THE TOWERS OF SILENCE
The Towers of Silence, the third volume of The Quartet, is what Scott calls his slow movement. The quietest, most domestic, most contemplative and elegiac novel of The Quartet, it serves as a bridge between the excitements of The Day of the Scorpion and the climax of violence and resolution of A Division of the Spoils. It goes still deeper into the psychological complexities of the characters caught in the grip of irreversible change generated by the World War II now entering its concluding stages. The novel charts a general change suggesting an inexorable movement towards the decay and dissolution of the Raj. For the British in India the far reaching political and social changes brought about by the war disrupt the old certainties and assumptions. The emerging order undermines established convictions and affects thereby the attitudes and mindstyles of the British which, varying in their kind and honed by the Indian experience, act as determinants of the Indo-British relationship. But unlike the preceding novels, which accord an identity of treatment of both the English and the Indian political and personal stances, The Towers limits itself exclusively to the English side of the colonial equation. It deals with the patterns of relationship within the British community. To that end, the novel, as K.B Rao puts it, microscopically examines the world of sahibs and memsahibs, intricate and hierarchical. The world of The Towers—the imaginary town of Pankot—is largely a world of the females, for most of the males are at the front deciding the fate of the war and of the Raj. The fortunes of the Raj are reflected in the web of interpersonal relationship of the Layton family which, strained under the weight of the collective change, constitutes the centre of the Pankot society.
The novel posits yet another woman character—the retired missionary teacher Barbara Batchelor—as the principal focalizer; it is through her eyes that the narrator sees most of the events that make up the story of *The Towers*. Upon her retirement as the superintendent of the Protestant mission schools in Ranpur, Barbie comes to stay at Rose Cottage in response to an advertisement by Mabel Layton offering to share accommodation with a single woman. Even with their different modes of behaviour they hit it off as a compatible pair. In fact, Barbie tends Mabel with a deep sense of devotion and loyalty. This, however, disturbs the plans of Mildred who, in the absence of her husband, a POW at the moment, hopes to stay at the Cottage with her daughters Sarah and Susan. Frustrated in her plans she gets angry with Barbie. The station rallies round her but fails to accept her dependence on the bottle. While in Pankot, Barbie reads of the attack on her friend and colleague Edwina Crane as well as Daphne and sees preparations made for the safety of the life and property of the station in the wake of the 1942 Movement-related violence. Later, she hears of the tragic death of her friend. The novel gives a fuller account of the life of Teddie, especially his courtship of Susan and his friendship with Merrick who appears as an intelligence officer of the army, entrusted with the task of following the growth of the INA. Reference is made in some detail to his honeymoon. Barbie gets an invitation to the wedding reception of Susan for which she has been preparing with a gown and a set of gifts. Teddie dies soon after. Not much later, Mabel dies
shocking Susan into a premature labour. Barbie who has been at a friend's at the time wants to hasten back but is restrained by friends who want her to avoid a confrontation with Mildred. A confrontation does take place when Barbie reminds Mildred of her obligation to bury Mabel at the place as desired by the latter. Mildred not only snubs her but also asks her to vacate the Cottage. Homeless, again, Barbie takes up temporary shelter with the Peplows. Lack of sufficient space at her new residence denies her the comfort of bringing along her trunk, her lifelong companion and a permanent encumbrance. She asks Sarah, who has been always considerate to her, to keep the trunk in the gardener's shed of the Cottage. She takes leave of the Cottage but the enmity of Mildred does not leave her. She returns the gift of the apostle spoons. Deeply hurt, she plans to offer them to the regimental mess. Calling on Kevin Coley for the purpose, she stumbles on him locked in a sexual embrace with Mildred. Escaping the adulterous scene, she hurries in pouring rain only to be taken ill with pneumonia and eventually hospitalized. Susan, having given birth to a son and lapsed into a post-natal depression, has similarly been hospitalized and is being psychoanalyzed.

When Barbie recovers, changes are afoot. The Laytons plan to close the Cottage and take a month's holiday at Calcutta so that Sarah can have an abortion and Susan a diversion from familiar surroundings. The rosebeds are turfed over to make way for a tennis court. As Barbie goes to the Cottage to collect the trunk, she meets Merrick who has obviously come to call on the Laytons. Merrick talks of the Mayapore incident and of his conviction.
about Kumar's guilt. Barbie gives him the Jewel-in-the-Crown picture. He helps her to load the trunk on a tonga. While returning, the tonga overturns in an accident, seriously injuring her and scattering her history sealed up in the trunk. She ends up in the hospital demented and disoriented. Later, she dies while watching the vultures on the towers of silence.

What is immediately noticeable about the story structure of The Towers is the peculiarity of its temporal organization. It goes further back into history than any other volume of The Quartet. Indeed, it begins with the retirement of Barbie in the year of 1939 and comes up to 1945, the year which sees "the election of a socialist government in London and the destruction of Hiroshima by a single atom bomb" (464). By dealing with the total duration of the World War II, the novel retraverses the political events already covered by the preceding two novels. The Jewel, for example, has its historical moorings in the Quit-India Movement of 1942 whereas The Scorpion has in the rise of the INA in 1943-44. These are important political and military landmarks of the war years. The Towers incorporates into its body both the events even as it moves beyond the previous novels at either end. The reiteration is really necessitated by the shifts in the locale: with each change of place, new characters come up interpreting and reinterpreting events from a variety of angles. And with every alteration of the narrating or focalizing subject, there is a corresponding change in the time-frames of the figural discourses. The locale in The Towers is Pankot which throws up new figures who touch upon those facets of the political event which interest them and upon such points of time as are appro
priate to these facets. This back and forth movement in time is reminiscent of Conrad’s literary technique. Marlow who is not the sole narrating agent of Lord Jim tells of those years of Jim’s life with which he is acquainted through his hesitations and questionings. A part of his life is also narrated by an external agent. The time-frames of these competing discourses very often clash and collide. In The Towers an external narrator relates the developments in the Indian polity since 1939. It refers, among other things, to the effects of the resignation of the provincial ministries in 1937 and the Movement of 1942—the political framework of The Jewel—as well as the conversation between Kasim and Malcolm, the Governor of the province, which occurs in the early part of The Scorpion. While these developments occur in the censuring attitudes of a common Englishman, the growth of the INA is traced by Merrick. The subject dealt with gingerly earlier finds a carefully researched explication in the shape of an address by Merrick to Teddie’s army unit. He offers new angles to the problem that the INA poses to strategic concerns of the British although such presentation is not without his private bias. He makes, for instance, a deep study of its size and strength and comes up with a shrewd assessment of its psychological impact on the morale of the regular army. He takes particular note of the emotional fervour of its cadres conferring a sort of legitimacy on their acts of treachery and the extenuating circumstances of the desertion of the commission by a few officers. At the same time he exposes a couple of central dilemmas that confront the INA, namely, its acceptability by the leaders of the Congress and the real motive of the Japanese, on whose support they depend, in the event of an English defeat on the Indian soil.
In *The Jewel* the political events have a determining influence on the course of the fictional events in the sense that all of its principal characters are caught up in their vortex. In *The Towers*, the political situations, despite their researched quality, do not involve the characters in that direct sort of way although, indirectly, they have a profound impact on their personal lives. Teddie's death results from his involvement with a couple of INA soldiers, but the death as a major thematic concern has already been exhaustively referred to in *The Scorpion*. *The Towers*, therefore, mentions his death only in passing. What is important is the unsettling effect that it has on Susan leading to her madness. Similarly, the fact of John Layton's having been taken prisoner of war by the axis powers disturbs Mildred to such an extent that her social behaviour is affected. The textual strategy in depicting the events of the war years in terms of loss and dissipation has been to foster a sense of foreboding of the approaching decay. The recapitulation of the Mayapore event emphasizing its human tragedy further attests to this: "This sense of danger, of the sea-level rising, swamping the plains, threatening the hills, this sense of imminent inundation, was one to which people were now not unaccustomed..." (36).

The to and fro movement of time assumes still more stylistic importance in the delineation of the novel's fictional foreground. *The Towers* relives the major kernel events of the earlier novels by either filling them in with new details elided previously or expanding them with new satellites. *The Scorpion*, for example, ends with the events of Barbie preparing to leave
Rose Cottage and Susan attempting in her shocked state of withdrawal to kill her baby. *The Towers*, however, begins with the coming down of Barbie to the hill station of Pankot and with the brief restatement of the history of the Laytons. The repetition of events and criss-crossing of the story-time are consequent on their reorganization from different points of view. The introduction of the Mayapore affair continues, for example, what Burjorjee calls 'the hunting presence of the rape'; the attack on and the subsequent death of Crane send Barbie to a speculation of the metaphysical hollowness of their lives. It establishes relations of similarity between the two. Likewise, the marriage of Teddie and Susan, a major kernel event in the preceding novel, recurs - but the new emphasis is less on the ceremony itself than on Teddie's courtship and his honeymoon. The marriage taking place in 1943 finds a mention in the novel in the shape of a newspaper announcement of the engagement and occasional remarks by other characters. The courtship of the pair occurring at a point subsequent to the narration of the marriage ceremony in the arrangement of events is an extended analeptic segment. A suitor of Sarah first, Teddie switches his attention to Susan and falls in love with her. This change of heart on Teddie's part evokes a unanimous censure from the women of the station which constructs Sarah's subjectivity as set off from and opposed to that of Susan's in its reflective capacity. It is this capacity that detects Teddie's single-track mind in his approach to the problems of life. His desires and drives are
directed at achieving a *sense of unity* with the standards he has set before himself: "... to date... he never did anything, never would do anything, except according to the rules laid down for what man of his class and calling should do and for how and why he should do it" (125).

Teddie's amorous fling with Sarah, characterized by his wholehearted application to the business at hand, is an attempt more at breaking loose of the stereotypes of a humdrum life by doing something unroutined than at satisfying some inner urge of the soul. This explains his formulaic approach to love.

(Sarah) thought, too, that his excitement was caused less by the effect kissing her had on him than by the feeling he had of breaking out, to the degree that was allowable, from the strict confines of his normal pattern of behaviour. But a man like Teddie didn't kiss a girl as he was kissing her just for the hell of it (123).

The experience leaves him with a distinct feeling of boredom and goads him therefore to turn to Susan. As in Sarah so in Susan, Teddie in reality pursues an idea of happiness. In his honeymoon to which the novel moves next, Teddie discovers his own happiness without bringing his partner to the same level of happiness.
The painful realization of Teddie is corroborated by Sarah who is frankly surprised by Susan's choice of Teddie as her life-partner: "Susan seemed to have put out her hand and picked the toy she decided she liked best" (124). The motivations for Susan for agreeing to the marriage even when she is not sure of her feelings for Teddie have already been gone into in *The Scorpion*.

This particular segment also deals with Teddie's relationship with Merrick. Merrick has been the best man in Teddie's marriage at Mirat, and been his companion in the war that claims his life. In *The Scorpion* he is the intradiegetic narrator who briefs Sarah on the conditions surrounding Teddie's death. The *Towers* moves to a point which is anterior to these, i.e. the beginning of a casual acquaintance between the two as they come to share a room in the regimental mess. This is also the time when the persecution of Merrick for his alleged excess in the Mayapore case begins. Someone places a broken ladies' bicycle and some cabalistic writing in front of the mess in order to remind him of the evidence in the form of a cycle that he has planted to convict Kumar. Teddie fails to divine the significance of the signs and chooses him as a last minute replacement as the best man. A stone thrown at Merrick in the continuation of his persecution hits Teddie and becomes one of the three incidents that almost spoil the marriage. This specific incident, reported previously, recurs later in the novel when Barbie enquires of Sarah about it.
The novel takes a break, as it were, to make a proleptic statement about Teddie's death as springing from his association with Merrick.

It is possible, perhaps, for death to come slowly, even gently, civilly, as if anxious to make the whole thing as painless as possible. One thinks of death at this juncture because Merrick represented Teddie's. Coupled with the civility and consideration a certain reluctance could be detected, almost as if Merrick knew and kept giving Teddie a chance to pack his bags and go before a meeting actually took place (146-147).

The future alluded to here has really become a past because the death of Teddie has been the subject matter of one of the storylines of *The Scorpion*. What the present volume offers, on its own, is a reconfirmation of the mindset of Teddie. As a secondary narrator, Merrick has presented Teddie as a man wedded to the paternalist military tradition. Teddie does really see himself as such. Symbolically, however, the segment encodes an important antithesis between naivety and maturity. There is an increasing feeling that Teddie wears his regimental commitments and class differences naively, as a mask against the superior intelligence and efficiency of Merrick.

The multiple folding of time is visible, again, in the event
of the wedding reception of Susan. The marriage as a kernel can be broken down into several constituent microsequences such as the courtship of the pair, the wedding ceremony itself, the honeymoon, the reception, the pregnancy of Susan and finally the birth of a male child. Of these, as has been noted, the first, the third and the fourth are unique to The Towers in the sense that they occur for the first time here but not in a sequential order. The others originating in The Scorpion are repeated in The Towers. The reception scene is not without substantial references to Sarah's visit to Lady Manners while holidaying with her family in Kashmir prior to Susan's marriage. While talking to Sarah, Barbie intuits that the gift of the book of poetry by Gaffur to the Nawab of Mirat has been the suggestion of the wise old lady. These two events have been reported in the early part of The Scorpion in the letter of Lady Manners to her friend Lili Chatterjee. The other events which are reintroduced in The Towers include Mabel's death, Susan's madness and her attempt to kill her son, Sarah's visit to Calcutta to call on the injured Merrick and Barbie's leave-taking of Rose Cottage.

In re-dealing with the previously engaged themes such as these, the novel brings out new areas of relevance. The death of Mabel is restated, for example, for its shattering effect on Barbie. It not only renders her homeless but, more importantly, adds to the list of her failures. From a chance remark that Mabel shall not go to Ranpur until she is buried, Barbie concludes
that her friend wants to be buried in the churchyard of St. Luke's in Ranpur because her second husband has been buried there. When arrangements are made, upon her death, to bury her at St. John's in Pankot, Barbie confronts Mildred with her failure to honour the promise. As a loyal friend Barbie finds it incumbent upon herself to give Mabel a decent burial at a place of her choice. With this in view she entreats Mildred:

"Please, Mildred, she asked for so little but she did ask for this. Why should I ask for it? Why should I make up a story? I'll do anything everything you say but please don't bury her in the wrong grave" (284). Mildred not only turns down the proposal for its impracticality but, irritated by Barbie's wild ramblings, evicts her from the room by throwing water on her. The failure to stand by her friend continues to rankle her.

Similarly, the madness of Susan, the high point of which has been her attempt to kill her son within a circle of fire, is re-examined in The Towers right from its onset till its treatment by psychoanalysis. It is only after Susan's hospitalization and Barbie's leave-taking of Rose Cottage that the novel achieves a unilinear movement of the story. Beginning with Barbie's expedition to present the returned apostle spoons to the officers' mess and ending with her death in the Ranpur hospital, The Towers offers a sequence of events which is original to the novel. This is the narrative point to which the novel progresses from all that has preceded, including the events reported in The Jewel and The Scorpion. Indeed, The Scorpion and The Towers can be regarded as a pair of
companion novels within the larger framework of *The Quartet*. Taken together, they complement each other by bringing about a sense of completion in their story component. *The Towers*, therefore, takes multiple plunges into the temporal frame of *The Scorpion*. The story movement in the novel is repeatedly arrested by the iteration of events as well as by descriptive pauses. Large tracts of figural thoughts occupy the space between the events bringing to the fore the importance of figural perspectives in *The Towers*.

Long parts of *The Towers* are focused through Barbie. As a result, she is the predominant focalizer in the novel. Her life and history, because of her narratorial status, form an important part of the narrative structure. As a character-focalizer, Barbie not only 'sees' the fractures opening up in an otherwise homogenous Pankot society but also becomes herself a minor reason of such fissure. The use of Barbie as the principal focalizer of *The Towers* adds to the narrative variety of *The Quartet*. It may be noted that with each successive volume since *The Jewel*, there has been a gradual narrowing down of the secondary narrating agents. The plethora of first-person accounts of the character-narrators in *The Jewel* is replaced by a multiplicity of figural focalizations in *The Scorpion*. In either case, the authority of the central narrator is crosscut by these figural mediations. In *The Towers*, however, the narration is almost fully conducted by the central narrating agent, identified
earlier as the Traveller or the Writer. The agent comes under the name of the Stranger in the novel: "From the curious quality of flatness of their eyes a stranger arriving in Pankot and warned to look out for it might have told which men among several in civilian clothes were Pankot Rifles officers" (43). The presence of the narrator is manifest in the collage of the newspaper reports which provide a chronological update on the Mayapore incident and the engagement of Teddie and Susan. A common link is thus established between the three novels. The narrator is most overtly present again in the second chapter of the book, which deals with Teddie's relationship with the Layton sisters and Merrick. A dissonant psycho-narration seeking to capture the mind of Teddie enters into a playful conversation with the narratee. As a result, he becomes an object of the narrator's scrutiny. This is a rare enough instance in The Quartet where the narrator directly judges the characters and is indulgently mocking towards them.

But in real life Teddie was upright, on his feet and his eyes open, alight with the pleasure if not the pain of being in love— or what passed for it in his opinion; and his opinion was the only one that could matter to him and was in this sense as good as anyone else's. Allow him that happiness, and the illusion that it sprang from Susan and not from an idea (124).
The narration is still more humorous in describing Teddie's sexuality and his dating of Susan, but the levity soon gives way to seriousness as the novel moves to his relationship with Merrick.

This alternately humorous and serious narrator is responsible too for depicting the settings of the novel and introducing the major characters who people the novel. The constant shifting from the external event to the internal consequences determines the narrative profile of the novel. The presentation of the figural consciousness on an external perspective is incidentally a rare feature of the novel's narrative situation. The Towers is basically a novel with a predominant figural perspective. Exploration of the minds of the characters through their own language assumes increasing primacy in The Towers. Thus, whenever the central narrator attempts to probe the figural mind, it is always oriented through internal focalization. External narration focalized internally distinguishes The Towers from the other volumes. Even where there is no personified focalizer, as in the recounting of the tide of political events since 1939, the language indicates that it is the eye of a common Englishman that colours the information conveyed. The neutrality of the narrator is so well-established that he cannot be said to be the originator of the lopsided political views. Elsewhere, the subject of narration functions at times as the focalizing agent so that the language of the external narrator is regulated by the
feelings and perceptions of the characters. Mildred, for example, hardly makes any attempt at concealing her enmity of Barbie. Believing Barbie to have been rumour-mongering on Susan’s psychiatric withdrawal, she works herself up into a controlled anger: "The name... was certainly not one to be bandied about by a retired missionary, an interfering woman whose tiresomeness had reached its apogee and was no longer to be borne" (299-300).

For the observation of the externally visible gestures of Mildred, the narrator is responsible; but it is Mildred's focalization that observes Barbie and sums her up as an 'interfering', 'tiresome' woman. The Towers has many such figurally focalized sections of short durations. Although the focalization in the novel may on this account seem to be 'multiple', it is in fact 'fixed', limited as it mostly is to Barbie. The actions as well as the characters as the performative agencies of such actions are seen through Barbie.

She is a silent spectator of the flow of events that grips the Pankot society. The assault on Crane, for example, has a disturbing effect on the society, eliciting varying responses from its members. But it is the view of Barbie, an outsider to Pankot, that is privileged over that of the others. Her status as an outsider is made clear when she is given a grudging
invitation to Susan's wedding reception or physically rebuffed in her attempt to intercede in the matter of Mabel's burial. These events, over which she has no control, send her in each case to a state of dejection from which she not only reflects on the nature of the events but also sets up a paradigmatic relationship with the characters. The representation of Barbie's conscious and unconscious subjectivity is a key part of The Towers.

It is significant that The Towers traits Barbie as a woman given to 'ceaseless chatter'. Her garrulity becomes often a reason of intense embarrassment. Whenever she is denied an opportunity for her loquacity, she falls enthusiastically upon 'imaginary conversations' (214). They take the form of a silent address to Mabel even when the latter is absent. The other mode of channeling her feelings is through letters. She is a "prodigious letter writer" (26). The Towers reproduces not less than six of her letters. The ones addressed to Crane are never replied to, while the ones for Helen Jolley are never posted. The letters have a function similar to that of diaries: they give an insight into the psyche of the person writing them. Questions of religious faith and disbelief dominate the tenor of Barbie's letters. Writing to Helen she wonders,

Is the universe an unprincipled design? Does God weep somewhere beyond it crying to its prisoners to free
themselves and come to Him? If it is all explained by chemistry, that chemistry is majestic. It can only lead to the most magnificent explosion, to which God will harken while we burn and disintegrate and scatter into pieces (241).

The recurrent religious imagery in her self expressions highlights Barbie's moorings which in turn set the perceptual framework of her own self-apprehension presented in the novel through a mix of consonant psycho-narration and quoted monologue. The external narrator who introduces Barbie in the opening part of The Towers soon effaces himself by fusing with her consciousness:

...Barbie's secret sorrow lay... in the fact that in recent years she had felt her faith loosening its grip. She believed in God as firmly as ever but she no longer felt that he believed in her or listened to her. She felt cut off from Him as she would if she had spent her life doing something of which He disapproved (12).

The mental verbs such as 'felt', 'believe' etc. betray the reporting presence of the narrator but the reported phrases denote inner happenings in such a manner that the gap between the narrating subject and the narrated subject is hardly noticeable. The relationship is not, however, always one of cohesion;
the narrator at times distances himself from Barbie by a tone which is ironic. Mabel's reticence, it has been noticed, is structured as a counterpoint to Barbie's talkativeness. Barbie rightly divines this withdrawn lifestyle as a burden of darkness on Mabel's soul and therefore prays for strength to lift the burden.

She prayed for longer than usual, hoping for a revival of that lost sense of contact. But it did not revive. She could feel the prayers falling flat, little rejects from a devotional machine she had once worked to perfection. The prayers hardened in the upper air, once so warm, now so frosty, and tinkled down. But she pressed on, head bowed, in the hailstorm (35).

The event of the prayer in the passage is summarized 'duratively' in that it is organized on a pattern of persistence. The particular instance of prayer in the total period recounted is only one of many; it is longer than usual, and different from the ones held earlier in its quality of failed communion. The diegetic summary of the passage thus marks out a distancing position for the narrator which heightens the acuteness of Barbie's sense of frustration. 'The secret sorrow' of the earlier passage is continued here signifying a stable characterization of Barbie. With Mabel, she finds a real sympathetic bond. The loyalty and devotion with which she serves her antagonize Mildred and jeopardize
her own private interests. Professionally, however, she idealizes Crane. Her valour and competence become a source of both envy and adulation for her. Crane's suicide following a murderous attack on her shocks Barbie into realizing the depth of the despair that lies underneath the veneer of Crane's confidence.

She wept because the gesture that had seemed sublime revealed an Edwina who was dumb with despair not purified by love. Revelation of Edwina's despair uncovered her own, showed its depth, its immensity. For herself she could have borne the knowledge, would have to bear it. For Edwina it must have been a cruel thing. Edwina had always seemed so strong and sure in God, in God's purpose, so richly endowed that just to be near her was to share her gift and feel one's doubt turn sour for want of nourishment.

The technique of the passage is still psycho-narration; but because of the overwhelming presence of the figural idioms, the passage lapses into sentences of narrated monologue. A parity of sorts is established between Barbie and Crane on the strength of their mutually sharing a common despair. To Barbie, however, it is doubly painful, for it involves a disillusionment, a sudden glimpsing into the hollowness of her ideal. The key words with a religious tint, such as, 'God's purpose!', occur in Barbie's stock of words rather than in that of the narrator. That it is so is
corroborated when she verbalizes her feelings in a monologue which helps her, additionally, to correlate herself with Sarah.

Barbie thought.... she looks at my old fond and foolish face and sees through it, I think, sees below the ruination, hears behind the senseless ceaseless chatter, sees right down to the despair but also beyond to the terrific thing there really is in me, the joy I would find in God and which she would find in life, which come to much the same thing. But if she's not careful she will find herself not living, just helping others to. Perhaps that's all I've ever done. If so it isn't much, it isn't enough I don't suppose. Especially if I ask myself: How many of those children did I truly bring to Jesus? (204)

This quoted monologue highlights Barbie's failure on the personal and professional counts. Personally, her life has been a movement towards a gradual weaning away from God. As a missionary teacher, she has always considered proselytizing - bringing heathen children to the ways of Jesus - as the foremost part of her professional goal. She is held back from achieving her goal by the secular attitude of the institution that encourages education rather than missionary activity. The joy embodied in God, therefore, eludes her. In this passage the external narrator merely names the thinker and her mental locution and then lets Barbie monologize. The effacing narrator still maintains, as the
surrounding text indicates, the same gently mocking detachment from Barbie even as these several segments continue to establish the set of values by which Barbie tries to live. It becomes, again, the yardstick by which she evaluates relationships and experiences. Stumbling upon the love-making of Mildred and Kevin, she is horrified out of her wits not only because it is far from an ideal sexual relationship, but also because such a union, by its joylessness, is a travesty of the divine design: "She was drawn ... by the creature's moans and cries (and) saw in the gloom the creature herself, naked, contorted, entwined with another, gaunt and male silently active in a human parody of divine creation" (359).

Barbie, because of her sexual puritanism, finds the alliance between the pair a thoroughly immoral affair. Barbie brings this puritanism to reflect upon the morality of the colonial situation in one more monologue. To her, the colonial system with its built-in coercive methods militates against the purpose of God. The attempt at rationalizing the British presence in India is a motive-hunting, a bid to cloak the nakedness of raw ambition.

And so it will be (Barbie thought) so it will be in regard to our experience here. And when we are gone let them colour the sky how they will. We shall not care. It has never truly been our desire or intention to colour it permanently but only to make it as cloudless for our selves as we can. . . . But we have no
purpose that God would recognize as such, dress it up as we may by hastily closing our wrap to hide our nakedness and convey a dignity and a distinction...

(287).

In this monologue as well as in those that surround it, there is a consistency in the imagery by which Barbie transcribes her apprehension of the reality around her. The imagery is invariably culled from her problematic relationship with God and society.

In the presentation of the military township of Pankot, the novel creates a microcosm of English society complete with the sense of rigid class distinctions. The choice of a military station as the locale of the novel is significant in the sense that the class hierarchies are best institutionalized in the military tradition. The official rank of the husbands determines the social position of the wives. In the absence of the male military officers, Pankot offers a "female hierarchy" (64). Isobel Rankin, as wife of the area commander, seats herself on the topmost layer of the hierarchy while wives of other officials including Mildred are placed in a graduated scale of diminishing social position. In such a circle Barbie, who has been a mere teacher and is professionally redundant to begin with, has absolutely no place. Because they are teachers both, there is a semic homology between Crane and Barbie. But unlike
Crane who is granted at least a condescending accommodation on the lowest rung of the Mayapore civil life, Barbie is a complete outsider to Pankot. The station views her stay at Rose Cottage as a usurpation of Mildred's claim to the property. The frequency at which the novel presents Barbie's loneliness, her insecurities, her ill-health and her sense of waste and futility evidences that she serves an important narrative purpose. As an outsider she looks at Pankot - a microcosm of the Raj-watching - the disruption of its stable bases and glimpsing epiphanically the dissolution of the Raj symbolized in the image of vultures hovering over the dead in the Parsi cemetery. Barbie is the marginal, the traditionally passive and inarticulate speaking on the mainstream, the centre. The dominance of the overtly peripheral and feminine points of view is explained by the historical and cultural conditions of the novel's production. It is no mere coincidence that the production of The Towers is historically specific to the first upsurge of the feminist thinking. Since women have always been a marginal group, Barbie and for that matter Crane take a hard look at the male-dominated society initiating a feminist interpretation of the patriarchal basis of colonialism. The repetition in The Towers of many of the events introduced earlier is ultimately accountable to this. Barbie as the major focalizer in the novel chooses to see them from her perspective as well as to find out the interconnections between them.

It is appropriate that The Towers throws up a virtual
gallery of life-like women characters. In fact, one of the strong points of The Quartet is the portrayal of its women. On the one hand it presents stereotypical models of women who crystallize the colour and sex consciousness of the Raj. The multiple instances of racial insults to Indians such as the offensive avoidance of Kumar at the Gulab Chands' (The Jewel 121), the objection to Ahmed and Susan's Indian ayah travelling first class even after Indian independence (A Division 691-694) etc. are perpetrated by British women. Even within their own community they erect barriers between themselves by consecrating the class differences. The disapproval with which they view Sarah's anti-Raj position or Mabel's eccentricities is a reaction against what they perceive as a threat to their group identity. The fall in Daphne's reputation is also attributable to this. She becomes the centre of attention and sympathy after her rape. From this position she is dislodged when she refuses to either opt for an abortion or identify her assailants and deny the station the pleasure of a public revenge. She ends up as an object of contempt. Even her aunt, Lady Manners, once a lady of social eminence, is relegated for having housed the illegitimate child of Daphne to the farthest edge of the society where she lives out her life like a pariah. As against this, on the other hand, The Towers individually etches the four Layton women—Mabel, Mildred, Sarah and Susan as well Barbie—who respond to India as Max Beloff rightly points out, "with devotion, affection, indifference or even hatred but it is an individual not a collective response."
The group values cherished and perpetuated by the common Pankot women of the British community are produced by the psychosis of a possible Japanese invasion which brings them together in a self-contained circle of the society. Such a society with its cloistered outer casing is homologous with the upcountry English club that figures prominently in *The Jewel* and later in *A Division*: both are insulations against experience. Unable to channel their prejudices born of such insulations, they take it out among themselves. Bitchiness becomes the common enough feature of the Pankot life. The novel, it is interesting to note, takes for its object not the actual battlefield— not a single shot is heard in the novel—but the domestic site of the Parkot women. Notwithstanding this internal stratification the women in Pankot endeavour to maintain a united facade against others, especially the Indians. It is Mabel who subverts such a plan of cohesion. The character of Mabel is overlaid by the influence of Mrs Moore in *A Passage to India*. Stunned by the profundity of her experience at the Marabar caves, she retreats into a pessimistic meditation. Similarly, angered at the double standards of the British in India in their polity and social worldview, Mabel, the doyenne of Pankot, withdraws into an inner silence, refusing any kind of social interaction.

... she criticized no one and seldom expressed any opinion let alone a hostile one. Her absorption in garden and bungalow, her habit of taking solitary walks, her refusal even of invitations it was
generally considered obligatory to accept, her complete detachment from Pankot's public life, were attributed to the personal idiosyncrasy of someone who had lost two husbands in the cause of service to the empire.... (35-36).

Even in her silence, Mabel turns out to be a strong-willed and fiercely independent woman who refuses to subscribe to the notions of the solidarity of the Raj advocated by, among others, her daughter-in-law Mildred, because to her the colonialism represents an inhuman system. The massacre of 1919 disturbs her profoundly by revealing to her the chasm between the colonial profession and practice. Her withdrawal into a contemplative poise is as much a reaction against her own ineffectiveness as a compensatory gesture of a meditation on her private view of India. Mabel's obsession with the cultivation of English roses on the Indian soil is an apposite symbol of the beauty of a cultural synthesis between India and England. The Rose Garden, thus, becomes a muted celebration of the concept of what may have been an ideal British-Indian relationship.

The relationship between Mabel and Mildred, based on a mutual antipathy, indicates the subtle power games that the members of the family play upon each other. Mabel forestalls Mildred's accommodation in Rose Cottage by taking in Barbie as a paying guest. Mildred on her part is deeply resentful of Mabel's negatively pro-Indian inclinations, her suppressed
Mildred saw... Mabel's long sustained and critical detachment from the life and spirit of things. Mildred—whom it used to seem that Mabel didn't trust—had obviously never trusted Mabel, and for better reasons. While the old woman was alive Mildred had held her own criticisms in check, for John's sake, the regiment's sake, the station's sake, and even now could not descend to anything so crude as a direct attack (305).

The deliberately underplayed emotions of resentment of Mildred against Mabel are ventilated in an explosion of wrath against Barbie. There is thus a scapegoating of Barbie for all the ills that befall Mildred. Because of her close association, Barbie becomes a metonymy of Mabel. The anger directed by Mildred at her is in fact aimed at Mabel. Not satisfied with turning her out of Rose Cottage, Mildred returns the twelve apostle spoons given to Susan as a wedding gift. The virtual hysteria that Mildred goes into at the very sight of her prompts Isobel to conclude that Mildred has "become over obsessed by Miss Batchelor" (344).

The strained relationship between the two elder Layton women is duplicated on a miniature scale between Mildred and Sarah. Unable to bear the shock of her husband being taken a POW,
Mildred takes to drinking heavily. With John Layton away and Mildred drunk to the point of distraction, it is Sarah who looks after her sick sister and keeps her mother "from degenerating into alcoholism and sexual dissipation". Nicky Paynton sees Sarah as having "spent long enough unconsciously making up to her father for not being a boy" (292). But of the two daughters, Mildred prefers the younger to the elder. The primary reason for Mildred's dislike for her elder daughter is that Sarah, who has inherited the independence of mind from Mabel, refuses to play the role of a typical memsahib: "Sarah...has always been the...quiet introspective type. But she's pretty determined and she can be impulsive" (309). The lack of communication between the two turns into a full fledged hostility in A Division. Sarah is far more tolerant than anybody else of the retiring ways of Mabel and considerate to the babble of Barbie. It is to her that Barbie frequently turns not only to satisfy her curiosity for information but also to seek comfort and consolation in her presence. Hearing that Sarah is going away to Calcutta for the time being, she feels cut off from the only source of warmth.

Sarah offers to keep her trunk in the Cottage even when she is turned out of it by her mother; she finds for her, while in Calcutta, a temporary engagement in order that she may continue to lead an honourable life. This sympathy and esteem for a fellow human being and consideration for a left-out member of her community point to new facets about her. The Scorpion
presents her as a woman, liberated from the set ideas fostered by the colonial life, open minded about the race relations and courageous in a balanced sort of way; The Towers repeats these character traits and offers additional sets such as her self-effacement for the happiness of her family, her genuine kindness for life. Sarah conceives following a brief sexual liaison with Clark at Calcutta. Aware of her condition, Mildred does not come to her rescue but asks Fenny instead, in a quiet show of temper, to get the illegitimate foetus aborted. Fenny finds the task entrusted to her impossible to perform, knowing that Sarah is attached to all kinds of living forms. She is reminded, for example, of the dog that has to be put down on account of illness: "She could not remember the dog's name but now that it had come into her mind she could not get it out because it was a living thing whose destruction Sarah had opposed with significant and dangerous passion" (383). Sarah's total worldview is born of this love of life.

Contrasted with her, Susan, who is more beautiful and winning in her ways, exhibits a singular lack of love not only in her numerous affairs but also in her marriage. Even Teddie, who is allowed only a public show of affection, is painfully aware during the course of their honeymoon of a total absence of any compelling private emotion on Susan's part. Her mute acquiescence in what should have been a "duality of ... enterprise" (193) is a logical culmination of Susan's "business-like and utterly unromantic" (191) attitude to marriage. In agreeing to marry...
Teddie, and in a rushed ceremony at that, Susan is motivated less by considerations of love than by a need to cover up her insecurity. In The Scorpion she has confessed to her sister to have deliberately placed herself in the middle of a charmed circle in order to conceal a deep sense of personal inadequacy. The nappy exterior of Susan is a masquerade for her metaphysical vacuity which is peeled off by the shock of Teddie's death, leaving her exposed and vulnerable. Hence her insanity.

Non-interfering and distracted as she is, Mildred hides her disapproval of Susan's marriage even when she loves her and does all that is required to see her through the patch of depression. She does not find Teddie a suitable match for Susan although she commends his death.

Mildred's commendation of Teddie's death, viewed by the station as wasted and meaningless, is the first indication of the growing cynicism about old certainties and of the beginning of the fissure in the edifice of the Raj. She feels that "what Teddie tried to do was worth the whole bloody war put together", that it has been a "praiseworthy sacrifice for a principle the world no longer had time or inclination to uphold" (307). As an attitude, this is a vocal reaffirmation in the colonial values of paternalism and is, therefore, a refutation of Mabel's silent critique of the colonial pretence. The change in the outlook of the English in the apprehension of their responsibilities to the colonial India and of their own view of themselves is best summed up by Isobel Rankin.
She accepted the fact that at home her own people had often been indifferent to Indian affairs and that this indifference sprang from ignorance. But in the old days when the code by which she lived had been widely upheld in England this indifference to India had not mattered much, because those who came out to shoulder the responsibility could rely to a great extent on moral support at home. But of recent years, in England, she knew that these values had been eroded (69).

Lack of the native succour robs the conviction and efficiency of the people who manage the Indian empire. As has been seen in The Scorpion, both Teddie and Merrick grieve, in their individual ways, for the passing away of an established order of certainty. The failure to function properly and to do full justice to the jobs they hold lends them a peculiar melancholy. The fractured personality of the colonizer issues from the contradiction of having to run a colony without any sustenance from the mother country and having to function without any terms of reference. It is because of this that Scott's characters especially in the last days of the British Raj "exist not in perpetual Edwardian sunshine, but in the shadows, the melancholy of exile."\(^{15}\) The importance of work to the main characters in The Quartet is unmistakable. Scott uses the men at work as a metaphor to express an engagement for the here and now of life, and the pursuit of its truths and rewards.\(^{16}\)
In commending Teddie's death Mildred attempts to turn back the tide of change and preserve the old colonial values. In order to make a show of her imperial responsibility she goes, immediately after her husband is taken prisoner of war, on horse-back to visit the nearby villages to talk to the wives and widows of the 1st Battalion's VCOs, NCOs, and sepoys' (47) assuring them that the colonel, given a chance, will look after his soldiers and fellow-prisoners. The action of her addressing herself to the work of a responsible colonel's wife conveys, however, a feeling that she is only acting out a 'charade'.

There was a glow, but it was external to the affair; a bit too theatrical to penetrate to the mind where it was needed. It gave the performance qualities of self consciousness which made it look as if Mildred's main achievement had been to draw attention to an undertaking whose only claim was a nostalgic one upon the fund of recollected duties and obligations which time and circumstances were rendering obsolete; as obsolete as Teddie's gesture, of which the division had taken a view of a kind it would not, in better days, have taken...(302).

As much as Mildred, Merrick tries to keep alive the old ways of life by upholding the myth of the British invincibility. His knowledge about the INA and his painstaking acquisition of the Japanese language in order that he may effectively deal with
Jiffs speak of his devotion to his new job of an army intelligence officer and of his drive for efficiency in the chosen field. On a chance encounter with him in the Cottage premises, Barbie offers him the Jewel-in-the-Crown picture. The picture symbolizing a frieze of the good old days appropriately objectifies Merrick's penchant to cling to what the picture represents: the British as the dispensers of justice and order to the natives. The efficiency of Merrick is a new feature. Like Sarah, Merrick is a steadily evolving character. The Towers presents him by roping in the traits already established in the previous novels. The reiteration of the same type of character-indicators in volume after volume, apart from establishing consistency, reveals a mind obsessed with narcissism. To Teddie he speaks of his humble origin; to Barbie he speaks of the rightness of his action in arresting Kumar as the ring-leader of the group which has organized the assault on Daphne. He presents Kumar as "the worst kind of western educated Indian, with all the conceit and arrogance of the Indian, whose family owns or once owned land, plus the arrogance of the most boring and unprincipled but privileged English lad" (448). The constant harping on Kumar's superior education and his landed status goes on to prove that "unlike Kumar Merrick is not a gentleman." His efficiency becomes the primary instrument with which he camouflages and comes to terms with his personal inadequacy. Barbie detects "a racial jealousy" (449) feeding Merrick's implacable conviction of Kumar's guilt. By acting on this conviction, he seeks to steal a superiority over Kumar, a superiority due to him on account of his English birth and denied him because of his upbringing.
More than as a dense character, Merrick is used in The Towers as a metonymy of the Mayapore incident; the incident is invariably cited each time Merrick appears or his name is mentioned. He brings back the question of the Kumar-Daphne alliance and thereby of the Indo-British relationship. The affair becomes in the novel a metaphoric matrix within which the English apprehend their relationship with each other. The basic man-woman and woman-woman relationships of the British community of Pankot are to a great extent determined by the Indian experience. Much of the tension in the novel arises out of the conflict between the attempt to control the conditions of such experience and the failure to have even a satisfying grip on the flow of events. Through a series of exemplifying images, The Towers presents a picture of irreversible change symbolizing the beginning of the end of the Raj.

The first change pertains to Pankot itself. The locale of The Towers and partly of The Scorpion has been identified as an English town nestling in its class stratification. But with "the reallocation of areas of military responsibility .. Pankot (is) stripped of a proportion of its powers as a central seat of military control and administration" (407). The dehierarchization of the British society begins with the American officers flooding the old English haunts. The informal and quite often the plebeian attitudes of these officers and their soldiers jeopardise the entrenched English values and thus disrupt the old balance among the English. One of the metonymies of the town has
been the Rose Garden of Mabel. The crumbling of the town is reflected in the forceful conversion wrought on the Garden: the Garden is converted into a tennis court. Returning to the Cottage quite sometime after Mabel's death, Barbie finds that: "All the central beds of rose trees had been dug up and turfed over. Lines of string and limewash mapped the place where a tennis court was being prepared. The roses in the bed that were left had been pruned down to bleak little skeletal bushes." (441).

A sense of cessation foreshadowing the eventual departure of the Raj is conveyed in the leave-taking of Barbie. Asked by Mildred to vacate the Cottage after Mabel's death, Barbie takes adieu of the roses she has come to love as an inextricable part of the Cottage's ambience. The poignance of her farewell address to the roses lends the novel a particular pathos. Again, the theme of the departure is further intensified by Nicky Paynton, who auctions off her goods and sails to London following her husband's death in war. The event signifies as much a loss of India in her working life as a loss of a paradise.

With one stroke India was finished for her and although she would probably assure her friends that she'd be back, this was one of these crystal clear cases of a woman leaving and knowing that her chances of seeing India again were slim enough to be non-existent. She would never be able to afford the fare (364).
The various images of violent change logically climax in that of the towers of silence which gives the novel its overarching symbol. Lying on the hospital bed at Ranpur, Barbie watches the vultures of the towers. The towers of silence are specially erected places where the Parsis dispose of their dead by exposing them to the sun because Zoroaster has declared fire, water and earth to be sacred; vultures pick the dead clean in the towers. To Barbie the Raj is morally dead; it is the British who with their spiritual bankruptcy pick the Raj clean. The loss of values ensues from the failure of the British to honour their commitments. Mildred's reneging on the promise of giving her mother-in-law a decent burial at a place of the latter's choice is the most forceful example of such failure. The broken promise, however, connotes much beyond what the event locally conveys: it refers to all the promises of political freedom that the British have made and have failed to keep. D.M. Burjorjee shows that Barbie may have in mind the promises of the British made to the Indians during the World War 1. It is to them that Crane frequently refers in The Jewel. Since Crane has been the ego-ideal for Barbie, the rhythmic structure of The Towers necessitates that Barbie echo a similar type of sentiment.

There (she thought) went the Raj, supported by the unassailable criteria of necessity, devoutness, even of self sacrifice because Mildred had snatched half-an-hour from her vigil to see the coffin into the hole she had ordered dug.... But what was being per
petrated was an act of callousness: the sin of collectively not caring a damn about a desire or an expectation or a fulfilment of a promise (286).

That Barbie is too deeply concerned with the moral questions involved in the situation is borne out by her passionate attachment to the battered tin-trunk. It contains an assortment of relics and mementoes collected over the whole of her professional life. It serves no practical purpose but causes her instead a lot of trouble, botheration and anxiety. Yet she insists on carrying it wherever she goes. On her first visit to Rose Cottage as a prospective paying guest she brings along all of her luggage. After leaving the Cottage she is worried no end for the safe upkeep of her trunk. The does not have room enough to house it. Neither is she comfortable with the idea, suggested by a few well-wishers of leaving it at Jalal-ud-din's, a heathen storeroom. She requests Sarah to give it a roof in the Cottage premises till she finds it a permanent shelter. Not much later Kevin Coley calls on her requesting her to remove it at an earlier date. She bumps into Merrick while trying to retrieve it and meets with an accident that costs her her sanity and self-identity while returning with it on a tonga. Barbie's fetish for the trunk is an example of what Swinden calls the symbiotic relationship between people and objects: objects carry a significance much in excess of their value and utility and influence the behaviour of a character. The trunk represents the continuities of Barbie's history:
The trunk is a very different kettle of fish. Unlike a writing table, unlike one's clothes, one's shoes, it is of no use. But it is my history and according to Emerson without it, without that I'm simply not explained; I am a mere body, sitting here. Without it, according to Emerson, none of us is explained (327).

Barbie's history is in fact the history of the Englishmen in India. The trunk symbolizes the burden of their legacy. The questions of morality are inescapable. The role and responsibility of the British in India, how far they have succeeded in their stated missions, in what way have their collective conscience shaped the moral focus of history, these shall survive the final disintegration of the British empire. Furthermore, the picture of Barbie shuttling from place to place towing the trunk along is one that forebodes the cumbersome burdens that saddle the colonizer in retreat. There is, thus, a movement in The Towers from the particular to the general, from the personal to the universal.

As a moral commentator on the decline of the Raj, Barbie turns out to be one of the most moving characters of The Quartet. Tracing the decline in spiritual and metaphysical terms, Barbie is herself implicated in a personal failure. Like Crane, with whom she is closely parallel, Barbie lives a dichotomous existence. She fails to identify herself with the spirit of India.
She remains distanced as ever from the country she has spent the whole of her life in despite her noble intentions towards it. The withholding of merger with India is mirrored in her inability to accept with equanimity the demands of the body. She is closeted with the contemplation of the soul. *The Towers* makes a special mention of the typical love that Barbie cherishes: "attachment of Barbie's kind . . . did not extend to flesh" (85). Notions of a compartmentalized spiritual love are reinforced again in the diegetic statement that follows "Barbie had never known the wilder secrets of life nor held the key to its deepest sensual pleasures" (195). Even her very get-up complete in severely tailored dresses conveys a repressed sexuality. The robustness of her Christian faith provides her with the sublimating outlets for her sexuality. However, the discourse of profanity that emerges at the end of the novel tames the earlier discourses of religious belief. Lying in the hospital, as she schizophrenically alternates between the twin identities of Barbie and Crane, Barbie asks Sister Mary Thomas More to "bugger the pope" (459). The use of the sexually abusive language in respect of the religious head coupled with the images of the hell and the devil is revelatory of a deep sense of despair that cancels out her sexual puritanism and the solidity of her religious creed. Barbie's death collapses whatever differences she may have had with Crane. The final fire image with which the novel rounds off the history of Barbie works towards this collapse: "They found her thus, eternally alert, in sudden sunshine, her shadow burnt into the wall behind her as if by some distant but terrible fire" (464).
Both the deaths symbolize the death of an ideal, personal and communal. But whereas Crane's death is brought on by an act of the will, Barbie simply disintegrates under the weight of a sense of failure. Barbie's disintegration is a proleptic indicator of the future of the Raj.

The Towers offers a sympathetic portrayal of the English mind. For the English the experience of India has been no less traumatic than the Indian experience of the British colonialism. To a few Britshers, though, India represents the idea of what a paradise should have been. In general, however, India heightens and intensifies whatever mindstyle the English carry over from home. An exploration of the British mind has been the central engagement of The Towers. It is fundamentally an English novel. It shows the continuing bafflement of the English with India, their melancholy and resigned sadness; it presents above all else how the class snobbery and superciliousness imported into India from the social scene of England affect the nature of the interpersonal relationship within the British community. The relationship between Mildred and Barbie, both members of a race united in their difference from the Indians, is a fine example of the class hauteur that marks the attitude of the upper stratum of the English society towards the people occupying the lower strata. The Pankot ladies who feel that Mildred is unreasonably angry with Barbie still vouchsafe her actions because the failure to do so would be tantamount to announcing a loss of faith in the system. Even Lucy Smalley who is given a lowly place
in this system—she is symbolically seated a foot away from the board constituted of upper middle class women for deliberating on the means to be adopted for the safety of the Pankot women—supports such a system because she hopes by being agreeable to someday belong to the upper circle. The class differences of the English become racial differences when they come to deal with the Indians. The racist exclusiveness, as has been seen, has been the major obstacle to the formation of any meaningful interracial and inter-personal relationship. If *The Jewel* makes the statement that although a successful British-Indian relationship is desirable, it is not feasible, *The Scorpion* and *The Towers*, through a probing of both the Indian and the British minds, set out the reasons why it is not feasible. *A Division* graphically presents in political and human terms the results of the failure of the desirable union.
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