



DAPHNE MANNERS - AN ICON OF EMPHATIC RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE RAJ QUARTET

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Abstract:

The Raj Quartet's strength is the ability of Paul Scott to populate an entire area with living breathing people and to get right inside of them and understand what they think and feel as they walk around observing. Many characters among the British and Indian communities play important roles in the novel, set in the closing years of the British rule in India. In *Daphne Manners*, we see a character who stands up for her feelings, without waiting for social and political sanctions. What is striking about her is her retention and strangely energetic manufacture of (false) hope.

Key Words: Living People, Stands Up, Retention, Hope & Righteousness

Introduction:

The Raj Quartet is a great and an incredibly engrossing historical fiction. It is unmatched, both in complexity and the richness of the characters. This is a perfect novel in which the characters leap off the page, as they are so real. The story covers all kinds of lives of both Indians and the British in the years of World War II just as the Quit India movement is at its height. There are so many memorable characters whose lives play out on the pages of this book. Set in the turbulent years during World War II, Britain is struggling to hold onto to her most precious possession, the colony of India. But the nation of India is seething with unrest and violence due to racial hatred and the class differences. It is as though a world is waiting to explode. In the midst of all this a young English nurse and her Indian lover fight their own battles. It is a compelling story that will evoke feelings of pity and admiration for both.

Slow to get going, this book gives a subtle picture of the end of the Raj. There are many cleverly delineated characters: Daphne, Lily, the Whites. By presenting all the subtleties of class and caste through the behaviour of the characters, Scott shows the impossibility - at that time - of people from different cultures and backgrounds living together on equal terms.

In the year 1942, everywhere, the winds of change are felt. In this chaotic situation, a British woman is raped by Indians - and all hell breaks loose. "The Bibighar incident", as it comes to be known, grows into a metaphor: the beginning of the end of the British Raj.

The novel unfolds through the perspectives of different characters, often not central to the story. It gives a jagged, kaleidoscopic feel to the narrative which is perfectly in keeping with India. And as the mystery of what happened at Bibighar is revealed, we seem to hear the bells start to ring the death knell of the British Empire.

Paul Scott's extraordinary achievement is to encapsulate this huge canvas into the private lives of a few misfits. Daphne Manners, large-boned and clumsy, with none of the charms of the English girl: Hari Kumar (or Hary Coomer, as he likes to call himself), Indian on the outside and English on the inside: and Merrick, the policeman acutely conscious of his low social standing in the British society. This triangle is like any other seen in literature, as love and hate in equal measure bind these people together, pulling them into the inevitable vortex at the Bibighar gardens.

Scott is the only British author to write without any hint of race superiority. A bit of himself can be identified in all three of the main characters. In Paul Scott, we find a truly empathetic English author.

Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet* is most renowned as the four works that examine the British Raj in India through the spectrum of English and Indian characters. Despite their critics, *The Jewel in the Crown*, *The Day of the Scorpion*, *The Towers of Silence*, and *The Division of the Spoils* are some of the twentieth century's most sensitive and intimate explorations of cultural encounters in a colonial context. From his portrait of Mohammed Ali Kasim, the Muslim politician, to Sarah Layton, the unconventional colonel's daughter, Paul Scott creates complex, riveting personae and indelible narratives. Scott dissects how the British had projected a fantasy both of themselves and of India upon the reality of the subcontinent.

Paul Scott's style, tone, depth, range and human understanding in *The Raj Quartet* have undergone a quite extraordinary, and enriching, metamorphosis from his earlier novels. The perception of character that had previously restricted itself, in essence, to Scott's own literary environs, here suddenly blossomed into a breadth of understanding that had no trouble with a psychopathic police superintendent, an aristocratic Rajput matriarch, an émigré Russian homosexual acting as chief minister in an Indian princely state, a highly sophisticated Muslim politician, two elderly spinster missionaries, and a wide assortment of military families brought up,

generation after generation, to serve the Raj. Scott often seems to use his characters like reactive chemicals, placing them in careful opposition to each other to produce a calculated effect.

The Raj Quartet's strength is the ability of Paul Scott to populate an entire area with living breathing people and to get right inside of them and understand what they think and feel as they walk around observing. Many characters among the British and Indian communities play important roles in the novel, set in the closing years of the British rule in India. I choose those essential for the development of the story. As the author claims: "This is a story of a rape, of events that led up to it and followed it and of the place in which it happened. There are the action, the people and the place; all of which are interrelated but in their totality incommunicable in isolation from the moral continuum of the human affairs." (TJITC 1)

Scott said that he wrote novels "in order to give a voice to people who would otherwise remain inarticulate." That statement can justifiably be extended to include people who are afraid to speak at all lest they reveal a despised truth about themselves.

Characters who cannot see what is before them or, even worse, choose not to acknowledge the evidence of their senses, are very often people with little awareness and understanding not only of India but ultimately of themselves. Such people like Brigadier Reid, Ronald Merrick and the minor women characters in *The Raj Quartet*, are generally found to belong to the group. In contrast, characters like Daphne Manners, Robin White and Miss Crane who see what is around them are also the individuals who look within themselves. They are the outsiders who break away from the community because self-inquiry gradually leads them to question the premises and assumptions upon which their societies rest. Together they expose the vulnerabilities and ironies in the certainties which bind the group together.

What however unites these three characters is the fact that in their approach to Indians they represent various stages in people's attempts to bridge the gulf between "them" and "us". In Miss Crane we see the reasoned approach, in Robin White we see fairness, and in Daphne we see a character who stands up for her feelings, without waiting for social and political sanctions. She is someone who is not willing to wait for "a bridge to be built..... It is as if she said to herself: life is not just a business of standing on dry land and occasionally getting your feet wet. So long as we stand like that we are not living at all ... So jump in and ... even if we drown, at least for a moment or two before we die we shall be awake and alive." (p.151).

Tragically enough however, it is because Daphne does not wish to remain a mere observer, but decides to cross the bridge between the civil lines and the native town, that she ultimately loses her life. To Daphne, the Bibighar incident was the dissolution of two personalities to form a new unified entity - "this was not me and Hari.....it was us" (p.433), but within the narrative, the Bibighar affair becomes a catalyst which articulates and deepens long-standing divisions between the two communities.

The Raj Quartet is an enthralling saga of British soldiers, an English woman, an Indian lover and a sadistic policeman, all wrapped in the turmoil of British-ruled India during WWII and the struggle for independence. The novel is captivating. The wonderful way in which strands of plot are woven throughout the series in new and interesting ways, the eternally memorable characters, the fascinating background of historical events, the series' sympathy to people of every age, social and economic background, the charm of many of the protagonists..... makes the Quartet an epic novel. And what is fascinating is that it is not necessarily the action which enhances the show but more importantly the psychological development of every single character.

Paul Scott creates characters that are multi-dimensional and multifaceted. The female figures discussed in the texts prove that even though they live in a male dominated society they often dominate the man and even though many of them struggle in their daily lives they are not victims of particular men but of a particular political and ideological system both men and women are subjected to.

Daphne Manners:

Daphne Manners is a young British girl who, after she became an orphan, comes to India to live with her aunt Ethel Manners and later she moves to one of the family's friends, Rajput princess Lili Chatterjee, who lives in MacGregor House in Mayapore. "When I first saw Daphne she struck me as, well, good natured but inept. She was big and rather clumsy. She was always dropping things," Lady Chatterjee refers to the girl. (JC 71)

Daphne Manners is Henry Manners' niece. Miss Crane regards Daphne as rather plain, big-boned and yet unmarried. Daphne works in the hospital at Mayapore for the war effort and stays in the MacGregor House as Lady Chatterjee's guest. On the contrary to Miss Crane, Miss Manners comes to India on purpose. It is the country she has heard so much about from her father. Daphne Manners was born in Punjab, but did not remember any of it, because her mother could not stand the climate and her father resigned from the service and went home into private practice when Daphne was still a baby. Her mother was a frightful snob, while Daphne's father worked himself to death. Daphne comments on this herself: "Poor daddy always regretted leaving India, didn't he? I wish he were here with me now to see it all again." Which Lady Chatterjee comments: "I thought she worked doubly hard at knowing India simply to make up to her father for what he had missed." (TJITC 87) This was one of the reasons why, after her mother died of cancer, she was inclined to go back to India, to the place where she was born and the place that her father loved. As Daphne remembers: "Daddy used to show me

photographs and tell me wonderful tales of the 'land where I was born', so that when I first came back out here, I was always looking for the India I thought I knew because I had seen it in my imagination, like a kind of mirage, shimmering on the horizon, with hot, scented breezes blowing in from far-away hills." (TJITC 366)

Another reason was that she became an orphan and her only relative, Auntie Ethel, lived in Pindi in India. However, coming to India is a cultural shock for Daphne. She awaits the oriental fairy-tale but she finds poverty and dirt of ordinary Indian people and only very gradually does she reveal the arrogance and snobbishness of the British. Daphne Manners describes her first months in India as follows: "*My second month in India last year if someone had offered me a passage home, I'd have accepted like a shot. I had what I can only describe now as a permanent sinking hatred. I hated everything, hated it, because I was afraid of it. It was all so alien. I could hardly bear to leave the bungalow. I was obsessed by the idea of being surrounded by strangers. I suppose it's only natural wherever we go we should need the presence of someone known and dependable and proven.*" (TJITC 101)

This explains well the existence of British clubs where the British people met and where they felt secure in the known and safe environment. During uprisings, there is a plan to move English women and children into places like clubs, which means to get them among other white people, where they would feel safe in their own community. Miss Manners interestingly talks about the British in the club. In her view they have nothing really in common except the circumstances forcing them to join together. The companionship seems to her pretentious and enforced. She thinks they all are imprisoned in it and that they all probably hate it, but dare not let go of it. She even compares the club with the Titanic, "*heading into the dark, with no-one on the bridge...If there is no someone there has to be something.*" She continues: "*In Pindi I became ridiculously attached to my luggage, my clothes, as if they were the only things I could trust. You took the dirt and poverty and squalor in your stride, as if it didn't exist, although I knew that's not what you actually felt about it. But this is why I snatched the blouse from Hussein. I couldn't bear to see him holding it up, examining it, touching it with his black fingers. I hated myself for feeling that, but I couldn't stop feeling it, so I shouted at him. When I went to my room I sat down and wanted to burst into tears and be rescued and taken home, home. I asked myself what on earth had I done, coming to this awful place? I even suspected Aunt Lily of having me here only because I was English and it was a feather in her cap to have a white person staying in her house. I think that is why I failed to keep my resolution never to go to the club.*" (TJITC 101 – letter to Aunt Ethel)

Here, in Daphne's words, Scott depicts the hard life of the British in India, which is one of the reasons why his work is sometimes seen as pro-British. The reader gets most acquainted with the Daphne's character from LiliChatterjee's narration. She compares features of Edwina and Daphne as follows: "*Daphne was different. She had to make her own marvelous mistakes. She didn't ever shrink from getting grubby. She flunks herself into everything with zest. The more afraid she was of something, the more determined she was not to shrink from experience it. She had us all by the ears finally. We were all afraid for her, even of her, but more of what she seemed to have unlocked, like Pandora who bashed off to the attic and prised the lid of the box open.*" (TJITC 104 – 105)

After some time spent in India Daphne becomes bored. She begins to despise society: "*I liked the fun of the English before it became self-conscious and vulgar and violent and I liked the simple almost childish fun of the Indians, and their seriousness, before it became prissy and prickly and imitative of European sulks.*" (TJITC 386) The fatal tragedies that were avoidable affect both Miss Manners and Miss Crane. Daphne Manners gets raped by the group of the Indians, because of her pig-headedness. She refuses to obey her lover, the Indian Kumar, who insists on the termination of their mutual amorous relationship, because it is too dangerous in the events of those days. Her sense of the superiority does not allow her to take an advice. She is convinced that she knows herself what is the best for them both. Moreover, she is irresponsible. The risky relationship to the Indian has a taste of the forbidden fruit for her. It is the adventure. "*I thought that everything I did was an adventure of some sort. I was breaking every rule there was. I made the horrible mess of everything,*" (TJITC 387) Miss Manners admits. Daphne does not even think about negative consequences that could occur and cause a disaster not only for her, but also for the Indian man, whom she states she loves, but does not have any respect for.

As the result of such an arrogant behavior of Daphne Manners, it is Hari Kumar, who is arrested and tortured by the policemen. Daphne must go through such horrific experience to realize that her feeling of the superiority is just an illusion created by the white society and that it causes only a cataclysm. They are not able to stand the disenchantment they feel. "*There is nothing I can do, nothing, nothing!*" (TJITC 409) Cries Daphne after being raped and wonders where she has heard those words before. The reader knows that she actually heard them in the hospital where she was working. Miss Crane pronounced them when she was recovering there after the riots. (TJITC 57)

The only redemption for her is death. Miss Manners decides to give a birth to her and Kumar's child by the natural way, even if she is aware of her poor health condition and of the risk, so she dies during the delivery. She acts as if she felt a need to be punished, as if she wanted to suffer and die.

Miss Daphne Manners is another victim for whom readers tend to feel both strongly sympathetic admiration and some considerable exasperation. What is striking about her is her retention and strangely

energetic manufacture of (false) hope. Willing to bear her child despite its uncertain paternity, Daphne is nevertheless unwilling to speak the truth herself or to allow Hari to do so. She had made a simple human contact with a living Indian, and found nothing simple about it at all.

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