



Inverting the Colonizer: A review of Paul Scott's novel *Staying On*

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Abstract

Partition of India is chronicled in pain, loss, separation and indelible haunting images. Partition fiction writers have made this man made crisis immortal through their works and in subsequent post colonial writings the violence and chaos has been relived through the eyes of natives. Thus, from canonized colonial writings to post colonial one the subject has been dealt through various dimensions. Paul Scott, the writer of famous Raj Quartet, in his novel *Staying On* draws an exception in this line of thought. The winner of Booker Prize, the fiction is story of Smalley couple, the colonisers, who had decided to stay in India after partition but 25 years after independence they were meted out unequal and unjust treatment by the same people on whom they ruled. The paper will unravel the different dimensions of the society that is in flux between tradition and modernity. It will explore the sensitive portrayal of the Tusker family through the narrative of changing cultural dynamics.

Key words: partition, post colonial, dimensions, colonisers, unequal.

Introduction:

Staying On opens in 1972 in Pankot, 25 years after Independence, Tusker Smalley, retired colonel of British Army, has suffered massive heart attack which eventually becomes fatal for him. As a postcolonial novel the novel presents changing socio-political scenario of post-independence India. Tusker Smalley and his wife Lucy had decided to stay in India after the Independence of the nation; the characters in the novel present the vivid complexities of cultural transition and echoes of imperial past. The emotional as well as the psychological landscapes of the characters reveal the loss of the identity that was associated with the empire, cultural adaptation and the problem of identity in the changing world.

***Staying On* : A Review**

Lucy and Tusker have been married for 40 years and lived in India all the years except for a short trip to England. Tusker was a Colonel in the British Army, forced into early retirement when India gained its independence from British rule in 1947. While the British military went back to their country, he chose to "stay on"; in the early phases of independence he was assigned to assist the Indian transition, later he became associated with a private firm, and finally in retirement he could not go back to his country. His wife Lucy agreed with his decision in the beginning, but was not consulted when the final decision to stay in India was deliberated by Tusker. Lucy is clearly not happy to stay back when all the other British families have left for home, she feels displaced, isolated and scared of what will happen to her if he dies first.

After the brief description about the death, the story moves towards the background when Tusker's suffered first heart attack about three months earlier. Tusker is agitated and disturbed over the unkempt garden and believes

that Mrs. Bhoolabhoy, the landlady, is not fulfilling the terms of their lease. Lucy, as a devoted wife, believes strongly that Tusker will be healthy soon and she will not be left alone. She secretly plans with Ibrahim, their servant, to hire a new gardener, they then make Tusker believe that Mrs. Bhoolabhoy has hired the gardener, Mr. Bhoolabhoy, the third husband of the landlady and a friend of Tusker becomes a party with them and assists in the lie.

As Tusker recovers from his heart attack, he spends much of his time reading and commenting on a small history of Pankot. Lucy on the other hand sways more into the past memories, reliving their happy moments and travel time.

As the story moves further Lucy receives a letter from England which takes her down the memory lane. A great deal of history is unfolded by her through imaginary conversations with a prospective visitor, David Turner, who does not enter the novel as a character. He remains an imaginary character in the story. This helps in putting the spotlight on Lucy and Tusker's background and reveals their feelings, fears, and hopes. The book revolves around Lucy's frustrations with Tusker, their meager funds. Tusker's behavior towards work and advancement is also highlighted that has led them to current situation. Lucy musters the courage and demands clarity from Tusker on what income she would have should he die first. Tusker writes to her confirming that she will have little income and few options other than to stay on. Lucy regards it as the first and only love letter she has received in her life, given to her by Tusker just the day before he dies. Characters of Lucy and Tusker are also seen through the eyes of other characters of the novel.

Mr. Francis Bhoolabhoy is as different from his wife as Lucy is from Tusker. He loves the hotel, which he managed before marrying his wife, and is equally devoted to his work at the church. In the novel Francis and Tusker are friends and often spend Monday evening talking and enjoying liquor, while Lucy goes to a movie and Mrs. Bhoolabhoy plays bridge. Mr Bhoolabhoy regards Pankot as his world and he is very happy there, although that world begins to crumble around him during the course of the book. Mrs. Bhoolabhoy originally bought the hotel in an effort to gain entrance into a larger consortium and she succeeds in her efforts during the course of the story. Mr. Bhoolabhoy is very upset about the likely changes, including having to write a letter essentially evicting the Smalleys from their place. This letter apparently causes Tusker's fatal attack.

A Post Colonial Novel

In the post colonial literature, narrative of victimized is paramount, in the novel the victimized is the colonial couple. Through the story line of the novel, the downward graph of Tusker Smalley is traced that evokes sympathy. From the officer of British Indian army to the one who was asked to help the new government to the position to where they were regarded as expatriate after living in India after 25 years of Independence. In this manner their journey is unique and pitiable. Aristotle in *Poetics* has mentioned pity and fall of mighty as one of the major components of tragedy. Post colonial novels have hybridists and assimilation as their main component. The British characters, who were accustomed to the life of privileges and authority, are grappling with the society that is now claiming independence and autonomy as their right. The narrative of the novel is set in the postcolonial era which is ready to break the colonial fetters. In the novel, Smalley couple celebrate holi festival and are surprised that Indian families are not showing any enthusiasm towards the festival. In the beginning of the novel Mrs Bhoolabhoy is described as one 'who had jowls and favored sarees in paste colours such as salmon pink which emphasised the fairness of her skin' (5, Scott). The description clearly emphasise the fascination of Indian society towards fairness and how it is equated with superiority and a signal to Britishers that they are no less than them. On the other hand Lucy Smalley is getting her white hair blue rinsed to preserve her identity. Although Tusker Smalley is adamant about staying in India but they have to struggle with their sense of belonging and identity in the changing society. The author throws light on changing power dynamics and has shown Indians in not so good light. He has shown that if British were harsh with Indians during pre- independence than

the indians treated the british in the same manner during the post-independence era. Smalley couple grapple with nostalgia and persistent tensions as they try to secure a place for themselves by 'staying on' in Independent India. The novel is unique in more than one way. It not only talks about the cultural identity and assimilation, it is in a way a post-orientalism critique too. Edward Said in his path breaking book orientalism had stated that the crisis in the orientalism comes because the west is not ready to give credit to the east, even when most of the colonies have claimed their independence from the colonial powers. The West has clearly distinguish between good orient and bad orient and an orientalist is of the firm opinion that east has the eyes on the largesses of the west. The novel affirms this belief when Mrs Bolabuoy has all the plan to take away the place of Smalley's. Homi K. Bhabha in "Nation and Narration" has talked about the third space that is necessary to understand how colonial encounters result in complex, hybrid identities.

Conclusion

The research paper has traced that through the portrayal of different facets Paul Scott's novel reflects the complexities of identity and enduring influences of historical forces in shaping post colonial societies. The tension depicted in the story line between the colonizers and the colonized, highlights the impact of decolonization on personal, social and cultural level.

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