplores belief in unverifiable dogmas and the emotions which that belief inspires.

Death is considered as a natural event in Pala. It is not associated with any kind of confusion. But it is calmly accepted. Dying is an art in Pala :

'What do you say to people who are dying?'
he asked. 'Do you tell them not to bother their heads about immortality and get on with the job?'

'.....yes, that's precisely what we do.
Going on being aware-it's the whole art of dying.'

.....'

'We help them to go on practising the art of living even while they're dying. Knowing who in fact one is, being conscious of the universal and impersonal life that lives itself through each of us.....' (pp. 247-48)

Thus Island represents Huxley's heroic attempt to reconcile science, sex and religion. Everything that Huxley shows existing in Pala is an ideal thing for us. We have been striving for it for a long time; and yet we haven't reached it. Hence most of the descriptions in Pala are, in a sense, 'Panstastic' for us. But the fantasy here is not out of man's reach; it is just at the threshold of the possible.

The utopia may be taken as a mild satire on the evils of modern mechanized life :

'You think first of getting the biggest possible output in the shortest possible time. We think first of human beings and their satisfactions. Changing jobs doesn't make for the biggest output in the fewest days. But most people like it better than doing one kind of job all their lives. If it's a choice between mechanical efficiency and human satisfaction, we choose satisfaction.'

Huxley criticizes the materialistic attitude in advanced societies, and also he points out that ideal things have been chosen by Pala.

The Palaness make use of Moksha - medicine to get more satisfaction through liberation. Moksha-medicine is a Reality-Revealer. By using it, even quite ordinary people can have visionary or even fully liberating experiences.

".....the moksha-medicine does something to the silent areas of the brain which causes them to produce a set of subjective events to which people have given the name 'mystical experiences.' (p. 143)

It is the same kind of experience that can be got through prayer, fasting and spiritual exercises. Moksha-medicine helps us in getting mystical experiences - which is everybody's birth-right.

In Huxley's fantastic world of 'Pala', judges and policemen are not required. Due to preventive medicine and preventive education most of the crimes are not committed. And a few crimes that take place are dealt with by the Criminal's MAC. The Palenese get only one newspaper published by a group of editors

representing different parties and interests. Some space in the newspaper has been allotted to each of them for comment and criticism.

The Palanese have attained a kind of perfection almost in every field. The joint efforts of the Old Raja and Dr. MacPhail are greatly responsible for this great achievement. The Palanese philosophy has shaped the Palanese minds in such a way that they believe that

'Patriotism is not enough. But
neither is anything else. Science is
not enough, religion is not enough,
art is not enough, politics and economics
are not enough, nor is love, nor is duty,
nor is action, however, disinterested,
nor, however sublime, is contemplation.
Nothing short of everything will really do.'

(pp. 136 - 137)

This is the key to the success of the Palanese in every field of life. They desire to live^a 'Complete' life. Nothing short of everything will really do.

Fantasy in Island appears sometimes in the form of satire. ^{for instance,} here is a satire on over-population:

'Even the women', he noted, glancing from face to face, 'even the women look happy.'

'They don't have ten children' Mrs. Rao explained. (p. 184).

One of the secrets of happiness in Pala is family-planning . The Palanese parents maintain small families. Contraceptives are distributed free by the Palanese government.

Huxley satirizes religion, too, In the Old Raja's Notes on what's what, and on what it might be Reasonable to Do About What's What, it is said,

"In religion all words are dirty words. Anybody who gets eloquent about Buddha, or God, or Christ, ought to have his mouth washed out with carbolic soap."

(p. 38).

It is a bitter criticism on religion. The Palanese, therefore, do not follow any traditional religion.

In Island, sometimes fantasy manifests itself in forms of irony. Huxley uses irony, for instance, to expose the meaninglessness of God.

'It was the Old Raja's idea',
Vijaya answered. 'He wanted to make
the children understand that all gods
are home made, and that it's we who pull

their strings and so give them the power to pull ours.' (p. 207)

Huxley points out that gods are home-made, and we make them strong.

Huxley makes fun of modernization thus :

'Why should anyone want to exchange something rich and good and endlessly interesting for something bad and thin and boring? We don't feel any need for your speed-boats or your television. Still less for your wars and revolutions, your revivals, your political slogans, your metaphysical nonsense from Rome and Moscow.' (p.77).

Huxley points out here the various ills of modernization. The mechanized society cannot compete with the ideal society of Pala.

Fantasy appears in the form of certain characters thinking and reflections, too. Huxley's fantasy takes a slight jump in such reflections:

'He thought of his son - he thought of his wife - of Lakshmi slowly wasting to extinction, of Dugald like a bright fiery flame suddenly snuffed out. Thought of the incomprehensible

sequence of changes and chances that make up a life, all the beauties and horrors and absurdities whose conjunctions create the uninterpretable and yet divinely significant pattern of human density.' (p. 30)

These are some examples of playful imagination in Island.

'With his mind's eye Will saw the waves breaking over the stranded bulk, heard with his inner ear the crash of their impact. Under her questioning he told her what had happened. The storm, the beaching of the boat, the long nightmare of the climb, the snakes, the horror of the falling..... He began to tremble again, more violently than ever.' (p. 16)

In this piece of imagination, Huxley presents some events of the past becoming 'visible' in thoughts. The very idea makes Will tremble.

As usual, in Island, too, fantasy manifests itself in terms of language :

'He does his work down ~~there~~, she explained; 'but he holds a string in his hand, and at the other end of the string is a kite, and the kite is trying to go

higher, higher, Higher. Even while he's at work, he feels the constant pull from Above, feels the Spirit tugging insistently at the flesh.' (pp. 60-61). The metaphor of the kite is very effectively used here: it symbolizes the immortality of the soul.

'He looked about him. At their desks a score of boys and girls were frowning, in a concentrated, pencil-biting silence, over their note-books.' (p.221). The metaphor 'pencil-biting silence' is a speaking metaphor. Sometimes linguistic fantasy occurs through similes, too.

'In the sunlight her skin glowed like pale apple flushed with rose.' (p.13)

Thus in Island Huxley's fantasy enjoys a great fight, but it is a straight flight - in line with idealized reality. He builds up his world of fantasy very carefully by selecting good ideas from different areas of life, and then presents these ideas in their ideal, perfect form. Our perspectives are never contradicted, as they are in dystopias like Brave New World, but surprisingly modified. The surprise is not the unexpected but half-expected, and fantasy does not take its origin in the anti-expected but in the half-expected.

Island is a utopia in which Huxley tries to combine both the worlds of the East and the West by blending the positive aspects of one with the creative aspects of another. Island gives us a positive picture of the human situation. He presents here an ideal society on the way to perfection. Therefore, Island can be regarded as an utopian thesis to the antithesis of Brave New World. Times Literary Supplement calls it 'a positive and benign version of Brave New World.'⁵ The Palanese have correctly solved the problems Mustapha Mond and his fellow World-Controllers have mismanaged in the Brave New World. Meckier rightly remarks : "Island is Huxley's corrective for Brave New World."

The novel Island appears to have ended on a pessimistic note. A question arises: why should such an ideal society fall? Huxley himself answers it - 'I am afraid it must end with paradise lost - if one is to be realistic.'⁷ Jocelyn Brooke remarks : 'Huxley has come to realize that such earthly paradise must prove finally helpless against the assault of industrialism and modern scientific techniques.'⁸ Thus an ideal society has no future in the world of science and technology. K.B. Rammurthy explains the reason behind the final fall

of Pala. He says: 'Why does Huxley show the fall of his utopia in the end? The answer to this, perhaps, lies in the philosophy of eternal recurrence propounded by the seventeenth century Italian scholar Vico.

Nietzsche and Spengler advocated similar theories which fascinated writers like Yeats, Joyce and Huxley. Vico believed that, when a human society reached a certain stage in a civilization, it would fall off into primitiveness, and then a new civilization would begin to develop.⁹

Island, Huxley's last novel, gives an impression of culmination, because every important problem that occupied Huxley's mind has been manouvered into it, and, seemingly, solved within the limits of present knowledge. It appears that Huxley has taken extraordinary pains over Island. Ronald Clark remarks, 'All his years of distress, all his experiences and all his learning, now seemed to contribute to this story of a society in which a serious effort is made to help its members to realize their desirable potential.'¹⁰

Thus, Island can be called a summing up of the Huxleyan theme. It is the culmination of a forty-year-old quest for fulfilment. Peter Bowering calls Island the final and the most important chapter of the Huxleyan

synthesis.¹¹ From Crome Yellow to Island Huxley journeys from sterility to fruitfulness and transcendence. He sums up his ideas, suggests the cures, and gives the structure of a utopian society. George Woodcock states that Huxley in Island gives 'the sketch of the kind of the world we might have if we were not involved in seeking power and making wars.'¹² In this way Island can be regarded as an affirmative utopia. Wayne Booth says that it is 'not a projection into the future of how bad things are now, but a discovery in the present of how good they might be.'¹³ In the final years, Huxley believed that he discovered the way, through mystical discipline, and the intelligent use of drugs, to give every man an equal chance of an enlightened existence, and so a utopia based on a balance of the physical and spiritual, the temporal and the eternal, seemed possible to him; such was the vision to which he gave concrete form in Island. Richard Kennedy remarks, 'As a humanistic document, Island provides a worthy and fitting close to the career of a great intellectual of our time.'¹⁴

Island is, from the point of view of fantasy, a beautiful product of creative fantasy working within the framework of profound humanism with the prophetic

purpose of showing the way to the erring humanity. So much of loving care, human sympathy and profound wisdom have gone into the novel, that it is a rare example of fantasy working in the service of man with the faith of a genuine social reformer, of an unacknowledged legislator of the world.

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