

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLES IN THE RAJ QUARTET

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Abstract :- Scott stated that “For me, the British Raj is an extended metaphor [and] I don't think a writer chooses his metaphors. They choose him.” In the *Raj Quartet* the metaphor of the Raj is extended into images, symbols and metaphors in the four volumes. Scott renders the history of the Raj in terms of the stories of the symbolic characters and events. These metaphors stand for various stages in the life of individuals as also of the raj – thwarted love, imprisonment, madness and death and funeral. The events that befall the individual characters have a parallelism in the events of the Raj. There is perfect amalgamation of history and story in *The Quartet*. Scott's method is to elaborate historic ideas in terms of symbols and metaphors. Scott has executed his magnificent conception of the novel as an “extended metaphor” for communicating his view of life.

Key Words: - Extended metaphor, Symbols, Images, History of the Raj, Conception.

Introduction :-

Paul Scott was a well-known British novelist, playwright and poet who wrote the famous tetralogy, *The Raj Quartet*. The books in the tetralogy series outline the final years of the British occupation of India from manifold viewpoints and address moral conflicts of British army officers in the East. *The Raj Quartet* is a long, leisurely, high-detailed set of novels. Paul Scott's monumental opus is inevitably complex and potentially confusing. Its central action spans a period of five years and is set in an area which went on to become five nations. It consists of more than 300 named characters, including 24 principal characters.

The Raj Quartet comprises four volumes, four masterpieces about the fall of the British Empire in India. It is undoubtedly one of the great works of English literature of the last century. It is an engrossing tale where history engulfs loves, lives, hopes, past and present, and it builds, too - something new, despite the forces which try to stop it. It's beautiful and poignant, wonderfully written, and despite its length, it's a compulsively enjoyable novel to read.

The Raj Quartet is a memorable literary experience. Paul Scott memorializes the complexities of the Indian/British colonial relationship in this massive work. It is rich in the atmosphere and culture of the Indian sub-continent. The book is an excellent novel, presenting the varying aspects of life in India in the last years of British rule. Paul Scott captures many of the attitudes and struggles of both the British and Indians in those years. The book is a really interesting exploration of the sort of last gasp of the British Empire in India, looking at a certain violent event from the perspective of many characters of different classes and races. It is interesting and well-written. It perfectly describes how the Indians and British viewed each other, the feelings that prevailed in the 30's and 40's when Partition occurred. We are not only introduced to the history of that period but we also get acquainted with the atmosphere of the times.

The action of *The Raj Quartet* takes place over a five-year span, from the nationalist "Quit India" disturbances of 1942 to Britain's departure in 1947. The consequences of these tremendous events are still echoed in the modern world of today. Paul Scott's four novels show us this history through the fates of several persons, most of them English. By the novelist's art we see the birth pangs of modern India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh — nations that contain over a fifth of the world's present population.

Four novels form Paul Scott's series known as *The Raj Quartet: The Jewel in the Crown, The Day of the Scorpion, The Towers of Silence, and A Division of the Spoils*. The quartet takes a panoramic view of India during the last days of the Raj, the British ruling class in India. In 1945, the British government voted to grant India independence from Great Britain; the days of colonialism ended and an uneasy transfer of power began. Scott's novels cover a five-year period from 1942 to 1947, and he uses that particularly turbulent and disturbing era to introduce a large cast of characters and the events that shape much of modern life—the last gasp of imperialism, World War II, and the dawn of the nuclear age.

Significance of the Titles :-

Scott stated that “For me, the British Raj is an extended metaphor [and] I don't think a writer chooses his metaphors. They choose him.” (Spurning,1970) In the *Raj Quartet* the metaphor of the Raj is extended into images, symbols and metaphors in the four volumes. Scott renders the history of the Raj in terms of the stories of the symbolic characters and events. “The giant Metaphor of the Raj emerges out of the individual metaphors of the four volumes – the picture of the Jewel in the Crown of the first volume, the scorpion in the circle of fire of the second volume, the towers of silence of the third, and the deaths of Ronald Merrick and of Ahmed, in the last volume.” (Badiger,1994) These metaphors stand for various stages in the life of individuals as also of the raj – thwarted love, imprisonment, madness and death and funeral. The events that befall the individual characters have a parallelism in the events of the Raj. There is perfect amalgamation of history and story in *The Quartet*. Scott's method is to elaborate historic ideas in terms of symbols and metaphors. “In the final analysis, *The Quartet* emerges as an “extended metaphor” standing for Scott's view of life.” (Badiger,1994)

The Raj Quartet is a story of thwarted love and death which, at the metaphorical level, are seen to be the history of thwarted love between

Indians and the British at the end of the Raj in India. This is best exemplified through the titles selected for the four novels of the *Quartet*. The first three books are each titled by a metaphor. Each novel's title relays a strong thematic content.

The Jewel in the Crown - The 'Jewel in the Crown' of the title is a phrase often used to refer to India when it was a part of the Empire. The phrase has a double-meaning as the Koh-i-Noor, once the world's largest known diamond, was confiscated by the British East India Company and presented to Queen Victoria when she was proclaimed Empress of India in 1877. Ownership of the diamond, which is now part of Queen Elizabeth II's crown, continues to be a point of contention between the British and Indian people and governments.

In the novel, 'The Jewel in the Crown' is also the title of a painting depicting the presentation of a diamond to Queen Victoria by several Indian princes who are paying obeisance to her. Miss Crane, a missionary teacher, uses the painting to explain to students that it is an allegory, that the jewel represents India and the scene as depicted never actually happened. Her teaching method comprises namely of a picture, "The Jewel in Her Crown," and the Indian children are educated on two levels, literal and abstract. The picture depicts Queen Victoria sitting on a golden throne in the open air, surrounded by representative figures of her Indian Empire, "princes, landowners, merchants, money-lenders, sepoys, farmers, servants, children and mothers, and remarkably clean and tidy beggars" (JC:26-27). The children thus learn to identify objects, colours and people they see, acquiring the knowledge of English language; in addition and probably more importantly, they learn about the social and political structure in India and also about Christianity presented in the picture by angels, hovering above the Queen's head, granting her protection. According to an ordained member of the Church, Edwina Crane has managed over the years "to teach English and at the same time love of the English," namely "their good intentions" (JC:28).

India is the "Jewel in the Crown". It signifies the Crown's most precious dominion of the Victorian era – its control, forced conformity, "civilizing" and exploitation of India.

The Day of the Scorpion - Scott takes the title *The Day of the Scorpion* from a haunting childhood memory burned into the mind of one of the novel's main characters, Sarah Layton. She recalls the day an Indian servant discovered a scorpion, surrounded it with a circle of kerosene, and set the fuel alight. While the fascinated and repelled Layton sisters watched, the scorpion arched its back and appeared to sting itself with its deadly tail before the flames could spread. There is a belief in India, that the only way to kill a scorpion is to pour kerosene around it and set it alight (you can't approach anywhere near it). When the heat becomes unbearable, the scorpion will sting itself to death. Scott uses this as a metaphor for the British Empire.

The image of the scorpion's suicide (even though later exploded as a myth) troubles Sarah and becomes a metaphor for English vulnerability within India's circle of fire. By the close of the novel, Sarah knows that her emotionally unstable sister has placed her newborn son in a similar circle of fire, echoing the scorpion and the fate of Miss Crane, who burned herself to death in a ritual form of suttee.

A scorpion, when death is imminent, will simply coil up into a ball, and succumb to death; this is what the reader is led to believe in part two of the Raj Quartet. This prevailing theme appears and reappears throughout the entire series; sometimes subtly. However, the real cause for the scorpions coil is revealed in "A Division of the Spoils."

Indians coil at English oppression as demonstrated by Hari Kumar's silence over the rape of the white woman he loves; Hindus coil at Muslim antagonism, and Susan, an English woman coils up again and again, in fear of life itself. Scott uses this theme to capture the essence of the strife between England and India, and between the Muslims and the Hindu's.

While part one of the Jewel in the crown puts the focus on Hindu culture, Scott leads the reader to understand the Muslim perspective in "The Day of the Scorpion." Perhaps Paul Scott, in the Raj Quartet, can bring the reader to more fully understand the dynamics of human nature, morality and culture better than any writer of this century. The thoughts and ideas that prevail throughout the series are applicable to many international situations. This truly makes "The Day of the Scorpion" a cross cultural work of art.

The Towers of Silence:- They are the big wooden structures where Zoroastrians hang up their dead, to be eaten by vultures. It was an apt metaphor for a dead empire. *The Towers of Silence* by Paul Scott is the third book in the *Raj Quartet* and continues the story of the last days of British rule in India as told mostly from the perspective of English people living in India during this period. The "towers" of the title are many things including quite literally the place where the dead of a particular Indian religious sect are laid out and their bodies exposed to carrion who devour them. Metaphorically, the towers may represent the place to which the mentally ill retreat after they witness what they believe to be the death of God.

In *The Towers of Silence* at least two people appear visibly "mad" -- Susan Layton and Barbie Bachelor. Others may be equally insane but these two defy established conventions and disrupt the equilibrium of those around them to the point they must be incarcerated.

Susan has been made a widow by the death of her new husband. She is pregnant at the beginning of the book and gives birth to Edward shortly after a terrible experience with another death. Afterward she suffers from postpartum depression.

Barbie is an ex-missionary--now retired--who has lived with Old Mrs. Mabel Layton for the past five years. Suddenly, Barbie finds herself without a home and with no relatives or close friends. She exhibits behaviour deemed odd by the establishment. Barbie also has an uncanny way of pointing to the truth others refuse to acknowledge -- except Sarah Layton.

Barbie Bachelor feels the presence of the "unknown Indian." In the end she feels and sees too much. She writes to her friend Miss Jolley, "After many years of believing I knew what love is I now suspect I do not which means I do not know and have never known what God is either." This book's title is related to the Parsee's Tower of Silence which is a circular, raised structure used by Zoroastrians for exposure of the dead, particularly to scavenging birds.

But then this is all plot, and the reader wants this to unfold anew from the book, itself. Let it be said that the characters of *The Towers of Silence* interact in remarkably complex ways. But what is actually said is only ever a small part of a much bigger story. Change is inevitable, and when it comes it is likely that those left rootless by it will be laid out on a tower of silence, the place where Parsees leave their dead to be picked to bones by raptors, where all the fleshed-out airs and graces of class will fall away.

Once again, Paul Scott, in his epic saga of the final years of the British Raj in India, presents events previously depicted from yet another perspective, providing further insights and nuances about these characters and their lives. It gets its title from the Parsi Towers of Silence where the Zoroastrian community lays out the bodies of their dead for excoriation, i.e. they are left to be picked clean by vultures. It's hard to imagine a more fitting symbol for a dying empire. Scott crafted what is truly one of greatest works of historical fiction ever produced;

A Division of the Spoils - The title, *A Division of the Spoils* comes from the **Isaiah 53.12** : “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” and the Proverbs 16.18-16 : “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud.”

The story covers in personal terms the humbling and hasty decamping of the British: the precipitous concession of power to a country fiercely bent on division; the travails of an honorable Muslim Congressman, Mohammed Ali Kasim, and his sons, one of whom had deserted to the Japan-directed Indian National Army; the quandary of the Nawab of the small fictitious princely state of Mirat, left in the lurch by the lapse of British Paramountcy; the suicide of a dysentery-debilitated and maladapted British officer; the prowling of the haunted Ronald Merrick. The new man on the scene is Sergeant Guy Perron, once a pupil of a public school called Chillingborough which Hari Kumar (as Harry Coomer) also attended when he lived in England. It is Guy Perron who returns in 1947/8 to be an observer of India on the eve of Independence; this assignment soon turns into a personal inquiry into the truth behind the hushed-up story of Lieutenant-Colonel Ronald Merrick's death in Mirat. The tragic consequences of India-Pakistan partition are dramatized in a horrific train massacre in which Ahmed Kasim, the son of Mohammed Ali Kasim, is targeted by rioters and chooses to sacrifice himself in order to protect the rest of the people in his carriage.

The Division of the Spoils embodies images of the Raj's madness, of nausea, leading to the deaths of Merrick and Ahmed, which are symbolic again. Merrick's moral degeneration is a symbol of the Raj's degeneration. Through the symbolic murders of Merrick and Ahmed, Scott implies not only the death of Raj but also its funeral in the form of division of the spoils.

Conclusion :-

By metaphorising the history of the Raj in terms of dominant metaphors and symbols in these four volumes of the novel, Scott has executed his magnificent conception of the novel as an “extended metaphor” for communicating his view of life. The metaphor of the Raj achieves its full unfoldment in an almost epical dimension, by way of symbols, motifs and images of symbolic significance.

The Raj Quartet is literature of the highest standard. The beauty of the book is in its vivid and wide scope of narration and a single story told from different perspectives of characters so that the reader comes out as the ultimate judge of events told in the book. It is a work of genius in its scale, in the stupendous breadth of its sympathies, and in its extraordinary narrative technique. It is undoubtedly the greatest piece of literary historical fiction ever written on colonial India. This book is indeed the “**War and Peace**” of British rule. It is “**a major work, a glittering combination of brilliant craftsmanship, psychological perception and objective reporting.**” - New York Times

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