

INTRODUCTION

Anglo-Indian fiction is the literary product of the British encounter with India. It is, of course, a branch of English literature. Anglo-Indian fiction must be regarded as a sub-genre of the main body of British fiction, ~~produced~~ produced by Englishmen who stayed in and visited India, at least for some time, and experienced it from inside as it were. But the studies of individual writers of Anglo-Indian fiction have been very rare. Apart from some work on Philip Meadows Taylor, E.M. Forster, F.A. Steel, Paul Scott, Rumer Godden, F.W. Bain, Kincaid, there is a curious lack of scholarly interest in this area. In fact, the value of micro studies of Anglo-Indian novelists and their work by Indian researchers can not be over-stressed. This area is nearer to the heart of Indian scholars, yet they are not interested in it. M.K. Naik's comments on this issue are quite appropriate. He says :

"Anglo-Indian literature still remains an 'area of Darkness', in another sense, being virtually as neglected as Indian English literature was about twenty five years ago."¹

Even Sujit Mukherjee felt that "the subject deserved and awaited the proper attention of a native".²

Of the standard surveys of Anglo-Indian fiction two are worth our notice, one - Bhupal Singh's A survey of Anglo-Indian fiction, (1934)³ and Allen J. Greenberger's The British Image of India : A study in the Literature of Imperialism 1880-1960, 1969⁴. Admirable as surveys as these books are, they lack and understandably so, an in-depth approach to the Anglo-Indian fiction. Bhupal Singh's book covers a period of about one hundred and fifty years of this branch of literature but Singh includes Indo-Anglian novelists also in his enquiry.

Greenberger's book neatly divides his study into three periods -

- 1) Era of Confidence (1880-1910)
- 2) Era of Doubt (1910-1935)
- 3) Era of Melancholy (1935-1960)

This pigeon-holing of the novelists, regardless of any concern for quality, may suit the needs of a cursory study of the area under consideration but it is of little help for a serious student of this branch. Even though Singh and Greenberger throw light on the complex area of Anglo-Indian fiction, their approach creates curious anomalies. Both the critics place E.M. Forster at the centre of Anglo-Indian fiction. Other novelists are compared favourably or unfavourably with Forster's classic A Passage to India (1924). Again these novelists are seen either as pro-Raj or anti-Raj novelists. We are not helped a whit in understanding some writers who touch both these categories. Edward J.

Thompson is one such novelist who deserves our special attention because of his meaningful encounter with the Indian reality of the first three decades of the twentieth century. His is an interesting case of a writer who has divided sympathies, who feels a dual pull towards the "justice of the Indian cause and a deep sense of loyalty to his own people".⁵

Both Bhupal Singh and Greenberger miss the distinction of the novelist who symbolizes the divided self of a sensitive Englishman, being pulled towards India because of his liberal outlook which was not compatible with the demands of imperialism much in vogue at that time. Therefore I propose to undertake here an indepth study of the two important novels of Thompson - An Indian Day(1927) and A Farewell to India (1931) with a view to gauging the impact of the Indian experience creatively utilized in his fiction. The third novel An End of the Hours (1938) is a mere rehash of the ideas projected by him in the earlier novels and therefore I do not consider it here. Thompson placed on record his weariness at the time of the creation of the third novel. He said :

"My mind's sickness when I was in India is mirrored in this last novel, a very tired book by a very tired man . . . can please no one It is not a good book"⁶.

So far there are no book length studies on Thompson's Indian and non-Indian work. However scholars from India, England and Pakistan have been attracted to it and have written about him and his art. It is only in reviews and articles of a superficial sort that some notice seems to have been taken of this "Prisoner of India"⁷.

Bhupal Singh in his work, cited above, offers a comparison between E.M. Forster's A passage to India and Edward Thompson's An Indian Day. He concludes by saying -

"E.M. Forster . . . describes . . . clash of the two races, without offering any solution of the perplexing problem, Mr. Thompson . . . suggests remedy"⁸.

But he is unable to analyse how the remedy offered by Thompson was useful.

Greenberger in his survey gives very brief comments on the novels of Thompson with a view to gathering evidence for his thesis that Thompson belonged to the "Doubters"⁹.

Benita Parry's Delusions and Discoveries (1972)¹⁰ treats Thompson in some detail but it ^{lays} stress on his expository writings and tries to measure the impact of these on his novel - An Indian day. Touching lightly upon the other two novels, she concludes about the trilogy -

"These are loosely structured around his lament for warped relations between races and his search for a value inhering in the British - Indian encounter"¹¹.

Shamsul Islam devoted a full chapter to Thompson in his - Chronicles of The Raj (1979)¹². Islam studies A Farewell to India in some detail but neglects the analysis of Thompson's overall achievement.

Sujit Mukherjee's perceptive article "A Prisoner of India"¹³ offers an effective analysis of Thompson's Indian novels underlining his sympathy for Indians and love for duty. Later Mukherjee extended his study and wrote a book on Anglo-Indian fiction - Forster and Further : The Tradition of Anglo-Indian Fiction (1993)¹⁴. In it he examines Thompson's Indian Trilogy and other two Indian Novels : Night Falls on Siva's Hill (1929) and So & Poor Ghost (1933).

Apart from these studies there have been some brief notices of Thompson's Indian and non-Indian fiction. M.K. Naik's recent book Mirror On The Wall (1991)¹⁵, suggests that it is Thompson's sense of shame and repentance at the rudeness and an overbearing attitude of the Englishmen in India that cost them the Indian Empire. Naik's Comments on the various images of India are useful but as his book is a survey of Anglo-Indian fiction, it lacks detailed and deeper analyses of Thompson's novels.

Pramila Garg in her book The Freedom Movement in Indian Fiction in English (1993)¹⁶, calls Thompson a writer of "divided sympathies". As her conclusions are not very different from those of Shamsul Islam, we do not have any advancement on comments on Thompson's fiction.

Kalpana Sheshadri's unpublished M.Phil dissertation on Edward Thompson's Indian Trilogy examines his novels for what she calls Thompson's concept of "moral hero"¹⁷.

Then there are the regular reviews of Thompson's novels in the The Times Literary Supplement¹⁸. But these are essentially superficial notices of the routine review style and do not offer much help.

From the above account of the available critical comment on Thompson's novels, it is obvious that although he has successfully attracted many Indian critics, he remains a neglected writer because of the lack of any detailed consideration of his major concerns. Therefore the present study proposes to explore the nature and effectiveness of his Anglo-Indian sensibility. Thompson's appreciation of the socio-political landscape of India in the last days of British Raj marks him out as a very special kind of novelist. Moreover, the long shadow of E.M. Forster and his A Passage to India has almost paled the significance of a writer like Thompson. Michael Edwardes puts his finger on the very point when he says about Forster's A Passage to India that it has received "uncritical praise"¹⁹.

However, Thompson, according to him, has remained an 'unjustly neglected novelist'²⁰.

Thompson has remained a neglected writer probably because of the critics branding him and his novels as 'artistic failure'²¹ in their construction. But I feel that Thompson was writing a different kind of novel which requires a totally different perspective for its proper appreciation. Mulk Raj Anand was profoundly prophetic when he underlined this fact in a paper on 'English Novels of the Twentieth Century on India'. He says -

" . . . the moral statement is enough as in the ardent Russians (Russian Novelists). . . .
Mr. Thompson thus substitutes pattern for plot. And we have travelled far away from the clumsy incident story and novel with a plot of Kipling. . .
And the cumulative effect of his novel becomes that of a rich and overcharged Russian novel, though 'more descriptive' than that of Mr. Forster's"²².

Thus, it is clear that Thompson's contribution to the Anglo-Indian Novel requires a detailed consideration so that the traditional image of the writer of 'Political tracts' is disproved and he is placed properly in the tradition.

My dissertation proposes to concentrate on the two important novels of Thompson - An Indian Day (1927) and A

Farewell to India (1931). I analyse here his central concerns, techniques and attitude and also take into consideration his dramatization of the Socio-political reality of his times. The study aims at examining how Thompson's Anglo-Indian sensibility has worked in terms of his Indian Experience and how he writes an Anglo-Indian Novel of a different colour from the archetype of this kind of novel, Forster's A passage to India.

The design of my study will be as follows :

Chapter I of my dissertation sketches the historical background of Anglo-Indian Literature ⁱⁿ underlining, | brief, various encounters in fiction. It also gives biographical information on Edward Thompson and his work.

Chapter II gives an in-depth analysis of the first novel, An Indian Day (1927) focusing attention on its theme and technique and considering it as an Anglo-Indian novel of historical-political content.

Chapter III analyses the second novel, A Farewell to India (1931) for its unique treatment of the theme of the rise of Indian Nationalism in the last days of the Raj.

Chapter IV winds up the discussion by pinpointing the conclusions, I have arrived at in my enquiry into Thompson's place along-side other Anglo-Indian novelists like E.M. Forster.

Notes and References

1. M.K. Nalk , Mirror On the Wall : Images of India and the Englishmen in Anglo-Indian Fiction, Sterling publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1991, P.8 (Preface).
2. Sujit Mukherjee, Forster and Further : The Tradition of Anglo-Indian Fiction. Orient Longman, Bombay 1993. P.7.
3. Bhupal Singh, A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction, London, O.U.P., 1934.
4. Allen J. Greenberger, The British Image of India : A study in the literature of Imperialism 1880 - 1960, London, O.U.P., 1969.
5. Shamsul Islam, Chronicles of the Raj : A study of Literary Reaction to the Imperial Idea towards the End of the Raj, London, Macmillan, 1979. P.60.
6. Jawaharlal Nehru, A Bunch of Old Letters, Asia publishing House, Bombay, 1958, P.203. It is a letter by Thompson to J. Nehru dated October, 21, 1938.
7. Edward Thompson, A letter From India, London, Faber and Faber, 1932, P.6. In the epigraph prefixed to his above cited (A.L. From India) work, he refers to an interview with M.K. Gandhi about his A Farewell to India. Gandhi remarked :

'They tell me, Mr. Thompson, that you have published a book entitled A Farewell to India?'

'That is so Mahatmaji'.

'Well, it seems to me that you have been wasting your time again. How do you think that you are ever going to say farewell to India? You are India's prisoner'.

8. Bhupal Singh, 1934, *Ibid*, P.232.
9. See, Allen J. Greenberger's 'British Image of India. Greenberger divided his study of Anglo-Indian fiction into three periods. In the 2nd period, 'Era of Doubt' he examines Edward Thompson and his work, as an Anglo-Indian Novelist. That is, Thompson is 'Doubter' and his doubt is about the existence of the British Raj.
10. Benita Parry, Delusions and Discoveries : Studies on India in the British Imagination 1880-1930 California University Press, 1972.
11. *Ibid*, P. 180.
12. Shamsul Islam, The Chronicles of the Raj, Macmillan, London, 1979, P.4,0 : 90 V2 Kg, 354545.
13. Sujit Mukherjee, 'A Prisoner of India' in the Image of India, in Western Creative Writing, edited by M.K. Naik, S.K. Desai, Karnatak University, Dharwar, 1971.
14. Sujit Mukherjee, Forster and Further : The Tradition of

Anglo-Indian Fiction, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1993.

15. M.K. Naik, Mirror on the Wall' Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, (C) 1991.
16. Pramila Garg, The Freedom Movement in Indian Fiction in English, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1993.
17. See Kalpana Sheshadri's unpublished M.phil dissertation (Hyd.University) on Thompson's Indian Trilogy. She examines Thompson's idea of 'Moral Hero'.
18. Reviews of Edward Thompson's An Indian Day and A Farewell to India in The Times Literary Supplement, dated 9 June, 1927 and 15 January, 1931.
19. Michael Edwardes, British India : 1872-1947. Rupa and Company, New Delhi, 1967 (C), First in Rupa Paperback, 1993, P.317.
20. Ibid, P.317.
21. Benita Parry criticizes his novels, calling them "artistically arbitrary, lacking the long view in which the incipient and potential can be seen unfolding". Delusions and Discoveries. P.201. Also "These are loosely Structured" ... (P.180).
22. , A meeting of the English Association was held on Wednesday, April, 21, 1943, at the Caxton Hall, S.W.I., Mrs. G.H. Bel, O.B.E., presiding, Dr. Mulk Raj

Anand read this paper 'English Novels of the Twentieth Century on India', See reprint of this article in The Image of India in Western Creative Writing, edited by M.K. Naik , S.K. Desai, S.T. Kallapur, Karnatak University, Dharwar, and Macmillan and Company Ltd. Madras, 1971, P.26.