

WOMAN OF LANKA: A PIONEERING, "RADICAL" NOVEL OF SRI LANKA

Academic research on the early Sri Lankan novelists of this century has generally been restricted to studies of Lucian de Zilwa and S.J.K. Crowther.¹ There are, however, some important novelists who have been neglected because their work is unknown, considered too esoteric for academic scrutiny, or rejected for their faulty conception. One novel that has not received any serious attention except for some fleeting references in critical works² is Jas [James] de S. Wijeyeratne's *Daughter of Lanka*.³ This novel, which is superior to *The Dice of the Gods*, *A Chandala Woman*, and *The Knight Errant*⁴ in many ways, lends itself to a postcolonial appraisal.

It must be admitted at the outset that *Daughter of Lanka* is flawed by some of the angularities that have been identified with other Ceylonese novels published during the first half of this century: the language is inflated, and the plot cluttered with love triangles and coincidences in the manner of modern day "soap operas." Two examples will suffice to illustrate the ponderous language found in this novel. Referring to a polluted lagoon, the author says, "[b]ut what pleased the eye proved to be an outrage on the olfactory organ," (p.20), and consider also the following verbose, convoluted passage which describes Cecily Fernando's reaction to the discovery that her father is planning to discredit Dr. Raymond Piyasinghe:

Although auricular appendages may not actually grow out of stone walls, little did Saradiel Fernando imagine that only three feet away from him and Marku Silva, a pair of ears took in the whole conspiracy

¹ Yasmin Abdul Rahuman, "S.J.K. Crowther's *The Knight Errant*: Satire in a Colonial Setting" *Navasilu* 1 (1976): pp. 49-56; Nihal Fernando, "Social Realism and the English Novel in Sri Lanka" ms; S.W. Perera, "The Treatment of Class Relationships in the Novels of Lucien [sic] de Zilwa and S.J.K. Crowther" *Navasilu* 7 and 8 (1987): pp. 149-158.

² Wilfrid Jayasuriya merely says in *Sri Lanka's Modern English Literature: A Case Study in Literary Theory*. New Delhi: Navrang 1994 p. 93 that "James de S. Wijeyeratne" [sic] wrote *Daughter of Lanka* and *The Exiles* but does not refer to the author in the index or bibliography thereafter.

³ Jas [James] de S. Wijeyeratne, *Daughter of Lanka: A Tale of Modern Ceylon*. Colombo: The Ceylon Observer Press, nd. All references are to this "special edition" and are incorporated into the main body of the text.

⁴ Lucian de Zilwa, *The Dice of the Gods*. London: Heath Cranston, 1917, and *A Chandala Woman*. London: Heath Cranston, 1919; J. Vijaya-Tunga, *Grass for My Feet*, London: Edward Arnold, 1935.

hatched against Ray, in all its cunning. It was a particularly pretty pair of ears, half hidden by coils of raven hair, and at this moment rather too red, to claim proprietorship of a Singhalese young lady. It may well have been the high souled creature who was an unwilling eavesdropper of the plot blushed for very shame, as the wicked details unfolded themselves within her hearing. For Cecily, the only daughter of Saradiel Fernando, though the apple of her father's eye, reacted to noble impulses in a diametrically opposite manner to her parent. (p. 50)

The plot, as has already been indicated, is clumsy and contrived. The story is well into its tenth chapter before the reader is informed that Ray, who has rejected one proposal of marriage but has accidentally met and been "smitten" by the woman in question, is secretly engaged to an Englishwoman. This Englishwoman for her part becomes alarmed when she hears about the perils of "Coffee and Milk marriages" (p. 65) told by an Indian Civil servant in England on furlough; consequently, she books a passage to Ceylon to be with her fiancée. Her life is complicated, however, when she fortuitously meets and falls in love with the same officer of the Raj on board the *S.S. Patipura*.

These are just some of the structural infelicities in the novel. What is more damaging, however, is Wijeyeratne's foregrounding of a "Brown Sahib" attitude to the lower classes through his principal character or through authorial comment. Consider Ray's reaction to Ceylon during his homecoming:

"That dirty tea-kiosk in the midst of these palatial residences," said Ray, pointing to a tumbled down shanty. Bunches of ripe plantains hung over its low roof. Varieties of native sweet-meats, scantily covered and prominently displayed, courted the dust and the none too fastidious palate of its *habitués*. (p. 6)

The omniscient narrator's observations on the "educated" onlookers soon after Ray's snubbing of Saradiel are equally disturbing:

The rebuff struck him like a lash and his oily smile vanished from his lips. The few onlookers were thunderstruck. It may have been that in their heart of hearts they sympathised with Saradiel. They were all educated men; but education alone may not suffice to eradicate the love of ostentation ingrained in the souls of Eastern people. Even after death they like to be borne to their graves to the strains of *Hevisi* or to the more tuneful music of Chopin or Handel (p. 9)

Such unapologetic, Orientalist postures would certainly provoke any modern reader to recoil from this book in disgust. Still, *Daughter of Lanka* is a significant work, despite these grievous flaws, because it grapples with two important issues that other novels of the period avoid, ignore, or treat cursorily—the position of women in Ceylon, and the

attitude of the colonizers to the colonized. This study focusses on Wijeyeratne's handling of these two themes and assesses the extent to which the author presents an enlightened, postcolonial approach to these matters.

Elleke Boehmer declares that

. . . colonized women were, as it is called, doubly or triply marginalized. That is to say, they were disadvantaged on the grounds not only of gender but also of race, of social class, and in some cases, religion and caste.⁵

Writers, like S.J.K. Crowther, reinforce such attitudes in their portrayal of women. Consider Crowther's description of the "ideal woman" sought by men of the "lower" classes in Sri Lanka:

Marriage with people in his station of life is rather a prosaic business and Peter if he had not risen above his station would have been perfectly content to take unto himself any young woman who his father and mother chose for him. If then he cherished an ideal at all, it would be the average village belle, fat and fair, dressed in a camboy, occasionally affecting a pair of ungainly shoes, who would bear his children with praiseworthy diligence and regularity.⁶

While this passage says much about Crowther's attitude towards the lower classes, it says even more about his opinions on the position and role of women. Women who belong to a higher social stratum are generally not dismissed in the same manner. Lucian de Zilwa's Sita, in *A Chandala Woman*, though descended from a rodiya family and rejected by her lover when he discovers her ancestry, eventually marries an upper class gentleman who eschews caste distinctions. The only novel which tries to come to grips with matters relating to Sri Lankan women with any degree of seriousness, however, is Wijeyeratne's *Daughter of Lanka*. This story is a variation of or extension to what Dorothy Jones identifies as the staple of the "romance plot which pairs the demure and the consciously virtuous heroine with a rival for the hero's affections who is usually more sophisticated, socially superior, and sexually assertive."⁷ Wijeyeratne's novel, which is to a large extent concerned with middle class women, does not conform

⁵ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford: OUP, 1995, p. 224.

⁶ S.J.K. Crowther, *The Knight Errant* Colombo: The Daily News Press, 1928, p. 121.

⁷ Dorothy Jones, "Decolonizing Women's Romances" *From Commonwealth to Post-Colonial*. Ed. Anna Rutherford. Sydney: Dangeroo Press, 1992, p. 394.

to this pattern in every particular. The "noble-minded" Cecily who had "humbled herself to the dust" (p.171) on Ray's behalf and is so anxious to alleviate the sufferings of others corresponds to the "consciously virtuous heroine" presented in Jones' category. Given the "modesty" with which Ceylonese women were supposed to regard sex at that time, however, the author is unable to present a woman who is totally aggressive in such matters. Somawathie who is, in opposition to Cecily, "passionate and impulsive" (p. 56), mildly flirtatious, "not entirely dependable" (p. 56) and "favour[s] him [Ray, the hero] with . . . one of her bewitching smiles" (p. 40) on the first occasion that they meet is the best that Wijeyeratne can do in this regard. Wijeyeratne's strength is his willingness to present a variety of women characters, and in doing so he perhaps unconsciously "insist[s] on the diversity and layeredness of women's experience"⁸ that recent critics have prescribed for novels that successfully depict the lives of women. Although Wijeyeratne bases his novel on the tradition of the romances, he subverts the same by presenting those who do not fit into any category. Wijeyeratne here anticipates the more sophisticated work of later authors. In Ray's fiancée Doreen (perhaps the most poorly conceived character in the novel), the author introduces the stereotypical, vacillating woman who is given to extremes of emotion, unable to make up her mind, and very impressionable. Most crucial, however, is his depiction of Cecily and Maggie.

This novel marks a breakthrough in Sri Lankan writing in English because it introduces feminist themes that were not really followed up till the 80s and 90s. Ray returns to Ceylon "look[ing] forward to the pleasure of taking her [Maggie] once more under his protection, and of moulding her young mind to his liking" (p. 13). He discovers soon enough, however, that such patriarchal actions are no longer possible even in conservative Sri Lanka because

The march of events which had shattered existing prejudices and had speeded on the feminist movement in Europe, has had its repercussion in far away Ceylon, and the wave of progress had already swept along Lanka's womanhood in its forward course. Maggie was no longer the malleable mass of potter's clay that Ray had thought she would be. At the age of twenty one, she had a decided personality with pronounced ideas of her own. . . (p. 13).

Maggie is not an exception. Somawathie, as Maggie informs Ray, will not countenance arranged marriages. She "belongs to the new generation of young women. Whoever wants to marry her would have to propose to her in person" (p. 16). Cecily too is "one of the moderns in thought and action--another unit of a reincarnated femininity clamouring for her proper place in the scheme of existence. . ." (p. 51). Ray, the educated, enlightened, "been to" male is fully supportive of such attitudes. To express feminist sentiment and to act on such beliefs are two propositions, however, and it is here that a basic contradiction appears in this book. A close reading suggests that

⁸. Boehmer, *op.cit.*, p. 226.

Wijeyeratne had either joined the *radical chic* in making such declarations or that he was projecting some of the anxieties faced by the middle class in introducing such themes. Although Cecily tries to establish that women are not given the same opportunities as men, especially in their choice of partners, in her discussions with her brother, the novel, as a whole, does not fulfil its early promise.

All the characters who are supposedly imbued with a liberal spirit outwardly reject traditional racial, religious, and class divisions. But their conduct does not always reflect these trends. Cecily, despite her apparent feminist views, "had a characteristically Oriental veneration for her father—an unquestioning acceptance of his conduct which practically amounted to a belief in the Divine Right of Parents" (p. 50); Ray and Don Simon take great pains to make a case for intermarriage saying that

Both Caste and creed impose such limitations on our choice of wife, that consanguinity in marriage is an unpreventable evil. Leaving the personal equation aside, I can certify as a Doctor that nothing short of inter-racial unions can save the country from degenerating into imbeciles. (p. 80)

Yet once he is free from his promise to Doreen, Ray seems to realize that interracial marriages are fraught and that now "he was free to choose . . . just a little woman of his own country" (p. 116). What is at issue here is not whether marriage to a foreigner is feasible in this particular instance. More to the point is that interracial marriages that are set up in opposition to the inbreeding and insularity that were apparently part of Sri Lankan life are suddenly rejected out of hand. Ironically, Ray's ultimate choice of a wife is still governed by his European bias, and couched in language that would certainly not endear him to the feminist cause:

By now, his eyes had grown accustomed to appreciate beauty, even though of a shade darker than the hues of more temperate climes. But Cecily was much fairer in complexion than the ordinary Singhalese maiden. . . . She had the sweetest of smiles which revealed teeth of perfect proportion, of the colour of ivory and the lustre of pearls. Her delicate features were sharply defined and chiselled out by the hand of the Divine Sculptor Himself. (p. 170)

It is patent that *Daughter of Lanka* falls back on traditional, patriarchal rhetoric in dealing with women's issues despite the expectations created in the early sections. Some of the problems are brought about because the author has structured this novel as a romance novel (a form that easily lends itself to sexist bias), and because he is unable to negotiate the dynamics between the demands of received Ceylonese cultural practices on the one hand and liberal humanist values culled from Europe on the other. If the aim of modern criticism is

to establish whether literature formulates resistance to, is subversive of, or complicit with the dominant discourses that seek to maintain authorial positions,⁹

a critical reading of this novel discloses that this author, while repudiating some of the factors associated with the discourse of arranged marriages with its attended evils like the dowry system and the general exploitation of women, valorises the discourse of liberal humanism which he employs to further the women's cause. What becomes apparent towards the end of the novel, however, is that the two dominant discourses are not antagonistic towards each other, but really "complicit" in their attitude towards women—a form of collusion that the women in the novel are unable to comprehend as such. A novel that is set up as one which is sympathetic towards or supportive of the rights of women to determine their destinies, then, does not fulfill its early promise.

If Wijeyeratne flatters and fails in his portrayal of women, he is more successful in his critique of empire. Once again, the book is remarkable for anticipating the kind of criticism levelled at the Raj by later writers. It would not be too extreme to say, in fact, that the indictment of Empire in *Daughter of Lanka* is more devastating and "up front" than novels like *Kanthapura*, *Things Fall Apart*, and *In the Castle of My Skin*¹⁰ which are now regarded as "classics" of postcolonial fiction. Wijeyeratne's novel is unknown because it was not published outside Ceylon and (it must be said) because he lacks the novelistic skills of Rao, Achebe, or Lamming. Still, he deserves some kind of recognition for his efforts. Although his portrayal of Mr Allen, the servant of the Raj, and the missionary, Miss Jackson, seems to border on caricature to a contemporary reader, it would have been strikingly original to readers brought up on the ephemeral fiction of *The Boys Own Paper*, the adventure tales of Edgar Wallace, the jingoistic verse of Henry Newbolt, or on the marginally more serious work of Kipling which in their different ways legitimized the mission of Empire.

Both the European characters who take it as their mission to "prevent this little English lamb [Doreen] from being slaughtered" (p. 88) are indubitably affected by the

⁹ Martina Michel, "Locating Postcolonial Studies" *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 26.1 (1995): p. 93.

¹⁰ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann, 1958; Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* Oxford: OUP, 1938; George Lamming *In the Castle of My Skin*, Toronto: Collier-Macmillan, 1970. Despite their status as pioneering works in the field of Postcolonial Literature, none of these novels project the colonial point of view with the immediacy of *Daughter of Lanka*. The District Commissioner in *Things Fall Apart*, the two planter sahibs in *Kanthapura*, and Mr. Creighton and the School Inspector in *In the Castle of My Skin*, though important to a degree, are really insubstantial characters.

"colonial gaze."¹¹ They peruse Asians from the vantage point of their experience of the East and their conviction that the West is superior to the former materially, intellectually, and spiritually. Since it was Mr. Allen who complicated Ray's and Doreen's plans by speaking caustically of the East, it is best to begin this section on the Raj with him. Mr. Allen remarks that

. . . if ever a "native" went home after having got engaged to a white girl, his people would never let him marry her. They would stop short of nothing, however appalling, to prevent his marriage, and that if persuasion failed to make him give her up, they would murder him in cold blood rather than see him marry out of his caste and community (pp. 65-66)

This is a diabolical comment which says much about Mr. Allen's character. But his determination to break the match and the steps he takes to ensure that Doreen never discovers the truth about Ceylonese for herself is emblematic of a more general colonial condition. Elleke Boehmer observes that

. . . contact between races, in particular sexual contact, invariably brings trouble in its wake. At the time when Social Darwinist ideas were popular, it was generally believed that consort with dark peoples compromised white selfhood and threatened race purity. . . . No matter how hard those who had been colonized might try to Europeanize themselves, colonial society whether in India or elsewhere was built upon this fundamental separation.¹²

Allen's actions and pronouncements authenticate these observations. He makes no apology for hating the East and even his job. He is a devoted member of the civil service to whom service to the Empire is a duty from which he derives no particular enjoyment, but a duty that he *must* perform to maintain the *status quo*. Consider Wijeyeratne's description:

Of puritanic tastes, and unflinching loyalty to the Raj, he had earned praise from his superiors and a respect bordering on affection from his subordinates. Yet, he had no real fondness either for the Civil Service as such, or, for a matter of that, for India or its people. He served

¹¹ For a theoretical description of this phenomenon see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* London: Routledge, 1992.

¹² *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68. See also the section entitled "Races Apart" in William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940*. Cambridge: CUP, 1994. pp. 20-25.

both king and country faithfully out of a sense of duty. With him, duty claimed precedence over everything else, including self interest, and he would think nothing of doing violence to his own feelings in support of his convictions. His private impression of India was, that it was a God-forsaken place, for a white man to reside in. He was a practical person, to whom neither past greatness nor mystic romance made any appeal, since he lived in the present, and for the present. Such being the case, it was no wonder he still ranked among the "eligibles" for, he argued with himself, if India was anethema [sic] for a white man, how much so for a white woman. (pp. 72-73)

Given that he is so obsessed with his job and so "encumbered with these conscientious scruples" (p. 73), his falling in love with Doreen would seem to be mystifying indeed. Yet the reason for his actions is consistent with his idea of duty to the Raj, loyalty to the British race, and his inborn need to "protect" what was then regarded as the weaker sex. He had ignored many "eligible" women because he believed that India was no place for a woman to reside in. But Doreen's presence in the ship, his knowledge that "this delicate flower" was being transported to Ceylon "to be plucked by the unholy hands of a common native" (p.94), and his growing desire for her force his hand. Homi Bhabha informs us in "The Other Question" that

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of a cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place,' already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated . . . as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved.¹³

Surely this is the same knowledge or strategy that Mr. Allen employs when he dismisses Doreen's assertion that Ray is an intelligent man who has lived eight years in England with the riposte that "they return to their barbaric state when they return home" (p. 94). The nature of this "barbaric state" is given in an earlier section of the dialogue. Doreen is shocked when she sees a "coloured cook" who is "all nude save for his spancloth" grinding curry powder and "washing all the dirt off his hands into the currystuff" (p. 94). Allen responds to Doreen's horror by saying, "You will soon develop the taste or

¹³. Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism," *The Location of Culture* New York: Routledge, 1994. p. 66.

at least the indifference for dirt, required of people settling down in the East" (p. 94). Not only does he make false generalizations about the Asians' apparent lack of cleanliness, but asserts in other sequences that Ceylonese are totally incapable of "advancement."

A related strategy used by colonialists was to distort, deny, and belittle the history of the original inhabitants of a land that was colonized. Mr. Allen cannot, of course, take too many liberties here because evidence of Ceylon's past is available to even the naive Doreen. The strategy he employs, however, is similar to that which Terry Goldie identifies with white societies in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand as they try to come to terms with the indigenes: "They are an indigenous people without a present, the indigene as corpse. They have a historical role but there is a sense that even in their earliest appearances in white documentation they are already remnants."¹⁴ Such an approach, as applied to Ceylon by Allen, involves asserting that a glorious past has been replaced by an atavism from which the island has never emerged, perhaps never will emerge. As an experienced civil servant, Allen is aware that he is "slander[ing] the nation," because "the revival of National Consciousness that was sweeping over Ceylon from end to end" (p. 95) was truly impressive. But having concluded that "the end justified the means" (p. 95), he persuades Doreen that she was "not going to marry one of those ancient civilized Singhalese. You are going to marry a modern Singhalese whose civilized core is covered with generations of decay" (p. 95). Wijeyeratne's achievement with this Civil Servant might seem limited given the manner in which he had been delineated. But as historians, postcolonial critics, and contemporary writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o¹⁵ have shown such officer who served king/queen and country were not unknown in Imperial history.

It is now commonplace to state that religion was an important accessory in establishing and in perpetuating empire. The school yard and the church are symbolically adjacent to each other in Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*¹⁶ and Ngugi wa Thiong'o makes this connection in practically all his novels. The motto of the Siriana mission school in *Petals of Blood*¹⁷ is "For God and Empire" and consider also

¹⁴. Terry Goldie, "The Spectacles of Indigenous History: Images of Indigenous Peoples in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures." *The Writer as Historical Witness: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*. Ed. Edwin Thumboo and Thiru Kandiah. Singapore: UniPress, 1995, pp. 141-42.

¹⁵. See Ngugi wa Thiong'o's portrayal of D.O. Robson and Mr. Thompson in *A Grain of Wheat* London: Heinemann, 1987 for British officers whose colonial attitudes are considerably more diabolical than those of Mr. Allen.

¹⁶. George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*. Toronto: Collier-Macmillan, 1970.

¹⁷. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood*. London: Heinemann, 1977.

this extract from *A Grain of Wheat*:

We went to their church. Mubia, in white robes, opened the Bible. He said: let us kneel down to pray. We nelt down. Mubia said: Let us shut our eyes. We did. Yuou know, his remained open so that we could read the word. When we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard: As for Mubia, he went on reading the word, beseeching us to lay our treasures in heaven where no moth would corrupt them. But he laid his on earth, our earth.¹⁸

To the missionary "who answers the call" service has its own rewards, even though the work involved would ensure a life of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation. Consider St. John Rivers' reaction to Jane's suggestion in *Jane Eyre* that he should renounce his decision to become a missionary and instead lead a different kind of life with Rosamond as his wife:

Relinquish! What! My vocation? My great work! My foundation laid on earth for a mansion in heaven? My hopes of being numbered in the band who have merged all ambitions in the glorious one of bettering their race--of carrying knowledge in to the realms of ignorance--of substituting peace for war, freedom for bondage, religion for superstition, the hope of heaven for the fear of hell? Must I relinquish that? it is dearer than the blood in my veins. It is what I have to look forward to, and live for.¹⁹

Although Charlotte Brontë is critical of St. John Rivers' sense of mission which warps his emotional life and even questions the convictions which prompt him to take such an extreme stance, she recognizes that he is anything but a hypocrite. Miss Jackson, a later day, female version of St. John Rivers, is treated more harshly. Unlike her counterpart in the civil service who loathed the colonized, Miss Jackson "availed herself of every opportunity to proclaim, especially in the presence of other white people, that she adored the 'natives' in general and her converted proselytes in particular" (p. 82). But in a very effectively rendered satirical sketch, Wijeyeratne shows how Miss Jackson has deliberately twisted the contents of the Gospels to support her positions. Convinced "of the superiority of the white races over the coloured ones," she preaches the doctrine of white supremacy to the "heathen" who "accepted with gratitude a condition of benevolent patronage from those who ministered to the wants of their body and soul" (p.82). In these circumstances, it is inevitable that those who benefit from Miss Jackson's spiritual largesse would accept her warped version of the Scripture as given truth. What follows

¹⁸. Ngugi wa Thiong'o *A Grain of Wheat*. London: Heinemann, 1967. p. 6.

¹⁹. Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966 (First published 1847) pp. 399-400.

from such a stance is the idea that marriage (an equal relationship) between people from "black" and "white" communities should be forbidden because it would be infradig for whites to form such alliances. Wijeyeratne's devastating satire on Miss Jackson's hypocritical stance on this issue is best given in its original form:

There were times when in her mind's eye the banner of Christianity somehow or other got hopelessly entangled with the Union Jack, since imperialism cannot find an honest footing, where the universal Brotherhood of man holds sway. But this kind-hearted misguided lady only subscribed to this essentially Christian Doctrine with reservations. She was not prepared to question the supreme position that matrimony occupies as a Sacrament in Christian dogma; but, she had her grave doubts as to whether the sacramental border, did not fall short of the colour bar. (p. 84)

Miss Jackson's determination to ensure that the marriage between Doreen and Ray never takes place is a manifestation of "colonial anxiety," and her joining forces with Mr Allen to achieve this objective is symbolic of the many occasions in which civil and religious authority collude to maintain the *status quo*. Given her years as a missionary among alien peoples, Miss Jackson is "a past-mistress in tactfulness" (p. 84). She is, furthermore, "accustomed to playing the pious hypocrite in a good cause" (p. 85). Consequently, she employs the tactics that unscrupulous missionaries and others who try to convert people to a political agenda have adopted over the years. She apprehends Doreen when she is in a vulnerable condition, gains her confidence, drops subtle hints like "I love the Indians . . . I would give them my life--**but not my hand** (p. 85) and then leaves her to the tender mercies of Mr. Allen. Doreen whose personality is weak at the best of times is like putty in their hands and is eventually crushed.

Miss Jackson's presence in the novel is important for yet another reason. Homi Bhabha claims that "the English book--'signs taken for wonders'" is "an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline."²⁰ By presenting the English book to the natives, the colonialists were able to exercise control and maintain dominance over the latter. Such action results in inevitable *slippage* or "excess," however, especially when the "natives" lay down terms and conditions under which they will receive these "gifts." Bhabha adds that, "[w]hen they make these intercultural, hybrid demands, the natives are both challenging the boundaries of discourse and subtly changing its terms by setting up another specifically colonial space of the negotiations of cultural authority."²¹ I wish to extend Bhabha's argument to

²⁰. Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," *The Location of Culture* New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 102.

²¹. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

include education as well. Education (or "learning book") was another way in which the English maintained dominance over others. They tried to keep the 'natives' in awe of the colonizers by suppressing the culture of the colonies and by focussing on the achievements of Europe in Art, Literature, History, Architecture, and War. Some students, of course, supported the colonial enterprise by accepting what was imparted unquestioningly; others, like the people mentioned in Bhabha's essay, however, appropriated this form of education and used it to resist and to subvert the Raj. It is this fear that makes Miss Jackson avoid the "better class of Indians . . . mostly University students, whose freedom of speech and manner, shook the very foundation of her inmost convictions" (p. 83). The ideal scenario for her is an India in which most individuals are poor, uneducated, and vulnerable--the kind of Indians on whom she could practise her ostentatious, patronizing form of altruism. They would be given just enough to feel grateful to the whites, but not sufficient to be independent. Unfortunately for Miss Jackson, Higher Education had created a monster which threatened to destroy the *status quo*. She expresses her fears thus:

She believed that it was a great mistake to allow the native any facilities for a liberal education, because her opinion was that education upsets his mental equilibrium. He gave himself superior airs and talked about nationalism, which was only another word for sedition! Hence, not granting the possibility of an Indian to be educated, she used to refer to this genus as the "so-called educated native." (p. 83)

It is patent that in his portrayals of Mr. Allen, the civil servant, and Miss Jackson, the missionary, Wijeyeratne has provided a sensitive, psychologically plausible insight into the colonial mind, insights that not many Ceylonese had access to at that time or had the courage to express. Some Sri Lankan nationalists had declared their opposition to the Raj in similar terms in the Legislative Council²² and in newspapers, but such crushing critiques of the Raj rarely appeared in Indian novels written during this period and certainly not in Sri Lankan fiction in English. This in itself makes Wijeyeratne's novel a notable achievement.

If Wijeyeratne had not diverted the novel from its course, *Daughter of Lanka* would have become a landmark in postcolonial fiction more than half a century before the word was even coined. The sections on the Raj anticipate the creative efforts of Achebe, Naipaul, Ngugi, and Raja Rao and even the critical/theoretical pronouncements of Fanon, Said, Bhabha, Spivak and others. The novel is vitiated, however, by its unevenness and by Wijeyeratne's reluctance to make a firm statement on the issues involved. The second half of the novel in which Ray marries Cecily and Mr. Allen "offer[s] to release . . . [Doreen] from a somewhat delicate situation" (p. 110) by

²². See for instance the submissions of several members of the Legislative Council in *Papers Relating to the Constitutional History of Ceylon, 1908-1924*. Colombo: H. Ross Cottle, 1927. pp. 176-231.

marrying her himself is really a "cop-out." The contrived ending only succeeds in reinforcing the stereotypes about women, about interracial marriages, and about the patriarchal notion of obeying one's elders at whatever cost²³ that had been questioned, if not always debunked, in previous episodes.

The novel, in fact, eventually endorses the odious Mr. Allen's comment that

I have the greatest admiration of the East and its people; but I do believe that the Orient and the Occident do not yet sufficiently understand each other to mate successfully. (p. 110)

One cannot even begin to grasp the reason for this authorial capitulation without understanding the deeper significance of the episode at the port. That Mr. Allen, the British Civil Servant, and Ray's father, Mr. Jacob Piyasinghe, should agree on the impossibility of "black and white marriages" (a view that Doreen and later even Ray concur with)²⁴ is crucial. To my mind this episode, and in fact the entire novel, shows the extent to which middle class society in Ceylon and in England are paralysed by a doublebind when confronted by such vital issues. Given their chauvinistic attitudes, Joseph and Mr. Allen cannot be expected to promote enlightened causes. What is more worrisome, however, is that Ray who subscribes to liberal humanist views (a dated, much maligned ideology now, but one which was regarded as radical at the time) is not only coaxed into giving up these ideals for "practical" reasons but also persuades himself at the end that he was misguided in his beliefs.²⁵

Jacob's consenting to Ray's marriage to Cecily and his rejection of Somaratne's last minute offer could be read as evidence that Jacob matures at the end. But such a reading would be erroneous. True enough, Jacob is appalled by Somaratne's comment that he would "see to the damages" (p. 195) if Ray and Somawathie are married by special license. He also loses his "last vestige of respect" (p. 195) for Somaratne when the latter responds to his saying that "the Church would not countenance such an injustice" with "leave me to tackle the Church. Can the Church refuse this favour to me who has been the builder of so many Churches?" (p. 195). It must be remembered, however, that Ray might not have been able to proceed with his plans had his father not realized that

²³. It is significant that Doreen decides to break her promise to Ray only after his father entreats her to do so.

²⁴. See page 116.

²⁵. This study has already shown how the feminist movement, the other ideology endorsed in the book, was also compromised eventually.

Though not so well dowered in worldly goods as Somawathie, she was an only child who would ultimately inherit Saradiel's considerable fortune; and as to social position, was she not a cousin to Somawathie, only once removed? And when Jacob considered the might-have-been-an Englishwoman for a daughter-in-law, he blessed this limited good fortune and welcomed Cecily into his family with feelings of genuine affection. (p. 192)

The second half of the last sentence is not ironic. It constitutes "slippage" on the part of the author and character. There is little that is "genuine" here. The tame, sentimental, "they lived happily ever after" ending does not occlude the knowledge that bias, prejudice, self-interest, money consciousness, and hypocrisy have triumphed over other enlightened attitudes. The celebratory tone and the total absence of satire at the end suggest, furthermore, that Wijeyeratne has at best reconciled himself to these parochial perspectives or at worst endorsed them as the only paradigm for living that middle class Ceylonese/Sri Lankans could observe.

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