

Situating Developmental Psychology within ‘Colonial Romanticism’ and ‘Postcolonial Realism’: A Study of Paul Scott’s *The Birds of Paradise*

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Abstract

This paper examines the colonial discourse in Paul Scott’s novel *The Birds of Paradise* from the perspective of developmental psychology. While doing so, it foregrounds the postcolonial notion of ‘self’ and ‘other’ through the fictional development of protagonist. Side by side, the paper also takes up the shifting position of the princely states during colonial India and the aftermath of decolonization on the rulers of these states. As a method, the development of the protagonist as a person from the childhood to his mature stage will be used to bring out the different facets of British colonialism and its effects on human psychology.

Keywords: Developmental Psychology, Princely State, Colonial Romanticism, Postcolonial Realism, Colonial Discourse, Paul Scott

1. Introduction

The Birds of Paradise was published in 1962 and the success of the novel gave Scott immense confidence to take up the mega project of writing *The Raj Quartet* novels and later on *Staying On* (1977). Most of Scott’s critics like Patrick Swinden, David Rubin, V.R. Badiger, and Gomathi Narayanan have praised Scott for successfully dealing with the Indian theme through a well-developed ‘narrative structure’ which coherently explores ‘the states of mind’ of the protagonist. The novel, considered as ‘pre-Raj achievement’ (Swinden 1980, p.47), focuses on the problems of princely states but in course of the novel goes on unraveling some gigantic issues like:

...the relationship of the private lives of the individuals to history; the relativity of what we know as “truth”; the epistemological question – the difficulty of arriving at truth; the isolation of individuals; the relation of a man’s life to his vocation or career; the lost childhood and the quest for paradise; the distinction (and frequent conflict) between the “consumers,” those who cultivate and batten on illusion, and the questers, those who suffer from the inability to sustain their illusions; and the real and the symbolic significance of man’s relationship with the nonhuman natural world (Rubin 1986, p.110-111).

Taking India as the theme of his novel, Scott unfolds various implications of racial myth and horrors of colonialism. The development and growth of the protagonist from his childhood till the

time of his revisit to India in 1960, offers us an insight into his experience of colonial and post-colonial situation.

2. Historical Background

The novel captures the crucial phase of colonial history extending from 1919 to 1947 and the post-colonial period from 1948 to 1962 which reveals the working of the whole colonial system. The protagonist of the novel, Conway, is the product of colonial history and most of the colonial situations come out through his encounter with various incidents and events in the novel. He delves into his early childhood and makes a comparison with his present (years of sabbatical period). In doing so he unravels different kind of experiences which he underwent in different stages of his life. His relationship with India or his evolution as a man in India exists at various levels: period of Indian boyhood (1919 to 1929), English boyhood (1929 to 1939), active life as an army officer (1939 to 1945), second visit to India after the war (1945 to 1946), his marriage and life thereafter in England (1946 to 1960) and the last period - his sabbatical year (1962) in India. Such frequent visits undertaken by the protagonist to India and England offers a comparative observation of the colonial and post-colonial situation. It is revealed as he narrates the story that he is somehow caught in the dualism of the colonial system. The duality of colonial- illusion and colonial-reality collides in his mind and he strives for a definite way to overcome the idea of 'romantic India' and see the real India by means of a face to face encounter with the post-colonial situation.

3. Protagonist and his Formative Stages

Conway's life begins in India from 1919 – the year of his birth in Gopalkand, a princely state. This formative period (of his life) – from 1919 to 1929 –raises the question of the colonial upbringing of an English child. Locke says that environment shapes the mind of the child at early stage and because it is most supple at this stage, it is easy to imprint whatever we wish (Locke 1693, p.32). Conway's father realizes that to make him a colonial master, the child must be groomed in a colonial environment. Accordingly, a phase-wise education is imparted by the governess or mentors of the English child. The child is made to organize himself through 'patterning process' - process by which actions become organized - (Gasell & Ilg 1943, pp. 16–17) in colonial set up through different principles like 'association', 'repetition', 'imitation', 'rewards and punishments'. Consequently, in his ten years of stay in India, Conway had learnt to question the very purpose of the English people in India – what role did they play in India, what they got in return, to what extent they should mingle with the Indians etc. By the time of his transfer to England in 1929 he had imbibed the civilizing spirit and developed a colonial mentality. In the words of Albert Bandura, development of a child occurs through a process of 'social learning' wherein the children witness, retain, re-enact the behavior of the adults (Bandura 1977, p.35). In fact, his life had been strictly regulated and monitored by a colonialist father, a messianic governess Mrs. Canterbury (Canters) and a professional and practical English teacher-historian Grayson-Hume.

4. 'Environmentalism' and 'Naturalism' within Colonial Discourse

It would not be wrong to say that colonial system mostly practiced Locke's notion of 'environmentalism' with regard to child's development. In such case, colonial culture tried to use

child's mind as a blank slate on which colonial code and conduct were written by the adults. In fact, colonial culture largely refuted the much scientific notion of naturalism given Rousseau. In Tradura, a place where he had spent most of his childhood years, he was separated from his Indian ayah at the age of five and put under the care of Canters in order to save him from the 'influence of a native woman' (Scott 1986, p.15) Under the supervision of Canters, Conway is infused with a curiosity for colonial business. Mrs. Canters preoccupied with the idea of civilizing the natives seems to be indifferent to the real motive of the British Empire – exploitation of resources and destruction of native culture, tradition, language etc. Consequently, her teaching appeared to be appropriate for the child as the preliminary motive for colonizing the native land had been on moral ground. This moral and racial ideology thus, acts as a cover for the ulterior motive of the colonialist. In the company of Canters, he wants to understand the colonial business of his father and derives satisfaction from her explanation of the myth of 'white man's burden'. Gradually, the predominant culture into which he is born and brought up has a profound effect upon his values and thus his development (Vygotsky 1929, p.415-432).

5. Conditioning and Colonial Environment

Conway's development as a child mostly falls under the modern learning theory of Pavlov and Skinner which considers child as a product of 'conditioning' – child's 'behavior is formed from the outside, by the external environment' (Pavlov 1928, p. 104). Conway performs his role as a colonial master only when the idea of racial supremacy, a conditioning 'stimulus', predominates his mind. Along with it, 'reinforcing stimuli' (racial supremacy) also controls his behavior from outside environment. Consequently, he sees himself (Englishman) as well as other English people as a Messiah whose presence in a country like India was a moral exile – aimed at guiding and teaching the uncivilized natives –modern and refined values and developments of the western world. He considers his father's relationship with the princely states "as the natural aura of a man who was one of the keepers of the sacred trust laid upon a certain kind of British to guide, punish and reward those whose mother's milk lacked the vital element that would make real men of them – fair-skinned rotters, for instance, or dark-skinned heathen" (Scott 1986, p.22). Such 'conditioning' of Conway lies in Canters' ability to make the theoretical knowledge practical. She elaborates and answers Conway's questions by giving illustrations from his father's life and experience in the colonial situation. Hence, Conway as a child adapts himself to the western logic of ruling India; a belief that colours his entire being. He regards all the sophistication, power and position of the Maharajah as a manifestation of the colonial mission of which his father was an impressive part:

To me he was a great and powerful ruler. ... What he would not have known was that this projection of himself as great and powerful only served to increase my loving awe of father, who told him what to do (Scott 1986, p.37-38).

The scene impresses upon young Conway the power of the British Empire; he feels a surge of imperial pride and begins to visualize the execution of imperial duty. His lessons on British imperialism are further continued by Grayson-Hume who informs him of the dual responsibilities of the British. That the India which was in direct control of the British Empire was in the mainstream of imperial ideology but there was another India within British India – the princely states and that men like his father were in the service of the princely states (Scott 1986, p.28)

Thus, his own father's life is understood by him as a sort of sacrifice towards dispensing imperial responsibilities -true English values among the natives; that in its handling of the affairs of the princely states, the British Empire had succeeded to "put down all the old feudal injustices" (Scott 1986, p.25) as well as raised the 'standards' of the subjects of the princely states' rulers. Mrs. Canters while elaborating upon the relationship of the princely state Tradura and the British government to Conway, celebrates this imperial success thus:

...Indian princes had been on the side of the British "to a man" that they had always been the loyalest element in British Indian life,... men like your father have shown them that the English understand true values (Scott 1986, p.24-25).

Mrs. Canters' assumption reiterates the fact that the English were true dispensers of divine justice to help, civilize and improve the lot of the natives. She urges Conway to adopt a responsible mode of life like his father for "it will be your (his) job to go helping these people to live better lives" (Scott 1986, p.25). Later, she reminded him that the English people's life in India was full of threats and dangers, when the barbarisms of the natives came in direct conflict with the civility of the English people. The natives' instinctual behavior dominated over the westernized self (natives) and became a problem for the English people. She warns Conway that "at any moment the good fellows in the guardroom at our gate might turn against us as the sepoys of British India had turned against their British officers in the mutiny of 1857" (Scott 1986, p.23). Grayson-Hume strictly pointed out to him that the fear was always there. Though there may not be a Mutiny like 1857 but there could be a more dangerous uprising as it was becoming apparent in the form of Civil Disobedience Movement led by Gandhi. He had visualized the future of British Empire in which the use of the gun force would prove to be a strategic failure to suppress such uprising. The interplay of psycho-politico social dynamics upon the growing boy Conway, molded him into a person whose actions and psyche in the course of the novel become easy to understand.

6. Biological Maturation and Colonial Upbringing

It is quite clear that child's development is conditioned by environment. However, such development is also governed from within - functioning of the genes i.e. maturation process (Gesell & Ilg 1943, p.41). Therefore, while subjected to such a political orientation, Conway was also busy constructing his own identity through his various engagements at personal level. As the colonial situation demanded an 'other' to establish the colonizers' identity, Krishi, an oriental representative, proved to be "fundamental in defining the west (him) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (McLeod 2007, p.47). The entire colonial game becomes apparent when Dora becomes the object of love for both of them (Conway and Krishi). Conway comprehends that as long as the three of them remained separate individuals he could continue to be the leader. But Krishi's closeness to Dora posed a threat to his identity or white masculinity. Colonial masculinity - active, dominant, heroic - gets manifested when Conway tries to assert his superiority over Krishi. This leads to a wrestling bout between the two, which comes to an inconclusive end because of Dora's leaving the place. Both of them enter into an argument with Conway asserting his superiority that "I can lick you any time...because I'm a British and you're only a wog" (Scott 1986, p.86). Thus, he finally gives voice to his sense of superiority, prejudice racial feelings and petty mindedness as ingrained in him by the colonial system:

And I needed Krishi as a standard of comparison as well as an ally. I humiliated him physically not only for the pleasure of getting best or making him take back, but in order to aggrandize myself in front of her. (Scott 1986, p.88).

Conway knows that Krishi was 'harmless and knowable' (McLeod 2007, p.53) but in his subconscious mind this poses a threat to his identity as a colonial master. This realization forces him to stereotype Krishi as a 'wog'. Later, he feels ashamed of his behaviour because there was also his desire in him to destroy the 'radical otherness' (McLeod, 2007, p.52) of Krishi and bring him 'inside western understanding' (McLeod 2007, p.52) by developing or establishing a friendship with him. This attitude of the protagonist throws light on the ambivalent nature of the 'colonial discourse'.

7. Performing Colonial Myth vs Performing Colonial Reality

Moreover, his reception and understanding of the political development and crisis is not free from racial influences. To him the Maharaja's bargaining for an heir of his choice appears illogical while his father's initiative to appoint an heir of British choice as logical. In his mind the image of the White man as an embodiment of right and righteousness (to bring stability amidst anarchy) colours his perception. He believes that the stability and reforms made by his father in the princely state would collapse if a wrong heir is chosen. Hence, Conway's childhood apprehension of the political situation reveals a sign of psychological rejection of black's identity and independency. As a boy, nourished and nurtured upon the myths of the raj, he fails to see the injustice on racial grounds of occupying and ruling a country whose people had now begun to see the civilizing myth as a colonial trope, to exploit and uproot them from their own country, its resources, its culture and tradition. His experience of being a subordinate in the company of the Maharajah on the occasion of his birthday celebration and during the shikar adventure did not go well with him. He resisted such disparity from within (Scott 1986, p.56).

Although conscious of his own sense of humiliation and subjection, he is unable to perceive or imagine the intensity of pain of the native people (along with the Maharajah) in their own country - India. The racial myth has restricted the free flow of his reason and he is made a slave to the white racial myth, just like Melba, a bird which Krishi and Dora gifted him (when he leaves for England after the sabbatical year), sings the song of glory and success of the British Empire. Till 1929, we see him aspiring to become a true colonialist and to continue performing the divine duty just like his father had done.

After leaving India in 1929, Conway finds himself to be a misfit in the purely English environment devoid of the colonial situation. The distinction and demarcation or the identity of 'self' and 'other' in which he has grown up no longer exists around him. Trained to think, behave and act like a colonialist he appears to be of no use in England. He is continuously haunted by the memories of India and at times searches for "our sort of background" (Scott 1986, p.110). This state of anxiety is described by him thus:

...I looked upon Four Birches as a place of temporary exile. It was never home to me when I was a schoolboy. It was the comfortable place I came to during school holidays. There was only one room in it where I consciously put down roots, but these were roots I brought with me from India. It was only a question of planting them (Scott 1986, p.110).

The problems faced by Conway in England are the product of his colonial upbringing; a life moulded or shaped by the idea of 'difference'. For the identity established by the colonizers and the colonized is based on a basis of comparison and difference. In England there is no Indian Krishi or no princely states to prove his leadership, heroism and superiority. Frustrated, he is

continuously searching in his mind of an Indian situation -- what can be termed in Jacques Lacan's perspective as fulfilment of 'lack' -- in England where he can make use of his energy and knowledge (Scott 1986, p.111). However, amidst this 'temporary exile' he finds some hope of going back to India and resume the job of civilizing the native people to 'live better lives' (Scott 1986, p.98). The only source of his consolation was the letters of his father. These letters fed his curiosity and allowed him to see India through a nostalgic haze:

It was Father who was India to me, from Father I wanted to hear. When his brief letters came I used to try to read between the lines, read questions into them, questions like: well, how are you shaping? Are you nearly ready? Do you understand, really understand, what you are in for when you join the service? (Scott 1986, p.126)

8. Psychological Trauma and Guilt Consciousness

Conway, having experienced the treatment of the Indian soldiers in the prison camp decides to come back to India to see the changed situation for himself. On reaching Gopalakand, he sees an entirely different picture of the princely states. While the Indian nationalists were busy in intensifying the freedom movement, the rulers of princely states continued to live in the belief that the British Empire was their guardian and would not leave the states as a prey to the vultures -- Indian nationalists. Diggy Row's son was firmly convinced that the actual battle and problem of the British government was not with the princely states but with the Indian nationalists:

We've stood by the crown, and the Crown'll stand by us. The jackals (Indian politicians of India India) aren't going to feed on us. Wavell will see to it. So shall we. So will men like your father (Scott 1986, p.156-157).

Trevor in his book *The Last Days of the Raj* describes the situation and alliances in the following words:

The Hindus regarded themselves as next in the line of succession to the British; the Muslims demanded their own state, pointing out that they represented 25 percent of the total population; the Sikhs pressed for a separate Khalistan; the princely states, all of 584 of them, wanted to remain within the empire.... (Trevor 2006, p.60)

But the coming of the Labour Government to power in England brought misery to these princely states as it made '*de rigueur* as a war aim' (Scott 1986, p. 157) and with it Gopalakand's dream of a free, 'independent and benevolent autocratic' (Scott 1986, p.157) state was shattered. Conway realized that whatever story Diggy Row's son had presented before him (about their relationship with the British government) was nothing but an illusion. He could sense in him a restlessness and fear of the present 'crisis' that could uproot the princely states. He (Conway) blames the British for the present condition of these princely states; for the question of their fate had been a part and parcel of British policy. During the last twenty years the political department had tried to form a federation of the princely states, but the initiative did not include the idea of independent status for these states. The underlying motive of the British Empire was to unite these princely states and use them to tackle the fast growing Indian national movement led by Indian National Congress. The image of the Indian National Congress was the only threat to their sovereignty.

Diggy Row's son regarded them as 'jackals' and blamed them for disrupting the process of independence of his state. The British government had assured the princely states that in the framing of the constitution of free India, their demand for independence would be taken care. It

was (as Conway saw it) yet another strategy of the British government of placating reality and sustaining the illusion of permanency. For the assurance could not be sustained and came to a sudden end with the British passing an order, suspending the paramountcy:

...independence for British India would mean the end of paramountcy, the end of treaties the British no longer had the means to adhere to. The states would be free to make their own arrangements, which of course meant cut adrift to fend themselves (Scott 1986, p.159).

Thus, the India of 1946 comes as a shocking revelation to Conway. The picture of 1920s and 1930s was totally gone. The 'romantic period' of his childhood days had been overpowered by a more realistic and painful realization. In fact, Conway's purgation of the colonial drama and his empathy with the Indians for their tragic fate becomes possible only because he has been derailed from the colonial track (since a long time). He could now see the ugly face of British colonialism, which having destroyed a nation politically, culturally, socially and economically was about to leave it in a state of chaos and dissolution. The policy of 'divide and rule' had so fragmented the nation that it was now even beyond the control of the British Empire. The game of chess played by him and his father becomes a metaphor for the weaknesses and blunders and mistakes committed by the British government. Conway's black pieces are symbolic of the Indian nationalism while the white pieces of his father stand for the representatives of the British Empire in service of the princely states. Symbolically, the one hour game covers the entire history from the rise of nationalist voice till the end of the colonial rule. It shows how Conway's father, as a representative of the empire, committed one wrong move after another which resulted in the loss of the game (colonial rule). These mistakes together formed a strong ground for the black pieces to overthrow the white pieces. When the moment of actual defeat came the British Empire tried to do something but it was too late to rectify the mistakes. Thus, the defeat of his father symbolizes his failure to protect and safeguard the interests of the princely states. He like the other officers was playing the game of colonial chess. The real decision was taken elsewhere (England) and by those people who failed to understand the plight of the native people. For them it would only be a question of getting rid off the unbearable colonial business (Scott 1986, p.187). After his departure to England, Conway's prophesy comes true. The princely states had been meted out a step motherly treatment by the British government:

The princes had been told that they could not rely on British paramountcy and would have to fit in with the new constitution after the transfer of power; this bald statement from the 1946 Cripps Mission was met with incredulity and dismay, not just by the rulers of the states themselves but also by their British political officers (Trevor 2006, p.133).

9. Colonial Anxiety and Search for Recluse

In 1945, he goes back to England for Christmas, but his departure from India is a kind of escape from the horror of colonialism. He could not dare to take his father to England. The image of his father would remind him of the pain and suffering of the English people in service of the empire; the colonial sensibility would once again become a part of his English life. Scott's dictum is clear – people like Conway senior were like the 'Birds of Paradise' left to rot and die on the debris of British colonialism. In fact, Conway's father is caught in a situation of 'colonial ambivalence' (McLeod 2007, p.52). On one hand is the white civilizing and racial myth that says that these natives are to be made like the white people while on the other hand there is a totally different

imperial discourse which fears being associated with the natives on equal terms. Such ambivalent nature of the colonial discourse brought frustration to Indians as well as to the British. They left the nation in a hybrid condition which ultimately resulted in the clash among the natives: princely states wanted to go back to their feudal autocracy, nationalists Indians wanted to carry on for themselves the half-achieved goal of becoming white-like.

Conway's information of these incidents (after 1945) is based on reports, books, newspaper and accounts of the British people. But deep within him was the desire to personally verify the truth of the matter. In fact, when he revisits India in 1961, he could make out the metaphorical tone in 'the birds of paradise' which refers to the plight of the princely states rulers and of the British people in post-independent India. Conway realized that for the English people colonialism had been more like 'maya' (illusion) but for the natives a harsh reality. The magical spell of colonialism and its illusion had affected the psyche of the princely states rulers. In 1947, when the illusion shattered, it affected them (British and the rulers of the princely states) in quite different ways. By 1935, the British had foreseen the future of colonialism (end of the raj) and when it finally vanished in 1947, they were able to accept and face the bitter reality. But it was most unexpected and pathetic for the princely states rulers as they continued to be swayed by the illusion of their power. When it was finally gone, it left them perplexed and in state of political coma. Conway discovers in Krishi a deep contempt and anger for the British people. They were, in fact, uprooted politically (excluded from major political development), historically (excluded from creating or producing history of their own state), culturally (they could not live together with the people of rest of India). Krishi embodies the plight of these princes as he is shown as the ultimate sufferer, the last representative of his kingdom – sans glory, sans power.

10. Conclusion

British Empire could hold on its control over the native people and their land through a systematic perpetuation of racial ideology, but it also, indirectly, made a no-escape situation for its own people thinking that the Empire is never ending reality. In manufacturing the White class for the sustenance of the colonial legacy, it produced wounded English minds. The upbringing of the English children on native's soil largely defied the notion of developmental child psychology. Colonial system created an 'environment' (physical, Social and cultural) quite contradictory to a 'just society for mutual fulfillment' (Kohlberg 1964, p.381-431). The child was exposed not to the natural surrounding but to racially guarded principles and are made to 'perform' and 'behave' like the colonial masters. In fact, the little child becomes a 'little adult' in matter of imbibing the colonial ethos and characteristics. In due course, the child archives the 'inner maturation' to continue the genetic obligation. Colonial failure to understand psychic differences of an English child born and brought up in Indian soil under colonial environment and the one who is born and brought up on English soil comes on the surface during the twilight years of British Empire. Conway's disorientation of 'self' in the formative stage under colonial environment and later his attempt to 'reorientation' of 'self' in postcolonial scenario underscores his search for true 'self' which came by constructing knowledge through experience instead of inheriting it from the environment or being innate and instinctual (Piaget 1973, p.135). Thus, *The Birds of Paradise*, a wonderful blending of history and fiction, very artistically brings out the psychological growth of such characters, as the protagonist, in an environment nurtured by colonial discourse.

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