



Dislocating The Dislocated:

Imperial Constructs in Maud Diver's *Candles in the Wind*

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All over the world there have been discrete communities that have uprooted themselves, or have been forced to do so, from their motherlands for several reasons. In the earliest days of displacement, commerce was the motivating factor but, later and more importantly, came the competition for colonial domination. Hence, large communities migrated first, as trader, and then as ruler, slave or indentured labourer to the New Colonies being set up by European masters from as far back as the late 16th century.

The result of colonization was miscegenation and a new community called the "Anglo-Indian" emerged in India as a result of British-Indian confluence. The Constitution of India 1949 has defined this community in the following terms:

...an Anglo-Indian means a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only..... (as quoted in 9)

The Anglo-Indians – or, as they were formerly termed, 'Eurasians' – have been in existence since the end of the 16th century. But it was only by the end of the 1800s, because of certain events and ideologies that marked the century, that they began to feature as characters in works of English fiction. The end of this period in Britain saw the flourishing of Imperial theories, for while the British had long practised attitudes of Imperialism, a theory of the same gained official recognition only in the 1890s. Such theories, especially with regard to race and power, were carried over to India and, since they were to the advantage of the white race, were adopted, practised and propagated. The continued expansion of the British empire supported Darwin's

theory of the survival of the fittest, as did the law of natural selection uphold the racial purity of the Anglo-Saxons – a tenet firmly held by the English. Such theories were detrimental to the well-being of the other non-white races, and were particularly intolerant towards 'half-castes'.

Maud Diver's *Candles in the Wind*, a romance novel written in 1909, will be examined to prove how prejudices were formed against the Eurasian community, prejudices that were committed in literature and thereby immortalized for posterity the belittlement of a whole community of people, all in an effort to play out the authenticity of the Imperialist theories to which the greater majority of the British population gave credence. Further, novels like Diver's were read by succeeding generations of British coming to India, serving as resource books to shape opinions even before actual experience was encountered. Since fact must necessarily precede fiction, a short history of the community will prelude a discussion of *Candles in the Wind*.

British-Indian miscegenation began almost as soon as the first known Englishman (but not the first European), a Father Stevens, arrived in Goa on 4th April 1579. He was followed by four others, one of whom, called Leeds, settled in Goa, married an Indian woman and opened a shop. The founding of the East India Company on 24th September 1599 in England resulted in a steady flow of Englishmen into India, where the East India Company established settlements for purposes of trade. The presence of women in such settlements was anathema to the Company, and so in those early days British women never made the trip to the sub-continent. But since the natural instincts of their men had to have an outlet, they were permitted to have relationships with the local women. However, when prostitution resulted in the men contracting diseases that crippled many, more permanent alliances, either through marriage or concubinage, were encouraged. Such families were even granted a gift on the baptism of their Eurasian child. The willful act of creating a new community was perceived to have advantages. The Eurasian was to forge a link between the white man (who if a resident in India began to call himself Anglo-Indian) and the native. For, being born of racially different parents he embodied two races and could potentially bridge the gap between merchant and native, ruler and ruled as the case may be. Hence in the early days of colonialism, maintenance of racial purity was not

a criterion in transcontinental relationships.

In India, the Eurasians held important positions in the East India Company and proved to be more loyal to their white families than to their native ones. This was inevitable because such children were brought up along British lines at home, without much influence from the Indian side of the family, for the Indian woman who defied her family and community to marry an outsider was ostracized by both. Further, these children were often taken away from their native mothers and sent to England for their schooling. Those who couldn't afford to send their children abroad, packed them away to orphanages for education.

Removed from closer ties with the mother race, the Eurasians were more European in thought, religion, speech and dress. The Englishman, on his part, was quite indulgent towards the Eurasian till around the latter half of the 1700s, by which time the number of Eurasians far outnumbered the British. A little later, news of the mestizo uprising in Haiti slowly reached India, causing fear among the rulers who realized that this might be their fate, too, if they did not impose restrictions on the Eurasians. To this end they adopted policies to render Eurasians totally insecure. They hired and dismissed them at will, and blocked the advancement of these men into the commissioned ranks. The new ambivalent attitude adopted towards the Eurasians resulted in great financial losses, reducing many to the state of pauperism. But more than the monetary deprivation, these people underwent the unmitigated trauma of rejection from a well-loved parent. From a position of equality, they were rudely shifted to an 'in-between' state, the British recognizing the English strain when it was beneficial to them and at other times distancing themselves from them so completely as to categorize them with the 'natives'.

In the social arena, the British continued to marry Indian and Eurasian women. But everything changed after the Suez Canal was opened in 1869, greatly shortening travel time between England and India, and allowing ship loads of English women to make the journey. With the availability of more women of their own race, the British started discouraging further marriages between their men and native and Eurasian women. Racial differences once accepted without question or condescension were now the reasons cited for prevention of further inter-racial marriages.

The arrival of Englishwomen saw a tremendous increase in the number of Romance novels, with India as the 'locus amoenus', being written and published. [Editor's note: *locus amoenus* is Latin for 'perfect place', a literary term generally referring to an idealized place of safety or comfort, or a pastoral place with connotations of Eden.] These novels were in popular demand, for they incorporated Imperial ideas in romance fiction, thereby lending credibility to fantasies. Since these Imperial ideas fashioned Victorian thinking it was not surprising that they found their way into the writings of the time. Pertinent to this discussion are the books written before the two wars. Writers who included Bithia Mary Croker, Alice Perrin, Flora Annie Steele, E. F. Penny and Maud Diver wrote from the experiences they themselves underwent, and their novels evince their rather 'neurotic concern with protecting their identity from pollution by strange, unwholesome and deviant India'. (Benita Parry, quoted in 1). Much more than their male counterparts, they were interested in exploring the inter-racial romances between British men and Indian women. Particularly interesting was the Eurasian community, for this section constituted a tangible danger to the European community because it held the power to blur distinctions and transcend the carefully constructed barriers between them and the pure bloods with their ability to 'pass' as European.

Maud Diver's creative corpus of fictional and non-fictional work numbers almost 30, with several of them dealing with the theme of hybridity. *Candles in the Wind* is perhaps the most representative. At the time of writing, the Eurasian population was already an established entity and, through the novel, Diver tries to convey the folly of inter-racial marriages. The Eurasian's ability to pass as British is both threatening and destabilizing and, by portraying them as more representative of the Indian race, Diver attempts to dislocate them as far as possible from anything white and thereby to indirectly deny them their right to claim kinship with the British.

The dislocation attempted by Diver is not physical but mental. There is no attempt to circumscribe the Eurasians in a location with physical demarcations. In fact the novel evinces the contrary. Psychologically, however, they have been categorized by the white man as an 'in-between' entity and the novel's motif is to achieve an uprootment even from this position to relocation to the Indian extreme. 'In-between' would make accessibility more facile, removal would negate their claims to links with the white

rulers, make associations more difficult and further miscegenation, hopefully, an impossibility. The title *Candles in the Wind* thus becomes a metaphor for the gradual disappearance of the community. Like a flaming candle that in windy surroundings will melt down quickly, the Eurasians if continually made to endure the changing winds of opinion and prejudice will eventually disintegrate and merge into the larger Indian community.

The tone of the novel is set with Laurence, the white protagonist's definition of the Eurasian.

...the half-caste out here falls between two stools, that's the truth. He has the misfortune to be neither white nor brown: and he is generally perverse enough to pick the worst qualities of the two races, and mix them into a product peculiarly distasteful to both.....Clever enough, some of 'em: but there's a want of grit in their constitutions, physical and moral. It's a bad business all round; the mixing of brown and white races in marriage. (p.45)

While the definition, unwittingly given to Lyndsay Videlle, the white wife of the Eurasian doctor James Videlle, fixes the Eurasian's present social standing it also blames him for the position he is in. He is unfortunate not to belong to either side but the misfortune is credited to his own making – "...he is generally perverse enough to pick the worst qualities of the two races..." The statement makes it seem like the Eurasian had a choice in determining his racial make-up. "Clever enough some of 'em ..." is designed to substantiate Dr. Videlle's position as a doctor, yet having given credit, it is immediately retracted with, "...but there's want of grit in their constitution, physical and moral." Throughout the novel we are shown instances of the varied weaknesses inherent in Videlle's character.

Since the white man's contribution to the genesis of the Eurasian race cannot be denied, Diver seeks to justify early miscegenation. Lyndsay's repulsion to white men marrying 'the sort of women one sees around here' prompts Laurence to go once again into an explanation:

And they don't now; at least not one in a thousand. But in the Mutiny days, or earlier, when men were stuck out here for half their service, it was another matter. One cannot blame them. It is not good for man to be alone. But their descendants have had to pay heavily for that simple fact. It's not race prejudice that puts one off.....It's the fatality of mixing such mighty opposites in marriage; and the white man's distaste for the

half-breed all the world over. I can't stand them. (p.p.45-46).

The "It is not good for man to be alone" part echoes the Bible and thereby condones the action of the white man. However, while they are absolved of their supposed fall, the resultant Eurasian has to pay for his father's faults. But most rankling of all is, "One cannot blame them," and as Loretta Mijares rightly asks, "Then whom are we to blame?" Laurence feels he has to defend his statement by claiming that he and his countrymen are not the only ones prejudiced against hybridity, "...the white man's distaste for the half-breed all the world over" is intended to excuse and explain his attitude: "I can't stand them." As such, Laurence indicates that he is quite fond of the Indian, but it is the Eurasian, who refuses to be content with his new location, that earns his hatred. So naturally, the "mixing of brown and white races in marriage" becomes "bad business" as such unions would increase the number of half-castes with the deceptive ability to pose as European. Here it is worth recalling the order passed against Eurasian children being sent 'home' (to Britain) for education for, once there, with their particular indistinctness (which would however be recognized in India) they would ultimately contract marriages with 'unsuspecting' English men and women and produce half-blood off- spring, thereby causing a degeneration of the pure race.

Fear of continued race-mixing prompts the need for further distancing and hence the focus is shifted to highlight the Indian in the Eurasian through his life-style and behaviour. Since the novel includes only two Eurasian characters, the manifestations of their personalities are taken to be representative of the community as a whole. Irrespective of the fact that almost all Eurasians are Christians, attention is drawn to their non-Christian mothers. Diver uses the occasion of Lyndsay's enlightenment to her husband's Eurasian identity to drive home the divide between the whites and the natives. The "pride of race that burned in her life a steady flame" causes her to smart under the sting of the revelation that she is married to a half-caste:

...the mother of the man she called "husband" had been no Spaniard but a Hindu; a woman born in the smoke-grimed squalor of a native hut: reared in an atmosphere of ignorance and superstition;... (p.64)

Nowhere do we actually get any concrete evidence as to the real identity or religion of Videlle's mother. But by emphasizing the mother's religion, and by associating her

with poverty, ignorance and superstition, Diver conveys the idea of the other supposedly inferior race that formed part of Dr. Videlle's genetic make-up, the part that proved more dominant in Videlle and was manifested by his lie, his melancholy and his "aloofness of the Asiatic".

Lyndsay's marriage to James is however a reality and must be explained. James's apparent slyness in concealing his Indian streak is contrasted with Lyndsay's naivety, and the success of his repeated proposals attributed to the emotional instability she underwent following the death of a beloved father, with Diver all the while asserting, "Lyndsay Videlle was not genuinely in love with her husband; though she had married him in that belief seven months earlier..."(p.59) The readers are therefore given to understand that a white woman, with all her faculties intact, would have perceived the difference between herself and a half-caste and would never have entered into such a repulsive union. Moreover, the Eurasian with "...the crooked pride of his kind", which stifles demonstrations of affection and understanding of English womankind, cannot be expected to sustain such a marriage. Videlle's maintenance of his widowed half-sister, Carrie Vansittart, and her son Montgomery is because "... the Hindu strain in his blood accepted her right to live under his roof as a matter of course. It was 'dastur' (custom)..." (p.84), and Carrie's behaviour and Monty's lack of schooling and familiarity with the servants "...suggested a more vital connection with the country than mere living in India could explain" (p.64) Later, on the announcement of her pregnancy, James Videlle's eagerness in catering to his wife's comforts evokes the comment,

Had she realized how typically Asiatic was his change of attitude – his respect, bordering on worship, for Woman, the Life-Bringer, the mother of men – the knowledge might possibly have checked her impulse towards closer union. (p.152)

Other typical Indian qualities are indicated through Carrie's letter containing "voluble condolences" at the birth of a daughter and her opinion that Lyndsay had failed "in a wife's first duty to her husband." "That was Carrie's Oriental way of looking at it"(p.217). In spite of Diver's repeated references to the Oriental in James and Carrie, nowhere do we read about their socialization with any other community but the whites – Diver's overt attempts to prove that such Asiatic qualities were a result of strong heredity factors rather than aspects acquired through association with the

environment.

Since the Eurasian embodied so many Hindu qualities his removal to 'in-betweenness' is justified and further relocation is desired, for the divide created by racial differences cannot be bridged by pretensions to Europeanness. As Videlle is representative of 'his kind', then all Eurasians are to be treated in like manner. They are to be distanced or relocated to the Indian side. Such a relocation is to be effected in their psyches. The relocation had already been executed in the mind of the white man but was having apparent difficulty in taking root in the Eurasian's. Furthermore, as a punishment for having dared to transgress the line of divide and defying relocation, he has to die so that the white hero, the white woman's soul mate, can take his place.

As the novel progresses towards its conclusion, with Lyndsay playing the Victorian 'angel of the house' in contrast to Videlle, who has the propensity to read "an ill motive into the simplest act", we realize that the Videlle marriage is also heading towards disaster. The union, contracted in deception between two most unsuitable partners, must necessarily end so that a more appropriate one between two pure bloods – as per the natural law of things – can materialize. Videlle must therefore be sacrificed at the altar of prejudice so that Alan Laurence, "wholesome and refreshing", can take his place. To this end Videlle must therefore be stripped of all virtues and shown to be what he, according to the white man's reasoning, has to be, which would make his exit all the more justifiable. To them, he is not a white man, only a pretender.

For the Eurasian, life took an unexpected, bitter turn from the late 1700s. The unwarranted change in attitude towards his kind produced complexes not easily cured, and further dislocation attempted during the Imperial tide threatened to obliterate the existence of such a community by categorizing them as fully Indian. The earlier displacement transpired as a result of political policies formed out of a fear of usurpation by the ever-growing Eurasian population. The second, and more earnestly sought-after re-displacement, a hundred years later, was born out of hatred for a class of people whose hybridity threatened the new-fangled theories of racial superiority and purity. The danger, as perceived by the new racists, existed in the perpetuation of this community and a permanent transplanting to the Indian side

appeared to them the best solution.

Diver's prejudice against inter-race unions is not unique to her. Kipling, F. E. Penny, and Flora Annie Steele have all dealt with inappropriate inter-racial marriages/liaisons by working out the death/sacrifice of the Indian or the Eurasian as a means of terminating unwholesome relationships instead of the other way round. The white man 'goes native' because of the circumstances in which he finds himself, the Indian has a choice, but the Eurasian, the fruit of willful act and option, is the fall guy. He is to be despised because he represents the outcome of lust, feared because he has the deceitful ability of 'passing' as either race, and must be relocated in an effort to maintain racial purity.

The despicable attitude adopted towards the Eurasian was a 19th century Imperial phenomenon, and the novels written with the purpose of decrying the folly of inter-racial alliances ultimately served to legitimize British Imperialism.

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