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## White Women's Burden: A Postcolonial Study of Paul Scott's Memsahib in *The Tower of Silence*

### Abstract:

*The Raj literature is mostly dominated by male characters with few negative stereotype women characters featuring in them. The Tower of Silence (1971/2005) by Paul Scott is one such novel which breaks the rule as it is women-centric, dominated by women characters of all ages. Unlike the common notion that Scott is critical of the Raj machinery, this paper will investigate the white women's burden a special technique used by Scott to display the irrevocable British superiority of race, culture and moral obligations. The Tower of Silence (1971/2005) has a vast array of Memsahibs, and this novel connects the story of the previous two novels of the Quartet through these female characters, and it is almost devoid of any native female characters. This paper will study the glorification of the white women's burden to display the vital role played by these Memsahib's in the propagation of the Empire.*

### Key Words:

Memsahib, White Women, Stereotype, Burden, Post-colonial

### Introduction

This study will take into consideration the third novel of the Raj Quartet by Scott (1976), *The Tower of Silence* ([Scott, 1971/2005](#)) with the focus on the white women characters through the post-colonial lens to highlight the burden these women held in fulfilling the imperial mission. Kipling's poem the White Men's Burden published in 1899 brought to light the immense bravery, struggle and sacrifices made by the English men for the establishment and sustainability of the Empire in India, surprisingly there is no mention of the white women in it. Similarly, Holmes (2006) stresses that it was a remarkable feat that a continent half a world away was dominated for some 300 years by a relatively few British, and by the few he means the Sahibs of India (xxi). What was missing in this narrative was the white women commonly known as the Memsahib; a term used for the European lady in India (xxiv). While Hickman (1999) has accounted for the reason of the absence of women from the records of the Empire, as simply that they were not involved in the affair of state so their experience had no value and she points to the fact that that history of diplomacy was very much a hip-story (xxiii). Hence their role in his-story might not feature, but Hickman (1999) further considers their ordinary lives, their resilience and resourcefulness as the greatest expression to be reported and recorded (xxviii).

The *Tower of Silence* published in 1971 is the third book that constitutes The Raj Quartet (1976), it continues the storyline of the *Jewel in the Crown* (1966) and the *Day of the Scorpion* (1968). Set at the backdrop of World War II it frames the British Raj as it approaches its end in India. *The Tower of Silence* (1971/2005) embroiled the fictional hill station of Pankot where the social, political and economic crises engulf the English wives, widows, daughters and missionaries. The Raj was one of the most important eras in Indian history as it resulted in evolving the cultural identity of the colonizers and the colonized. The Raj fascinated the authors who according to [Jain \(2010\)](#) were representing the identity issues and remapping the realities in more than one way. It is a women-centric novel, and the story revolves around the Rose Cottage and its inhabitants revealing the burden these white women held under the Raj obligations and amicably full filling their duties. In contrast to that, there is no native woman who features in the novel as Scott's white Memsahib is placed on a higher moral pedestal. Though the Raj historians have paid scant

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attention to the White ladies of the Empire as such, Scott has concentrated on the assumed racial superiority of the White culture and given voice to the unspoken burden carried by these ladies in *The Tower of Silence*.

This paper will address the white women's burden as depicted in the novel *The Tower of Silence* (1971/2005) from the post-colonial facet addressing different aspects of the oriental study. Usually, the women characters have been missing from the Raj narrative or either projected from a singular stereotype viewpoint, hence this study will try to see them from a different perspective and discuss the burden these women were carrying and serving the Raj in their own right.

## Literature Review

The publication of *The Raj Quartet* (1976) has fascinated readers all around the world attracting innumerable critics, interested in Raj they have commented upon it from a number of perspectives and angles. The query regarding Quartet continued even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Haswell (2000) gives a fresh voice to *Quartet* and a new look to British India as projected by Scott, a voice of a growing number of readers who are keen to enter into a considerable discourse on it by making use of Bakhtin's theory of language and art for its analysis of *Quartet* by means of crafting a primary image or memorial picture with both a front and back dimensions to investigate the theme of the novels, thus succeeding in expanding our understanding of these novels. While Mezely (2006) indicts Scott's mourning for the Raj and considers *The Raj Quartet* (1976) as melancholia and a historical engagement. Scott's British characters are detached from the ordeal of partition, according to Mezely, and they can observe silence at will, whilst the Indians suffer the direct trauma and have no options in the whole affair. Thus Paul Scott's work places even the considerate British characters in a position of physical and emotional imbrications, witnessing of the violence disrupts their chances of arriving at any conclusions. On the other hand, [Micháľková \(2007\)](#) explore the social and political angle in *The Raj Quartet* (1976) and looks at the *Quartet* as a social and political chronicle. Micháľková looks at the Quartet as an investigation into the colonial period in India, especially on the lives and the influence it had on the natives and the British inhabitants. The aim of the study of [Goonetilleke \(2007\)](#) was to investigate the human fate, thus a transmission of new values of life that demonstrates how conflicting man's destiny and moral sense is. He stresses how Scott focuses on human veracity and civility. Whereas Onstoot (2014) examines the commencement of history, race, and colonial culture in the *Quartet*, he provides a critical reconsideration of Scott's exclusive contribution to the co-evolution of British and post-colonial literature in the second half of the twentieth century. [Patil \(2016\)](#) is of the view that *The Quartet* evaluates and examines British imperialism and not to be taken simply as a series of novels. Scott is rather chronicling the demise of the British Raj in the novels and thus initiated his theme of the twilight and the eclipse of the Raj in India. Whilst [Khan \(2017\)](#), in his study, explores the subaltern agency in Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet* (1976) and investigates the status of the subaltern in it. [Al-Khafaji \(2019\)](#) has investigated the *Quartet* as a postmodern discourse tracing the elements of a detective story as various incidents in it remains an enigma for many. As Al- Khafaji has closely investigated the two main crimes, the rape of Daphne Manners and the murder of Ronald Merrick and considers them to be interlinked. He is of the opinion that both the crimes were ritualistic in nature and performed and engineered with the utmost care, he has reversed the linear narrative structure of the novels and astonishingly comes to the conclusion that Scott has been avoiding to admit the superiority of the native in the novels.

It was Bharttaray (2004) who has specifically touched the white female characters of the *Quartet* (1976) and is of the opinion that Scott was an anti-Raj novelist and unlike the popular negative image of the Memsahib projected by Raj authors, Scott looks at the struggle of these women in turbulent times. According to Bharttaray Scott's white women were intellectual and anti-imperialist, thus it is through these images Scott's memsahib differed from the conventional image of the white women that prevailed in Indian fiction. Banerjee (2016) has studied some of the most divergent images of women in Empire literature including *The Quartet* (1976) and contradicts the most popular claim against the Quartet to be a nostalgic account about the demise of the Raj. He has defended Scott for using the allegorical picture, Jewel in the Crown and focuses on the image of a

running girl. He is of the opinion that actually Scott perceives futuristic women running away from the common imperial prejudice and seeking a new, dynamic post-colonial society. This rich literature on *The Raj Quartet* (1976) opens the scope for a further post-colonial investigation especially from the point of view of conventional images of women characters in Scott's novels and to take it as a white women's imperial burden.

### Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the extensive textual reading and analysis of the novel *The Tower of Silence* (1971/2005), in an effort to trace the role of the English ladies and the burden they were carrying, for this investigation, the framework of the post-colonial theory has been used. While [Said's \(1978\)](#) concept of Eurocentrism is the basis of this investigation where the West is considered superior to the East and the Orient is an outsider and a weaker partner for the West; thus the West is what the East is not hence the Orient has been used by the West to define Europe. The concept of binary opposition in the exploration of the cultural identity by [Said \(1993\)](#) is a key factor in identifying the burden carried by these ladies in fulfilling the duties of the Empire.

What is missing in a post-colonial study is the role of women, so this study will take into consideration the Feminist Post-colonial theory. [Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin \(2007\)](#) is of the opinion that patriarchy and imperialism are equivalent forms of domination in colonial culture and that domination effects the position of women within the society. Thus colonialism is used as a tool by the colonizers as a self-representation by exposing their cultural domination over the colonial subjects. Lewis and Mills (2003) argue that the involvement of white women in the Empire was not merely symbolic but rather had a material presence in the running, sustaining and even financing of imperial and colonial projects. [Sen \(2003, p.160\)](#) states that the nineteenth century was obsessed with the image of the Memsahib as propagated by Kipling this role may be stereotypical still it portrayed these women as a superior being working and sustaining in hostile conditions. Hence [Keith \(2010, p.307\)](#) has placed these white women in another dimension by stating that they held an additional duty as well of not letting the colonizer go native and calls it the white women's burden.

So this paper will trace the white women of Scott in *The Tower of Silence* (1971/2005) to examine: (i) How the white female stereotypes are portrayed within the colonial society of Pankot? (ii) How these ladies serve the civilizing mission of the Empire and in return, carry the burden of the Empire? (iii) How are these Memsahibs playing their part within the historical background and context replicating the rules of the patriarchal Raj society? (iv) How these ladies behave and act in the appropriation of their status, upholding the white women's burden?

### Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion

This study will investigate the text to provide the answer to the above questions. Hence the character portrayal of Barbara Bachelor, Edwina Crane, Mabel Layton, Mildred Lyton, Susan Layton and Sarah Layton will be used as a base for the discussion of the white women's burden. These characters can be divided into three main categories the missionaries, the Memsahibs and the young aspiring wives.

The story of *The Tower of Silence* (1971/2005) unfolds through the eyes of Barbara Bachelor an old missionary who retired from her post as superintendent; she is portrayed as a hardworking, dedicated teacher and a God-fearing Christian. She retired after some thirty years serving the mission in India and Scott in this novel explores the British imperialism and the involvement of ladies at its demise through the last days of Miss Bachelor. So in this novel, Scott's main focus remains Miss Bachelor who takes up a room at the Rose Cottage as she had no place to go after her retirement. This loneliness was the price which only white women can pay in the shape of a lifelong commitment to the mission and the Empire.

She believed in the goodwill and good sense of authority of the mission, and for her, the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic had never been as important as the teaching of Christianity ([Scott, 2005, p.2](#)). On arriving in India, she was disappointed with the secular approach of the mission, stressing only the

education of the native children and controlling the zeal for religious conversion after the mutiny of 1857. Barbara had a strong conviction that to bring even one Hindu or a Muslim child to God was very satisfactory and in her capacity, as a missionary was open for her (Scott, 2005, p.3). Vishwanathan (1987, p.12) has pointed to the fact that opening of India to missionaries was a commitment of improvement by the British to the native and a step towards the Evangelizing mission and the burden lay on the shoulders of the white women as here on Ms Bachelor. And bringing the unbelievers into the fold of Christianity was her way of using her position and power as provided by the mission schools where she was appointed, she requested the First Steps in Bible Reading a series of colouring books for the native children and when she found a child colouring Jesus in blue, a colour usually associated with Lord Krishna she simply took away all the blue crayons leaving the children with no option of colouring the sky. [Said \(1978, p.227\)](#) argues that it was the authority before which the nonwhites and even the whites themselves were expected to bend.

Through Miss Bachelor, Scott connects the third novel to the two main incidents of the *Quartet*, in which two white women were assaulted by the native men in Mylapore. One was Edwina Crane again a missionary who had spent years in India and an acquaintance of Barbara as she had replaced Edwina in the school at Muzaffirabad. It was here Barbara came in contact with the picture titled Jewel in the Crown and from where Barbara learned teaching the native children English and loyalty very much like Miss Crane.

Previously Miss Crane had courageously saved the native children and the school building by defending it from the rioters as “she was so sure of God” (Scott, 2005, p.98). After the terrible incident in which Miss Crane’s assistant Mr Chaudhuri had been killed, is used to portray the ultimate heroic gesture to be attached with the White and here Scott places a heroic, brave and self-sacrificing Miss Crane. But her inability to save Mr Chaudhuri led her to commit Sati, an act prohibited by the British in 1892 and its prohibition according to Mortan (2003, p.63) was an act used by the British as a justification of imperialism and promulgate the civilizing mission, is overlooked by Scott and he puts her final act of taking her own life to be associated with her simplicity and purity of the heart and when she was given an “occasion to perform” rose up to the challenge, doing a deed as such summed up the meaning of life in India (p.71). [Parry \(1972, p.294\)](#) is of the opinion that through this act Scott demonstrates her commitment to the burden placed by her mission in India, this is in a confrontation of the civilized mind of the modern west. Thus Crane and Barbara were both servants of the Raj embarking the divine mission, and through these missionary characters, Scott depicts the burden of the white women which they carry at the cost of their lives.

The white women’s burden also features in the duty and commitments of the Memsahib’s in *Tower of Silence* (2005) by two leading ladies of the Pankot British society one was Mabel Lyton and other being Mildred Lyton.

Mabel Lyton was an old widow, and according to [Mahmood \(1983, p.249\)](#) with the civil and military background, she was a symbol of distinction. Though a typical Memsahib, she is depicted by Scott (2005) with some extraordinary qualities and defined by the Anglo Indian society as herself the Army (p.15).

Mabel spends her days in the garden which has been elaborately explained by Scott and according to [Rajeswari \(2015, p.121\)](#) is the conceptualization of ideal India, she works tirelessly weeding and pruning the bushes to keep the garden in good condition just as the British had been trying to do for years in India. For her, the garden was a reminder of the glorious past, but Mabel is disillusioned by the British mission of the well being of India after the 1919 Amritsar incident and withdraws herself from the public life, engrossing in her garden. Hence “Gillian Waller” that she talks in her sleep is her helpless admittance to the 1919 massacre and her regret to stop it, which led her to retreat at the hill station vowing never to return to Ranpur till she dies.

[Tyson \(2006, p.419\)](#) while discussing the pre-eminence of the colonizers argues that their culture and moral values were highly advanced and embarking on this assumed superiority the colonizers remained under pressure as [Orwell \(1936\)](#) said in *Burmese Days* that the white man had to do what the “natives” expected of him. So Mabel Lyton being a superior Memsahib acted the way a white person had to in dire circumstances,

she refused to donate any money to the General Dyer's fund and instead stood at the higher moral ground by sending funds to the Indian families of the victims of Jallianwalla Bagh incident and that was also done anonymously, a feat which only a white person can do. For Mabel her duty to the Raj was supposed to go on even after her death and realizing the hostility of Mildred towards Barbara, she made sure that she gets annuity every year, this was her gift for the old missionary and the way of easing the burden which fell on her shoulders once she let her live in her Rose Cottage. Thus Scott (2005, p.15) gives credit to Mabel and proclaims her to be the "bara mem" to do the unthinkable feat.

The other Pukka Memsahib was Mildred Lyton, daughter of a General, wife of Colonel Lyton, and the daughter in law of Mabel Lyton. The *memsahib* was a resented yet crucial cog within the imperial machine ([Chilton 2003, p.36](#)) and it is through the character of Mildred that Scott portrays the stereotypical wife of the Raj. Like a true Memsahib, she was arrogant, rude and class conscious still all too aware of the burden she was under due to her position in the British Pankot Society. As Macmillan (2018, p.24) states that British women, along with men, were forced onto a stage in India and the women had a leading role in the imperial pageant. Mildred was alone in Pankot as her husband Colonial Lyton was posted out. She had two daughters to look after, to ease the pressure of a lonely life she takes to excessive drinking, a lifestyle that did not match the Colonial's pay. Yet she is respected in the British community, she was involved in every charity run by the imperial wives and enjoyed her position in the hierarchy. Her antipathy for Miss Bachelor was obvious, and she was resentful of Mabel for giving away money to Indian charities. She is not all together portrayed as an ideal role model, and Miss Bachelor was shocked to find her adulterous affair with Captain Coley and considered it as the ugly face of the Raj; still, Scott praises her for some of the extraordinary traits only to be found in white women of the Raj.

With all her shortcomings, she is revealed to be under the moral burden which every white woman in the Raj held. The imperial obligation to act right and do the right as Said (1978, p.37) states that the Empire must be wise, to live up to the expectation of the imperial mission as well as to the expectation of the natives. Macmillan (2018, p.23) points to the fact that the British had a strong conviction that they were in India as rulers and to do their duty. Scott(2005,p. 272) has elaborated on the details as to how Mildred was aware of her duties especially in the absence of her husband, so she went on horseback to thank the natives for presents and goodwill messages for Susan's wedding. Putting aside her derision for the natives she held the squealing black babies, patted the weeping native women, discussed the crops with the village elders, and confers the intimate problems with the wives of the natives who were engaged in the imperial army. All this encouraged the natives to commit young lads for future recruitments. So Mildred like a true Memsahib carried her responsibilities of the Raj in the absence of her husband and was aptly addressed as "Colonel Memsahib". Mildred thus took this exhaustive journey to put up an impressive façade simply to fulfil her moral obligations held by white women which Orwell (1936) puts as that the colonizer wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it.

The daughters of the Raj were carrying the white women's burden in their own right as [Macmillan \(2018, p.76\)](#) states that they were trained to be good wives and mothers in India that also meant being part of the team. So were the two Lyton sisters Sara and Susan, they were first sent back to England for education and latter came back to India to find themselves, suitable husbands. Scott has depicted a typical young Raj daughter in the form of Susan, energetic, beautifully dressed, innocent and seeking the attention of the young eligible bachelors, deciding to marry Teddy Bingham and opting for a lavish imperial wedding. Later she is shown as a typical young widow mourning, giving birth and afterwards ending up remarrying, following an imperial tradition and carrying the white women's burden.

But it is through Sara Lyton that Scott depicts the higher moral grounds through which the Raj daughters operated. Sara though belonging to the daughter of elite, better known as the Lyton girl is an embodiment of a traditional Anglo Indian military family, who is well versed with the rules and conventions yet she is not a conventional girl. She volunteers for the British military and works in a dafter. Scott has shown her to an independent soul who ignores the racial and class distinctions. She is the only one apart from Mabel who treats



Miss Bachelor as a human being. In Srinagar, she displays unthinkable courage to visits Lady Manners and sees baby Parvati in the boathouse. In order to show the true embodiment of a Raj daughter Scott (2005, p.29) defines her as unassuming and intelligent, who took her obligations seriously. It was the burden of these obligations that she works hard to hold the family together when her father was away, and her mother indulged in drinking and when her sister Susan first decided to marry her elder sister's boyfriend or later at Teddy's death suffers from a nervous breakdown. Sarah knew her duty; she looked after Susan's son and even went to see Miss Bachelors in the hospital to console her. Thus she was aware of the man-bap phenomenon as Scott (2005, p.291) points out that it was the father-mother relationship of the Raj with India which gave Sarah an edge to understand what her father felt for the men of his regiment and what Barbara felt for the native students.

The most baffling feature of the *Tower of Silence* is the missing of the native women in the novel and the only logical explanation is that it is a celebration of the white Memsahib and by concretizing on their positive traits no place is left for Scott to even talk about the Other women as [Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin \(2007\)](#) point that the appalling binary system is responsible of the concept of race, and it is this celebration of the burden of the white women's race which leaves no space for the native women. Thus Scott's white women were conventional; still, they are sensitive and intelligent, and they were ready to withstand the white women's burden. Jayawardana (1995, p.3) has pointed to the fact that the white women were considered guardians of purity and race, and they were aware of their duties. Scott had given credit to these women for living an extraordinary life under some unusual circumstances and used silence as a metaphor to show how when his leading ladies were unable to hold the burden gracefully submerges into silence, thus repeatedly Mabel, Susan and later on Barbra slide into silence.

## Findings

This study through analysis and interpretation of the *Tower of Silence (1971/2005)* in the light of the post-colonial theory provides the answer to all the hypothetical questions regarding the white women's burden the Memsahib's were carrying. The narrative discourse provided insight into the ulterior motives of Scott to emphasize the superior sense of commitment on the part of these white women. Scott has shown some of the most extraordinary ladies who are fully committed to the carry on the mission of the Empire in India.

## Conclusion

The above discussion reveals that Scott has celebrated his white women and very convincingly portrayed all the positive traits in them and shown them to be able to carry the burden aptly. For Scott what started as a story of rape turns out to be the story of the celebration of some of the most extraordinary white women standing and guarding the imperial glory by bearing the burden of the Raj. By analyzing the third novel of the Quartet, *The Tower of Silence (1971/2005)* it becomes quite obvious that the white women were captive to the collective self-image and under the burden to uphold the manbap conviction of the Raj. The images of Scott's white women were conventional in fulfilling the duties of the Raj, but they were wholly committed to the mission of the Empire and put up some of the most incredible acts to display their existence, not as a mere tool for the white men, rather an inevitable partner to the very existence and maintaining the Raj authority in India.

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