CHAPTER - IV

The Devil's Wind
In all aspects of historical novel with its pre-requisite qualities as ordained conventionally for its fulfillment and perfection as per the norms of English historical fiction, 'The Devil's Wind' is considered to be the first genuine historical novel. In this novel Nana Saheb, the hero, is presented not as a dark and dismal figure but as a true human being with a few limitations. Writing about historical perfection attained in this novel P.P. Mehta says:
"The Devil's Wind" can be considered as the first perfect historical novel of Indo-Anglian fiction. It is historical in the sense that it is based on the most spectacular historical event in Indian history - the so-called mutiny of 1857. It is a historical novel in which most of the characters are actual great men and women from the pages of history. It is a historical novel in which the hero himself is the most important person of the history of those turbulent days.41

In this context, "The Devil's Wind" which is given as a title to the novel is proper to explain here because there is certain historical event on the back stage of the title. The British general of East India Company proposed to celebrate the centenary of the Battle of Plassey on "the twenty third June, 1857" (p.103). Nana states that he remembers well about the Plassey (1757) and its atrocities:

"We knew it in our bones; we had been told about it in the dying pronouncement of Satis, widows who cremated themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres and the prophecies of our saints. When one hundred years had elapsed, the company's rule would end. "The Devil's Wind" would rise and unshackle Mother India."(pp.103-104)

Though it was a prophecy it has happened in history. On the "thirty first of May a dust storm hit the city and brought the monsoon visibly close." (p.143-144) "The Devil's Wind was now uncontrollable." (p.144)

Ms. Erika Cheetham, the author of the book "The Final Prophecies of Nostradamus" writes:

"Nostradamus also predicted the 'Sepoy Rebellion' against the British in 1857.... He also wrote that the wind will be strong against the rebels 'who will be driven off by lime dust and cinders.' Accounts of the early days of 'rebellion' relate that the British were able to escape defeat because the initial sepoys onslaught was thwarted by huge dust storm caused by a high wind."42

This storm just preceding monsoon will be much devilish and so Azim said to Nana:

"Then we should all pray that the monsoon should never come."

(p.144)

So the wind was quite harmful to the Sepoys to face a defeat.

Among the historical novels of Indo-Anglian fiction, 'The Devil's Wind' is, in a way, a perfect historical novel. It concerns itself with the story of Nana Saheb, the controversial figure of the Sepoy Revolt of 1857. The Sepoy Revolt, provided with capital material for many historical and fictional writings both in India and abroad. As S.D. Singh says:

"There are about fifty novels written by English Writers on these events."43

---


The difficulty with most of these novels and historical works has been that Nana has been depicted as a dark and dismal figure, thereby presenting a distorted version of history and also of maligning of an Indian hero. M.K. Naik rightly observes:

"I have often been struck by the extent of the ignorance of India displayed by many of the Indo-Anglian writers."\(^{44}\)

However a few historians and also critics like Edward Thompson have tried to present Indian history in the right perspective. They feel that one is not justified to throw the blame of the genocide in 'The Sepoy Revolt' upon Nana Saheb as a true human being. In his own words:

"All history of India is written from the British view. Nana Saheb, the leading figure of the Mutiny has historically been treated as a villain. In my book ...... I treat him as a human being. I write of him as a neither a patriot nor a villain, but as a rather mixed up human being, like most of us are."\(^{45}\)

These lines show how the novelist is anxious to present Nana Saheb as a true human being.

The story of the 'The Devil's Wind' can be summarised briefly. Baji Rao II, the Peshwa haunted by the Maratha confederators, was given protection by the British and he was kept in Bithoor, a small village on the right bank of the Ganges .... twelve miles away from Kanpur after his


\(^{45}\) *The Ellsworth American*, No.12, Nov.,1970.
defeat in 1818. Nana Saheb, his adopted son, grew up with all princely luxuries.

Under the prediction of the ghost, Baji Rao believed that if Nana's marriage "is consummated, the wife shall die ... not a single woman can live to bear his child." (p.17) Though Mani was betrothed to Nana, the marriage did not take place owing to the curse as predicted by the ghost, and Nana led his early conjugal life with concubines. The first part of the novel recaptures the splendour and pageantry of India before 1857. Nana writes vividly of his father's sexual excesses of the beautiful women of the palace and of his own fabulous parties and dinners given to the British V.I.P.S. It is also narrated the changing conditions of India at that period, of the discontent and unrest among the large sections of the Indian population produced during the British regime in India.

When Baji Rao died, according to funeral rituals of Indian culture, a land had to be gifted away to the priest. Nana said that there was no land of his own anywhere:

"I was bluntly told by the commissioner that even the land on which the wada stood and the grounds surrounding it were mine only for life, that they all belonged to the Company." (p.41)

Under the "Doctrine of Lapse" instrument of Lord Dalhousie the pension that was being given to Baji Rao, was also stopped. Under the same instrument, Oudh State was also confiscated by the British. The
British officers under their cruel policies managed to murder many heirs of Delhi. Bahadurshah had left the throne to live in a rural area. So, the Mughal dynasty was at its verge of extinction.

Part two of the novel deals with the endurance of the Indian army. The Maharajas of Bengal, Bihar, Oudh, Punjab and Delhi were very much deprived of their rights on their states. A conspiracy was arranged to make an united revolt against the British by Zeenat Mahal of Delhi:

"It was at this meeting that the broad strategy of the revolt was decided upon .... the lavender veil announced that the Queen's personal seal, the white lotus, would be the symbol of the revolt and that it would be used in secret communication among the leaders, almost as a code sign." (p.73)

Hence the revolt was programmed at Delhi in Mughal Redfort to which Nana was also invited, but he sent Azim to attend to it. "So the plan was born, the date set." (p.74) for the revolt to be taken up on 23rd June 1857 on which date "the hundredth anniversary" of the battle of Plassey was programmed to be celebrated by the Britishers.

As against to these decisions secretly made, the revolt of unprecedented nature broke out exhibiting the fury of the Sepoys of Meerut "on Sunday, 10th May, 1857", earlier than decided, on religious grounds of the cartridges having been applied with the pig's and cow's fat and that were to be bitten by the Hindu and Muslim Sepoys as well. So the enraged Sepoys went berserk and attacked the British officers enjoying the holiday at their residences:
"The cavalry sepoys ran; ran as they were, naked to their strips of their waist clothes. Some went to the jails and unfettered their comrades, others rushed to their officers bungalows to wreak their vengeance, and many began to loot the bazaar shops." (p.114)

"So the revolt had begun, on Sunday, May 10, 1857." (p.114)

Nana, in Bithoor, received, the incidents of Meerut and made arrangements to attack Kanpur military regiment under the guidance of Tika Singh and Tantya Topi and other tribal sepoys. They made Nana as Peshwa, "Victory to our king; to Nana Saheb, the Peshwa" (p.148) they said.

So, Nana and his troops attacked the Military garrison at Kanpur. The Entrenchment of British Military was almost destroyed. Subsequently Nana's troops were terribly defeated and killed by the British in Bithoor's war. Under some compromise Nana agreed to send away the remaining Britishers in the Entrenchment to Allahabad by means of forty boats. But, the Britishers in all forty boats were killed by sepoys. Only four were left alive. Meanwhile, the Britishers also organised a heavy massacre of Indian-women and children at Daryaganj and other villages. In retaliation to the British havoc many British men and women and children were massacred in Bibigarh. The Bibighar incident is denoted as -

"In common with names like Waterloo, or Panipat, or Balaclava, it has its inherent violence, a power to shock." (p.189)
Meanwhile, the Britishers were made alert and army was sent to Kanpur on the morning of 23rd June. At dawn the attack began. It was planned to take place in two phases.

"A handful of white soldiers had once again defeated thousands of blacks. The residue of the centenary of Plassey was writhing mass of wounded men and horses engulfed by smoke and flames and their heart rending screams." (p.174)

After subsequent attacks from either side and after many atrocities and massacres of Daryaganj, Satichaura, Bibighar and Fatepur incidences, the Britishers had put down the revolt and on, "Friday, July 17, the British Flag once more flew over Kanpur." (p.205)

The third part of the novel called "Gone Away" deals with the British suppression of the revolt and Nana's escape to Nepal, where he spends fourteen years in concealment. Nana himself states about his concealment thus:

"In both our great religious epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha, the duration of 'Vanawasa', or jungle living, that the principal characters have to undergo the same fourteen years." (p.276)

During his stay in Nepal, he learnt that Tantya Topi, Jhansi Rani were killed in fighting against the British and the Britishers strengthened their position in India. Nana returned to Kanpur under the guise of an ascetic and visited Kanpur and saw the ghastly places of human massacre. Nana was never captured by the British, even though they had offered a lakh rupees for his head. He went to Mecca and from there to
Constantinople where he spent the rest of his life writing his memoir. For the British, he became "the villain of the century" replacing Napoleon Bonaparte as the hate object.

Malgonkar tries to achieve an artistic integration of history and fiction in this novel. In the three parts of the novel he narrates the personal life of Nana Saheb, his role in the Sepoy Revolt and his last days. In the words of the novelist, the novel takes "no liberties with varifiable facts or even with probabilities."\(^{46}\)

In this context G.S. Amur observes:

"As in 'The Princes' and 'A Bend in the Ganges' and in 'The Devil's Wind' too Malgonkar presents certain blend of historical and personal themes and the unfoldment of Nana Saheb's career synchronized with the march of events. A large number of historical and imaginary characters and events relating to Nana Saheb are projected on the wide canvas to create an impression of epic solidity."\(^{47}\)

In history sometimes facts get perverted and distorted at the hands of the strong and the rich to suit their own convenience. Thus heroes and warriors become villains and the cruel ones and vice versa. Nana is a victim of this deliberate distortion. His 'Brahminical humanitarianism' was of no consequence to the British. Infact, the British made him 'a monster of ferocity'. Nana explains:

---


"It was that my being blown up into a 'Monster of ferocity' was a deliberate act. Our revolt had thrown up a surfeit of British heroes but no villains to balance them against, and they needed villainy of the requisite magnitude to serve as a back drop for heroism. How hallow would Havelock's victories have seemed. If I, Nana Saheb, had not been their principal objective!" (p.241)

So, the British magnified the horrors that were already there and made Nana into a monster. Malgonkar does not seem to appreciate this stand of the British as he presents a pucca humanist in Nana.

Nana had a quite a few friends among the British. Naturally he was in conflict between his friendship with the Britishers and his loyalty to his race. He did not whole-heartedly like to fan the fire of agitation in Kanpur at first. He did not want innocent men, women and children to become helpless victims of war. Look at the turbulence in the mind of Nana:

"Could I now stand by and watch the men and women who had sung and danced and laughed in my house slautered by howling mobs? They had done no harm to me or indeed to India. Why should they have to be sacrificed for all the wrongs piled up by the East India Company over 100 years." (p.123)

These lines show Nana's concern for his friend. Like E.M. Forster, between a friend and a country or a race, he is partial to his friend. He, after a considerable thinking, decides to escort the British families to Bithoor, on the request of his Collector friend Hillersdon. He also tries to keep Kanpur unaffected by the revolt because of his concern for the
innocent people. He believes that he would be 'the mediator and negotiator' and "would go down in history as the man who had tempered a revolt, who had helped his own people to achieve freedom from foreign conquerors with only the minimal blood letting." (p.127) This only shows that he has genuine concern for his land inspite of his affinity with the British officials in India.

S.D. Singh rightly observes that Sepoy Revolt came unawares to the English men in India living "a life of comfort and luxury." But, the long pending impatience among the soldiers and kings against the British burst forth all of a sudden. For Malgonkar, revolt was "a spontaneous explosion of accumulated discontent of the Indian people." The Doctrine of lapse introduced by Dalhousie was downgrading certain princely states, often annexing them. Baji Rao II of Bithoor had left no sons. Nana, who was, an adopted son was not conferred as Maharaja. Dalhousie rejected his requisition bluntly. Dalhousie went about swallowing kingdom after kingdom as though they were his natural food. His ambition was to clear India off the Indian rulers. The Doctrine, according to history runs thus:

---

48 S.D. Singh, pp.16-17.

"The basis of the Doctrine of Lapse was that as the English company was the paramount power and latter had the right to withhold the sanction."

The usurpation of power made the Maharajas and Nawabs of India unhappy. This crude instrument of confiscation evolved by the British to annex the domains of the rulers made the Indian rulers restive. Somany rulers naturally lost their power. So, they rebelled against the British. Added to this, the news that the cartridges greased with the fat of pigs and cows were given to the soldiers roused their feelings. In cities like Meerut, Delhi and Lucknow, soldiers rejected to handle the new cartridges. The incident of Cox firing at the second cavalry resulting the death of Nizam Ali, a soldier had lead to a revolt under the leadership of Tika Singh. Under these circumstances Nana was reinstated as the Peshwa of Kanpur by Tika Singh and his followers.

Nana is one person who gives utmost importance to his friends. Between friendship and race, it is the friendship that gains a prime of place in his dīqārī. So, he sends word to Wheeler before his attack was made. In his own words:

"I sent him word because I had promised to do so, and I shall never admit that my love for his daughter had anything to do with it. Some how it seemed important that the gesture be made ...... It was my last concession to a friendship I truly valued." (p.150)

These lines show how Nana concerns himself with saving the innocent men and women from the entrenchment.

Malgonkar's portrayal of characters in 'The Devil's Wind' is exclusive and excellent. Nana is the central figure in the novel. Not only Nana has played a role in the past events but plays even a crucial role in the very act of telling those events. He is seen as both an actor and narrator. He, as the central character of the novel, denotes an impression of a growing, complex and fluid personality. The other characters of the novel - The Wheelers, The Hillersdons, Tantya-Tope and others - are also vivid characters of the novel. As a novelist, Malgonkar is deeply interested in characters. Characters living in a period of momentous change presented the greatest challenge to his powers as a novelist. In this context Indira Bhatt observes:

"Malgonkar's characters journey through passive despair and submission to defiance, affirmation and fulfillment of the self. Discarding the restrictions of the family, society and religion, the individual believes in himself... Malgonkar portrays, the intellectual anguish and torture in his protagonist with deep feelings, moral dilemmas are difficult to settle but Malgonkar deftly analyses and resolves these and the character finally emerges as a mature individual. Nana Saheb in 'The Devil's Wind', Abhay in 'The Princes', Gian and Debi-Dayal in 'The Bend in the Ganges' all find themselves at cross roads, combat with their otherselves and come out triumphant."51

The image of Nana is tarnished with the Bibigarh genocide. When Nana was camping in Maharajpur, preparing for a battle, about hundred and seventy British captives were killed at Bibigarh. The killing was suspected to have been done by butchers under the guidance of Husseni Begum. As her daughter was burnt alive in arson at Daryagunj, Husseni Begum in retaliation took this genocide. Nana felt very sorry for the Satichaura and Bibigarh incident.

"Satichaura and Bibighar are monuments to our brutality. Look and be ashamed the world will forever admonish us. "This is what you have done; this is what you are capable of." So long as the Sun and Moon go round, our noses will be rubbed in their dregs." (p.207)

In part three of the book Nana returns to his land to perform the rituals to his father on the bank of the Ganges, where a priest recognises him and takes him to Kanpur. To his dismay and atonement he finds inscriptions by the side of the well and entrenchment, affixing the responsibilities of massacre on him. Nana feels sorry for the rebels. He says:

"It was a mean spiteful thing to have put my name on the plate, implying that I was somehow at the back of it all. On the same principle should not Queen Victoria's name be inscribed on a thousand monuments in India to suggest that she instigated the atrocities perpetrated by her subjects."(pp.286-287)

It is very difficult to prove whether Nana was present when the Bibigarh tragedy occurred. Nana was made as the master of Bibigarh. The humanism in him sprang up when he regretted the genocide
committed by the Indian soldiers. Moreover, he did not feel happy at the unfortunate deaths of British women and children.

Patriotism is one element that redeems the character of Nana from all evils. After liberating Kanpur, he lost battles with the British at Fathepur. His effort to save the Pandu river bridge failed. Moreover, his own countrymen betrayed him. He never appreciated the slaves who were assisting their masters. In a desperate mood he disappeared to Chaurasi. He sustained his hopes of regaining his freedom and power. He felt happy when he saw Tantya-Topi, Mani, the Rani of Jhansi, Hazarath Mahal, the queen of Oudh continuing their attacks on the British. He mused thus:

"There was still a good chance of the tide is turning .... one day I would return to Bithoor riding on a white charger. Ganga-mayi would welcome back the child, she had so callously abandoned." (pp.218-219)

Nana organises many attacks against the British. Never did he become victorious. So, he went back to Nepal where he bought thirteen months of free life with his precious Naulakha Necklace. He sustained his spirit of fighting against the British. He wrote an open letter to Queen Victoria.

"All I want you to understand is that I am not a murderer, but at the same time you have no enemy more determined than myself. so long as I live, I shall fight." (p.167)
These lines show his indomitable will to fight for the freedom of his country.

Jang Bahadur of Nepal wrote a letter to the British Resident Colonel Ramsay that Nana had died of Terai fever. With his ambitions wrecked, he ultimately found his fulfillment in the loving company of his beloved Eliza. He, in a way, gained a blissful state in her company. All his losses were compensated by this domestic bliss. Thus, the novelist presents a figure who cared for values like freedom, friendship and love.

Manohar Malgonkar furnishes several factors as the cause of the Mutiny of 1857. The annexation of Indian kingdoms under Lord Dalhousie’s Doctrine of Lapse, the British plan to abolish the Mughal Monarchy with the death of emperor Bahadurshah. The mad Mulla’s call to the people to raise in a rebellion to end the British rule on the hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Plassey, when, according to the traditional Indian belief, ‘The Devil’s Wind’ will raise and unshackle Mother India. The novelist provides a detailed and realistic account of how the British acquired and consolidated their power in India. Another illustration of British imperial tactics provided by Malgonkar is the raise of Sindhiyas of Gwalior. Their original raise was due to Baji Rao’s support and benevolence. But, the Peshwas’ descendants have lost every thing they had. The Sindhiyas, even though deprived of their independence are, influential and wealthy.
The character of Mad-Mulla is presented as pious feature. He becomes a fiery rebel and calls upon his listeners "to kill the firanghis as though they were cobras and mad dogs to eliminate their race." (p.123)

A sentence of death is passed on him and he is arrested and put in jail. But, two months later he reappears and commands his listeners to destroy the firangi race. So, the novelist does not take any sides even with this Muslim character. We can easily say that Malgonkar has not only presented the facts competently, but also recreated the past with its vibrating life.

The narration of the historical events truly adds some flavour to this novel. For example, the atrocities of the Indians against the British in Delhi, are vividly described. The Sepoys in Delhi, upon learning of the uprising in Meerut, turn upon their British officers and kill them along with the Indians converted to Christianity and then they declare the restoration of Mughal rule saying, "the land has returned to Allah, the Government to Bahadur Shah." (p.127). They enter churches and force Indian Christians to renounce their faith and become Muslims. (p.172). Similarly the atrocities committed by the Sepoy's in Meerut are accurately described (pp.119 & 126). This accurate description adds a new dimension to this historical novel.
The atrocities committed by the Britishers is realistically presented in the novel. The novelist compares Neill and Renaud to mythological man-eaters Ahi and Mahi. Particularly the description of British atrocities is grippingly presented (p.246). This is the contribution of Malgonkar to history as well as to literature.

The novelist dwells upon the native disunity in the face of alien imperial design. For example, Nana requests Jayaji to support their rebellion but later refuses to do so. Malgonkar says "If the rebellious Indians had won just one battle, then the princes waiting for just such a signal from the skies would have jostled each other to display their national spirit. (p.243)

Jayaji Scindia and also the character of Zeenat Mahal are true historical figures, who participated in the Mutiny. Similarly General Wheeler is presented as a liberal much influenced by oriental thinking. The Indian soldiers hold his name in the highest esteem. Because of his sympathies for the natives, he never became commander-in-chief. Nana became very friendly with the Wheelers and the romance between him and Eliza survives the horrors of the rebellion. Thus Malgonkar recreates Indian history convincingly and interestingly. Though Malgonkar reveals the Indian point of view in defending Nana from the attacks of the British historians, we cannot possibly say that it is not dispassionate. The novelist points to the horrors committed by both the sides - the Indian and
the British. He brings out both the virtues and lapses of Nana Saheb. Marshall A. Best, a renowned critic says:

"Nana is neither a hero nor an anti-hero, he is the kind of ambiguous character that Malgonkar delights in."  

Thus Malgonkar has made use of his imagination in viewing historical events into an interesting story.

"He has achieved a superb integration of history and art in portraying Nana as a moving character in the novel."  

Malgonkar's narrative and his attitude are convincingly impartial and faithful to history.

---
