CHAPTER - II

EARLY NOVELS

Malgonkar's success as a writer of Entertainments cannot be analysed and assessed by reading his first three novels, Distant Drum, Combat of Shadows and The Prince. But a close study of these novels would reveal the making of the Entertainer. The fictional rhetoric that makes a book a successful and satisfactory entertainment can be noticed in its embryonic form in the early novels. Combat of Shadows, from this point of view seems to occupy a prominent place. As K.R.S. Iyengar says, "For a first novel, Distant Drum has unusual distinction, for not only does Malgonkar make his characters and incidents stand out clearly, it has also a feeling for form and atmosphere." While the preceding citation rightly emphasises Malgonkar's feeling for form and atmosphere, it doesn't take into consideration, the narrative mode that operates in the novel. In most stories, Malgonkar keeps one or two characters at the Centre and makes plot and character converge on that point. Kiran Garud affectionately called "Jacko" by his friends and admirers makes his reappearance in the later novel, Bandicoot Ran.
This suggests that Malgonkar would like to dramatize themes which are a part of his experience, especially his experience as an army officer. This doesn't mean that they are autobiographical. As G.S. Amur rightly observes, "Malgonkar's strength as a writer lies in the recognition of his limitations and the integrity he scrupulously maintains in the use of his material."

In the following pages an attempt is made to analyse the material and the milieu of the novels under consideration. *Distant Drum* is a neatly narrated account of an army officer's experiences as a man, a lover and a soldier. The emphasis in the narrative appears to be on code, not in the Barthean critical sense, but in the dictionary meaning of the term. We see the operation of the code in Raniwada Cantonment and in the Army Headquarters in New Delhi. In the course of the narrative and in the course of Kiran's maturing process, the word 'Code' seems to acquire a few undertones and ironic implications. One of his friends says:

We were together at the academy. Jacko was a junior to me. I must say everyone thought him pretty dumb those days. He hardly had a word
to say to himself. It was only after he joined his regiment that he became a bloody fire-eater. Told his own C.O to 'Shut up'.

The above citation suggests that Kiran's view of code doesn't consist in the superficial observance of manners associated with the hierarchy in the army. On the other hand, the code is meaningful to him only in terms of a soldier's active engagement on the field. Throughout the narrative it is unmistakably brought to our notice that Kiran takes justifiable pride in his sense of 'belonging to' Satpura Regiment and its military achievement.

During his active service in the Second war, Kiran realised that a sense of duty was more important than his outspoken attitude. But that was not the view of the rank and file in the army. This is suggested when the narrator tells us, "Since then, Kiran had been through two great Campaigns. He had been awarded the Military Cross for what they had called, "Exemplary devotion to duty in the field of battle, and he had been twice mentioned in despatches, but these

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1Manohar Malgonkar, Distant Rum (Delhi-Orient Paperbacks, 1974), p. 20.
later triumphs did not seem to carry half the glory of that incident long ago, when, as a Second Lieutenant he had humiliated a drunken old British Lt. Colonel."

Apart from his growing sense of duty and loyalty to his regiment, Kiran develops a strong sense of human responsibility. He had been friendly with Margot Medley, the enterprising wife of Bob Medley, a colonel in the Regiment. The friendship develops into an illicit affair. They meet accidentally in Calcutta when Kiran was there on a holiday from the Burma campaign. It so happened that Bob Medley came to the flat to see his wife and found Kiran there. Bob Medley was not the sort of the person to think of revenge. Instead he punished himself by committing suicide. This incident had a deep impression on Kiran's mind and made him often go into moods of introspection. Throughout Part I, "The Regiment," what is brought home is Kiran's evolving sense of the Code as responsibility. In other words it is an accountability which one owes to oneself. The following passage amply demonstrates the point:

It was a process which, despite all its crudeness, had been proved through the ages
to achieve splendid results and had made the regular officers of the British army the fine leaders of men they were. It was not merely a matter of hard training, although, of course, that was there in the fullest measure so that at the end of the day you were ready to drop from sheer physical exhaustion. It was even more, a process of cutting you down to size, as they put it, of making you learn how to 'take it,' of making you realize that just because you were entitled to a salute and to life-and-death obedience from those you commanded, you were not really somebody important, that you that you were just a soldier among other soldiers, the only difference being that because of your upbringing and education and training, you had assumed greater responsibilities than common soldiers, and above all of making you fit to carry that extra burden of responsibility.²

²Manohar Malgonkar, Distant Drum (Delhi-Orient Paperbacks, 1974), p. 79.
and acquiring the capacity for leadership. But the scrupulous observance of the code becomes very difficult and at times impossible when Kiran is transferred to the Army Headquarters in Delhi. In discharging his responsibilities of his new job, Kiran gets a sound advice from one of his friends, Mansingh. He says, "Cultivate the right people; keep away from the wrong ones; wangle a room in Akbar Mess, My mess; join the Delhi Sports Club."

Whether Kiran conducted himself according to the advice of his friend or not, is not the point. The whole point of Part-Two, 'The Staff,' is the choking and frustration to which he was subjected in the Army Headquarters.

For example, Brigadier Shindey of the Directorate of War Plans asked Kiran to help him in preparing an appreciation of the communication requirements of Border Region III (Three). Strictly speaking, the work is outside Kiran's sphere. But he is asked to do it because of his experience as a soldier. Since he has to do the work in a short time, he could not follow procedures in collecting the material. Without taking the official permission, he went to the Section dealing with Maps, and brought the required material to his office. This provokes the officer,
Nemdar, who is in-charge of it. Even Brigadier Shindey fails to support Kiran against Nemdar because in the Army Headquarters they always invoke the authority of the General to silence any opposition to, or criticism against the rigid official procedure. Besides this, we find that the top men in the Army Headquarters are accessible to the politicians and the V.I.P's of New Delhi. They intervene not only in the administrative affairs and policy matters but in personal and private affairs. After coming to New Delhi Kiran falls in love with Tina Sonal whom he met long ago in Raniwada. She is an announcer and a news reader in the A.I.R and is the daughter of Mr Sonal, a Secretary to Government in New Delhi. Mr Sonal doesn't want his daughter to marry an army officer because army officers are notoriously unpredictable in their behaviour towards women. Moreover, he wants his daughter to marry a rich man who can provide her with an opportunity to live upper class life. He was instrumental in getting Garud transferred to his Regiment in Raniwada. These events are unmistakable indications of the corrupt practices that
soil in the code. What is significant is that these corrupt practices have themselves become a code which frustrate an open hearted person like Kiran. Now we see that a code by itself is not enough, even in the very arduous profession of a soldier. The narrator tells us towards the end of Section Two, that "after Mr Sonal has left, presumably for his game of Bridge, Kiran waited at the Bar, and although it was still a few minutes to opening time, he persuaded Ram Lal to give him a double whisky. He was bewildered, hurt and angry. That talk with Mr Sonal had left him with a feeling that he had not acquitted himself well. Somehow he felt as though he had let down both the things he loved above everything: the service and Bina (Emphasis added)."

In part three, "Active Service," of the novel, we find Kiran restored to the Service and Bina. Kiran's joining his Regiment is a surprise to him. His stay in Raniwada is not as pleasant as he expected to be. He and Abdul become close and their friendship is the result of their relationship with Bob Medley's wife. Before he
had left for Raniwada he met Abdul and both of them unexpectedly get involved in the on-going communal riots.

But Kiran could withdraw from the scene with the feeling that, "what stood out magnificently secure in that holocaust was the fact that although they belonged to the two opposing communities crazed with vengeance and thirsting for blood, he and Abdul had been able to work together in the closest accord, their loyalties to each other absolutely unruptured by that incessant strain." We realise later that Abdul told a lot of lies to save Kiran from trouble at the Court Enquiry on the raids. As the commanding officers of the opposed armies and Nations, they exchange greetings and celebrate their association with the Satpura Regiment. Although situation was tense on the boarders, Kiran keeps cool and faces the charge brought against him with boldness. General Torgal tells him,

"Colonel Garud, you have committed a serious, very serious breach of military discipline," the General boomed. "You have acted in total dis-

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regard of the accepted code of behaviour of our officers. Just to satisfy a childish, personal whim, you very nearly brought disgrace upon the fair name of this division. Supposing you had been taken prisoner. Supposing your battalion had started a battle on its own to retaliate, just on the eve of the cessation of hostilities. Think of the complications. Supposing the Pakistani Commander had given orders to have you ambushed. 4

Kiran knows, that there is no way of answering the charge. Facts are facts. His testimony about Abdul's loyalty is beside the point. But the General himself is not very serious about what he said and about Kiran's lapse, because a few minutes later, the General invites him to an evening party.

From the foregoing analysis of Distant Drum, a few points emerge. At the centre of the novel, we have a hero who adheres to a code, but not the sort of the code as is normally understood in the army. His frank

and outspoken behaviour make him ultimately succeed, both in love and war. But there are certain lapses in the craftsmanship of the novel. Garud's participation in campaigns in Burma and other related items are retrospectively narrated. There is neither an inside view of the hero's psyche nor a dramatic rendering of the most tense situations and occasions in his career.

No doubt there is an elaborate and realistic presentation of the atmosphere of clubs, mess, dances, and love affairs which sometimes come in the way of the hero and his code. That these have not been organically integrated with the theme of the code, can be shown by a close study of the novel. But what is impressive and significant from our point of view is that, at no point do we find the narrative dull. Some of the incidents like Bob Medley confronting Kiran in his wife's flat, the communal riots in Delhi, the meeting of Abdul and Kiran as friends in an No-man's land, even though they belonged to the rival armies and the character of Margot Medley are interesting and exciting. All this is skilfully aligned with the change in the meaning of the word Code.
The above features mark the novel not as a successful 'Entertainment' but as a convincing one.

For the sake of the exploratory convenience we shall ignore the chronology of Malgonkar's fiction and analyse The Princes, his third novel and discuss Combat of shadows in the concluding section of this chapter.

Prince Abhayraj, the last of Feiars of Begwad, recounts his experience as the ruler of one of the six hundred princely states of the Pre-Independent India. The most significant event in the life of Abhayraj is neither political nor social, but purely a domestic one. As an adolescent, he discovers that his mother has an illicit relationship with the palace officer, Abdulla Jan. From a human point of view, the Maharani may be exonerated. But the later events make her behaviour more shocking. She leaves Begwad, goes to Pakistan becomes a convert to Islam and marries Abdulla. But this is not an unusual incident in fiction. What is surprising is that Malgonkar has not evaluated it in terms of the career and prospects of Abhayraj. No doubt throughout the narrative, we find that he develops more sympathy for his father than for
his mother.

In a revealing passage he says:

The painful scene between my father and myself had brought into the open a resentment which had been growing within me for a long time. Hitherto, I had never shown any open resistance to his ideas. Me, on the other hand, must have always assumed that I had absorbed without question all that he had taught me to believe. Lately, I have wondered what psychological quirk in my character made me take a perverse delight in having digs at him about the growth of nationalism in the country and the hopelessly insecure position of the princes, for although I would not have admitted it readily at the time, I myself went a long way towards sharing his views and values as far as our state was concerned. Indeed it seems to me that with the passing of the years, I have come to identify myself more and more with those values, with the result that today I feel myself a spokesman for whatever the princely order once stood for.\(^5\)

The above citation unmistakably suggests that it took sufficient time and self-analysis for Abhayraj to

realise the values for which his father struggled. But as a growing boy, he is endowed with a sensitive response to his time and milieu. The Prince's growth in awareness is neither morally nor spiritually oriented. Except for two significant events, his schooling, his career in the army his abdication of his title appear to be very normal and routine matters. He seems to have subscribed to his mother's idea that one loves after of marriage. Like his father, he also has, a few extra marital relationships and on a few occasions seems to be excited about them. As for example in the following passage,

I realised with a stab of ecstasy that she wore nothing beneath it. She lay still while I held the folds of her shirt in my hands and pulled it over her head with a jerk and flung it on to the grass, and then she was snuggling closer and closer to me, white and feminine, hiding her face flushed with shame into my chest.⁶

But the novel as an 'entertainment', seems to acquire its power to engross our attention because of two

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significant incidents. We have already noted his mother's marriage with Abdulla Jan. In terms of the overall thrust of the narrative, it has its own irony. Abhayraj tells us that his mother, the Maharani of Bagvad, always confines herself to a place in which she worshipped the Seven Sethis, that is, the Seven Maharani who immolated themselves by jumping into the funeral pyre of their dead husbands. Perhaps the Maharani taking the conventional practice as a pretext, was brooding over her husband's indifferent attitude towards her and at the same time also using it as a cloak to cover her affair with Abdulla. The real peripetia in the novel is the incident of the public flogging of Kanakachand. Early in the novel, Karakchand was given a public flogging by the Maharaja. This incident seems to have more impact on the narrator's mind, than his mother's shocking behaviour. As it usually happens in Malgonkar's fiction, Kanakachand and the narrator are diametrically opposed, representing two equally formidable and contrary political ideas. The first flogging brings them together. But as the plot develops, the two become rivals. Towards the end of the narrative, we find both succeeding, not in direct fashion but in an oblique manner.
As a popular demagogue, the local Praja Mandal Chief and later as the Education Minister, Kanakchand lets loose a verbal havoc on the princes of India. Kanakchand describing the ruling prince as the relic of the old order, challenges him to come on to the platform and says:

what has happened to the man who flogged me? His power is gone, his money is gone, he himself is gone. I, whom he whipped, have the honour to be one of your Ministers. It is they who are finished; it was we who finished them. It was the sacred oath of the Praja-mandal, those of us who worked and suffered for the advent of the people’s raj ... we were determined to wipe them out. This we had sworn - this we have fulfilled. 7

Abhayraj, who goes to the meeting with a pre-determined mind, rushes on Kanakchand, and flogs him again, and mutters to himself that he has sworn to do this and he has fulfilled his oath. Ironically enough, which we have noted earlier, the fulfilment is not a solid achievement, but a sad relinquishment so far as Abhayraj is concerned.

From the foregoing analysis, it may be said, that *The Princes* like *Distant Drum* is not a very successful entertainment but a very convincing one. In *Distant Drum*, we have two characters who belong to the same regiment but whose destinies were ultimately shaped by forces, over which they have no control. In *The Princes* we have two characters, the Narrator and Kanakchand whose destinies were shaped by conflicting forces that have shaped the country's history as well.

*The Princes* was published in 1963, and the *Combat of Shadows* was published in 1962. In both the books, we have 'hunting' as the dominant motif. But what is to be noted is that in terms of organisation, *The Princes* is evolutionary, in the sense, that the plot and the characters evolve and *Combat of Shadows* is melodramatic. The epigraph of *Combat of Shadows* tells us, that desire and aversion are opposite shadows. To interpret the novel, exclusively concentrating on desire and aversion, may involve us in a moralistic exercise. We have pointed out earlier how melodrama serves very well for the purpose of entertainment. This doesn't mean that *Combat of Shadows* is a melodrama.
What we would like to suggest is that, in *Combat of Shadows*, Malgonkar finds his forte and uses the devices of melodrama to accelerate the velocity of narration and tie the loose ends into an organic whole. Henry Winton and Eddie Trevor are the two characters, in whom we notice passion, excitement channelised in terms of sex, and outward life.

Winton is a good shot and marksman. Eddie is a Hockey Player. But temperamentally they are different. Winton is an opportunist who successfully manages Tea estates. Eddie, on the other hand, is very out-spoken and brave. It is his loneliness as a bachelor that draws Winton to Ruby Miranda, an Anglo-Indian girl. In the first part of the novel, 'Prelude to Home Leave,' we find that Winton doesn't love Ruby. He gets acquainted with Miss Jean Walters. He tries to love and marry her and at the same time does his very best to keep Ruby as his mistress. Jean turns down Henry's proposal. This situation suddenly transforms itself into a situation which threatens the prestige of Henry as a hunter. Love and lust are replaced by pride and power. Invited by the District Commissioner to kill the one tusked rogue elephant that
has caused terror among the people, Winton goes to prove his ability. When he and his shikari or tracker, Kistulal, sight the elephant, Winton fires. But the cartridges fail to work. This is one of the melodramatic incidents that has a far reaching affect on the course of action in the dramatization of the novel. The elephant kills Kistulal and Henry runs to save himself. Winton's boss Capt. Cockburn advises him to twist the tale by saying that Winton's shots injured the elephant but could not kill it. This would help not only to save his own prestige but also the prestige of the 'Englishman.' But this tale doesn't convince Kistulal's son Pasupati. After settling some of the problems raised by the labour unrest in the estate, Winton leaves for England. But before he leaves Winton comes to know that Ruby is likely to marry Eddie Trevor as soon as he gets a job.

The events that follow Winton's return from England, are intricately interwoven with the destinies of Winton, Eddie, Ruby and Jean. Winton marries Jean in England. Now he would like to give up Ruby. Eddie and Jean renew their contact and friendship at Silent Hill. This in turn
leads them into an affair of absorbing passion. Winton's attention was drawn to the affair of Jean and Eddie by Gouri, the niece of Jugal Kishore, who from the position of a labour leader rises to that of a Minister under provincial autonomy. It is here that we find a stock entertainment - device, revenge, coming into play. Winton carefully plans his revenge against Eddie Trevor. It is at this stage we find that Winton assumes the role of a melodramatic villain. He encourages Eddie to hunt and kill the one tusked rogue elephant, a job which was actually offered to him. He gives Eddie his gun and the box of cartridges. Winton himself failed to kill the elephant, because the box contained dummy cartridges. Kistulal's son, Pashupati, who accompanied Eddie realises the diabolical mischief and trick played by Winton. Although Winton succeeds in taking revenge on Eddie, he himself becomes the victim of a vendetta planned by Sir Geoffrey Dart, the illegitimate father of Eddie, Ruby, and Pashupati. They all make him go to the game-cottage in which he got burnt to death by a fire that was generated in the forest.
The foregoing summary of the plot suggests how *Combat of Shadows* is organized. Unlike *Distant Drum* and *The Princess* in which codes, games and the natural backdrop, are descriptive and evocative are firmly foregrounded in the novel under consideration. The Pythons are not a part of the atmosphere, but constitute a formidable image which serves a functional purpose in the narrative. As K.R.S. Iyengar points out, "The entire action of the novel has this Python-movement, for Winton is caught at the very beginning although he doesn't realise it; he wriggles, he strikes out, but the coils only get smaller and smaller, and there is really no hope for him."

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