

## THEMATIZING POLITICAL TRANSITION WITH REFERENCE TO PAULSCOTT'S SIX DAYS IN MARA PORE

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### ABSTRACT

Transition often figures up as a main theme in Paul Scott's principal literary works. The political transition is the main concern in *Six Days in Mara pore* (1953). This paper examines various contexts of the political tension triggered by the imminent Indian freedom. He depicts the political tension in the turbulent years just before the Indian Independence in 1947 by creating a fictional town "Mara pore". India's independence was a vexed issue as it was not all about the British pull-out from India; it also meant division of land and people on political, religious, linguistic, geographical and ideological grounds. The proposed partition created panic and uncertainty in the native and the aliens as well. Nonetheless, the aspiration of the princely states for independent status also emerged as a challenge for the nation as it posed a challenge to India's integrity. Here, the political transition serves as a catalyst and all other issues revolve around this principal motif. Paul Scott probes the very heart of the matter by selecting characters from the British expatriates, the native Indians and the millions rendered homeless.

**KEYWORDS:** Homeless, Independence, Integrity, Princely States, Pull-Out

### INTRODUCTION

1947 was a pretty eventful year in India's political history. In that year India attained freedom from the yoke of British imperialism. It was a culmination of a century-long struggle by millions of Indians, was by no means, a smooth process. In order to resolve the vexed issue of India's independence Clement Atlee, the then Prime Minister of England, made an important proclamation. "Atlee had already declared on February 20, 1947, that the power would be transferred to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June, 1948." (Shodhganga) It had two important provisions. The first being a self-government to India by June 1948 and the second being the issue of princely states to be dealt with after the transfer of power. Accordingly, Lord Mountbatten, the Governor General of India made an important announcement on 3 June 1947. This was essentially a culmination of a series of diplomatic maneuvers. This announcement had a far-reaching impact on Indian history. It made provision for partition of Punjab and Bengal too. However, in the context of this novel the autonomy to the princely states to join either India or Pakistan created such a hue and cry. Transition means "to make a change from one state, place or condition to another." (1751) This novel reflects the political transition that diplomacy had triggered. Paul Scott, the prominent British novelist, incorporates his constant preoccupation with India in his fictional corpus. He visited India twice as a military officer of the British Raj and worked in the Burma operation in 1942. This Indian experience stood in good stead with him when he tried his pen in novel writing. Besides the much eulogized *Raj Quartet*, his other novels too breathe in the political unrest that India experienced in the face of freedom. *Six Days in Mara pore* published in 1953 illustrates various contexts the political transition. Rajiv a Wijesinha points out that "in this single novel Scott's obvious concern is the British reaction to independence." (Wijesinha)

### **Mackendrick's Symbolic Presence**

India's independence attracted attention of the international community. The UNO observers often visited India to take stock of the situation prevailing there. Mac Kendrick had come from America and therefore he was looked upon as a messenger of freedom and democracy. However, the British like Cynthia could not stomach the American presence in India. Mac Kendrick was an American and his presence in India at this particular juncture was highly suggestive. He represented a nation that had suffered the pangs of imperialism and colonialism for centuries, and he symbolized the Indian struggle for freedom that the Americans had already attained from the British a century ago. Cynthia remarked that it was pretty normal to have Americans in India watching the discomfiture of the retreating British. He was looked at with an eye of suspicion. While taking tea Cynthia's expressed similar hostility about the Americans, for she believed that the Americans sided with the Indians over the issue of freedom.

"I'll begin to think you're an official observer from Uno or one of those dreary organizations comes to watch the British skedaddle with their tails between their legs." (Scott 32)

### **The Status of Princely States**

The issue of Indian independence was further complicated due to the existence of princely states. "There were two five hundred and sixty two princely states at the time of partition." (Mir: 104) The condition of these states was indeed very pitiable. Time and again the British had interfered with their private affairs. Some of them were annexed during the regime of Lord Dalhousie. They exhibited considerable diversity in matters of economy, politics, culture etc. Some of the princely states were economically backward. Some of them preferred to maintain their own independent status. This was a great threat in making a uniform Indian nation. Kalipur in this novel served as a prototype of this conflict. There were rebellions within the state due to poverty and squalor and starvation which co-existed with the royal luxury. Jimmy Smith, the young prince was ruling the state. Like elsewhere in India his throne was tottering too. The Mountbatten Plan had already called for the partition and India was to be divided into India and Pakistan. But the partition was not that easy, it was marred by communal violence. The plan of making Hindu dominated India and Muslim dominated Pakistan was a very complex issue. The situation here in his state was pretty tense. It was time of uprising. Jimmy too was hatching out some strategy to maintain a sort of autonomy. He revealed his scheme to Harriet thus:

"The Mountbatten plan leaves the Princely States in the lurch, my dear. Half of my subjects are Muslims and half are Hindus. I am a Hindu. I have three alternatives. I can become a part of Pakistan and then from the religious point of view half of my subjects will be aliens with the right to become refugees. I can cede to India. The same applies in reverse. The third alternative is for me to declare my independence. I can become a sovereign state." (Scott 78)

Kalipur came in to lime light when Tom Gower, the editor of *The Marapore Gazette*, brought out an editorial floating the idea of its merger. It elaborated the prospects of Kalipur after its merger. Jimmy, the ruler of Kalipur, really wanted autonomy. Demographically speaking, half of his population was Hindu and half Muslim and therefore he was sure that in any circumstance he would maintain autonomy as well. So this article had opened a third option to ambitious Mr. Jimmy. We learn from Harriet that Jimmy had taken advantage of the instability wrought by the political transition. In fact, he frequently visited Delhi in the recent months and had talks with the diplomats pressing for autonomous status. The British Government had appointed several missions to settle the issue of independence. Therefore, the 1940s was

essentially a diplomatic decade for India. Cripps' Mission and Mountbatten Plan were only a few to mention. Most of them advocated the creation of two nations. The most important and equally provocative provision in the Mountbatten Plan was to bequeath independent status to a few princely states and this made rulers like the Maharajah of Kalipur more optimistic. In the earlier part of the novel, we get a clue of his intention from Mr. Desai's apprehension with regard to renting a room to Jimmy Smith because his views were also taken as pro-British propaganda. Jimmy was excited to learn of this development because it would protect his political interests. In his meeting with Harriet at the Smith's Hostel Jimmy revealed the purpose of his Delhi visit more explicitly.

“Confer. My dear Harriet! What a question! In Delhi at this moment, history is being made. Don't deny me the right to participate, and try to suppress your surprise at my doing so.” (Scott 77)

This conference, in all probabilities, refers to the conference that Lord Mountbatten held and in which he announced a time-bound plan for independence. According to this new announcement the British would leave India before 15 August 1947. That meant a speedy negotiations and immediate partition of India. It created great uneasiness and haste among the British communities as they had only 10 weeks to vacate India which was a very short span. That's why when Tom Gower was called “Go Home” it is Jimmy who invited him to seek refuge in the state of Kalipur simply because he supported the idea of Pakistan. Earlier Scott has given his readers a faint idea of this development when we see Desai deliberately keeping the issue of the *Mara pore Gazette* in the room no three where the Maharajah was to be accommodated. He pleaded Dorothy to convince her husband to accept the job in Jimmy's state. It was in this context that Kalipur had fetched the attention of people across India. Hitherto politically unimportant Kalipur came in to limelight due to Gower's editorial. But this happiness of Jimmy was short-lived as towards the end of the novel we learn that Jimmy returned home depressed from Delhi. His wife told Harriet about the failure of the Delhi talk. The political development taking place in Delhi had its inevitable reflection in both Mara pore and Ooni. In the later part of the novel the news of fanatics attacking Mr. Jinnah in the Imperial Hotel in Delhi came in and Mac Kendrick remarked that both the Hindus and the Muslims used their fanatics to mess up.

### **Impact on the British**

Disenchanted by the provocative article published in the *Mara pore Gazette* student agitation took a violent turn. Vidyasagara young athlete refused to take Victor Ludorum (Medal) for his best performance at the sports ground. He did so because the medal was being given away by Tom Gower who had earlier supported Kalipur's idea of merging in to Pakistan. Major Milner, Cynthia and Harriet were about to reach the sports-ground, but literally ran away as demonstration disrupted the prize distribution programme. Later the news of strike at Ooni came in. To resolve the crisis, Gower went to Mr. Nair the owner of Ooni and the *Mara pore Gazette*, returned a broken man as the latter symbolically suggested him to step down. All this had happened due to his pro-British. Though Jimmy offered him a job in Kalipur, the joy was short-lived as all was not well in Kalipur. While proceeding to the court Gower disclosed Steele his idea of going to Kalipur. Steele was not much impressed with Gower's decision. Steele's refusal to go along with him demonstrates how the situation in Kalipur too was uncertain due to the rapidly deteriorating political scenario.

The atmosphere was socially insecure. No Englishman could walk alone at night, let apart their women. At Ooni, Gower's agricultural, the situation was not normal any way. As Milner had drunk too much at the party that Harriet Haig hosted, Miss Haig requested Mac Kendrick to see Judith Anderson back to her hotel. Had it been ten years ago, Miss Haig wouldn't have bothered at all, but since it was time of great unrest she was very careful. Miss. Anderson agreed that owing

to the political unrest, waking alone at night was full of risk. As Gower was leaving for Ooni to Meet Mr. Nair, Abdul; his domestic servant offered him a revolver knowing that there was a possibility of attack on a controversial Englishman like Gower. In one of her contemplations, Harriet put it thus:

“They were stubborn; these Britishers on the point of departure, stubborn like the aged and the dying. About them was the smell of the sickroom. They were clearing out of India and leaving the smell behind them. If you sniffed, now, it smarted in your nostrils. Decay Death. An end to ambition a burial of pride” (Scott 67)

Scott’s understanding of India was surprising. He knew India its people very well. He could perceive the fact that the Indians were religious people and any interference in their religious matters led to conflict. The Uprising of 1857 were fresh in his memory. This sort of transition affected all domains of life in India and its ripples were also felt in the religious sphere too. Muttra Das, the estate clerk was assaulted and injured fatally. Mr. Gupta reported that he was assaulted because he provided Mr. John Steele a Hindu girl. He also added that he had a Muslim servant Abdul who actually abducted the girl. Gower’s experiments at the agricultural station met a miserable end due to the moral bankruptcy of his officers. Gupta shares his religious views with Tom Gower thus:

“Hinduism is a way of life not only a religion. And there are glorious traditions, Hindu traditions, from which our young men and women in the flower of their youth should not be wooed.” (Scott 169)

Harriet felt that Jimmy’s strategy in the aftermath of the Mountbatten diplomacy to declare independence was not viable in larger contexts. To retain independent existence of Kalipur with in a vast land like India, according to her, made no sense. Her concern was more economic and utilitarian than political or diplomatic. She expressed her resent over his decision:

“It’s – capricious. It’s irresponsible. It couldn’t work. You couldn’t exist economically. You have always seen yourself how much we depend on each other.” (Scott 79)

The transition of power that was about to happen in 1947 also has its impact on the social life of both the native and the alien. The *swadeshi* was the story of the day British occupation in India was badly shaken. According to Miss Haig the uncertainty had ruined the occupations of the British people in India. On another occasion Cynthia and Mac Kendrick had to face a dangerous situation as the anti-British procession gave slogans at the sports ground. They were frightened and fled the scene at once.

Similarly, Cynthia Mapleton, the widow, had planned to go to Kenya amidst the political tension. The unrest forced Cynthia to leave India. Knowing the rapidly deteriorating law and order situation in India, she decided to go to Kenya because there were already a lot of British living there. Economically, it was out of her budget to meet the travel expenses, but she tried to make up by selling her ornaments. She offered to sell even her wedding ring. Mac Kendrick’s bearer Bholu had to suffer the consequences of the proposed partition. He came from Punjab. Before the tension built up, he had to reach home.

The political transition was also coupled with a host of other immediate questions, displacement being one of them. It shook the belief of those who considered India their home. As the freedom was approaching, this belief was badly shaken. The walls of their ideal home were badly shaken and the people inside it were terribly panic. After reading the controversial article magazine people of Mara pore reacted violently, especially the student demonstration at the sports ground was an outbreak of discontent. As the student movement was gathering momentum, its first tremors were felt in

Marapore. The angry students painted the slogan *Go Home Gower* was on the wall of the *Gazette's* office. Thus some of Scott's people are helpless individuals because they repeatedly fail in searching 'a home.' But there are some expatriates like Harriet who believed in adjustments for co-living in the new setting. Mac Kendrick's anguish really encapsulates the problem.

"You're all dried up and rotten, the whole lot of you. You're all dead and finished. You're not alive anymore any of you. If you were you wouldn't stay another minute in this god dam funeral parlour." (Scott 99)

Under the crushing pressure of rapidly changing scenario at Ooni, Tom lost his home. The bustle of independence terribly exposed Gower's idea of indianization. He had been in India for some twenty years and therefore he always looked upon it as his country. He had adjusted with the hot weather, curries of all types, chillies and social manners. Besides, his reforming activities in the field of rural development at Ooni deserve a special mention. But politics rendered him homeless and was planning to make another home, most probably in Kalipur. But he also lamented that all his reforming activities in Ooni yielded no fruits. During his first ever meeting with Mac Kendrick Gower happily referred to Ooni. He said it was a model village where pupils come to live with their wives and where apart from farming they learnt craft, hygiene and sanitation. But as the people went on strike, Steele, Gower's estate manager, had a tough time. Telephone lines were cut off. Workers cleared out under the pretext of famine. It was difficult to maintain the farm without their support.

Mr. Nair was also displeased with Gower for his sensational views in the *Gazette*. Being an Indian his patriotic sentiments were trifled with. In his assessment, Gower failed to safeguard the magazine's interests. Mr. Gupta was brought in in order to reflect the public sentiment in to the newspaper. Consequently, he ousted Gower from the position of the periodical. He appointed Mr. Gupta the new editor of the weekly. For Gower calamities came in a chain. Gupta explicitly pinpointed the cause of Gower's debacle. He also thought of going back to his home country Britain. But here again he was to lose something for Dorothy was not ready to go with him. In his absence Dorothy would be rendered homeless.

"She told him tonight that if he goes he goes alone. I overheard her say that, Miss Haig. So you're wrong. And she didn't say it for my benefit; she didn't even know I was there. She said, you're finished in Marapore all right but if you go home to England you go alone." (Scott 101)

The British were full of irritation at the very thought of leaving India. It was a time of rumours. Some easily gave in; others simply rejected them. There were views and counter views among the British and Indian communities. Every day there was some dramatic development. At times the British thought that, despite the decisive diplomatic parlays, they would not leave India so soon and so easily. At other times, their moral was clouded by the deadlines and hasty packing activities. Optimistic Cynthia rightly pointed out:

"Typical. They think they can do what they like to us already. They're in for a shock if you ask me. Someone told me this morning that Mountbatten's being pretty clever and all this business in Delhi is just window-dressing and we're not actually leaving India at all." (Scott 124)

He compared those fearing and the feared to Dwight who always tortured him in his childhood. He remembered the incident when his brother threw him in to the cold pond on an autumn morning, a fatal prank. To view this sort of confused behavior of the British expatriates, he felt sick. Harriet described the day on which Tom was insulted by Vidyasagar in the mood of disruption. Harriet interprets this tragic incident as a preplanned scheme. In a telephonic talk with Dorothy she described it as a campaign against Gower.

The external political turmoil gave rise to domestic crisis. She was a Eurasian but hid her ethnicity from her husband and others. She said she hailed from England; in reality she had never been to England. So she was reluctant to go to England after August 1947. Dorothy was afraid that her mask would be exposed. People like Harriet knew that being in India for decades, they must try to settle in India itself after August 1947 because if they went to England, they would start everything afresh no matter how difficult it was. She advocated compromise and co-living. She repeated this fact on telephone to Dorothy. She tried to impress on Dorothy that she should not hate Ooni and Marapore and that England was no home to an indigenized person like Tom Gower.

## CONCLUSIONS

The novel is a saga of instability that engulfed all sections of Indian and Anglo-Indian society. Marapore serves as a prototype of India on the brink of political crisis. The Indians wanted to drive the foreigners from their soil while the aliens were desperately trying to hold their positions. The political issues are multidimensional and interrelated. Uncertainty about the future owing to displacement caused great panic in people. Different communities had different vision for their future. Some were afraid of its political fallout, some economic and still others were worried of their home. Certain sections were ready to make compromise but were forced to quit. The impact on women is represented by Miss Haig, Cynthia, Judith and Dorothy. It stirred every section of Indian and British society in India. The student movement got a spur. Their agitation put the normal life of the British out of gear. Scott brilliantly captures the facets of political transition in *Six Days in Marapore*.

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