

Edmund Candler's Abdication : A Britisher's Insights in Colonial India

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The British colonial hold on India which fired the imagination of the English for almost three centuries inspired a vast body of literature known as 'Anglo-Indian Literature'. The tradition of Anglo-Indian Fiction begins roughly from 1890 and the three following decades are important because they produced a number of writers. Among the significant Anglo-Indian writers are Fanny Penny, E. M. Forester, Rudyard Kipling, Paul Scott and Edmund Candler. The earlier generations of Anglo-Indian writers had regarded vast areas of India merely as blank spaces. They took it upon themselves to portray India and its inhabitants from the point of view of a colonizer. But this sense of superiority of the colonizer as opposed to the inferiority of the colonized could not go on forever. As an educator and novelist, Edmund Candler was sympathetic in his portrayal of India and his depictions were largely realistic and sensitive. This research paper tries to elaborate on his political and social realities in colonial India as an outsider-insider.

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Second half of 19th century saw a lot of changes in the colonized India. Indian kept on building their resistance against the oppressive British regimen, whereas, the British adhered to the ideology of implementing various political and economic measures for the consolidation of their rule. From 1870s the indigenous reform movement designed to eradicate social ills in Hindu society gained further impetus in Bengal, Maharashtra and Panjab through the efforts of local reformists. The Arya Samaj movement was also making inroads in Panjab and in some areas of Uttar Pradesh in the 1880s. Bengal and Maharashtra too became grounds of social reform movements.¹

Late 19th century became the hub of mobilizing masses through socio-political messages. Vernacular literature, press and local symbols were used to garner the support of local people. Celebration of local festivals, recitation of folk tales and enactment of plays in Marathi-these were used to forge an aggressive Indian nationalism. After these efforts, the Marathi literature grew rapidly and dramatically. To stop the spread of patriotic fervour, the British government banned Marathi texts which contained themes of political disturbances.² In Bengal, newspapers, magazines and novels for used to express indigenous responses to colonial rule. Bankimchandra's Anandmath with Bande Mataram struck an emotive chord. Newspapers and journals like Bangbasi, Amrita Bazaar Patrika in Bengal and Tilak's Kesari gained immense popularity by invoking patriotic and populist ideals.

Edmund Candler (1874-1926) was an English journalist, educator and novelist. He came to India in 1896 and stayed in the East for about twenty years and took up various teaching positions in order to gain insight into the emerging political and social realities. After his arrival in India, he taught in a school in Darjeeling. He was also a private tutor to a native ruler before taking over as a Principle of Mohindra college in Punjab. Hence, his experiences in Bengal and Punjab provided him ample opportunities to observe fast changing political trends and developments which were unfolding in the early twentieth century. In 1912, His novel *Sri Ram : Revolutionist* was published anonymously. Set in the background of Punjab, the narrative offers an important intersection of politics of text, religion and nationalism in the genre of Anglo-Indian literature located within the imperial tradition of the early twentieth century.

Abdication appeared in 1922. *Sri Ram : Revolutionist* and *Abdication* provide a political context and negotiation with the prevailing political and social conditions which endeavoured to shape imagination in the historical and political background in the early twentieth century.

Abdication was kind of a sequel to *Sri Ram : Revolutionist* and any attempts to read it without reading the former is reductive. The central figure in *Sri Ram : Revolutionist* is an anglicized Indian. This cultural process of 'Anglicization' prevents a cultural assimilation with the ruling community. Sri Ram commits suicide. Skene in the spirit of benevolent Christianity still feels responsible for 'pathetic hybrids'.³ In *Abdication*, Sri Ram's friend and Skene's student, Banarasi Das needs to be rescued. It is his turn to chart out his destiny in the politically fluid situation.

Riley, the editor of Thompsonpur Gazette, came to India seeking quixotic, 'Romantic East'. The First World War has destroyed the notions of glamour, romanticism of empire; and has given way to the emergence of different discourses of nation, race and religion. Though the discourse on the East is still orientalized for its exoticness, it has lost its exotic appeal and attraction in view of current harsh realities. Where is that East romanticized and orientalized by the poets? Riley explores the existing realities, which have destroyed his ideal notions of adventure, and mystery that had initially inspired him to come to the East. The basic question that emerges for the Anglo- Indian officials is how to govern India? Was India to be governed by pen as Henry Lawrence, the Anglo-Indian civil servants had said, or by sword? The question agitated the official mind as the narrative in *Abdication* demonstrates. This theme has been addressed in *Abdication*.

Riley, located in Punjab, realizes that political developments have mitigated the romance and now the 'unglamorous East represents a space for contesting and conflictual identities and culture. The acknowledgement of the fact that the British symbols are perceived meaningless for the natives drive him further to analyze the winds of political changes. The question is whether Queen Victoria's statue stands for the "monument or effigy"⁴. The narrative explores Riley's consciousness and through him the increasingly complex structure of political situation perceived by the Anglo-Indians and the natives. For him it's not the stage of accepting

legitimate grievances but time to let India manage her own affairs. Violence has overcome placidity and the narrative delves into the situation and brings out the various strings and threads connected with politics.

“It must be beastly being run by foreigners”, he thought, “I should hate it. Of course, it was all right before they began to worry about these things. What a bore it must be to be politically correct” (6-7).

This is the confession and admittance on the part of the dominant race that the political consciousness of the subject race has evolved and has become dominant. The educated and politically-conscience people worry about their own place and identities in the changing scenario. 'The trouble now is that we have taught the East to be dynamic, hence the collision. And we have done it with our eyes open. It is the relationship between these two dynamics which needs to be defined. Tension between them exacerbates mutual distrust, hatred and suspicion. Riley wants to cross the space and reach out to the natives. He is in tension with his own society. A witness to various historical events Riley examines the various possibilities to resolve the racial impasse. It is also the exploration of the idea, whether the contemporary political and social structure owes their existence to the official Anglo-India and their racial policies towards the natives.

Banarasi Das, an enthusiast for participating in the political process to achieve glory, attaches himself to various organizations. He is perpetually moving in search of a stable identity to fight for the Motherland. In order to define himself he lends himself to the revolutionaries but fails to pass the test of strength. The narrative is engaged to show the dense complexities within the political system. It explores the development of Hindu- Muslim camaraderie during the Khilafat Movement. What brings them together is the destruction of the British Rule in India. The narrative represents the Khilafat movement as a pan-Islamic movement. In spite of his honourable intentions and devotion to the cause, Banarasi Das's effeminate nature becomes his enemy, and he appears a suspect, a betrayer without his fault in the eyes of the Wahabis, and the Islamic fanatics. The fragile trust and faith cemented between them against the British is destroyed.

In the first novel, there is a move to mobilize regions, for the nationalist ideas travel from Bengal, Maharashtra into Punjab. In *Abdication*, the scope extends to examine the relationship between Hindu- Muslim communities. The narrative represents the mood of the people by showing how the majority of them during the Khilafat and Non-cooperation Period were mobilized to denounce the government and its authority of justice and fair deal. The indigenous politics was no longer confined to the intellectuals and the professionals, but extended to the masses.

The Colonial discourse of Hindus and Muslims discord finds resonance in the narrative of many Anglo- Indian writers. Banarasi Das, in midst of the Muslims and the British opts for the Muslim cause, but through his personal experiences rushes to embrace his former foes, the British in India, which shows that his affinity with the Khilafat cause has been rather superficial. The discourse confirms the British perception of the artificiality of religious harmony. In the background of religious fanaticism, Banarasi Das is taken unawares. The narrative invokes fear and anxiety to highlight the violent conduct and religious bigotry. Bulbul alias Abdul Hakim launches the strategy of recruiting volunteers to go to Istanbul to "unite the jihadis" (4). He is an austere soldier who is willing to go any extent to meet his goal.

Riley breaks the conventions of his own society and gives his opinions by objectively subverting his own colonial enclosure. The official Anglo-India rejects his opinions and he finds himself alienated in the club. He reflects over the race relations and the extent of complete mistrust as any "contact was likely to take the form of collision" (8). A narrative set in the context of political events takes disparate opinions and bemoans why the bureaucracy has refused to acknowledge the flow of ideas and political movements in the country. It is the attitude of people, their traditions, their conventions and their orientations, which bureaucracy has refused to accept. The British in India have become as static as men like Bolton, who have no contact with men and who are engrossed in paperwork. They have become fixed in their established conventions and are unable to see the altered atmosphere. The natives agitate and Riley takes note of it, "I'm not justifying it. I'm explaining it" (47). The air of apprehension, scepticism, and complete wariness engulfs both the colonists and the colonized. In such an uncooperative, contradictory environment, the

other elements emerge that destroy the whole system and vitiate the political and social atmosphere on the basis of persistent practice of rumour-mongering.

It is the deployment of language, twisted metaphors which heighten the passions of people, leading to an aggravation of already stained relationships. Men like Barkatullah and Banarasi Das are created in the atmosphere of political and racial hatred. These 'hybrids' offer a critique of the colonial educational policy. Barkatullah, is an inveterate opportunist, without any conscience and scruples embezzled money. He has been extremely successful in the eyes of public by writing scurrilous articles in his paper *Itihad*. He becomes Gandhi's disciple and in the manner of Mark Antony destroys Gandhi's discourse of non-violence before the masses and becomes a popular hero. The British in India punish him for spreading poison and their policy of punishment turns him into a hero. The Extremists, too, have taken immense advantage by inventing circulating, advertising, unrolling rumours and propagating activities of the disgruntled persons who become public heroes on the basis of their shallow rhetoric. The narrative also unfolds the shrewd manipulation of dynamics of power by some disgruntled persons to further their personal interests. In the scenario the Moderates have been pushed aside as they have lost ground to the Extremists. Gandhi is a 'soul force' but for Riley it is alarming to note as to what extent the government and Gandhi are responsible for the creation of 'riffraffs' who refuse to see the proper perspective and are bent upon deliberately creating anarchy. They are active in concocting 'grievances' in order to marshal support among people to inflame discontentment and hostility against the British in India. 'Murder Europeans', becomes a rallying cry. Topi Walla an abuse flung in reckless abandon reflects hatred for Topi - a symbol of British colonialism. Propaganda has affected so much the Skene admits 'how much they believe of these rumours. I would give a good deal to see the Raj through the eyes of Banarasi Das.' Such a picture through the 'reversal of gaze' would be at variance with the colonizer's image and conception. The forces of vernacular papers correspond to bazaar rumours and the writers mindlessly reiterate this material venomously in newspapers. Riley says about the government "They are afraid to govern and daren't abdicate." And he seeks the unadulterated East, the traditional, original conventional East

without the influence and impact of the British authority and direction.

In the narrative, the treatment of political developments is not chronological, by identifying them in a succession, one event following on another, nor is thematic. Right through the narrative deals with the historical developments alluded to from the end of the First World War to the Non-cooperation movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. The main focus in the work is on the government's recruiting policy in the war, E. S. Montagu, the secretary of State's famous declaration of 20 August 1917 (which emphasized the general development of self-governing institutions in India), the famine riots in 1918, the Montague-Chemsford report in 1918, the Rowlatt Bill passed into law on 21 March 1919, the Jallianwala Massacre and Martial law and the Khilafat and the Non-cooperation movements. The account is an imaginative reconstruction of the past by highlighting by the interplay of personalities and events. It is the study of the official mind of the British in India, its perception of what was going on in the country and the evolution of their policies. The impact of their policies on Indians and the convoluted entanglements are interpreted and narrated which throw light on various dimensions of the relationship that subsists between Indians and Anglo-Indians at the critical junction when events were moving fast. Riley often intervenes in the narrative and he departs from it to leave for the hills, living among the natives.

The narrative digresses from the genre of Anglo-Indian fiction as the inhabitants of India enter into the imagined space and are engaged in inscribing themselves. In *Sri Ram: Revolutionist*, India is an abstraction, an idea that the inhabitants of the country are unable to define. In Candler's second novel *Abdication* India's identity becomes concretized, and the objectives of the political movement though the contradictory are evident. The natives through their 'reversal of gaze' challenge the prevailing colonial discourse and assert their presence within the Anglo-Indian genre by their varied, counter affirmations and discourses. These are neither nameless nor faceless passive beings but personalities deployed by Candler to play active part in his narrative. It also brings to our attention the movement of ideas across the space and as a consequence the emergence of Indian 'nation' in the text. The idea of India is imagined

in the process. The British-Indian encounter in the realm of political text emerges in the genre of the Anglo-Indian literature.

The debates centering around the colonial discourse hold the novel as the most significant 'artifact' and an agent for circulating knowledge, translating the local, indigenous cultural processes and perpetually engaged in the process of their discovery and identity. Firdous Azim studies the novel as an 'imperial genre'. The British had set the Imperial agenda. It is in the Imperial ideological location that Candler's text is situated in order to study the literary and cultural processes which shaped the novel which also negotiated with emerging heterogeneous political processes in the early twentieth century.

Thus, it is safe to say that Edmund Candler succeeds in depicting the real struggles of Indians in the colonial era. On the cusp of social and political changes, the nationalist movement was sweeping through the country. The religious ties were strained. All these realities are sympathetically captured by the pen of the novelist. He has shaped the narrative in such a way that history as well as his subject are equally justified.

References

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4. Edmund Candler, *Abdication*, London : Constable, 1992. All references are from this text only. ★