

**DOUBLE-CROSSING TRANSCULTURAL  
FIGURES IN ENGLISH NOVELS SET IN INDIA**

**Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
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*Dedicated to my parents and my brother,  
true bibliophiles, for showing me by example  
that life is a continuous process of learning.*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

All writing arises out of specific social and historical contexts. Thus a close analysis of a text reveals that the text bears within it significant information about the specific age when it was written. Such information may be gleaned from the content of a text as well as from its form and from the structure of its narrative.

A genre of writing, the origins of which have been traced to a specific historical moment is the novel that emerged during the eighteenth century. The development of the novel as a form of reading material that found a receptive audience has been the subject of extensive research and critical analysis.

The increasing numbers of novels that were written during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been described as the evolution of a literary form that could accommodate a multiplicity of voices. The heterogeneity of opinion expressed within one novel itself could reflect the views of an entire cross-section of English society. The subject matter of a novel could reflect the concerns and interests of the English nation and of a wide range of its people.

One of these interests which finds significant expression in a large number of English novels is England's then large colonial Empire. As a

result of the increasing exploitation of the natural wealth of the colonies, products from these dominions were made available to consumers in England. As the continents were surveyed and mapped and as more colonies were established, (the idea of England as a country with global interests was reflected in the literature of the time). Many of the novels that are described as the 'canonical' works of English Literature today, mention these distant colonies.

Sending a character away on work to one of these colonies was a useful plot device that can be seen in many of the novels of the time. For instance in *Mansfield Park* [Jane Austen, 1814] Mr. Bertram the head of the household leaves to oversee his plantations in the English colony of Antigua in the West Indies. His absence and the timing of his sudden reappearance are crucial to the narrative of this novel.

The West Indies is mentioned in several other novels of the nineteenth Century. In Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* [1847] Bertha Mason and her family are described as West Indian Creoles, and in W.M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* [1847-48] Rawdon Crawley is appointed the Governor of a West Indian Island.

Another colony that increasingly finds mention in English novels of this age is India. It too occupies a significant part of the colourful stage of *Vanity Fair*. Colonel Dobbin serves in the Army in India and Joseph

Sedley serves as an administrator in India for years. He retires as the Collector of Boggley Wallah and returns to England full of tales of his life in the exotic East.

Apart from novelists writing in England, the colonial presence in India too produced a large amount of writing of different genres. These works range from colourful accounts such as those of Joseph Sedley, to detailed descriptions of the geographic, ethnographic, economic and historical aspects of the land and its people. Memoirs, travelogues, social and political reportage written by administrators, journalists and by a number of English women, many of whom were wives of the men who worked in India, found an interested readership back in England.

Works of fiction that did not merely mention India as a colony peripheral to the metropolis but which described life in the subcontinent and were largely set in India were also written. Many of these texts that are set in India were written by women writers.

The encounter between cultures proved to be a fascinating subject with unexplored depths and tremendous creative possibilities. It was a theme that was explored and described in each of these novels and short stories over and over again.

The underlying ideology of these works was an unproblematic celebration of the policies of colonialism. The fact that a large landmass



and its people were ruled by another country on the other side of the world was not questioned. Since many of the writers of these texts were a part of or interpellated in the colonial apparatus, the fitness of the existing relations of power was accepted not only as right and just but also as the only possible state of affairs and this was portrayed as likely to continue unchanged.

The construction of such narratives that validate the cultural direction of a country are a means of creating the living history of a nation. Thus in these narrative accounts of English life in India a reification of benevolent imperialism can be seen.

It is important to keep in mind here that the terms colonialism and imperialism though intimately linked are not synonyms. Colonialism describes the actual settlement of people in an occupied land and is the active outcome of imperialism. Imperialism connotes the ideology, the dominant values and the furtherance of these values through economic means such that a metropolis can legitimize its influence over a distant territory. While colonialism is the physical act of domination and possession, imperialism is the code that legitimizes such occupation and makes it possible. Thus though many of the erstwhile colonies are no longer colonial possessions they continue to bear the social and economic

consequences of their colonization and continue to be influenced by imperialism.

To return to the subject of fictional narratives which depict colonialism, Homi Bhabha has stated that 'At the heart of the colonial encounter lies an unspeakable silence.'<sup>1</sup> However when one realizes the sheer range and number of works that arose out of the colonial presence in India it would seem that the converse is true. In fact the varied and many mouthed articulation of the problems and complexities that arose out of two cultures/inhabiting more than merely a common geographical space, characterizes the colonial encounter in the subcontinent.

Mary Louise Pratt describes such shared spaces as 'contact zones'. She defines them as 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination - like colonialism.'<sup>2</sup> This articulation of the inequalities of the contact zone became truly multifaceted when Indian writers gained access to publication and when the novel as a literary form began to written in Indian languages as well.

Many of the Indian novels published during the early half of the twentieth century are imbued with the spirit of the freedom struggle. For instance novels such Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* [1908] and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* [1938] are critiques of colonialism and describe aspects of

India's struggle for Independence. The determination to describe and define an Indian identity and the construction of a national self-hood are dominant themes that recur in the narrative of Indian novels published post Independence.

The idea of India as a unified nation that coalesced during the struggle for independence had to be understood as a cultural and social idea that had mass support across the subcontinent before it could be translated into a political movement. Writing in the form of newspapers, pamphlets and fiction too had a part to play (in this creation of a cultural unity that provided a basis for the idea of a national identity.)

In a speech that is considered a significant primary text in the study of nationalism, Ernest Renan said:

'A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together...To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more – these are the essential conditions for being a people. One loves in proportion to the sacrifices to which one

has consented, and in proportion to the ills that one has suffered... Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort.

A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarized however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. A nation's existence is...a daily plebiscite.<sup>3</sup>

Novels written in India post Independence engage in different ways with this idea of common consent. While many narratives describe the processes of the formation of such consent, other accounts question the exclusion and marginalization of different social groups such as women or Dalits during the freedom struggle and their continued disempowerment post independence. In both cases the dominant themes are the impact of the recent past on the present and projections of the idea of the nation into the future.

Novels written by English writers after the colonial presence in India ended however continue to be set in the past and cultural practices

such as Kali worship, the Cult of 'Thugi' and the ritual of Sati continue to be central to the narrative of these novels.

This depiction of superstition, of misunderstood religious practices and inhumanity perpetuated a constructed stereotype of a native culture that consisted of inexplicable rituals and brutality. This reiteration of cultural stereotypes in novels that were published years after the entire subcontinent had undergone a long drawn out political upheaval, that in turn was preceded by processes that brought about significant social changes, is interesting as well as problematic and gives rise to questions about the motives and accuracy of these cultural representations.

The most immediate question would be, why were cultural stereotypes such as 'thugi' and sati highlighted and made central to narratives published in the latter half of the twentieth century. And why did these narratives which depict the events of a century in the past, find a receptive audience.

Some of these narratives published after India's independence but which are set a century earlier and which depict outlawed cultural practices are the texts that I shall analyze later.

These texts are *The Deceivers* by John Masters (1952, Penguin) and *The Far Pavilions* (1978, Allen Lane) and *Shadow of the Moon* (1957, Longmans) both written by M.M. Kaye.

Since these texts continue to be reprinted and read today and some even re-appear in a new incarnation as television serials or cinema, the imperialist ideas contained in these novels clearly continue to appeal to a certain audience.

Firdaus Azim while discussing the novel and its relationship with imperialism states:

‘The imperialist heritage of the novel can be traced to the moment of its birth, and is visible in its themes, as well as in the problematic nature of its status as literature. The novel is placed in a position of difficulty – it oscillates between a factual and fictional world, it reproduces, while subverting, the tenets of capitalism, it has a long history which places it somewhere on the fringes of respectable writing. It’s uneasy positioning is echoed in the history of its reception and criticism.’<sup>4</sup>

While the position of the novel is clearly a contentious and significant one, the position of the protagonist of the novel too is a matter of interest. Of the novels mentioned above the first describes the actions of a male protagonist while the other two works of popular fiction have both male and female protagonists who inhabit the contact zone and are able to move beyond its confines.

Edward Said while discussing an earlier novel set in India, Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) states that:

'The appropriation of history, the historicization of the past, the narrativization of society, all of which give the novel its force, include the accumulation and differentiation of social space, space to be used for social purposes. This is apparent in late nineteenth century, openly colonial fiction: in Kipling's India, for example, where the natives and the Raj inhabit differently ordained spaces, and where, with his extraordinary genius Kipling devised Kim, a marvellous character whose youth and energy allow him to explore both spaces, crossing from one to the other with daring grace as if to confound the authority of colonial barriers.'<sup>5</sup>

While Kim, the adolescent, can seemingly cross cultural boundaries, his loyalty to the masters of the 'Great Game' remains unquestioned. However these colonial barriers are problematized further in the three novels mentioned earlier because their adult protagonists are depicted as people who are able by means of disguise to cross over from the dominant socio-cultural milieu of the colonizer to the larger Indian community and then successfully cross-back again. These protagonists who inhabit the

contact zone between cultures are involved in furthering the colonizing mission of the ruling nation.

Their location though clearly established within the English community is rendered problematic by their chameleon like ability to integrate themselves into the Indian community. By means of this infiltration they are able to secure information that strengthens the hold of the colonial power that they serve. The sympathies of the protagonists however are divided between the English and Indian worlds creating the dilemmas of a split personality.

Psychoanalysis perceives the fragmented human subject as caught in a dialectical relationship between the self and a constructed Other. Homi Bhabha describes this relationship in terms of the Lacanian mirror-image. In the context of colonialism the persona of the Other is provided by the Native or the Black against whom the white man positions and constructs a complete self. Bhabha explains the problems of this self construction when he says 'The black presence ruins the representative presence of Western personhood: its past tethered to treacherous stereotypes of primitivism and degeneracy.'<sup>6</sup>

Bhabha's statement is significant for this analysis because during the course of each narrative the English protagonists confront a uniquely Indian cultural practice and the protagonists' interaction with this practice



constitutes the crisis which must then be resolved by the narrator in each of these three novels in different ways.

During the course of the narrative the protagonists are depicted crossing over from one world to the other, in a sense 'transculturating'<sup>7</sup> themselves, and assimilating completely with the Indian people. The novelists stress the differences between these two polarities and construct a clear distinction between the well-ordered world of the English and the anarchy of the Indian world. The 'rational' English self in the process of crossing over however does not lose its identity but skillfully disguises it to create the impression of belonging to another cultural life space. The self and the 'Other' are shown to inhabit the same physical and psychological subject. This dynamic equilibrium is maintained until the end of the novel when the protagonist crosses back to the security of the English side. This process of deception is legitimized by the novelists' endorsement of the rule of law established by the colonizer. Even though the protagonist breaks these laws during the time spent in disguise.

The narrative voice that establishes these protagonists as English and then relates their journey as they cross back and forth through cultural boundaries) tries to retain control over the ambiguous protagonists. This task becomes increasingly problematic as the protagonists themselves become a site for the furthering of imperial motives as well as for the resistance to this process of subjugation.

Gayatri Spivak commenting on literature written earlier during the Nineteenth century, stresses that such literature cannot be read:

‘without remembering that imperialism, understood as England’s social mission was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English. The birth of the novel coincided with the European colonial project; it partook of and was a part of a discursive field concerned with the construction of a universal and homogeneous subject. This subject was held together by the annihilation of other subject positions.

The novel is an imperial genre, not in theme merely, not only by virtue of the historical moment of its birth, but in its formal structure - in the construction of that narrative voice that holds the narrative structure together.’<sup>8</sup>

Thus in my analysis of these novels in the chapters ahead I shall focus on the problems that arise due to the narrator’s attempt to construct a view of the English presence in India that seeks to maintain the imperialist status quo. However this project is rendered unstable by the protagonists’ own fluid cultural identity. Thus a reader who may not, to borrow Edward Said’s term, engage in ‘contrapuntal reading’ may certainly be deceived by the protagonists’ facility in accomplishing a process of double crossing.

## Notes:

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- 1 Bhabha, H.K. (ed.) (1990) *Nation and Narration*, London and New York: Routledge. p13.
  - 2 Pratt, M.L. (1992) *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London and New York: Routledge. p 4.
  - 3 Renan, E. (1882) 'What is a Nation' Lecture delivered at the Sorbonne, 11 March 1882. p 12. Trans by M. Thom, in H.K.Bhabha (ed.) *Nation and Narration*.
  - 3 Azim, F. (1993) *The Colonial Rise of the Novel*, London and New York: Routledge. p 23.
  - 4 Said, E.W. (1994) *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Vintage. p 93.
  - 5 Bhabha, H.K. (1986) Foreword to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press p xii.
  - 6 Pratt, M.L. 'Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone' *Imperial Eyes*, p.6.
  - 7 Spivak, G.C. (1985) 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism' *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1): p 243.

CHAPTER 2  
DECEPTIVE FICTION

For a reader who reads an English novel set in a non-English location, the very act of reading is in itself an exercise in cultural politics. This is so because, while the novel has its origins in the economic specificities of the publishing industry of eighteenth century England, the subject matter of the novel often has a cultural origin unique to the novel's location. This very English cultural form, the novel, encapsulates within its brief length a range of subject positions. It gives voice to an entire cast of characters, it often reflects the dominant ideology of the time in which it is written and it may also reveal the personal biases of the author.

Reading John Master's *The Deceivers* is an appropriate example of such an exercise in cultural politics. This English novel, by which I mean that the novel was both written in the English language and written by a person from England, is set in Central India during the early eighteenth century and describes a cultural practice that was believed to be prevalent in that region.

The narratorial voice relates the actions of the chief protagonist of the novel in the third person. This central character becomes increasingly schizophrenic as the novel progresses. The novel also has a large cast of supporting characters ranging from the local jagirdar to a performing bear,

all of whom have the space within the novel to express their unique personalities. Parts of the novel certainly express the ideology of the time in which it is set, that is the early eighteenth century, as the novel begins in 1825 and details the events of the next year.

The dominant ideology of the time in which the novel was written, that is 1952, is more problematic to identify since this a time characterized by many competing ideologies. It would not be incorrect to state that England and the other colonial powers of Europe were living with the consequences of the end of the Second World War, which ended in 1945, as well as readjusting to the loss of their overseas possessions, which had gained their independence as a result of the combined processes of social mobilization and mass political movements in these colonies. This condition of reduced circumstances for the former colonial powers, has been described by another writer, who wrote a number of books set in India, as 'the end of the party and the beginning of the washing up.'<sup>1</sup>

While *The Deceivers* can easily be labelled as belonging to the genre of writing described as Raj nostalgia literature, a closer analysis will prove such a description simplistic and incorrect. It is of course a work of popular fiction; however because of its evocation of the locale and the historical period that it describes, as well as the strongly delineated characters who form the keystones of the plot, the novel can be read as a

significant socio-historical document. The novel as cultural artifact becomes a text to be analyzed for both its cultural and historical value.

The personal biases of the author as revealed by the text and whether the narrator's voice, the protagonist's voice and the author's voice are one and the same, are other questions that this analysis will look at closely.

A good place to begin therefore, would therefore be the location of the author himself:

'John Masters who was born in Calcutta in 1914, was of the fifth generation of his family to have served in India. Educated at Wellington and Sandhurst, he returned to India in 1934 to join the 4<sup>th</sup> Prince of Wales's Own Gurkha Rifles. He saw active service in Waziristan in 1937, and after the outbreak of war, in Iraq, Syria and Persia.

In 1944 he commanded a brigade of General Wingate's Chindits in Burma, and later fought with the nineteenth Indian Division at the capture of Mandalay and on Mawchi the Road. His story is told in the three volumes of his classic autobiography *Bugles and a Tiger, The Road Past Mandalay and Pilgrim Son*.

Masters retired from the Army in 1948 as a Lieutenant-Colonel with the DSO and OBE. He went to America and turned to writing. Several short stories were succeeded by *Nightrunners of Bengal*, the first of an outstanding series of novels set in India. His epic trilogy on the Great War, *Loss of Eden*, was completed in 1981. Mr Masters died in 1983 in New Mexico.<sup>2</sup>

The above extract is the publishers' flattering account of John Masters' life and writing ability. It is of more significance for us to note that Masters' contribution to the literature that resulted from the English presence in India consists primarily of the trilogy mentioned above. *The Deceivers*, *Nightrunners of Bengal* and *Bhowani Junction*. Other books set in India are *The Ravi Lancers* and *The Lotus and the Wind*.

The trilogy follows a chronological order and is a fictional representation of different periods in Indian history. *The Deceivers* is set in the time from the year 1825 onwards.

*The Night runners of Bengal* is set during the events of 1857, a period described by Indian historians as 'The First War of Independence' as a response to the English historical description of it as the 'Sepoy Mutiny.' The concluding book of this fictional journey through the subcontinent's history is set during the time shortly before India became an independent country in 1947. The link between all these three novels are the

protagonists who belong to the same English family and who bear the surname 'Savage.' The name itself is an ironic choice by the author, because all these English protagonists are men who are a part of the apparatus of administration. All of them are engaged in furthering the rule of English law among the native people of the land and they are instrumental in eradicating their 'savage' behaviour of the people they administer, be it 'thuggee' in *The Deceivers*, rebellion in *The Nightrunners of Bengal* or sabotage in *Bhowani Junction*.

In his postscript to *The Deceivers* Masters claims that his purpose was:

'to recreate the "feel" of a historical episode rather than write a minutely accurate report. To do this I had to use the novelist's freedom to imagine people and create places for them to live in; but the times and circumstances of those people are fixed by history, and I believe this book gives a true picture of them.

In general therefore, the facts about the Deceivers (the *Thugs*) and all the details of their cult and their operations (called collectively *Thuggee*) are accurate. They did flourish for centuries, they did believe in their religious call, they did



live by the omens and ceremonies described, they did kill travellers in the manner and the numbers suggested.

It is thought that, first and last *Thuggee* must have murdered well over a million people. Ironically enough, after existing hundreds of years, it was uncovered and uprooted shortly before the coming of railroads and telegraphs to India would in any case have destroyed it. Nonetheless, William Savage's remark that it constituted the greatest criminal conspiracy of history was justified at the time he made it.

The setting of the story in time is correct within a year or so. The physical shape of the land we have travelled in (the area bounded by a line Jubbulpore-Nagpur-Jhansi-Allahabad) is correct, and it was in this area that *Thuggee* was comprehensively discovered and attacked. Incidentally bees there are numerous and dangerous. Many a bather, hunter and traveller has met the death which my Deceivers died.

All the incidents are imagined. All the characters are imaginary except a few bystanders. Please note particularly that if one man can be credited with the real-life destruction of *Thuggee*, that man was William Henry Sleeman of the Indian Political Service. Sleeman did not use the methods I

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have ascribed to William Savage. At least he has not said he did. William Savage is in no sense a portrait of William Sleeman.

All places should be treated as imaginary, though in fact most of the rivers and hills and a few small villages are real. My reason for this is that it is not now feasible for me to find out what say Damoh looked like in 1825, and I do not think it is proper to invent "facts" about real places; I must invent the whole town – and call it Madhya.<sup>3</sup>



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Further on in the course of this chapter I shall discuss the issue of 'Thuggee' in the light of further historical research on the subject, that contest the assumptions made above. The research that I shall refer to post-dates the publication of this novel, and it portrays a vision that is diametrically opposed to the view endorsed by Masters in the extract above and therefore helps in locating this novel, which claims to depict real historical occurrences. I shall also refer to William Henry Sleeman's own life as depicted in his memoirs and in a biography written by another English officer since these are the original records which detail the cultural practice of 'thuggee.'

For the moment let us look closely at the novel itself. While it may be 'in no sense a portrait of William Sleeman' as Masters states above, it is

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certainly informed by Sleeman's writings, by his accounts of 'Thuggee' and by his memoirs. Certain episodes such as the crucial episode of a woman who is convinced that her husband is dead and who therefore chooses to commit sati are obviously borrowed from Sleeman's memoirs where he describes such an episode in some detail.<sup>4</sup>

The novel begins in the year 1825 with the marriage of William Savage, who occupies the post of the Collector, the English officer, in charge of administering the Madhya District. As the narratorial voice proceeds to describe the scene, we learn that William Savage is marrying Mary, the daughter of a senior official – the Agent to the Governor-General of India for the Kiamur and Mahadeo Territories, whom Savage works under and whom he must report to. We learn from Savage's thoughts that the world he lives in (and the world that the novel describes) has a clear division between the English and the other. 'The English circle was tight about him, but it was small and thin and beyond it the old Gods ruled.' [Masters, 1952:9]

As Savage, his wife Mary and his junior officer George Angelsmith, approach the village of Bhadora where Savage has lived for the past three years, they are received by Jagirdar Chandra Sen, the Patel of the two villages of Padwa and Kahari. Chandra Sen is rewarded with a scroll of honour conferred upon him by the British Government for the services he

has rendered to his rulers. They learn from him that 'The wife of Gopal the weaver is going to become suttee tomorrow evening.' [20] This proves to be a worrisome situation for Savage who had reported a case of sati in his district the previous year. Savage himself is in two minds about the ethical dimensions of this cultural practice.

'All his life in India he had tried to feel for suttee the automatic revulsion of his fellow Englishmen and Christians. In part he had succeeded, but always underneath there was a glow of respect and admiration...the idea was beautiful...with faith it would be so small a step to climb into the fire...One step up into the flames, then to soar on to the rising oil-fed smoke to a place near the brilliant sun, where there was no night and no hunger. William tried to understand, tried in the Western fashion to separate the good from the evil, to balance the beauty of sacrifice against the ugliness of waste, which is an essential of all sacrifice. But to these Hindus there was no conflict between God who is all-powerful and Satan, who yet flouts and perverts His intentions. Her creation and destruction were opposite sides of the same medal, equal energies of the same universal spirit. He had to understand it if he could. Men and women who thought and acted in those beliefs were in his charge. If

he failed to understand, he could work only from a single sweeping generalization: that Indians were fatalistic, brutal and loveless. That was the depth of untruth, in spite of the many who believed it.' [22]

This particular case is further complicated by the fact that no one knows whether Gopal the weaver is really dead or not. Gopal left his home over a year ago and his wife decided he was dead after she had the same dream thrice, in which she saw his dead body. The novelist now makes his first move that extends the limits of the probable in order to further the action of the plot. Chandra Sen describes Gopal as being very similar in appearance to William Savage:

'Gopal was no older than Savage sahib, in the prime of life... He was very like you sahib; a broad forehead, short jaw, your height, strongly built. He was rather in skin and not disfigured by smallpox like so many of us. Brown eyes. His hair was blacker, of course – what you could see of it under his turban.' [23]

He suggests that Savage disguise himself as Gopal and speak to the woman claiming that he, Gopal, was in trouble and therefore had to stay away for a while longer. Savage with his skin darkened and suitably disguised in Indian clothes, embarks on this mission of deception to save

the woman's life and after preventing her death stumbles across something he has never known about. A man accosts him and then takes him to a grove where a group of travellers are about to have their evening meal. Hidden in the undergrowth, Savage witnesses the murder of a Sikh farmer and his son. Unable to remain merely a silent witness to this horrific act, Savage emerges from his hiding place, strikes out at the murderers and then flees for his life. He returns to the Patel Chandra Sen's house where Mary and he are staying, awakens the household, musters a group of men and sets out to find the murderers, after washing the dye off his skin. Savage's first attempt to cross back and forth between the English and Indian worlds, is a mixed success. He succeeds in deceiving Gopal's wife, and thus prevents her from ending her life just then, but he is rudely introduced to another inexplicable cultural practice – that of ritual strangling.

Learning more about the people who carry out this practice soon becomes an obsession in his own life, for when Savage and his men dig into the earth at the grove where the murders took place they find sixty-eight skulls and assorted bones.

As the narrative proceeds, Savage decides he must find the murderers and is convinced that such a large number of people could not have been killed solely during his tenure at Madhya. From the condition of

the exhumed human remains he deduces that the gang of killers must have been operating for a long time already. ‘The scale of murders was appalling enough; and the gang must have been kept alive for a century and more by new blood, by descent from father to son perhaps.’ [68] He sets out to expose them at the risk of neglecting his day to day duties as the administrative head of the district. While on a tour of inspection he encounters the man who had led him to the murder and takes him into custody. From this man, Hussein, he learns for the first time of ‘the servants of Kali’ a group of which Hussein too was once a member. Hussein explains how he was almost killed by the gang because he attempted to save one of their intended victims. He then explains why, when he saw Savage disguised as Gopal, he felt that here was someone who may be able to infiltrate the network of the murderers and perhaps put an end to it.

‘Hussein said, “Do you fear our gods?”

William thought, and shook his head. “No.”

“Then how can you rule us, know us?...until you fear our gods you cannot understand me – or believe me. The goddess, Kali, who is the Destroyer-Goddess of the Hindus, has given the roads of the world, and all who travel on the roads into the hands of her servants. Her servants must love none other than her...you have to learn to fear our gods– fear Kali. [That night] I saw a man hurrying through the

jungle. I followed and learned that he too did not want to let a woman die; that he would even do wrong to save her for lying is wrong; and that he was not Gopal the weaver. He was an Englishman. Watching him, it came to me that only the English have the power to fight the servants of Kali, and put me in a safe place and protect me. And it came to me that they had the power because they did not fear our gods, but that they could achieve nothing until one of them, at least learned that fear.' [80-1]

Hussein then demonstrates the method of strangling used by 'the servants of Kali' using a large square of cloth around the intended victims neck. He also asks for the protection of a job as a chuprassi that will entitle him to wear a red coat. The alternative worlds of Indian and English, each with their established structures of power and sources of security are contrasted in Hussein's words when he seeks the protection that Savage can provide by virtue of his authority.

'You've been in uniform all your life – red coat, fine hat, sword! You've been one of a band! All the English here are a band. You've had a place in the Company, sure of help when you wanted it. So was I, until a year ago. Since then I've had no company, no friends, no place. I can go back to Kali but I don't want to. I am afraid. I want a red coat, I want to be safe in it. And I can't be unless you help.' [83]



Hussein warns Savage about the planned murder of a Thakur and his servants who are travelling through his district and tells him that he will return after locating the whereabouts of Gopal the weaver. Savage refuses his request, and retains him in custody but learns the next morning, that Hussein has escaped after almost strangling his jailkeeper.

Savage, Mary and a retinue of some policemen, set out to follow the path taken by the Thakur's party. After four days, this group cannot be traced. But the bodies of all seven of them are recovered from their burial pit beneath the main path used by travellers. A dozen older skeletons are also unearthed from the same pit. Mary points out that these murders have not been committed in Madhya but in the adjoining district of Khapa. Savage realizes that Hussein wasn't lying when he spoke of the widespread, network of 'the servants of Kali.'

After enlisting the help of the head of Khapa district, his junior officer George Angelsmith and a regiment of Lancers, they set out to track the killers. There is an encounter with a large group of travellers who are armed and who fight back. During this engagement Savage discovers that the Patel, Chandra Sen is the leader of the group, who appear to be ordinary wayfarers. His first attempt to track down the killers having ended in failure, Savage arrests a few men who resemble the description of the men involved in the killing of the Sikhs that he had witnessed and attempts

to have them positively identified. But the witnesses, a family of ferrymen, refuse to oblige and in exasperation Savage orders them to be arrested too. But now official censure comes upon Savage in the form of Mr Wilson, his superior officer and father-in-law, who recommends that Savage transfer back from the political to the military department because he isn't suited to continue as a civil administrator. Mr Wilson also cannot understand Savage's reasoning when he says:

'How can a rule of law flourish where people call themselves "servants of Kali" and kill because a goddess orders them to...I tell you sir, they cannot be run down within our rule of law! Indians aren't English. We've got to go outside the law to catch them, to prevent more murders.' [114]

Savage meanwhile has come to understand that he has his own reasons, and that these reasons override even the laws of English justice that he has sworn to uphold.

'From the beginning – and the woman at the pyre whom he had not allowed to die was the beginning – he had been bound to this thing by special, personal chains. It had controlled not only his mind but his heart, and even his hands.' [116]

That very night Hussein reappears. He suggests that Savage accompany him for the next five months as a 'servant of Kali' to understand from within, the methods and motivation of the ritual murderers.

'When you have seen and learned to fear our gods, you will understand everything...you must leave your law behind and become an Indian and take to the road with me. That will be possible because you have dark eyes and can speak good Hindi...now you must come away with me. You will be gone five months...to complete one whole travel season on the roads, from the beginning to the final dispersal of the bands...in all that time you have to keep silence. You will have to watch murder and do nothing; worse perhaps, and say nothing, until we return and are ready to act.' [120]

It is now that Hussein tells Savage that the servants of Kali are also known as 'the Deceivers' or 'thugs.' To counter the influence of Kali, Hussein asks Savage for a talisman that will protect him from her influence:

'Give me a cross, then. Allah and Mohammed his prophet have failed me against Kali. Your God is a foreigner and does not know Kali's strength, and will fight better against

her than ours, who do, and are frightened. We must fear but we must not fall. Give me a cross.' [121]

Savage leaves a pregnant Mary behind, with the promise that he will never kill anyone during his time spent with the Deceivers. He also promises Hussein the job that he will appoint him to the post of a chuprassi, which will entitle him to wear a red coat and a badge proclaiming his post in the English structure of power. As Savage accompanies Hussein, disguised once more as Gopal the weaver – who Hussein has discovered isn't dead but is a servant of Kali – his movement away from the world of the English and into the surrounding world of India commences.

'Tonight, as for two weeks past he was truly a part of India.

He had worked here all his adult life – nineteen years, the last three in Madhya. As an Englishman he had fallen in love with Madhya, and this central lands pattern of beauty had grown into him...yet always his race had held him back from complete absorption in it.' [124]

The novelist is quick to reassert control over his character who has just begun a process of doublecrossing. The novelist makes it a point here to remind the reader of the reasons why Savage has embarked on this process of deception. 'These weeks alone with Hussein, as in the months to

come, he had to be Indian to keep his life, and nothing but Indian. Only by being Indian and thinking Indian and feeling Indian could he hold any hope that he would return at last to his English ways and his English wife.' [124]

By this very act of reinforcement, the voices of the author as omniscient narrator and William Savage his chief character begin to diverge. The character has outgrown the boundaries of the novelist's bipolarized English and Indian worlds and by trans-culturalizing himself has become an ambiguous identity. The character now has an identity that resists a clear-cut either/or categorization. Savage has now moved away from the English and moved closer to the Indian. However, as the novelist is quick to remind us, he has done this to ensure the continuation of the control of the English over the Indians in an even more efficient manner. Savage so far, has deceived the English by vanishing from their sight, and he is now engaged in doublecrossing the Indians by pretending to be one of them, so as to betray them comprehensively later on. Savage at the moment is a symbolic amalgam, able to cross over between both the Indian and English worlds, able to blur the boundaries between them, and able to assimilate within himself aspects of both worlds. Savage's readiness to learn and his own ability to identify with a cultural practice that he has not been trained into, but nevertheless is open to, is graphically described by the novelist, in the episode where Hussein explains the technique of strangling to a pupil who appears to know it already.

‘There had been a strange incident one evening in a lonely place where Hussein was showing William the rumal. It was the three foot-square-cloth the Deceivers used for strangling, and Hussein was instructing him how to stow it in the loincloth, one end just peeping out ready for the hand to grab.

William said, “It doesn’t matter, of course because I’m not going to use it, but surely it would be safer to carry it like this.” The rumal turned easily in his fingers: he twisted the top corner over and down and back inside the coil of the rest in a loose knot; it was all hidden from sight. “And it’s just as easy to get out.” He flipped one finger into the loincloth, the rumal sprang out in his hand. Hussein leaped away from him, his eyes starting from his head, and stammered, “Who – who taught you that?” William tucked the rumal away. “No one. It’s obvious, isn’t it?” Hussein said, “All the gods help us!” ’

[125]

The author reminds us of Savage’s innate ability later on in the narrative as well when Savage is a part of a band of the servants of Kali and recognizes his own ability among them.

“William felt a little spurt of craftsman’s pride; he could pull out the rumal without leaving a corner ready to his hand. That total concealment, he now knew, was the mark of a strangler who had been formally taught by a professor; it was the strangler’s doctorate. He had not been taught, but his hands had known without being told.’ [142]

Savage has grown into his new identity so completely that he is accepted unquestioningly when Hussein and he meet up with a band of the servants of Kali at the town of Jalpura. Savage himself has not only grown into his role as Gopal the weaver but has come to feel a true sense of belonging and oneness with who he now is.

‘All was quiet and William fell into a fitful reverie. He liked the roughness of the blanket under his chin, this life was real and complete to him; in these past few days he had become a part of the road, as much in place as its wayside trees and wandering beggars. The road itself moved, carrying him forward, unwinding a tapestry of India, outstripping the dusty, laden-footed folios of paper that had loaded him down in his office. Here on the road he knew people, and knew himself, and was a full man. He would be happy to spend the rest of his life on the road.’ [131]

The band that Savage and Hussein have joined, attach themselves to the entourage of a travelling Nawab. While in their company Savage witnesses the complete modus operandi of this band of the servants of Kali, led by Jemadar Khuda Baksh and the priest Yasin Khan, as they invoke the favour of Kali and then proceed to kill the Nawab and his fellow travellers. By maintaining his silence Savage colludes in the killing.

‘As they stood with heads bowed, their faces purposeful and religiously calm, William heard his own heart beating and felt his nerves tightening with theirs. While Yasin spoke, he wondered what power made the Jemadar, and Yasin himself, who were Mohammedans, bow down and pray to the Hindu Destroyer-Goddess Kali. But whatever they waited for, whatever the reason or superstition that held them, he waited with them and was held as they were held.’ [142]

Savage’s increasing attraction towards and assimilation into the Deceivers continues, in the days that follow. He participates in their rituals and observes their ritual practices wholeheartedly along with his newfound comrades.

‘From the time he had entered the clearing and saw the broken idol and stood among the Deceivers in that anxious ceremony, he had been an acolyte in an old religion. Once,



by the pit he had tried to summon up again the shame of those previous nights when he had counted himself guilty of murders then uncommitted; but the shame would not come, only the embarrassed nausea of the new comrade, of the fledgling doctor. An aching half-religious lust had possessed him, to see what would happen next and be a part of it.' [151]

Hussein notices this tendency of increasing assimilation in Savage with increasing dismay and alarm. He knows that only if Savage succeeds in his mission, will he ever get a chance to break away successfully from the company of killers and secure the promised job of a chuprassi and wear a red coat. He too has a crossing that he wishes to accomplish.

"Please, Gopal, keep off the blanket tomorrow if you can. Don't eat the consecrated sugar. Eat of the other, the part that is put aside before consecration...What's the use? You'll have to, or Piroo will get more suspicious than he is already. And he can ruin us if anything makes him try. We're trapped." He looked up suddenly and said "I know you *want* to eat the consecrated sugar." William tried to laugh, but the laugh choked in his throat.' [152-3]

Hussein's alarm is reinforced when Savage partakes of the ritual and accepts the consecrated sugar and water, which symbolizes the sweetness

and the milk of Kali. Hussein believes that Savage has gone over heart and soul to the Deceivers and says so to Savage when they rest at the town of Manikwal. Savage has just mentioned that he plans to bury the notes that he has been making in a safe place so that he can retrieve this detailed record of events later on and that he intends to use these notes as evidence against the Deceivers in the future.

‘Hussein’s face was compressed with misery. “You’re never going to use those notes against the Deceivers.”

“Of course I am,” William said growing unreasonably angry.”

“You’re not, because you’re a Deceiver, from this dawn on for ever, a strangler. Only stranglers may stand on the blanket: you stood on it. Only stranglers may take the consecrated sugar of communion: you took it. It doesn’t matter what a man thinks he is. When he eats consecrated sugar, on the blanket, in front of the pick-axe, he is a strangler, because Kali enters into him. It has happened before that man with no training or aptitude have got on the blanket by mistake. Always Kali gives them the skill and the strength they need.” He took his head in his hands and groaned. “Now you’re a strangler. Now you will never return

to your office. Now I will never be a chuprassi. We could not help it," he finished, suddenly resigned. "Kali wills it so it is...Why couldn't you be a Deceiver? Why not? The Saint Nizam-ud-Din was one, the Rajah of – oh, many great men for hundreds of years past. Why not you? You travel, don't you? You meet travellers who seek the protection of you convoys. We Deceivers could find men for all your staff, all your police, clerks, bungalow servants, jailers, chuprassis."

William sprang to his feet. "You dirty murderous filth! Hold your tongue! I am *not* a strangler. I never will be. I am not going to kill, whatever happens. *I'm not going to!* Do you understand?"

Hussein said again, "You are a strangler. You cannot help yourself now." [161-3]

The truth of Hussein's statement is proved by Savage the next day when the Deceivers are preparing to celebrate a feast. Savage and Hussein are detailed to fetch water. As they return to their hired room Savage notices a strange pony in the stables. And then he realizes the identity of the owner. It is Gopal the weaver, the man whose role he has taken on and whose life in turn has taken him over. Now in an instant his new identity could be exposed and the only way to prevent that from happening lies

literally in Savage's hands. And so he acts instinctively to ensure his own self-preservation, by killing his alter ego.

'The stranger's eyes were flecked brown; his shoulders wide; his forehead broad and low under the turban. He looked at William and said slowly, "Who – who in the name of Kali are you?"

William's unease concentrated in one swooping lurch of his bowels. It was himself that he saw in the expanding grey light. This face stared at him when he plucked his whiskers. This face reflected too the panic in his eyes. The stranger stepped back, stumbled over a saddlebag in the dirt, and began to fall. He fell, and the light snapped in his brown eyes, and William saw understanding there, and death. The single flash stabbed him, strangled, garroted, broke his joints, drove a stake through his belly, through all love, through Mary, through all sacrifice and success, through life. The stranger was himself, and failure, and Death. He was Death. The rumal came to his hand, the rupee in the knotted corner swinging easily. He stepped forward as Gopal the weaver began to fall. He kicked at Gopal's crotch. Gopal turned away and began to say,

“Ali...” William’s rumal swung. The sound mewed like a hungry cat and choked off.

The weighted end of the rumal flew into William’s left hand with a precise and simple mastery. His wrists met, he jerked them in and up against the side of Gopal’s neck, under the ear. The silver rupee bit into his hand through the cloth. Gopal’s head snapped sideways. His neck cracked.

William stood up. The rumal swung free in his right hand. He found his left hand streaming it through the palm to straighten out the creases, caressing the coarse woven texture. A wonderfully pure warmth flooded him. He had only seen it once, to watch closely. He had never practised it. Now, when everything depended on it, and at his first attempt, he had killed cleanly, single-handed.’ [165-6]

Hussein is the only witness to this act of Savage’s. The feast that follows is a further movement towards Kali for Savage, who recognizes that the killing of Gopal was more than an act of self-defence. He had enjoyed the pleasure, thrilled with the feeling of power that he possessed while he killed. ‘William, drank and tried to push away the vision of the dead weaver; but when he had done that a worse memory

remained: the lovely warmth of the killing. He thought suddenly of Mary, wet-lipped and hungry in the darkness. It was like that and his knees melted as he thought of her. But it was horrible – and passionately desireable. It was the open-armed, sucking-soft body of Kali, and her embrace. He feared Kali now, and he knew why Hussein had said he must learn to fear her.’ [170] The knowledge of this power to kill that he possesses takes him further away from whom he used to be. His sexual encounter with a prostitute after the feast has come to an end, is another moment when blood-lust and death combine when he uses his newfound power and almost strangles the woman. He is checked by Hussein, who comes to remind him that they have to bury the body of Gopal. The narrator again makes his presence felt here by introducing religion overtly into the discourse of power. The earlier references to religion in the novel were in the form of Mary, William Savage’s wife who plays the part of his moral compass in the novel, and when she gives Hussein a cross when he asks for a symbol to counter the strength of Kali. The novelist now strongly reasserts the religious aspects of the struggle for power within Savage, in his authorial comments:

‘William... shook and knew he had seen Kali’s naked, appalling beauty as the Deceivers saw it. Digging he prayed to Christ, and felt Kali struggled against his prayers. There would be more trials. Kali would embrace him again. He needed strength, and here on the road it seemed that only he could give it. Her evil lay, concealed or open, in all strength or all power. Not all – perhaps there was another strength in Hussein’s little cross.’ [176]

As the gang of killers moves on, Savage takes on the role of inveigler. In the course of their journey from Manikwal, with him at the head of the advance party, he learns that the jewels taken from the bodies of those who are killed, are sold at the end of the season, at the annual fair held in March in the village of Parsola. The jewels are purchased by a group of jewel brokers brought there by Chandra Sen, the patel of Padwa and Kahari, the same man who had been rewarded by the English for his loyalty towards them. The gang come upon a platoon of native sepoy who are travelling with their wives and decide to target them. Savage is sent to inform the group of men who perform the functions of diggers and buriers among their band of stranglers, to meet up with the rest of the band at the ford below Padampur. The buriers travel with their performing bear on a different route from the rest of the group and thus avoid drawing attention to the stranglers. As he waits with the buriers and their dancing bear, which

is very fond of him, thinking about his position, the author intercedes with a further judgemental comment on Savage's present situation. The author refers to religion once more to present the dichotomy in Savage's being and to problematize the reasons why Savage must continue on his present chosen path.

'The oppression of the goddess's wide spreading sins bore down on him. He had said he would not kill. He had been a Christian, believing in the value of life that God lent to mankind and sanctified by the lending. He could stand no more. He had become two men, a Christian and a Deceiver, and was being torn apart by remorse. His notes had enough in them to bring the evil fully out into the open. Then, surely, no one would deny that there was need of a great unified campaign. Thinking further, he swore to himself, and knew that men would deny, and would, and still not be wicked only complacent. The weight of death piled up on his head. He had failed Mary and God.' [185]

As the band attacks the armed sepoy, Savage kills again. This time he kills one of the sepoy. If he has justified his earlier killing of Gopal to himself, as necessary for the safety and completion of his plan, this second



murder is harder to expiate. Now he has killed someone who is allied to the English, a side to which he too once belonged.

‘His sideways movement ended in a pivot off the left foot. The rumal jumped into his hands and whirled through the air. Both ends were in his hands. He looked down and saw nothing but his tight white knuckles. He felt a powerful jerk from his thighs and waist and shoulders. His wrists cracked in and up against the sepoy’s neck. Another crack burst over it. A slow warmth crept up his spine and mingled in his brain with the falling, fading scarlet coat.’ [188]

The fading uniform is a clear metaphor for the waning sense of belonging he feels for the English world he has left behind, a world where everybody was interpellated into their assigned place in the structure of power. In the world he lives in now, power may change hands at any moment to favour whoever is prepared to accept the challenge. During the course of the attack, Jemadar Khuda Baksh has been killed. Savage is asked to take over the leadership of the group and to act immediately to counter the Rajah of Padampur’s cavalry that is fast approaching them, in order to make them pay the price of not having paid their protection money to the Rajah, the last time the band passed through his territory. William successfully rallies the Deceivers and gives orders to decoy the Rajah’s

cavalry and lure them into a trap from which they cannot emerge alive. The Rajah himself, unseated from his horse, falls at Savage's feet. Savage without any compunction kills again.

'The Rajah fell forward at his feet and struggled to free a short dagger from his sash. All the brightness outside, and the movement, were reflected in black mirrors behind William's eyes, and the rumal was in his hand. A wolf snarled at his feet. It was the evil of Kali, and he could strangle it in one motion. It was the evil thing that God had made and, having made strove to destroy. His knuckles sprang up white...he heard the double crack. He bowed his head and slowly, luxuriously, let his wrists turn down. The rumal un-loosed. There was never such power as this in all the world, or such fulfilment.' [192-3]

This time the authorial intervention sanctifies the killing of the Rajah who has been described earlier thus:

'The rajah of Padampur had an unctuous record in his dealings with the English...

William sneered because so many Resident's and Political Agents had been deceived; because so much power for good, so much wealth, nourished itself on banditry and was

expended for the benefit of murder. What terrors did the ordinary people of India *not* have to live with?' [191]

The author strives by his comments in his role as the role of omniscient narrator to assert control over his character and to remind the reader that Savage remains loyal to the English. However his forced intervention is undercut by the voices of other members of the band:

'Piroo's voice was full of respect, and in his face the awe of a man who meets Death' walking in at his gate or comes suddenly upon Dedication praying in the streets. The awe was in Hussein's eyes too, mixed there with a panic fear, as of the supernatural. The chief burier lifted up his voice. 'Oh Jemadar-sahib-bahadur, now we know why our leader who is dead said you might be the greatest that the Deceivers have ever known.' [193]

The authorial interventions become more forced, direct and overtly explanatory as his Character, Savage, appears to take on a life of his own, and repudiates the orderly English code valorized by the author when he accepts the leadership of a band of killers. The author continues to remind the reader forcefully that Savage has not forgotten the mission that he had set out to accomplish.

‘He was the leader. There was no dispute among his men or within himself. His heart was hard, and he could watch without emotion as the foolish women and the stupid soldiers were thrown into the flames. The woman at Kahari should be in this pyre, with her dreams. The acrid smoke smarted in his eyes. He was the leader. He had to be. Only so could he cover the thin sheets of paper and record for ever the beautiful honeycomb detail of the Deceivers’ world. It would be the work not of months but of years, years on the wonderful road where a man could find power and fulfillment.’ [194]

We learn later on in the narrative that Savage has led his band from November to March with great success and he has even acquired a nickname as a result of his efficient leadership.

‘His band was much bigger now. Success had crowded him on the long journey. As he travelled, other bands had joined him in a loose confederation...that was because of his success. If they had been English they would have called him ‘Lucky’ Savage. As it was behind his back they called him ‘Gopal Kali-Pyara’, Gopal the Beloved of Kali.’ [198]

Savage knows that the original plan suggested by Hussein was that he should accompany Hussein for five months and observe the servants of Kali from within their organization for an entire season. He has succeeded beyond his own expectations but at the tremendous price of breaking his word to his wife and of redefining his sense of self.

‘His face was set in the grim and thoughtful mask that the grass fire had scorched on to it the day of the massacre at the Padampur ford. Behind the mask he feared for himself, because he had learned the power of Kali, and his own weakness, and had learned in the spasms of his three murders to love the evil of the goddess. Since Padampur he had not killed with his own hands; he was the great Jemadar, the planner. But the terrible beauty lingered, a warmth at his wrists and heart, and he was afraid of the moment when he must meet Mary’s eyes. He clung grimly to his purpose, but even there he was afraid.

‘His notes lay concealed in twenty clever places along the miles of road he had traversed since first meeting with the band at Jalpura. To men of good intent the notes would be above any assessment of value. He had met hundreds of other Deceivers, and the notes were a complete tale of all he had seen and heard and done; of all the Deceivers who engaged in any action, with their descriptions, habits and homes; of each

murder, and how it had gone, and how it might have been prevented – or improved upon. The words could be read for either purpose, according to the purpose, according to the spirit of the reader. The spirit of the writer was ambiguous. This long season of murder would in the end save lives; but William remembered that sometimes he had written his notes in professional pride and critical admiration, and therefore was afraid.’[196-7]

Savage and his band head for Parsola, a village that is ironically within the District of Madhya where he was once the Collector and where he lived a year ago, believing he knew everything about the area under his jurisdiction. As they travel, they prepare for a final attack on a group of travellers whom they have stalked and chosen as a suitable target. But as they pray to invoke the favour of Kali, the omens they perceive are all negative. Savage overrules the others’ fears and insists that all the effort of their elaborate preparations should not be wasted and so they should continue with their planned attack. had been asked to coordinate with the supporting bands who had been sent ahead and during the attack when Savage’s band is outnumbered and some of the members of his band including Yasin Khan are killed and no other Deceivers come to assist them, Savage realizes that Hussein has betrayed him. Or has Hussein saved

Savage from himself? That is the question Hussein puts to him when they meet at their prearranged rendezvous to take stock of the failed attack.

‘Hussein rose to his feet and stood close, an ordinary little man, summoning dignity and not finding it. “I gave them the wrong orders.”

William’s anger choked him so that the words fought together in his throat. His hand took hold of the rumal at his waist.

“You! On purpose? Have you gone mad? Yasin was killed. And I had to rescue the pickaxe.”

Husein’s jaw trembled and his voice shook. “Sahib, I took my own omens three nights ago, when you first suggested the plan. They were bad, but I held your wife’s cross and was not frightened. I knew, holding your God’s charm, that all I needed was courage. I had to try once more against Kali because you had eaten her sugar and sold yourself to her. I had no hope unless I *fought* Kali for you – and for my red coat. Sahib, do not deceive yourself. If this had gone well today, you would never have returned to your place. It’s true!” ’ [204]

Savage recognizes the truth of Hussein's words and decides that it is time to call for help.

'Silver cracks splintered the black mirrors. There was light, but contorted. Kali's hold was slackening, but he could not stand another trial. Whatever the cost, this passion –half fear, half love – must be ended. He said to Hussein, 'Go to Madhya. Tell her. See the new Collector. Tell him to bring the cavalry at once, from Khapa, from Sagthali. I can't stand any more or – or I don't know what I'll do.' [205]

He instructs Hussein to bring the English cavalry to Parsola where the Deceivers are headed. His internal conflict though remains unresolved. For him to return now to the English seems the most difficult step of all. And yet it must be done. But his task as a Deceiver is not yet complete. He has to see it through to the end to be able to collect evidence against the power brokers such as Chandra Sen and at the same time to ensure, in his capacity as the leader of this gang, that the survivors of this attack remain with him until his task is done. He has to continue to maintain the terms of the double-cross he has been engaged in for a while longer, to ensure the completion of his mission as well as his own personal safety.

While Savage is in the village of Parsola for the annual jewel sale, he is recognized by several people there, as Gopal the weaver from Kahari.



A woman tells him about Gopal's wife. 'Don't worry. We all knew here that you'd gone back to Kali. We haven't told the one of your house. She waits by her pyre for you,' [210] she informs him. The village of Parsola where Savage has arrived with the remaining members of his band, is entirely given over to the servants of Kali, which is why even the women of the village are aware about the activities of the Deceivers. Savage is overwhelmed by his knowledge of the vastness of the network he has merely caught a glimpse of.

'In the nine years of the English Company's rule nothing had been done against the Deceivers. But William realized now that most Indians knew at least of the existence of the Deceivers; and, knowing, they could not believe the English did not also know; therefore the English officials too were sharing in the spoils; so what was the use of informing? He had found Kali on the road, and followed her, and found her in palaces, and in hovels. Kali's hand truly lay all over India.'

[211-12]

One of the men who recognized Gopal at Parsola is an informer of Chandra Sen. When Chandra Sen learns of Savage's disguise and of his role as Gopal over the last five months he knows Savage must be silenced.

It occurs to him that the best way to do this could be to reveal Savage's whereabouts to the English, after claiming that he is insane.

Once reclaimed by the English, who have so far listened to Savage's earlier words about the servants of Kali with utter disbelief, Savage may be neutralized as a threat by them without Chandra Sen needing to take any further action. Chandra Sen leaves after assuring George Angelsmith who is holding charge in Madhya and Mary that he will return with Savage. Just then Hussein arrives and asks George Angelsmith to send for the cavalry from Sagthali or Khapa to set out for Parsola, so that they can come to Savage's assistance over the next day and a half. Hussein flees as Angelsmith distrustful of him, orders the guards around the house to arrest him.

Meanwhile at Parsola, Savage and his deputy Piroo, carry the jewels that are the spoils of their killing over the last season to the barn where the annual sale is to be held. Savage's internal struggle continues as he nears a moment of crisis.

'The morning of the sale William walked apart and alone in the jungles. Hussein might come anytime with news. Then he could put Kali behind him, but not before, because there were moments at night when she was still beautiful in his dreams. As the sun moved across the sky and the hour of the sale

approached, he felt physical fear. Chandra Sen might be there. And yet it was not Chandra Sen, or death, that he feared. Kali would stand at the patel's right hand and reproach him with her burning eyes, and his fear was of her.

[215-16]

The religious dichotomy that is present as a continuous theme throughout the novel, is blurred further by Savage's interior monologue during which he compares the barn where the Deceivers have spread out their wares to a place of Christian worship.

'He wanted to get up and run away, but could not. It was too late now. The hum of talk in the barn quietened, giving place to light and smell. Ten thousand gems threw up a spectral brilliance. The Deceivers were angels bathed in light. The roof of the barn, all grimed and smoky black, became a barred mosaic, a cathedral under the earth, a sacred arch held up by the worship of men's hearts.' [217]

Chandra Sen is present at the sale and has a plan to imbricate Savage even deeper in the service of the servants of Kali before he returns to the English. Chandra Sen reveals to the assembly that there is traitor in their midst. Savage walks towards Chandra Sen fingering his rumal tucked into his waistband, intending to warn him that the cavalry is on its way and

that Chandra Sen had better surrender. Just then Chandra Sen produces Hussein and states that he is the traitor and that the only fitting punishment for him would be death by Savage's hand.

'Chandra Sen said to William, 'Great Jemadar, Prince of Stranglers, Beloved of Kali, give this traitor his disproof. Strangle him!

William gazed at the thin ascetic face and knit his brows. An inner radiance transfigured Chandra Sen and glowed behind the wide eyes, wider now in a wonder of adoration.

Chandra Sen knew him but had not come here to kill him. This was not Chandra Sen, the patel, or Chandra Sen the jagirdar. This was a priest of Kali, at whose right hand Kali now stood. No vengeance or anger troubled the soul behind the eyes, only a burning glory of salvation – William's first salvation...the large eyes were warming William's own, and his wrists itched, and the goddess touched the small of his back with her lips. Hussein had no wife and no child, born or unborn. It was Mary and his old life, that Kali offered him through Chandra Sen's two-edged words. To recover them he must give up his soul to Kali. For them he must take the oath in the death throes of this lopsided little man who was

looking at him and who wanted a red coat. The Deceivers in the barn waited for him to kill. They were his servants only while he loved Kali. To keep them he had to kill – someone, Hussein. He could make up a story afterwards, but now he had to kill. Here was the crisis of his spirit, for death was Kali's love.' [219]

It is a moment of resolution and self-realization for Savage. He can continue on this path as a servant of Kali after returning to live among the English and he can thus extend Kali's reach. This is what Chandra Sen offers him if Savage will kill Hussein. His life as an Englishman if he will continue his life as Deceiver, if he will play out a double, doublecross. 'He stood, blinded by the white clarity of his mind, his hands at his waist. Why should he not kill Hussein, and so save his own life, and Mary's? And afterwards, when they were safe, tell all? Hussein was a murderer many times over and worthy of death. He saw in Chandra Sen's eyes that he would be let free if he killed. And he saw that Chandra Sen knew that the oath, so taken, would not be broken. There was nothing to stop him – except himself.

'Chandra Sen was right, Kali was right. To kill in this mind and in these circumstances, would break him loose for ever from the love he believed in and sought now so desperately

to find again. Once he had been an ordinary man, one among a thousand million undistinguished others of every race and colour and creed, who lived, strongly or weakly, by love. This killing that tingled in his hands would rank him for ever where he now stood, among the select who lived by scorn, without love. Nor was he just a man, or only of this place and time; he was a part of eternity. If he failed how many others, following, would fail? Kali's road wound up high hills, and from their summits she had shown the spreading cities of the plain which could be his kingdom. He felt the press of the future, the pushing feet of men unborn who would dedicate whole peoples to the rule of Kali, and take possession of countries in her name and still call themselves Christians, and their feet would follow only where his had led.' [220]

As the internal conflict of his split personality consumes him and he turns smiling towards Hussein, Hussein grapples with Chandra Sen, throwing him off balance and breaking the momentum of the tense moments before. At the same time he tells Savage urgently to escape. Savage seizes his chance and leaps through a window, as Hussein struggling to break free, upsets an oil lamp. The fire that ensues spreads

through the barn, causing panic among the jewel traders and consuming the trapped Hussein.

Savage reaches his old residence at Madhya and finds that Mary has left for Sagthali earlier in the afternoon. Savage gives orders to Sher Dil, his old guard, to send for the police and then he and Sher Dil outwit George Angelsmith, who tries to arrest Savage whom he thinks is insane, and set out to find Mary. As they ride cross-country they realize that bands of the Deceivers are out in hot pursuit of the man who has betrayed them. When Savage and Sher Dil catch up with Mary and her escort, Savage asks Mary to exchange clothes with her tire woman. Thus creating a decoy, he sends the escort on its way while he and Mary who cannot ride now, make their way on foot through the jungle.

After a day and a night of travelling, as they awake the next morning, Savage realizes that the pursuit has not yet ended. The Deceivers are tracking his scent by means of their performing bear, which has followed his trail. Savage and Mary make their way into an overhang cut by a running stream in basalt cliff overgrown with stinging nettles. They hide there for the night but by next morning the bear, Chandra Sen and his Deceivers have trapped them. Chandra Sen asks them to emerge at once or face greater pain. If they decide to surrender however, he tells Savage their

jurisdiction over them – wherever they are found – regardless of where they've done their murders.”

Mr Wilson thought before replying. “That will involve legislation in Council and a large appropriation of funds. For how long do you think?”

“ Ten, fifteen years.”...

Mr Wilson said, “It'll be difficult to persuade the Presidencies to believe it, Savage, and agree to surrender some of their powers to a central organization as you propose.”

“They've got to!” William said forcefully. “The Rajah's too! The Governor-General's got to do it. I'll tell him. He'll see.”[242]

The fact that large parts of India remain under the jurisdiction of local rulers is deemed of no importance in the face of this overriding need to impose law and order. The fact that Savage himself has broken these laws in his time spent as a Deceiver not only by killing with his own hands but also by planning the operations of his band is left unresolved. The novelist does attempt an aesthetic consummation of the novel in Savage's final encounter with the wife of Gopal the weaver. Savage meets her where



she waits, beside the pyre by the riverside and confesses that not only has he deceived her in the past but he has gone on to commit a further crime by killing Gopal, and so she is now in fact a widow. The woman asks Savage to help her commit sati and Savage lights the pyre for her. The woman's words reiterate her willingness to end her life and her actions provide a closure for the episode of Savage's life spent as an Indian among Indians. Savage's return to the English and his commitment to their future is re-emphasized by Mr Wilson giving him the news when he returns to the ford at Bhadora, where they are camped, that Mary has given birth to their son. Having closely scrutinized the narrative sequence of the novel let us understand what this sequence actually means in terms of the larger questions that the novel deals with. Savage's search for greater understanding of the practice he encounters and becomes a part of, is mirrored by his own search for self-definition. It is significant that his is the dominant voice throughout the novel. He is the only character who can successfully cross the cultural boundaries between the Indian and English worlds, and that too not just once but repeatedly. He is able, at the end of the novel to successfully cross back into the safety of the ordered English structure of power. This facility is denied to the other person who attempts to switch his allegiance in the novel. Hussein, who wants desperately to belong to a group, has tried once before to break away from the Deceivers.

He tries again, hoping that with Savage's aid he can become a part of the English 'band' by gaining the post of a chuprassi and the red coat that goes with it. But though Savage may not have strangled Hussein as he was asked to, in Hussein's death during Savage's escape from the Deceivers, his voice is silenced as surely as if Savage had wielded his rumal. The dominant voice that remains to explain the network of the Deceivers and their practices to the English is the voice of Savage. The subaltern voice, in this case that of Hussein, cannot speak because he has been silenced.

The other voice in the novel that could express a grievance against Savage is the voice of Gopal's wife. However, the novelist in his resolution of the plot to ensure Savage's return to the English side, ensures that this woman does not accuse him but instead urges him to help her end her life as well. And Savage is quite willing to do so. It is a resolution that contradicts Spivak's formulation about a standard trope of colonial narratives about India 'White men are saving brown women from brown men.'<sup>5</sup>

The novelist has borrowed from Sleeman's description of a sati that he witnessed and uses words that are very similar to Sleeman's own narration of this episode.

'Again looking at the sun – "I see them (her soul and her husband's soul) together," said she in a tone that affected me

a good deal, “under a bridal canopy!” – alluding to the ceremony of marriage; and I am satisfied that she at that moment really believed that she saw her own spirit and that of her husband under the bridal canopy in paradise.’<sup>6</sup>

Masters embroiders on this account. The passage in the novel is as follows:

‘The woman knelt facing the east. She cried out with lyrical passion, her voice strong and sure. “ I see you in your place beside the sun, my darling and lover. They have kept me from you where you sit in majesty and honour. I love you, my lord, I worship you with my body and spirit. I am your wife and your servant. I come to our bridal bed, to lie with you in the sun.’<sup>7</sup>

While the silencing of the voices of Gopal’s wife and Hussein are not entirely due to Savage’s agency alone, the throttling of a powerful yet unheard voice that resonates through the novel and for which Savage alone is responsible, is the strangling of Savage’s doppelganger Gopal. The face to face encounter between Savage disguised as Gopal and Gopal himself is a defining encounter between the self and the other.

In colonial discourse the white male finds his other in the image of the black or native man. Bhabha describes this dichotomy and the problems it raises thus:

‘The black presence ruins the representative narrative presence of Western personhood: its past tethered to treacherous stereotypes of primitivism and degeneracy.’<sup>8</sup>

To ensure that his own voice remains the dominant voice in the discourse of self-definition, Savage destroys his other and justifies this as an act of self preservation. An act that was necessary, to ensure the success of his mission to further English rule. Besides Gopal too was a murderer who deserved to be punished. In an exploration of the self/other dichotomy Nirmal Verma points out that ‘the European notion of the ‘other’ is an inalienable entity external to oneself, both as a source of terror and an object of desire. Sartre’s famous statement “Hell is the other” carries a strong echo of Hegel, who always defines one’s identity as “identity against the other, either to be appropriated or to be destroyed.” But here the European man gets himself trapped in his own contradiction; if he succeeds in completely subjugating the ‘other’ the identity of his own self becomes dubious.’<sup>9</sup>

Thus during the course of the novel we see Savage increasingly drawn towards the group that he has infiltrated and become a part of.

However, whenever he is drawn further away from the norms of the English world, the novelist intercedes to remind us of Savage's true allegiance. Savage remains the dominant voice throughout the novel, who alone may describe what he witnesses and defines who he is by his actions. Savage's recorded history in the form of the notes that he compiles and hides, planning to use them later on as evidence, and the power that he wields in the course of his mission to ensure that his voice will be heard, come together in the role of the narrator who relates Savage's exploits.

However as Firdous Azim while discussing the novel and its colonial heritage points out:

'The narrative voice spinning the tale is neither homogeneous nor unified and the narrative terrain it creates is split between a sense of social reality and the creation of fantasies, dreams and desire.'<sup>10</sup>

Having examined the thematic thrust of the novel let us look anew at some of the issues that the novel deals with. The cultural practice of ritual strangling, described in great depth in this novel has become a part of the mythology of India. It has entered into our 'common sense' understanding as one of the social ills that plagued India before the British took over and established law and order. It is necessary therefore when such a viewpoint is wholeheartedly endorsed by a fictional account of a

historical period, for the reader to enquire about how accurate such a portrayal may be. Historians in the latter half of the twentieth century who have reexamined colonial history, have found that Imperial historiography overlooked local structures of power, ignored or misinterpreted indigenous socio-economic systems and constructed and then perpetuated stereotypes of primitivism, barbarism and overall backwardness, to emphasize the superiority of the rulers over their subject peoples.

Edward Said has thrown a great deal of light on the processes of the reification of the Orient, as an object of study by Western Academic Orientalists. He stresses that the processes of cultural stereotyping that are then accepted and renewed as the dominant discourse, have to be countered by searching for elements in the residual discourse that depict viable alternative readings. Historical research on colonial India is an ongoing and often controversial process. Let us engage in this debate by looking at some of the work that sheds more light on the cultural practice of 'thugi.'

In a series of essays<sup>11</sup> that describe state formation in eighteenth century India, Stewart Gordon has pointed out that that the prevailing knowledge about this historical period consisted primarily of 'self serving' historiography written by historians of the Empire.

During Colonial rule historians and researchers were not granted access to the archives maintained by the regional Indian states, such as the

Pune Daftar, 'which was filled with millions of documents of [the] enormously sophisticated revenue administration'<sup>12</sup> of the local Maratha rulers. Researchers who were granted access to these and other regional archives after Indian independence have challenged the assumptions and stereotypes perpetuated by Imperial historiography.

The dominant historiography represented the subcontinent as a chaotic region where inexplicable and horrifying practices such as 'Sati' and 'Thugi' were prevalent. The establishment of a settled administration and the prevalence of law and order were depicted as a natural corollary of the establishment of the Empire. Gordon argues against such a simplistic interpretation of the facts and in his wide ranging series of essays he stresses that the complex structures of power that prevailed in eighteenth century India cannot be ignored or dismissed as anarchic. In fact it is within the context of the shifting power equations, in the region at the time, that the histories of practices such as 'thugi' must be re-examined.

Gordon compares different statements made by several historians and writers about the origin and nature of people were called 'thugs'. These statements are clearly contradictory and irreconcilable. According to Russell<sup>13</sup> thugs are classified as a unified caste. This implies a degree of hereditary occupation. Percival Spear's<sup>14</sup> account differs from this because

he attributes lack of employment as the factor that drove men to join robber bands.

In contrast to both these statements is James Sleeman's account of 'thugs' whose activities he describes as 'cold blooded murders...The taking of human life for the sheer lust of killing was the thug's main object.'<sup>15</sup>

Gordon points out that these contradictions arose due to the inaccurate use of the term 'thugi' to describe 'inadequately understood social institutions and groups of people'<sup>16</sup> In addition to this are the processes of cultural stereotyping that were reinforced by official writing. Thus the myth of a cohesive, widespread cult of killers was constructed and embellished by an ambitious military official called William Sleeman whose actions Gordon describes as follows:

'More than any other person, William Sleeman is responsible for the stereotyping of the word 'thug'. Many of our 'primary' documents on Thugs were produced by Sleeman in this period, and they are anything but unbiased.'<sup>17</sup>

Gordon quotes another historian who addresses the issue of the Deceivers as well as Sleeman's lone crusade to highlight this activity, and make use of it to concentrate power in his own hands. 'Sleeman found himself up against a British wall of avowed disinterest, even hostility



towards any organized investigation. Government House, and most of his fellow Magistrates argued that if Thugs existed, and there was no proof, they were members of a religious fraternity; and company policy was not to interfere.’<sup>18</sup>

The following excerpt from a biography of Sleeman by his grandson depicts a similar view of Sleeman’s pet obsession and describes how he was identified by it, while attempting to depict it in a favourable light. The biography goes on to valorize Sleeman’s feats in India, including his elimination of ‘Thugi’. Note that in the following extract of a conversation Sleeman has not yet actually found or identified a single ‘Thug’.

He has just been posted to Jabbalpur in 1824, where he reports to Mr Molony the Magistrate.

“I’m glad you’ve come, Sleeman. We are hard pressed here.”

“I had heard that, sir. What can I do?” Outside the Magistrate’s court there squatted under the peepal-trees a large concourse of Indians waiting a hearing.

Molony turned to his clerk, ‘ Babuji, I can find no evidence against these people. Send them away.’”

Then to Sleeman: “They’d a lot of goods that I think must have been stolen, but no one will come forward to claim

the articles. So I must let them go. Well, well – will you go over to the court-house and start work there? There are many cases waiting to be tried...

You might even find a case of Thuggee,” said he with a sly smile. He had often chaffed Sleeman with his pet obsession – a passing idiosyncrasy in a practical officer. Sleeman grinned good humouredly. He had ‘lived with’ his problem, so he said emphatically what he really believed, although from experience he knew it to be rejected by his colleagues.

“Well, Sir, my theory is that the whole thuggee system is one single tree spreading over India from the Indus to Cape Comorin. Find one branch, follow it and you will feel your way down the stem to the root. Cut it there and it will fall. You will ask if I have proof. I have none...Yes, sir... I deserve to be laughed at.”

Molony looked at him quizzically, “Yes, you do. People do laugh at your thug theories.

But” (kindly) “don’t bother. We all think you’re obsessed, and we wouldn’t have you otherwise, my lad. Do you know that we call you Thuggee Sleeman?”

Sleeman laughed. “No, I was not aware of that, Sir. Thuggee – Thuggee,” he mused. He took his leave of Mr Molony and walked happily over to the court-room. Well, perhaps he was wrong – perhaps – perhaps...No, he felt he was right – a tree – even a family tree?

He smiled to himself. Thuggee Sleeman? Right: he would earn that name.’<sup>19</sup>

Sleeman went on to do precisely that. In his personal writings and later on in his memoirs his campaign against ‘thuggee’ finds repeated mention. Gordon highlights Sleeman’s role in the negative stereotyping and over emphasis of the dangers of ‘thuggee.’ In his detailed analysis of state-formation in Malwa, Gordon describes how the local leaders and chieftains of mercenary bands were incorporated at different levels in the prevailing feudal structures of power. As power at the highest levels was taken over by the British, the local chieftains either submitted to the new authority or rebelled against it. The rebels were classified as Pindari’s and marauders and hunted down. Smaller groups, such as dacoits and a few families that committed murder, were stereotyped as ‘thugs’ and were described as a dangerous and widespread enemy by the British administration. This was done to ensure an increase in their available manpower and to assure the community in their mother country of the

justness and necessity of British rule in India. 'Research to date, thus suggests that what the British saw as 'Thug' – 'a national fraternity of murders' – consisted of a small core of families, members of which had been murderers for several generations. These and many other men recruited bands in their local areas during the severe dislocation of the last decade of the eighteenth century and especially after the British defeat of the Marathas in 1803.'<sup>20</sup>

It is also worthwhile to look at the writing of other British officers who served in India in the same area around the same time. In the memoirs of another English officer, Sir John Malcolm, an episode is described where an Indian official takes action against a band of killers, thus showing that all Indians were not powerless in the face of the 'thugs' and did not depend on the English alone to establish law and order.

'It is not six years ago since (Appah Gangadhar) the manager of Mundissor, surrounded a body of Thugs, who professed themselves, and appeared to be, a party of horse and foot soldiers that were escorting their baggage on camels and bullocks from the Deccan. He had, however, gained information who they were, and commanded them to submit; they refused, and an action took place, in which the Thugs were routed, some of them killed, and others made prisoners.

The whole of their booty captured, amounting in value to more than a lac of rupees, and every variety of personal clothes and ornaments, rich and poor, for they plunder all classes indiscriminately. Among other articles a great number of their strangling-cords were taken and exhibited.<sup>21</sup>

This memoir consists of two volumes and 'thugi' merits two pages in volume two, which is a weighty 547 pages, and depicts an Indian official taking action against them. Surely if Thuggee were indeed a vast nationwide conspiracy it would merit more space, and the author would highlight the English role in their suppression. As Gordon points out:

'It was the writing of William Sleeman and the Evangelical and crusading tone of the British administration of the 1830's that played up these locally organized small scale marauding groups (given the name "Thugs" by the British) into a hideous widespread religious conspiracy, somehow typical of India and Indian national character.'<sup>22</sup>

This view of Thuggee as an imagined religious community has entered our popular consciousness and as we have seen, has been reiterated by Masters in his novel. The two significant questions that I shall address in a later chapter, are firstly, why is such a novel that perpetuates a specific cultural stereotype written and published well into the twentieth century.

And secondly why does the figure of a person who can employ disguise, to cross between cultural boundaries as William Savage does in this novel, recur in other novels set in India, written by English novelists in the latter half of the twentieth century.

## Notes

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- 13 Russell, R and Lal, H. (1916) *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, London. [Quoted in Gordon, 1994. p 2.]
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CHAPTER 3  
ALLEGORIES OF EMPIRE<sup>1</sup>

In the detailed analysis of John Masters' *The Deceivers*, in the previous chapter, we saw how the protagonist of that novel employs the artifice of disguise to camouflage himself as a member of a socio-cultural group that is very different from the group to which he originally belongs. The protagonist's ability to successfully infiltrate another cultural space, his increasing sense of affinity to the group that occupies this space and the novelist's resolution of the plot, to ensure that the protagonist returns to the cultural world to which both the character and the novelist belong, are some of factors that recur in some other novels that were published several years after the above mentioned novel appeared in print. Two such novels which will be analyzed critically in this chapter are *The Shadow of the Moon* (1957) and *The Far Pavilions* (1978) by M. M. Kaye. Both these novels have English protagonists who possess the ability to disguise themselves and pass as Indians and thus successfully cross back and forth between cultural boundaries. Both these novels, though published in the latter half of the twentieth century, are set in a tumultuous historical period that was in the previous century. Both novels deal with the role of the English colonial empire in India and the protagonists in these novels encounter cultural practices that they are simultaneously attracted to and repelled by. Their ambiguous response to a cultural practice such as sati,



for instance is conditioned by their ambiguous location, as a result of their being in a state of disguise. Thus they occupy a position of belonging to both the cultural worlds of the English and the Indian at the same time. And during this time they constantly wonder about precisely where their liminality ends and belonging begins.

This search for belonging is a common theme in both the novels under discussion. M.M. Kaye's novels have achieved a great deal of popular success and *The Far Pavilions* was also picturized as a widely-viewed, television mini-series in 1984. The first of a series of audio-visual works set in India that appeared in the nineteen eighties was Richard Attenborough's biographical epic *Gandhi* (1982). The response to the television adaptation of this work, as well as other cinematic versions of books that dealt with the British Empire in India such as, *Heat and Dust* (1982) a Merchant Ivory Production, based on the novel by Ruth Praver Jabhvala, *The Jewel in the Crown* (1984) based on Paul Scott's Raj Quartet and *A Passage to India* (1984) David Lean's adaptation of E.M. Forster's novel, has been analyzed by media critics and writers. Salman Rushdie described this series of works as the 'refurbishment of the Empire's tarnished image'<sup>2</sup> and a 'recrudescence of Imperialist ideology.'<sup>3</sup> He felt that the English were 'in danger of entering a condition of cultural psychosis, in which it begins once again to strut and posture like a great power while in fact its power diminishes every year.'<sup>4</sup> According to

Rushdie, the English were looking back 'nostalgically to the lost hour of their precedence'<sup>5</sup> and that their behaviour was reminiscent of the 'phantom twitchings of an amputated limb.'<sup>6</sup>

The fact that these cinematic and small screen adaptations of versions of colonial life appeared during a time when England was engaged in a dispute over possession of the Falklands/ Malvinas Islands with Argentina and was coping with the consequences of an economic recession, is a significant one. This is so because, by deliberately projecting a specific view of imperial history, through the medium of cinema and soap opera, the lost glamour and exotic lifestyles that were believed to be a part of the reality of life as a colonial power were sought to be re-evoked to palliate the reality of post-imperial life in England. Thus fictional narratives were put to use to project a vision of history and bolster the idea of an imagined community that shared a glorious past. An attempt was made by projecting these visual spectacles to reflect some of this fictional glory onto a nation and its people through its cinema halls and television sets. At the same time we must recall that several critics have analyzed these works and pointed out how the visual versions often distorted and simplified the original texts on which they were based.<sup>7</sup>

Let us return to the two texts mentioned earlier and begin our scrutiny of these two novels of M.M. Kaye, by looking at the location of

the author herself as well as some of the elements that make her books best sellers. M.M. Kaye was born in India and spent most of her childhood and much of her early married life here. Her family had a tradition of working in India: her grandfather, father, brother and husband all served the Raj, and her grandfather's first cousin, Sir John Kaye, wrote the standard English accounts of the Indian Mutiny and the first Afghan War.

When India achieved Independence her husband joined the British Army, and for the next nineteen years she travelled with him to different parts of the world, including Kenya, Zanzibar, Egypt, Cyprus and Berlin. M.M. Kaye is best known for her popular fiction/historical novels, of which the best known and best-selling is, *The Far Pavilions*. Her other novels are *Shadow of the Moon* and *Trade Wind*. She has also known for her detective novels, which include *Death in Berlin*, *Death in Kenya* and *Death in Cyprus* (published in one volume as *Murder Abroad*) and *Death in Zanzibar*, *Death in Kashmir* and *Death in the Andamans* (which are published together as *House of Shade*). She has also written an autobiography of her early life, *The Sun in the Morning*, and has written a children's story *The Ordinary Princess* (1991).

M.M. Kaye's novels fulfil all the conditions of popular fiction. Her novels, though longwinded, are easy reading and have a straightforward linear narrative. Her protagon- ists, according to their gender are beautiful

or handsome and are often aristocratic. They wage a lone battle against their circumstances. There is a wealth of detail that provides the reader with the socio-historical backdrop, before which the protagonists play out their roles, and true to type, the novels end happily with the chief protagonists united and looking towards the future.

Keeping this background in mind, let us look at the first of these two novels by M.M. Kaye, that are set in India, during the colonial period. *The Shadow of the Moon* is set in the early and mid nineteenth century in India, briefly in England and then India again. The major part of the novel describes the events of 1857. The novel ends shortly after the English Army re-establishes control over the areas where the English officers and civilians had been killed or forced to flee. An added dimension to the issue of trans-cultural protagonists that this study is concerned with, that is seen in this novel, is the presence of a female protagonist who is also able to pass as an Indian during the course of the novel (there is a male protagonist who does the same). Both their locations within the English socio-cultural establishment in the novel are clearly established at the very beginning of the narrative. Thus in Kaye's novels we see that crossing cultural boundaries is not a privilege of the white-English male alone, English women too are granted this agency.

*The Shadow of the Moon* begins with the birth of Winter de Ballesteros, the daughter of an English mother Sabrina, who dies soon after her child is born, and a half-French, half-Spanish father Marcos de Ballesteros. She is born in the home of her father's Indian relations by marriage, a pink building called the Gulab Mahal in Lucknow. The first book of the six into which this novel is divided, provides the reader with many details of the life of young Winter in India, where she is cared for by her aunt, who is married to an Indian, and her extended Indian family. After she is orphaned (her father joins the English Army and dies in an attack on Kabul), she is sent to her ancestral home in England. The reader is introduced to all the members of her English family headed by the aging patriarch, her great-grandfather the Fifth Earl of Ware, who alone treats her with affection, apart from her Indian maid Zobeida.

The contrast between both the countries is strongly emphasized by the narrator when she describes Winter's lonely childhood in England.

'Her memory painted India as a place of wonder and beauty where the sun always shone and where people did not live in vast chilly rooms full of ugly dark furniture but in gardens full of strange and beautiful flowers and tame birds. "One day" Aziza Begum (her aunt's mother-in law) had said,

taking tender farewell of the weeping child, “you will come back to the Gulab Mahal and we shall all be happy again.”<sup>8</sup>

The sense of retaining aspects of her early life in India, such as the ability to speak an Indian language and the idea of Winter returning to her true ‘home’ is a recurrent theme in the narrative. As the years go by and Winter grows older, this sense of belonging is never completely lost, though it recedes further into the background of her memory.

‘As the years went by Zobeida came to talk less and less of her own country, and Winter’s days were fully occupied with lessons in the school room. India retreated into a golden haze and she began to forget many things, until at last only that impression of rose pink walls, sunshine, flowers and brightly coloured birds – and happiness –remained.’ [56]

But the contact with India is renewed when an officer in the service of the East India Company visits her ancestral home. Conway Barton who is described as an unscrupulous opportunist, persuades Winter’s aged great-grandfather to consent to a formal contract of betrothal between the eleven year old Winter and Conway, so that they may marry after Winter comes of age, or after the Earl dies. The author ridicules the orientalist stereotype of India in her description of Conway’s ingratiating himself with

Winter, once he realizes her interest in him is merely a result of her memories of India.

‘Mr Conway Barton began to speak to the eleven-year-old Winter of life in India, describing fantastic beauties of scene which were for the most part purely imaginary. The India he created for her was apparently entirely populated by oriental kings and queens who rode on white elephants decked with golden trappings, and lived in glittering fairy-palaces of white marble in a land where the sun always shone and the gardens were full of flowers and exotic fruits: all of which was so much in tune with the shadowy country of Winter’s memory and imagination that she listened with rapture.’ [58]

As the narrative proceeds we learn that Zobeida dies and two years later so does Winter’s great-grandfather. Prior to this Conway receives a letter from the Earl in which he mentions his failing health and asks Conway to return and marry Winter, who is now sixteen, as soon as possible. Conway, who is the Commissioner of a District called Lunjore, however has grown obese and dissipated, though no less shrewd and realizes that were he to return to Ware, the terms of the betrothal will not be fulfilled. Therefore he sends for his assistant, Alex Randall, who was about to return to England on leave and instructs him to go to Ware and

escort Winter to India. Conway believes that once in India, she will be alone and friendless and unable to break the contract and therefore will have to marry him.

The narrator sets up a clear polarity between Conway Barton and Alex Randall. While the former is described as slothful, corrupt, libidinous, obese and a drug addict, his assistant, a soldier turned administrator, is described as someone who is driven by a passion to excel at his work. The reader is informed that he speaks the local languages and thus can communicate with the people he is set to administer, for whom he feels a genuine sense of responsibility and concern. We learn later in the narrative that he is also able to employ the artifice of disguise and thus passes as an Indian from time to time, to gather information from the larger community around him, to further the efficiency with which he maintains law and order in the district where he is posted.

~~This sense of~~ responsibility also expresses itself in Randall's decision to tell Winter the truth about her betrothed's unsuitability as a husband. When Randall arrives at Ware he finds the house in mourning after the death of the Earl. Winter's guardians, her aunt and uncle, the new Earl, ignore Randall's dissuasive words about the inadvisability of firstly, sending a young woman out to India during unsettled times and secondly of marrying her off to Conway Barton. Randall then tries to tell Winter



herself, but his words are not heard by the young girl, who bears a romanticized image of her future happiness with Conway in India.

During the long sea voyage to India, Randall and Winter encounter a wealthy Indian gentleman called Kishan Prasad, whom Randall had met in Crimea where they had seen the English Army beaten back by the Russian Army. They witness Kishan Prasad's rendezvous with a Russian agent and Randall explains to Winter that Prasad was plotting to overthrow the rule of the East India Company in India. Randall's distance from the mainstream of Imperialist English opinion is seen repeatedly in his interior monologue.

'If Kishan Prasad schemed for the overthrow of the Company's Raj, did that make him a traitor or a patriot?

"And why in the name of hell," thought Alex in tired exasperation, "can't I stop seeing the other man's side of the question? Why can't I believe, as Lawrence and Nicholson and Herbert Edwards do, in the divine right of the British to govern?" ' [135]

Some days later, Randall rescues Kishan Prasad from drowning after he is swept over-board. As a token of his gratitude, Prasad gives him a ring which he says may save him, if there is an uprising against the English, because the ring will be recognized as a sign of Prasad's

protection. When the ship docks at Calcutta, Conway does not arrive to receive Winter, but sends a letter asking her to travel to Delhi. Randall departs for Lunjore leaving Winter with the Arbuthnot's, the family she had travelled with on the ship.

He reappears in Delhi, bearing another message from Conway asking Winter to travel to Lunjore. While in Delhi, Winter learns, erroneously, from a friend of Conway's that he has been ill and therefore could not come to meet her in Delhi. She confronts Randall and accuses him of keeping this news from her. After hearing another account of Conway Barton's true nature from Randall who then kisses her, she believes he is lying and flees, only to accept protection from another opportunist, Lord Carlyon. Carlyon agrees to help her travel to Lunjore, though his intention is to seduce her. Winter escapes from him because she encounters her Indian cousin by marriage Ameera/Anne Marie who was travelling to Lucknow. Winter arrives in Lunjore and marries Conway only to be speedily disillusioned and to learn that all that Randall had warned her about Conway was true.

Randall meanwhile, during his trip from Calcutta to Lunjore takes a detour to Khanwai along with his guard Niaz Muhammed. He has learnt that a group of men plotting to overthrow the Company are gathering there.

He arrives at Khanwai dressed as a Pathan and gains entry to the gathering by showing the guards Kishan Prasad's ring.

'His grey eyes made it impossible for him to pass as any but a hill man or a northerner, and so he had selected his present role and worked hard to perfect himself at it. He had used it upon several occasions, in company with Niaz, to gain sorely needed information.' [195]

At the gathering he finds both Hindu and Muslim men participating in a ritual that involves the sacrifice of a white child. Among the group of leaders, sadhus and maulvi's Randall recognizes Kishan Prasad himself. The episode of the sacrifice that is described in gruesome detail, introduces several stock images of India. The sacrifice is made to the goddess Kali, and there are thugs present who are involved in burying the child's body after the sacrifice is over. Randall and Niaz wait for the gathering to disperse and avenge the death of the child by killing the priests who had carried out the sacrifice and who were the last to leave. Their act of vengeance is mirrored by the violence depicted later on in the novel, when many of the English people are killed during the uprising and the English Army retaliates with equal ferocity while recapturing the areas that had been lost. As the narrative proceeds we see Randall working in the district to maintain law and order while anticipating the imminent uprising.

Meanwhile at Lunjore Winter gains the affection of the townsfolk by her friendliness and her ability to speak their language. She overhears a plot to kill Randall and alerts him, thus ensuring that he is forewarned and can take action to save his life. In realizing how much his presence means to her, she recognizes the hollowness of her marriage and accepts that she loves Randall. He however sees her and all the other Englishwomen as an added responsibility who will only be a useless obstacle in the event of the English men having to defend themselves against an uprising. While teaching Winter to shoot, Randall demonstrates the use of the newly introduced Enfield rifle to Niaz and his syce Yusaf. From their reactions he realizes that the spark that will spread the flame of disaffection from the civilian population to the Indian sepoy, has been provided by the greased cartridge papers of the ammunition issued with the new rifle. His words of warning go unheeded once again by his superior officers. Winter while on a trip to Lucknow, meets her cousin Ameera/ Anne Marie, who urges her to return to England and informs her that the beginning of the uprising has been planned for the Thirtieth of May. Winter conveys this information to Randall who begins to make preparations for any eventuality, stockpiling food and ammunition in an abandoned tower, the Hirren Minar, in the jungle some distance from the town. But by then the uprising has begun in Meerut on the Tenth of May. As the news and the uprising spreads from one garrison town to another and the sepoy turn against their officers, the

first fugitives from Delhi arrive. These include the pregnant Lottie Arbuthnot, whom Winter gives shelter to. The uprising in Lunjore follows shortly after and all the English women who had gathered in the residency are killed, except for Winter, Lottie Arbuthnot and Lou Cottar, who are saved because of Randall's intervention. They make their way to the Hirren Minar and hide there. Randall meanwhile blows up the bridge that connects the road from Lunjore to Oudh and arranges for the newly built road from Suthraganj to Lunjore to be destroyed while wagons bearing ammunition from the arsenal at Suthraganj traverse it, thus ensuring that the district remains relatively isolated from the tumult of the surrounding areas.

During the shootout that ensues after the bridge is blown up, Niaz is killed and Randall survives only because Kishan Prasad places himself in the line of fire and repays the debt he owes Randall who had saved his life earlier.

‘There was a rush of shouting men but Kishan Prasad did not move from the narrow doorway and his voice rose clearly above the tumult: “Stand back!” cried Kishan Prasad.

“I am a Brahmin; and if you kill this man, you will first have to kill me.”[499]

His action allows Randall the opportunity to flee into the nearby jungle and make his way to the surviving women. For the next few months

Randall, Winter, Lottie and Lou hide in the Hirren Minar waiting for news that the English have re-established control over the nearby cities.

Winter dresses in a sari unlike the other English women who continue to wear their dresses though they find them cumbersome and uncomfortable in the hot weather.

‘ “You’re letting yourself go native, Winter,” snapped Lou Cottar one hot evening in an unwonted burst of irritation. She looked resentfully at the girl and in the same moment thought how well the draped folds of the cheap sari became her.’

[522]

Randall uses his ability to disguise himself and pass as an Indian, to go out to Lunjore undetected and to meet his old friends and contacts and returns unharmed with information and provisions. ‘There was a bundle of native clothing in the ruined dome of the Hirren Minar, and Lou Cottar coming unexpectedly upon him as he set out had taken him for a Pathan and had been betrayed into a scream.

‘ “Oh God Alex, you frightened me! – I thought for a moment... ”

Alex said: “Does it change me so much?”

“Yes, I don’t know why – it’s only clothes. You look so much darker, and that hair makes a difference.”

“It’s a mistake to wear false hair,” said Alex, pulling at the greasy locks that fell onto his shoulders beneath the puggari cloth, “but it can’t be helped.” ’ [518]

‘Alex went by night and returned at dawn to sleep through most of the day...Sometimes it would be [to meet] Kashmera, sometimes Amir Nath, and once it was a friend of Alex’s from the city Lulla Thakur Das, a bazaar letter writer who lived in an alleyway near Ditta Mull’s silk shop. And in this way he heard the news of the city and the villages and the surrounding districts.’ [519]

Winter’s decision to abandon her English attire and wear a sari, as well as her ability to speak to the local people in their own language also helps them. Her appearance and speech saves Randall’s life some while later. This occurs after Lottie dies in childbirth and they are forced to leave the Hirren Minar because of a fire in the surrounding forest.

Lou Cottar, in whose care Lottie leaves the child, sets out to find some milk for the infant while Winter tends to the fever weakened Randall. The villagers who Lou meets take her into their custody and then retrace her steps to capture Winter and Randall. When they are taken prisoner

Winter is perceived to be an Indian. This is an impression she furthers by informing her captors of her Indian relations.

‘The tone and the quality of the Hindustani she used gave the men pause, and they looked at her doubtfully. It occurred to them suddenly that this might after be an Indian lady of good family. Her fingers tightened imperatively on Alex’s shoulder, and he had obeyed the unspoken warning and remained silent. He could not have risen if he had tried. The man with the musket said uncertainly: “Of what city art thou?”

“Of Lucknow,” said Winter without hesitation, “Of the household of Ameera Begum, wife of Walayat Shah, who is my cousin and lives in the Gulab Mahal by the mosque of Sayid Hussain. This man is of Persia, and my – my husband.”

[549-50]

The talukdar in whose custody they and eight other English men, women and children are held, sends all of them to the Gulab Mahal where Winter’s relations live in Lucknow.

Winter and the surviving English men, women and children live in relative security within the Gulab Mahal. All of them are dressed in Indian



clothing for their own safety. Winter dresses in a similar manner for her own comfort.

‘Winter too made friends in the Gulab Mahal, and she was the only one who went freely to the women’s quarters. Dressed in Ameera’s clothes and wearing Ameera’s jewels, with her blue-black hair in a heavy plait and her slim feet bare or in a pair of Ameera’s flat, curl-toed slippers, she would have passed anywhere as an Indian woman of good family, or from the hills.’ [569]

During their stay there, the English garrison in Lucknow is reinforced. Randall returns to Lunjore to begin the process of re-establishing English control over the district. Winter remains in the Gulab Mahal even after all the other English women leave, to ensure that her Indian relations who have sheltered them are not harmed when the English recapture Lucknow. Winter, who by now has married Randall, gives birth to their child in the Gulab Mahal and becomes as one with her extended family.

‘Within the faded pink-washed walls of the Gulab Mahal the days passed peacefully, and Winter sank into the life of the Rose Palace and became part of it – as she had been part of it in the long-ago days when Juanita and Aziza Begum had

been alive and Winter herself a small, black-haired child playing with the painted plaster birds in the room that had been Sabrina's.

The inmates of the palace frequently forgot that she was not of them by birth, and she spoke and thought and dreamt in the vernacular as she had done as a child.' [606]

However when the English Army wrests control of Lucknow, she goes out to meet the English soldiers who come to the house, dressed once again as an English woman. She does this to ensure that the house where she lives is not attacked and that her relations are spared the reprisals meted out to the rest of the town by the English troops as they recapture the city.

'Winter had gone down to them alone, wearing Juanita's white dress, not knowing who it might be. She had heard the British voices above the din and had opened the gate...to see the men of the Highland Brigade.' [609]

Thus during the course of the novel we see both Randall and Winter using their ability to disguise themselves as Indians, as a tool to ensure their survival. Randall also uses disguise to travel unrecognized and gather information, which he then employs to further the efficacy of the English control over the Indians. The ability that both Randall and Winter possess, to cross successfully back and forth between cultural boundaries, ensures

that they remain on the winning side in any encounter. Since the English gain the upper hand at the moment in history at which the novel ends, their return to the socio-cultural world of the English is certain, though the novel leaves this unsaid. The narrative ends with Alex returning to Winter and their infant son who are both in the Gulab Mahal. Disguise in this novel is made use of as a survival strategy. Randall and Winter's individual destinies as a part of the collective English socio-cultural establishment can only be achieved if they incorporate aspects of India into their lives and reflect this assimilation in their most immediate environment i.e. their bodies. Each person is a cultural signifier and their ability to appear as members of either of the two very different cultural groups, as and when their circumstances require it, makes them floating signifiers (that belong to both sides of the cultural and civilizational divide.) This sense of being able to see the points of view from both sides is seen at several points in the novel.

“We interfere too much,” thought Randall tiredly. Am I God that I should arbitrate?”

He looked out across the flat lands and the quiet river, dusty gold in the low light and thought wryly: “I am thinking like a Hindu.” [354]

“And why in the name of the four hundred and ninety-nine thousand angels,” thought Alex impatiently, as he had thought so often before, “can I not rid myself of this habit of seeing both sides of a thing instead of only my own? Which one *is* my own?” ’ [355]

While seeking their own place, both Winter and Randall bridge the divide between the two communities by maintaining contact with people from both groups, who however belong exclusively to one specific community alone. Through their personal contact they exemplify Mannoni’s words, ‘Civilization is necessarily an abstraction. Contact is made not between abstractions, but between real, live human beings.’<sup>9</sup>

I shall explore the issues of how the use of disguise and how the novelist’s resolution of the plot in this narrative differs significantly in this novel from the Masters’ novel analyzed in the previous chapter after analyzing the last of the three novels chosen for this study. All three novels can be read as allegories of Empire and therefore the differences in the ideology inherent in the narrative, lead to alternative possibilities and suggest as Sara Suleri has stated that ‘narration occurs to confirm the precariousness of power.’<sup>10</sup>

Some of the positive aspects of this novel are the varied depiction of both the English and the Indian communities. Neither community is

depicted as a monolithic group. Several of the English officials are depicted as negative characters, as people who are corrupt and out to gain as much profit as possible during their time in India. Several of the Indian characters are depicted in a positive light, for instance the Indian members of Winter's extended family, who grant all the surviving English people sent with Winter the protection of their home. The leaders of the uprising such as Kishan Prasad are depicted in a manner that ensures that the motives for their actions are understood. The novel does have passing references to 'thugi' and 'suttee', Randall we are told had rescued a woman from a burning pyre before the action depicted in the novel begins. But the novel on the whole makes a larger humanist statement of connection, of the recognition and acceptance of the differences between communities. By providing the Indian characters in the novel, the space to speak and express their views the author has ensured that the novel does not become dated in the manner that many other Raj novels, that provide only a one sided narrative, have.

Let us turn our attention now to the second of Kaye's novels. This novel too has a huge cast of colourful, Indian characters and an English male protagonist who passes successfully as an Indian for several years during the course of the novel. At first as a child when he is in hiding along with his foster mother and later on as an adult when he deliberately disguises himself and uses his ability to pass as a Pathan to gather

intelligence for the English. The novel also has a strong female protagonist who however does not use the artifice of disguise to cross cultural boundaries. She is a hybrid of two cultures, born to wife of a Raja of a small Princely State, who was herself the daughter of a Russian father and an Indian Princess. Though during the course of the novel the male protagonist crosses back and forth between cultural boundaries, the end of the novel depicts the inability to transcend these divisions and both the protagonists set out to make a life for themselves away from the two dominant socio-cultural worlds they have lived in so far.

The novel begins in 1854, with the birth of the male protagonist Ashton Hilary Akbar Pelham-Martyn, in a camp in the Himalayas. His mother dies in childbirth and Ashton is brought up by Sita, the wife of Daya Ram his father's head syce. The Akbar in his name comes from the Akbar Khan, his father's travelling companion. But Ashton comes to be known as Ash-baba and later Ashok and believes that he is Sita's son. His father, Professor Hilary Pelham-Martyn, appears to be a travelling linguist, ethnologist and botanist, but is also an intelligence agent for the English. While in his father's camp, the young Ashton assimilates many aspects of Indian life including several languages and different modes of attire.

'Ash reached the age of four without realizing that the language in which his father occasionally addressed him was,

or should have been his native tongue...he picked up a number of tongues in the polyglot camp...though he used for choice the Punjabi spoken by Akbar Khan, Sita and Daya Ram... He was dressed either in Hindu or Mussalman garb – the difference of opinion between Akbar Khan and Sita as to which he should wear having been settled by a compromise; Mussalman one week, Hindu the next. But always the former on a Friday.’<sup>11</sup>

After the camp is decimated by cholera that claims the lives of Akbar Khan, Professor Pelham-Martyn and Daya Ram, the other camp followers flee. Sita takes the four-year old Ashton and the money and papers concerning Ashton, that the Professor entrusts to her and leaves the camp to take the young boy to his relations in Delhi. But when she reaches Delhi the city has been sacked. Delhi has been taken over by the Indian sepoy of different regiments of the British Army in India and the English officers and their families have been killed. Sita and Ashton, whom she now instructs to answer only to the name of Ashok, flee from the city. Their travels away from Delhi take them to Gulkote, a small principality in the Himalayan foothills, where Sita finds work and Ashton/Ashok becomes one of a gang of street urchins. Later he too begins to work as a horse-boy in a stable. Sita learns about the recapture of Delhi and the re-establishment of English control over the areas they had lost. However she

decides to stay on in Gulkote and not to send Ash back to his people, though his father had asked her to do so.

‘She had begun to see him as her son by right. Had she not cared for him from birth? He knew no other mother and believed himself to be her child. He was no longer Ash-Baba, but her son Ashok.’ [50]

Ash saves the life of Lalji, the Yuvraj of Gulkote, by restraining his horse, when a slab of coping stone is pushed onto him while he passes under an arch on one of the city streets. As a reward, he is summoned by the Yuvraj and asked to stay with him as his companion. Sita is provided work as a serving woman to the Princess Anjuli Bai. The Princess is the daughter of the Raja of Gulkote by his late wife, the feringhi Rani, the daughter of a Russian mercenary and an Indian princess. The court in Gulkote is in the throes of a power struggle as the current queen Jannoo Rani attempts, by using all possible means, to replace the Yuvraj with her own son in the line of succession to the throne. One of the Yuvraj’s courtiers, Biju Ram, who is in the pay of Jannoo Rani, resents Ash’s presence at the Yuvraj’s side, particularly after Ash foils several of his attempts to assassinate the prince. Biju Ram frequently slights and hurts him, once even branding him for life on the chest with the heated barrel of a revolver. Ash and Sita befriend the neglected Anjuli Bai, who becomes



devoted to Ash. Both the children find a secluded tower, called the Peacock tower in a corner of the palace, that they make their retreat from the intrigue of the court. Ash also finds peace of mind in praying to the mountains that can be seen from the balcony of the Peacock tower. These mountains are called the Dur Khaima or the Far Pavilions.

Ash also earns the affection of Koda Dad Khan the Master of Horse at the palace and his son Zarin who leaves to enlist in the English Army's Corps of Guides, inspiring Ash to hope to do the same when he is older. Sita who has grown older and weaker disapproves of this friendship because she fears she will lose Ash.

But Ash and Sita have to leave Gulkote when Anjuli Bai overhears the details of Janoo Rani's plot to kill Ash. With the help of Koda Dad Khan and Hira Lal another friendly courtier, Ash escapes from the Peacock tower and meets Sita outside the walls of the city. Before he leaves the inconsolable Anjuli Bai he breaks the fish charm she wears around her neck, and which she has given him as a parting gift, and gives half back to Anjuli saying they will surely meet again and put the two halves together. For Anjuli, Ashok and Sita had provided both companionship and affection in the present and a dream to cling to for the future. Sita had often told Ashok the story of how the two of them would go away and live by themselves in a distant valley. Anjuli too had been included in the story

and reaching this valley some day when Sita and Ashok return, is the hope that sustains her after they leave Gulkote.

Ash and Sita move from village to village trying to stay a step ahead of the Rani's agents who are sent after them in pursuit. Finally Sita knows she is too weak to travel any further and so before her strength fails her, she tells Ash the truth about his English parentage and gives him the papers and the money Ash's father had given her.

' "No," said Ash. "You are still my mother. And I don't believe any of it."

"If you are my son you will obey me. Stay with me until I go. It will not be long. But afterwards take the money and the papers and go quickly...use them and return to your own people." ' [104]

Sita's death changes the course of Ash's life because he now has to redefine who he is and where he belongs.

'He was not yet twelve years old, but he would never be a child again. He had grown up in the short space of a single afternoon and left his childhood behind him forever. For it was not only his mother whom he had lost that day, but his identity.' [105]

Ash sets out to find the person, to whom the letters his father had written are addressed. This person was Ash's uncle, a Colonel Ashton of the Corps of Guides, who died during the attack on Delhi in 1857, but the other officers of his Corps take responsibility for Ash and promptly send him to England. Ash's old friend Zarin Khan and his elder brother Awal Shah, the sons of Koda Dad Khan, who are both soldiers in the Guides, point out to their officers that Ash has potential value as an intelligence agent because of his knowledge of the languages and the ways of life of India.

‘“It is a pity,’ said Awal Shah to his Commanding Officer, “that the boy will forget the speech and the ways of this land, for a Sahib who can think and talk as one of us, and pass as either a Pathan or a Punjabi without question, would have made his mark in our Regiment. But in *Belait* he will forget and become as other Sahib's; which will be a great loss.”

“The Commandant had been struck by this observation, for... it was plain that William Ashton's nephew was a native of India in all but blood, and one of the few who could go deeper than the skin. As such he might prove of inestimable value in a country where accurate information often meant the difference between survival and disaster, and Awal Shah

was right: such potentially valuable material ought not to be wasted.”’ [111]

Ash’s transition from one socio-cultural world to another is not an easy one but Ash learns and assimilates all that he can. All the while he remains certain that that he will return to India one day as an officer in the Corps of Guides.

‘He was to remain a stranger in a strange land, and England would never be “Home” to him, because home was Hindustan. He was still – and always would be Sita’s son.’[113]

The author introduces a critique of colonialism through the words of the young Ash as he learns about the world and how it works. “It was their country, and they weren’t doing you – I mean us – any harm. I don’t think it was fair.” [115] He tells his guardian when asked to comment on the English presence in India.

‘He hadn’t wanted to come to *Belait* and learn to be a Sahib. He would far rather have stayed in Mardan and become a sowar like Zarin. But he had not been given the choice, and felt in consequence that he understood more about the feelings of subject races than his Uncle Matthew, who had spoken so patronizingly of “bestowing the benefits of peace and prosperity on the suffering millions of India.”

“I suppose they look on me as one of the suffering millions, thought Ash bitterly, “but I’d rather be back there and working as a coolie than here being told what to do all day.”

’ [115-116]

Ash makes his way through school and the Royal Military College and returns to India in the summer of 1871. He is met at Bombay by Zarin and on their journey to Mardan where the Corps of Guides are posted, Ash returns to his old familiar life as an Indian.

‘Ash had donned the dress of a Pathan and roistered in the city until dawn. He was filled with an exhilarating sense of freedom, as though he had broken out of gaol. The Western veneer so painfully acquired during the cold years at school and Pelham Abbas fell away from him as easily as though it had been no more than a winter overcoat, discarded on the first warm day of spring, and he slipped back effortlessly into the ways and speech of his childhood...he was once more Sita’s son Ashok, who had come home and inherited a kingdom.’ [142]

On his way to Mardan Ash meets the aged Koda Dad Khan, who has left Gulkote some years ago. Koda Dad warns him that he and Zarin cannot be friends as they used to be, for Ash is now an English officer and

Zarin is his subordinate, a daffadar in the Guides. Ash accepts his advice but reminds him that his English identity is not his only identity, he is someone who belongs to more than one community and that is a fact that he cannot change.

‘ “The Hindu boy from Gulkote is dead and in his place is a Sahib – an officer-Sahib of the Guides. You cannot alter that; or try to be two people in one skin.’ said Awal Shah. “I am that already,” said Ash wryly. “Your brother helped to make me so when he told me that it would be best for me to go to *Belait* to the care of my father’s people, and to learn to become a Sahib. Well, I have learned. Yet I am still Ashok, and I cannot alter that either, for having been a child of this land for eleven years I am tied to it by something as strong as the tie of blood, and shall always be two people in one skin – which is not a comfortable thing to be.” ’ [156]

Ash puts his ability to pass as an Indian to use when a soldier under his command deserts, carrying away his weapon and that of another guard. Ash sets out to find the soldier and retrieve the missing carbines. Ash sets out across the border into areas that are not under the control of the English and spends two years living in disguise until the task he sets himself is accomplished. He returns with the stolen weapons, wounded and ill but

alive. His survival during those years was due entirely to his ability to pass as one of the people around him. His senior officers are aware of the value of his achievement but for reasons of his own safety decide to have him transferred to Rawalpindi. While posted there Ash meets Ensign Walter (Wally) Hamilton and for the first time makes a true friend among the English. Ash is then sent as a Liason Officer to escort a convoy that is on its way from the princely state of Karidkote to the princely state of Bhitore. The convoy is a bridal party for the princesses of Karidkote who are on their way to be married to the Rana of Bhitore. Ash takes charge of the convoy of approximately eight thousand people and half as many baggage animals that include elephants, camels, bullocks and horses. During a meeting with Jhoti, the younger brother of the princesses, Ash recognizes Biju Ram, the courtier from Gulkote who had made his life miserable as a child. Cursing himself for not having acquired prior information about whom the royalty he is escorting are, Ash learns from his bearer Mahdoo, that Karidkote is the new name of Gulkote after it merged with a neighbouring state. He also learns that Lalji, the Yuvraj whom Ash was companion to, died in an accident, that Janoo Rani's son, Nandu, is now the Raja of Karidkote and both the old Raja and Janoo Rani died in suspicious circumstances. To ensure that there are no further challenges to the throne Nandu had decided to marry off his younger sister Sushila and his older half-sister Anjuli Bai to someone as far away from Karidkote as

possible. Therefore the Rana of Bhitore's proposal was accepted and both the princesses were sent on this journey.

Ash remembers the playmate of his youth, Anjuli Bai, and searches among his possessions for the half of the fish charm that she had given him when he had been her friend Ashok. Ash rescues Sushila and Anjuli from drowning, one evening when the rath in which they are travelling tilts over while fording a river. The next evening while meeting the prince and his sisters in the durbar tent, Ash gives Anjuli his half of the charm and discovers that she still wears her half around her neck. That night Anjuli comes to his tent to ask for news of Ashok and Ash realizes that he has fallen in love with her.

Their journey to Bhitore occupies a large part of the novel. During the journey Ash saves the life of Jhoti, injures himself in the attempt, fights and kills Biju Ram and then successfully negotiates with the Rana of Bhitore to bring about the marriages of Sushila and Anjuli Bai.

During the journey Ash considers eloping with Anjuli after he realizes that she loves him too, but her sense of duty towards her younger sister forces her to stay by Sushila's side. Ash too realizes that there is nowhere in India where they can stay in safety or gain acceptance if they do elope, but then again there is nowhere else they would rather be.



for the rest had talked, thought and dreamed in the language of his adoptive mother, Sita.' [471]

Ash meets the aged Koda Dad Khan while on leave and listens to his advice about forgetting his lost love. He also hears disturbing news about unrest in the North-West Frontier Provinces and beyond the border in Afghanistan. The author introduces overt political debate into the novel in her depiction of the English social establishment. For instance in a heated conversation between Ash and a visiting English public speaker.

‘ “Well, look at it this way, sir,” said Ash earnestly. “Imagine the British Isles as conquered territory, as it was in Roman times , but part of an Indian Empire instead. An imperial colony, in which Indians hold every post of real authority, with an Indian Governor-General and Council proclaiming and enforcing laws that are completely alien to your way of life and thought, but which make it necessary for you to learn their language if you hope to hold any reasonably well paid post under them. Indians controlling all public services, garrisoning your country with their troops and recruiting your countrymen to serve the ranks of regiments that they themselves would officer.

Declaring anyone who protested against their authority a dangerous agitator, and putting down any rising with all the force at their command. And don't forget, sir, that the last of those risings would have been less than twenty years ago, when you yourself were already a grown man. You would remember that rising very well, for even if you had not fought in it yourself, you would have known people who had, and who had died in it. – or been hanged for complicity, or suspicion of complicity, or merely because they had a white skin in the reprisals that followed it. Taking all that into account, would you yourself be eager to get on close and friendly terms with your Indian rulers?" ' [503]

Ash is transferred to Ahmedabad, a move he welcomes because it brings him nearer to Bhitore. While in Ahmedabad he makes two friends, an English sailor, Captain Stiggins and a Gujarati aristocrat Sarjevan (Sarji) Desai. Some while after Ash is sent to Ahmedabad, Gobind Das the Hakim to the royal family of Karidkote, arrives, in answer to a summons from the Rani Sushila to treat the unwell Rana of Bhitore. Ash assists him on his way and insists that they keep in touch so that he may learn the news of events in Bhitore. The Hakim sends word that the Rana is about to die and his wives are expected to commit sati. Ash, Sarji and Manilal, the Hakim's servant set out for Bhitore along a hidden route through the

surrounding hills, guided by a local hunter Bukta. Ash is disguised as an Indian once again. This time he is disguised as

‘a sober middle class Indian, whose dress proclaimed him a professional man in good standing. A vakil perhaps or, a hakim, from somewhere like Baroda or Bombay.

...“Aiyah!” breathed Manilal awed, “it is wonderful. And ...yet it is only a matter of clothes and a razor. But what is the meaning of this, Sahib?”

“Ashok,” corrected Ash with a grin. “In this garb I have another name, and am no longer a Sahib,” ’ [568]

Once in Bhitore, Ash realizes that his telegrams to the English authorities asking them to take action to prevent the Rani’s from being forced to commit sati, have not been heeded and that he too can do nothing to prevent it. So he decides that he will at least ensure that Anjali’s death is a quick and relatively painless one, by shooting her when she is on the lighted pyre before she is consumed by the flames. He positions himself on a structure overlooking the pyre and hears the crowd call out in approval as the procession begins. But only Susheela is to commit sati. Ash learns later from Anjali that the Rana had never acknowledged her as his wife and Susheela had turned against her sister, had banished her from her sight and made a prisoner of her. Now that the Rana was dead Susheela had decreed

that Anjuli was to watch Susheela commit sati and then she should be blinded. The Hakim had devised a plan to rescue Anjuli and then escape with her from the enclosure where she was to watch the cremation and sati, by disguising himself, Manilal, Sarji, Ash and Anjuli in the uniforms of palace servants. Sarji brings Ash back to this enclosure and all of them are about to leave, when Anjuli insists she will not go till Ash does for Sushila what he had planned to do for her. Ash fires and kills Sushila when she is about to rise and escape from the flames that surround her and then they flee from Bhitore, pursued by the Rana's troops, who manage to kill Manilal, Gobind Das and Sarji.

Ash and Anjuli, helped by Bukta, arrive in Ahmedabad and travel north by sea in Captain Stiggins' ship and are married by the captain during their journey. When they disembark and travel to Rawalpindi, Ash is once again in the garb of an Afghan. He and Anjuli stay at the house of Fatima Begum, Zarin's aunt. Wally and one of his senior officers are introduced to her. But Ash knows that she will never be accepted by the English, as one of them.

His officers meanwhile, are preoccupied with the possibility of having to fight a second war against the Afghans. [The English Army was annihilated by the Afghans in the war of 1817] The present conflict was in fact being forced by the expansionist policies of the English who act to

counter what they believe is a Russian plot to take over Afghanistan. Ash volunteers to go across the border to provide the English with reliable information, a task he knows he can accomplish because he can pass unnoticed. 'He was across the border and had vanished into Afghanistan; dropping out of sight as completely as a pebble that falls into a deep pool.'

[734]

In his identity as an Afghan he is known as Akbar. As Akbar the information that he provides to the English about the Amir of Afghanistan's policies makes his superior officers doubt his loyalty.

' "There are times," observed Major Cavagnari tartly to Captain Battye, "when I begin to wonder whose side your friend is on. Our's or the Amir's." Wigram smiled a little lopsidedly and said with a hint of remonstrance:

"I wouldn't say it was a question of sides, sir. If you ask me, I should say rather that he can't help seeing both sides of a question, while the majority of us tend to see only one— our own." [736]

Anjuli joins Ash in Kabul, where he works as a clerk in the Amir's administration, thus gaining access to information that he conveys to the English. After a brief military encounter a treaty is signed between the English and the Afghans and an English mission, of which Wally is a

member, is sent to Kabul. The last section of the book deals with the precarious position of the English mission in Kabul and how they defend their Residency against repeated mass attacks, down to the last man. Ash fights alongside the English and is left for dead, but survives to return to Anjuli. They know they can no longer stay in Kabul because their presence endangers their host, and so they choose to leave, hoping to find the valley they dreamed of as children.

‘ “If only there were somewhere we could go where we just live quietly, and be happy, and not be hedged about by rules and trivial, ancient tribal taboos that musn’t be broken.

Somewhere where it doesn’t matter who we were or what gods we worshipped or didn’t worship, as long as we harmed no one: and were kind, and didn’t try to force everyone else into our own mould. There ought to be somewhere like that – somewhere where we can just be ourselves. Where shall we go, Larla?

“To the valley, where else?” said Anjuli.”

...“But my Heart, that was only a story....”

...“What does that matter?” asked Juli. “We can make it come true...” ’ [948-9]

The novel is open ended and the narrative ends with Ash and Anjali heading out into the unknown, with the narrator providing an optimistic closure.

‘They rode out together from the shadows of the trees, leaving the Bala Hissar and the glowing torch of the burning Residency behind them, and spurred away across the flatlands towards the mountains...

And it may even be that they found their Kingdom.’ [955]

This novel is a combination of stereotypical images of the orient, seen in many earlier novels set in India as well as of critiques of the colonial enterprise in India. Let us first look at some of the stereotypes that recur. One of the Indian cultural practices that this novel describes at some length is that of Sati.

The question of sati was an important issue over which there was a significant debate between the English and the Indians during the nineteenth century. This debate resulted in the Abolition of Sati Act of 1829. However the commonsensical understanding of sati depicted in works of western narrative fiction such as Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873) where the traveller Phileas Fogg rescues a Parsee woman who is about to be forcibly cremated, isn’t entirely accurate.

Gayatri Spivak sums up such narratives in a pithy sentence 'White men are rescuing brown women from brown men.'<sup>12</sup>

There existed a tradition of indigenous protest against the practice of sati from the seventh century onwards. The poet Bana states

'The custom is a foolish mistake of stupendous magnitude, committed under the reckless impulse of despair and infatuation. It does not help the dead for he goes to heaven or hell according to his deserts. It does not ensure reunion since the wife who has uselessly sacrificed her life goes to the hell reserved for suicides. By living she can still do much good both to her-self by pious works and to the departed by offering oblations for his happiness in the other world. By dying she only adds to her misery.'<sup>13</sup>

Critical views such as the above existed alongside differing interpretations of Hindu scriptures that were used to sanction the elimination of widows. In the same text Arvind Sharma points out that Western perceptions of sati were not homogenous and changed over a period of time. Sati has

'aroused a wide gamut of reactions ranging from admiration to outright condemnation, and abolition. Over the long history of Indo-Western contact the emphasis shifted. In what



has been called the first period from 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C to 1757 –the Western reaction was a mix of admiration and criticism. In what has been called the second period – the 1757-1857 period – the reactions of condemnation and prohibition manifested themselves with vigour leading to the abolition of sati in 1829. In what has been called the third period – the post-1857 period – two opposite trends emerged. On the one hand an approach of broad-based condemnation was developed which used sati as a justification for the perpetuation of the British Raj in India. On the other hand, a streak of admiration also reappeared.<sup>14</sup>

The cultural practice of sati is depicted in all the three novels that constitute this study. In *The Deceivers* the protagonist sympathizes with the woman who states that she wants to commit sati and feels that she should be entitled to act as she chooses. The narrative ends with the protagonist aiding the woman whom he has widowed, by lighting her pyre. In *The Shadow of the Moon* there is only a passing reference to sati. We are told that the male protagonist had rescued a widow from a burning pyre and later wonders whether his interference actually helped her.

In *The Far Pavilions* the male protagonist is unable to prevent a young royal widow from voluntarily ascending the pyre. But just as she

seeks to rise and flee from the flames, he shoots her, thus ending her life in a manner that the author endorses because it is a quick and relatively painless death. Lata Mani in her study of the debate on sati points out that the woman's voice is never heard. That the discourse was constructed entirely between the male colonizers and the elite or priestly Indian men who were consulted as scriptural authorities. Mani asserts that the widow was

'consistently portrayed as either a heroine – entering the raging flames of the pyre with no display of emotion – or an abject victim – thrown upon the heap, sometimes fastened to it by unscrupulous family members or pundits... We can concede then, that women are not subjects in this discourse. Not only is precious little heard from them, but they are denied any agency. This does not, however, imply that women are the objects of this discourse; that this discourse is *about* them. On the contrary I would argue that women are neither subjects nor objects, but rather the ground of the discourse on sati.<sup>15</sup>

Within the three narratives though the novelists employ different approaches, one fact remains constant. All the women come to the same end. Their voices are silenced. In *The Deceivers* this occurs so that the

narrator can achieve a sense of closure in the novel and retrieve the protagonist from the ambivalent cultural space he occupies and ensure his return to the English world. In *The Shadow of the Moon* the woman is neither seen nor heard. She appears merely as a passing reference alongside the mainstream narrative. In *The Far Pavilions* there are several references to sati, including an instance where we are told that an evil rani ensures her younger rival dies on the pyre while she lives on, after their husband's death. There is also the larger episode of the sati that ends in the killing of the widowed Rani by an Englishman. Clearly the cultural stereotype that sati was a prevalent practice in India is one that English novelists have reinforced in their narratives.

But their own differing approaches to the depiction of this cultural practice that continues to be more than merely a matter of debate even today, mirrors the ambivalent responses to sati within the colonial establishment itself.

M.M.Kaye's novels have not been subject to much critical attention. This may be because they have always been perceived as popular fiction and therefore not deserving of academic scrutiny. For instance a contemporary historian mentions her work thus in passing.

'For many years British books on India formed a small but precise genre of their own, involving the use of phrases like

“the heady smell of spices and woodsmoke.” And descriptive evocations of cruel maharajas, sly holymen, rebellious tribesmen and the heat of the Deccan, together with occasional appearances by tigers, missionaries, memsahibs, gymkhanas, Kipling and tiffin. This extended into histories of the edifice lately termed the Raj, and although it is now rare to find imperial drama articulated so openly, a nostalgic subtext still hovers beneath the pages of many books like a loyal native bearer lurking discreetly under the verandah of one of M.M. Kaye’s bungalows.’<sup>16</sup>

But a closer look at her novels reveals much more. One of the significant aspects of *The Far Pavilions* that it repeatedly expresses very critical views on colonialism that are never as overtly expressed in other novels. The ideas that Ash repeatedly expresses about the wrongs of colonialism do not appear in other novels that depict life in the sub-continent in the colonial period. In this novel we see Ashton/ Ashok/Akbar switch his identity for a variety of reasons. As a child he is made to do so in order to survive. As an adult he does so to find himself and to provide information to his fellow English officers and the establishment they represent. He also does so to save the woman he loves. This mixture of motives and Ash’s repeated self-questioning about his identity make this the most complex of the three novels analyzed in this study. It is significant

therefore that unlike both the previous novels, where the protagonists who cross between socio-cultural worlds during the course of the narrative, are able to return to the safety of the English side, to which they originally belong, at the narrative's closure, in this novel that possibility is negated. Ashton is not shown returning to the English world but sets out to seek a world of his own.

As an allegory of Empire *The Shadow of the Moon* re-establishes the status quo at the end of the novel, with the colonizer firmly in control of his world again. In *The Far Pavilions* however, the colonizers are defeated and their sole survivor rejects their expansionist doctrines and leaves to try and find an alternative world. This is so because, Ashton does not merely cross back and forth, he too is a hybrid, someone who inhabits more than one world. Anjali is a hybrid too but she knows that she belongs to neither of these two worlds, having fled from one and because she will not be accepted by the other.

Let us understand how the condition of hybridization has been defined. While discussing how forms of language such as the novel can be read, Bakhtin points out how even a single sentence can be read in more than one way.

'What is hybridization? It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an

encounter, within the arena of utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor.’<sup>17</sup>

Homi Bhabha develops these ideas further when he points out that the words of the colonizer can be used as a tool by the colonized as well because hybridization

‘reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority. Hybridity becomes the moment in which the discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal grip on meaning and finds itself open to the trace of the language of the other, enabling the critic to trace complex movements of disarming alterity in the colonial text.’<sup>18</sup>

Thus when we see Ash speak out in this novel against his fellow Englishmen and reject their worldview at the end of the narrative, it is an acknowledgement of his hybrid condition. His is a condition born out of the colonial experience and tempered by his own awareness of the world of the other, that he has also integrated into his being.

For Bhabha hybridity is

'a problematic of colonial representation... that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other "denied" knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority' <sup>19</sup>

Thus we see that the hybridity that can be observed within colonial discourse can invert the structures of subordination/domination in the colonial worldview.

'If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridization...[it] enables a form of subversion...that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention.'<sup>20</sup>

In this novel such intervention occurs when Ash finds himself working undercover disguised as an Afghan, seeking out information for the English but finding his situation increasingly difficult to maintain because his opinions have begun to differ significantly from those of his fellow officers. This difference in views occurs because Ash is no longer convinced of the validity of the project that he is a part of. He plays a crucial role in the project that involves extending English domination to cover the whole of Afghanistan. In his role as an Afghan informer Ash has crossed a cultural boundary using the means of disguise. However when he no longer believes in the righteousness of his mission he does not cross

back but chooses to leave the battlefield to find an alternative world, thus double crossing his senior officers to whom he is expected to return. The return to the English side is a crossing that the narrative momentum of this novel cannot produce. The double cross that is played out here on the part of the protagonist, is directed against the English, who constituted his own side. It is a doublecross that cannot be reversed.



## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> The title is taken from the first line of a short story by R. Kipling. The line reads 'This is how it happened, and the truth is also an allegory of Empire.'
- Kipling, R. (1886) "Naboth" in *Life's Handicap: Being Stories of Mine Own People*, New York: Doubleday and Maclure Co, p. 71.
- <sup>2</sup> Rushdie, S. 'Outside the Whale' American Film, January-February, 1985, p. 70.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 70.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.16.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.17
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.18.
- <sup>7</sup> Some of insightful essays on this topic are Kipnis, L. (1989) 'The Phantom Twitchings of an Amputated Limb: Sexual Spectacle in the post-Colonial Epic', *Wide Angle* 11 (4). Oct 1989: pp. 42-51. And Featherstone, S. (1991) 'Passages to India', *Critical Survey* 3(3) 1991: pp. 290-6.
- <sup>8</sup> Kaye, M.M. (1979) *The Shadow of the Moon*, Harmondsworth: Penguin. p. 54. (First published by Longmans, 1957).
- <sup>9</sup> Mannoni, O. (1956) *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, trans. P. Powesland, London Methuen, p.23
- <sup>10</sup> Suleri, S. (1992) *The Rhetoric of English India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.23.
- <sup>11</sup> Kaye, M.M. (1978) *The Far Pavilions*, Harmondsworth: Penguin. p. 23.
- <sup>12</sup> Spivak, G.C. (1998) *Can the Subaltern Speak*, in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, pp 271-313. (p.296.)
- <sup>13</sup> Sharma, A. (1988) *Sati: Historical and Phenomenological Essays*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, p.16.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p.13.
- <sup>15</sup> Mani, L. (1989) 'Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India', in K. Sangari and S. Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, pp 88-126. (p. 117.)
- <sup>16</sup> French, P. (1998) *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division*, Harper Collins Publishers India. p. xxviii.
- <sup>17</sup> Bakhtin, M.M. (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- <sup>18</sup> Bhabha, H.K. (1985) 'Signs taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817', *Critical Enquiry* 12 (1), Autumn: p 144-165. (p. 154.)
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p.156.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p.154.

## CHAPTER 4

### DOUBLE-CROSSING

‘Theoretically we are only at the stage of trying to inventory the interpellation of culture by empire.’<sup>1</sup>

There are two significant questions that this chapter seeks to answer. Firstly why are novels that depict life in a previous century during the colonial period, produced and reinterpreted,<sup>1</sup> in the audio-visual medium for instance, more than a century later?

Secondly why is the trope of disguise that is used as a means of crossing cultural boundaries, a recurrent theme in some of these novels. In our analyses of the three novels chosen for this study we can observe a shift in the manner in which the novelist resolves the plot and locates the protagonist, who has engaged in disguise and thus changed identity during the course of the narrative.

If we consider all three novels as allegories of empire, let us understand what these narratives tell us, about how the imperialist project is envisaged in retrospect.

In *The Deceivers* we see a clearly imperialist narrative that borrows considerably from the writings of the historical character on whom the fictional protagonist is based. The novel builds on these historical writings

and extends the ideas expressed in them further. In his writings about thugs, Sleeman describes a leader of a group of thugs, a man called *Feringheea*.

*'Feringheea* so named because his mother, a Brahmin relation of a landowner called Rai Singh, gave birth to him while their house was burnt down by attacking troops led by European officers/ *Feringhees*.<sup>2</sup>

*Feringheea* is a man of high birth and of means and has no need to pursue the profession of thugi for a living. He is of attractive personality, fine intelligence, soft voice, debonair and handsome. This is the man whom you are to hunt until he is brought to the gallows.

His influence is great and with his capture Central India will be clear of Thugs. I believe that we came close to seizing him last Autumn and again this Spring, but we have never had a sight of him.<sup>3</sup>

It is possible that the author of the novel put together both the ideas of Sleeman's pursuit of the thugs and a thug leader who was noticeably fairer and different looking from the rest of his men. Thus creating the fiction that an Englishman disguised himself as a thug and then was able to put an end to their activities because of the inside information he had

gathered. What really strikes a reader about the novel however is the manner in which the protagonist is drawn towards the cultural activity that initially struck him as abhorrent, before he embarked on a life lived in disguise. However the novelist ensures that the protagonist returns to the English side at the end of the novel and his location is firmly established by his being anchored deeper in his community by the birth of a son, a common plot device in a narrative to signify continuity. The ideology that is re-established at the end of the novel is that, the rule of the colonial authority is the rule of law and that this is the best system of government for an unsettled land such as India where primitive practices such as 'thugi', which the novel describes at great length, are prevalent. The cultural stereotype that is perpetuated as the reality of life in India at the time, is a justification of the need for English rule.

Francis Hutchins points out that

'An India of the imagination was created which contained no elements of either social change or political menace. Orientalization was the result of this effort to conceive of Indian society as devoid of elements hostile to the perpetuation of British rule, for it was on the basis of this presumptive India that Orientalizers sought to build a permanent rule.'<sup>4</sup>

This cultural stereotype is repeated in later novels too. For instance in the final volume of Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet* when the character Ronald Merrick is killed after a long period of pursuit, his death is suspected to have happened in a manner reminiscent of thugi.

'Bronowsky stopped, released Perron's shoulder, leant for a moment on his stick.

"I wonder was the thing done in the old thuggee way?"

"Not unless the neck was broken and a grave already dug?"

"Ah, I've forgotten that. But it was something else I had in mind – the many days the thugs sometimes travelled with their chosen victims, to lull suspicion. Isn't there a resemblance between this and the long period of preparation. And then it is said isn't it that when it came to it they were mercifully quick. Compassionate even."<sup>5</sup>

A somewhat similar ideology to that expressed in *The Deceivers* can be observed in *The Shadow of the Moon*. Again the male protagonist is an administrator who uses disguise to gather information and uses the knowledge gained in this manner to maintain law and order more

efficiently. The novel ends soon after the re-establishment of English control over the parts of India that had risen against colonial rule. Here too a son is born, and the protagonist returns to claim his wife and child from the Indian family who has sheltered them, and though this is left unsaid, undoubtedly returns with them to the cultural space of the English world in India.

Said's words about 'contrapuntal reading' bear recollection while reading such a novel. While defining the term he says

'it means remembering that Western writers until the middle of the twentieth century... wrote with an exclusively Western audience in mind, even when they wrote of characters, places or situations that referred to, made use of overseas territories held by Europeans... we now know that these non-European peoples did not accept with indifference the authority projected over them, or the general silence on which their presence in variously attenuated forms is predicated. We must therefore read the great canonical texts, and perhaps also the entire archive of modern and pre-modern European and American culture, with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally

present or ideologically represented (I have in mind Kipling's Indian characters) in such works.'<sup>6</sup>

Thus in *The Shadow of the Moon* we see that once again continuity and the rule of English law, are the notes on which the novel ends. However during the course of the novel the recognition that colonial rule is resented by the Indian people who actively oppose it, as well the positively nuanced characterization of some of the Indian characters in the novel render this book at a remove from *The Deceivers* in its ideological discourse.

The novel accepts that colonial rule is achieved at great cost to both colonizer and colonized, and that a time will come when such rule can no longer be sustained. By depicting protagonists who bridge the gap within communities in their personal lives, the novel suggests the possibility of a future co-existence between communities in a different social framework, without the unequal relations of power that exist between the people who make up the dominant, colonizer class and the people who are the subordinate, colonized subjects. Though the novel re-establishes the status quo at the end of the narrative, during the length of the novel other possibilities are allowed to emerge.

*The Far Pavilions* is the most complex of these three novels. It is the most overtly orientalist in its depiction of oriental despots, beautiful

princesses, intrigue, and sati. However at the same time the novel grows increasingly disenchanted with the expansionist ideas of imperialism. In the death of Wally Hamilton, who dies while defending the residency at Kabul, we can see the death of the imperial idea. Its cost in lives lost, finally proves too high a price for the colonizer and its denial of humanity to the subjects of colonialism leads to its rejection by the protagonist. *The Far Pavilions* lends itself to cinematic reinterpretation because of the visual possibilities inherent in the description of the life of oriental royalty. The novel allows for a depiction of the deserts of Rajasthan, elephants, camels and all the trappings of power colourfully displayed, as a visual spectacle. This is what people remember of the novel as well as its audio-visual version.

However the novel clearly says much more. Its rejection of the imperial idea, that is depicted by the protagonists heading away from the failed mission in Kabul, is a complete negation of the colonial systems of power that are depicted in the novel.

Thus in these three novels we see a shift in the depiction of colonial rule. In the first it is upheld as the desirable norm. In the second the possibility of alternative systems of power are depicted, but the novels maintains that colonial rule is not yet over. While in the third of these three novels, we see a comprehensive defeat of an imperial outpost and more



significantly a rejection of the expansionist idea of colonialism by the protagonist.

Let us now consider why disguise is a common theme in these novels. The concept of using disguise to further information gathering is not an uncommon one. The English traveller, Sir Richard Burton travelled to Mecca disguised as a Muslim pilgrim and returned undetected. In India too, historical accounts mention the use of disguise by the English.

For instance when the movement for Indian independence was suppressed when the Defence of India Act of 1915 came into force (that permitted authorities to arrest and detain suspects without trial or cause) the crackdown in Bengal was conducted by an officer called Charles Tegart, who was in charge of the Intelligence Branch of the Bengal Police and had a formidable reputation.

‘According to Sir Percival Griffiths’ *History of the British Indian Police*, Tegart was revered among British residents as a fearless genius. He had survived several assassination attempts, was rumoured to disguise himself as an old Bengali woman or a Sikh taxi driver when visiting unlikely locations and was said to have informers and secretive shadows all over Calcutta.’<sup>7</sup>

The device of disguise is not unknown in fiction set in India either. Rudyard Kipling has a number of short stories about an officer called Strickland who disguises himself as an Indian in order to carry out various secret missions undetected. For instance this ability of his is put to use in the short story 'The Bronckhorst Divorce-Case'<sup>8</sup>.

Another story from the same collection that employs disguise is 'Beyond the Pale' in which a character called Trejago disguises himself so that he can carry out a clandestine affair with an Indian woman without being detected.<sup>9</sup>

In all these texts one common strain that a reader observes is that through the act of disguise the English protagonist moves closer to experiencing a life that the novelist visualizes as truly Indian, however inaccurate the representation may be. The authors borrow from existing knowledge and past impressions of India to construct what they believe life in India to be. However these past records and impressions often prove to be a mere repetition of cultural stereotypes. It is useful to recall Said's argument about the representation of the Orient to understand why these cultural stereotypes are perpetuated.

'The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger

whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore in the novels we have analyzed we see English protagonists playing out their roles before the historical backdrop of India. That this backdrop is often inaccurate is something we as informed readers must remain aware of. However in the depiction of Indian characters with agency and an agenda of their own, whether it is Chandra Sen in *The Deceivers*, Kishan Prasad in *The Shadow of the Moon* or Koda Dad Khan in *The Far Pavilions*, the authors provide strong figures rooted in their cultural space, who anchor the narrative while the transcultural protagonists explore the ambiguous spaces that they occupy. In attempting to make the English characters come to an equation with the situation in India though, the novelists however fall back upon familiar stereotypes that have often made their appearance before. That their depiction of life in India does not change these stereotypes, may be because even retrospective views can be coloured by the lenses of the past.

Geeti Sen, in a work on the perception of India suggests that distortion may have arisen because of different ways of envisioning history. According to her the European concept of history is a linear one,

which is inspired by the Judeo-Christian tradition and which conceptualized time and space as discrete categories. Thus while European history was constructed as a series of linear progressions, the history of the Orient was perceived as an ahistorical and timeless one. This was however not how Indians perceived themselves. However since the dominant ideological and popular cultural representations of the world and its cultures were Western ones

‘India became a reflected image in the multiple mirrors of European civilization. To Marx it was a moribund culture of outlived feudalism seething with savage gods and dark superstitions. To Hegel Indian thought was reduced to an abstract “dream image” never reaching the level of philosophy, which was regarded as a uniquely Indian achievement. For European merchant conquerors, India was an object of desire.

Between an object of desire to be appropriated and a beautiful dream that has passed, India as it existed remained largely invisible to the European eye.<sup>11</sup>

Thus when we read the work of novelists who are able to break new ground in depicting aspects of India, for instance by depicting positive Indian characters, or by questioning the motives and methods of

colonialism, but who nevertheless return to stereotypes and indeed perpetuate them, by making cultural practices such as 'thugi' and 'sati' central to their narratives, we as informed readers must remain aware of the dialectic between the acceptable and the iconoclastic, that the novelists themselves operate within while writing popular fiction. The genre itself often involves the simplification of complex historical issues and a deeper understanding of these issues is required for the reader to avoid being taken in by the writers facility in recreating a historical period with characters who can accomplish a process of double-crossing in more ways than one.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Said. E.W, (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*, London:Vintage. pp. 71-2.
  - <sup>2</sup> Toker. Sir F, (1961) *An Account of Thuggee and its Supression*. London: J.M.Dent and Sons. pp. 38-9.
  - <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 72.
  - <sup>4</sup> Hutchins. F, (1967) *The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p.180.
  - <sup>5</sup> Scott. P, (1975) *A Division of the Spoils*, London: Heinemann. p.572.
  - <sup>6</sup> Said. E.W, *op cit.* p. 78.
  - <sup>7</sup> French. P, (1998) *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division*. Harper Collins. p.14.
  - <sup>8</sup> Kipling. R, *Plain Tales From the Hills and Other Stories*. New York Publishers Books Inc. pp.239-46.
  - <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* pp.170-79.
  - <sup>10</sup> Said. E.W, (1991) *Orientalism*, London: Penguin. p.63. (First published Routledge and Kegan Paul 1978.)
  - <sup>11</sup> Sen. G, (Ed) (1993) *Perceiving India Insight and Inquiry*. New Delhi: Sage Publications and India International Centre. p.142.

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