



COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE OF MANOHAR MALGONKAR IN HIS NOVELS

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INTRODUCTION

Of all the Europeans, the British stayed in India the longest, and they had more contacts with the Indians. They were the rulers, and the Indians the ruled who hated their rule. Malgonkar's novels deal with this part of Indian history in which the Indians were trying to throw off the yoke of foreign rule, and to gain freedom from its supremacy. For most of the writers connected with India, Indo-British relationship or East-West encounter was a favourite theme. "A large number of their novels tend to concentrate on the so-called encounter between East and West, not only at the level of people but also at the level of ideas observes Meenakshi Mukherjee. While the majority of these writers find a creative challenge in this tension between the two civilizations, Malgonkar does not exploit it as his contemporaries have done; it does not acquire the prime source of tension in his novels though the confrontation of the two cultures and values becomes a major concern.

As in the case of man-woman relationships Malgonkar's novels provide the historical sequence of Indo-British relationship, starting from the nineteenth century, as seen in *The Devil's Wind*. There is a truthful description of this relationship at the political level. The East-India Company, as Malgonkar portrays it, is in the nature of a vulture ready to eat up the weak rulers, first by offering protection, and later leading them to destruction. The Indian rulers lived in constant fear of the British whose good-will was essential for their privileged existence. Under the policy of annexation, they were like jungle animals, fearfully waiting for the game drive to begin. The slaughter-house imagery that Malgonkar employs in this connection beautifully brings out their terrorized situation.

Where there had been tigers were now sheep-sheep waiting in neat, British-made pens, nervously eyeing the figure with the axe to make the next move, hoping they would be spared just this once. . . . that someone else, some other herd of sheep would stampede and trample down the butcher with the bloody axe. (*Devil's* 84-85)

While thus was the case at the political level, there was greater discontent at the racial level. "The conquest of a race requires imaginative grasp of realities, human sympathy, tolerance and constant touch with the people. The British, on the contrary, were suffering from the common malaise of over-confidence due to perceptible consciousness of race superiority."² The new officials of the Company were incapable of exercising restraint in their dealings with Indians. Even in the dispensation of law and justice, they were partial. When the Indian soldiers

were blown off for not biting the greased cartridges, the British criminals were let free after a farcical trial. The Indians were never permitted into British drawing-rooms as they were considered untouchables. Even the Eurasians were barred from the army and civil services. In the past it was not so because there were 'bibis' who acted as the link between the sepoy and the sahibs. The racial arrogance started with the arrival of the British women, and the rejection of the 'bibis' for their sake. Thus, we are told of "the changing condition of India, of the discontent and unrest among large sections of the Indian population produced by the British rule."³

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

While portraying Indo-British relationship in India Malgonkar contrasts it with his description of it in England through Azim's meeting with Sir William Russell. He, with whom a lowly port officer in Bombay refused to shake hands, was treated as an equal by Russell. His experience with the white women in England, and especially with Miss. Sylvia Bolten who comes madly to India to marry him, amply illustrates this contrast.

And when Mrs. Scobie at Kanpur tells Miss. Bolten how she treats the Indians--allowing them the use only of the back verandah and the back gate- the contrast is more than clear.

"The social isolation of the ruling race" which "generated contempt for the ruled"⁴ is stressed by Malgonkar in describing the incident of the British community at Kanpur, meeting under the leadership of Mrs. Scobie to have Miss. Bolten certified insane, and, failing in it, deciding unanimously to extern her on moral grounds. How strong is their desire to maintain the purity of race can be seen in their thoughts and efforts to get her declared as "an 'undesirable person' (under a regulation normally invoked to get rid of disease-ridden prostitutes)" (Devil's 62), and then shipped back to England. So, it is not a curious fact when she, after her marriage to Capt. Frazer, appears as the peer of Mrs. Scobie herself with her efforts to preserve the purity of her race.

Though the general atmosphere was such, Malgonkar does not portray Indo-British interaction as a matter purely of hatred and disgust on both sides. Nana is insufficiently committed to the cause of the revolt because of his friendship with many Englishmen. His close friendship with General Wheeler and Hillersdon, the Collector, has given him to understand that there are men without "the unqualified hatred of the Coopers and Hodsons; as though deep in their heart, they were never free of a doubt that they were fighting for the perpetration of a great wrong, the enslavement of a gullible and hospitable race" (Devil's 84).

Nana's relationship with Wheeler illustrates that personal losses do not interfere in friendship. Since the General is more Indian than British, not only because of his Indian wife, but also because of his long stay in India, he and Nana become very close. Not only the two men, but also their families mingle very closely. That a brotherly love existed between them is proved by the fact that Nana feels that something he himself longed for all his life has been snatched away when the latter is denied the post of C-in-C for the last time.

Contrary to Nana-Wheeler relationship, Nana-Hillersdon relationship is a case of official status curbing true and intimate friendship. The racial fear and suspicion of the British result in their lack of trust in Nana who is their professed friend. First, they decide to entrust their families to his protection, and later change it. This creates suspicion in him. So, he concludes Hillersdon is no longer a friend. It is through the relationship of the two that Malgonkar strikes

at a 'blind spot' in British character. They take patriotism and racial loyalty as their monopoly; they are not able to understand that Indians like Nana might put them above the obligations of friendship. It is true that he shows patriotism and racial loyalty, but at the same time he succumbs to the obligations of friendship as far as possible. Before he locks himself on the Indian side, he keeps his promise of sending word to Wheeler and Hillersdon about the attack as a concession to a friendship he truly valued. "In fact Malgonkar tries to put before us a completely different image of Nana Saheb from the conventional image put forward in the pages of history."⁵

The social atmosphere before the mutiny, as Malgonkar portrays it, is one of fear and suspicion on the part of both nations. Nana tells Hillersdon that the British are afraid of the sepoys, and are trying to instil fear. How they can go on ruling the Indians when they are afraid of them and show it, he asks Hillersdon. Malgonkar delves deep into the imperial situation when he makes Nana ask such a perceptive question. It is the same fear of the Indians that made the Company deny the post of C-in-C to Wheeler because of his Indian connection. Nana tells Hillersdon that the degradation done to Wheeler has taken away the faith of the sepoys in their British masters when the latter speaks to him of their devotion for the General. In this context one is reminded of Ralph Crane who has noted the difference of Malgonkar from the Raj novelists in the portrayal of the attitude of the sepoys towards the British.⁶ Hillersdon's view is of the Raj novelists while Nana's view may be Malgonkar's.

Indo-British relationship acquires the nature of a see-saw when the superior position of the British comes down to hard surprise at the upsurge of the revolt. Those who had put the Indians into sheep-pens were in the pens themselves. With their crookedness they create dissension in the ranks of the Indians. But such crookedness does not affect Nana's personal relations with Englishmen as is seen in his hurry to send them off to Allahabad. The British does not make any such distinction in their ruthless revenge on the Indians. It is a part of the counter-revenge of some of them who were craving to make the last retaliation before they were victimized that tragedy occurred at Satichaura and Bibighar, says Nana. Thus, Malgonkar makes Nana willing to admit the facts and shame of the Indian savagery only in the light of British savagery. This, as Ralph Crane said, can be taken as an example of the skill of the historical novelist in him who, by breathing subjective feelings into his work, becomes a writer of fiction, not of history.⁷ As such, one has to disagree with Amur who finds in the work "more history than novel."⁸

While *The Devil's Wind* deals more with the political side of Indo- British relationship, concentrates on the racial rather than the political side of this relationship that continued to exist in India. But no reader will fail to notice the political context of the book because it is in this larger political context that the racial and cultural prejudices of the characters could be fully understood.⁹ As in the former novel, here also there are men and women of the three races, Indian, British, and Anglo- Indian. Of the men the most important are Jugal Kishore, Henry Winton, and Eddie Trevor respectively.

Kishore was one of the favourites of Wallach who tried to introduce the privileges of British labourers into Assam. As the chief stockman Henry finds him soft and yielding whenever it suited him, and capable of violent recoil also. He is not a man to be put down with bluster, he understands.

He needed far bigger guns, and plenty of ammunition too, Henry thinks in the hunter's language. His relationship with Kishore begins when the latter starts labour union activities. He doubts whether he has become the whipping boy of the low-caste fellow when the complaint is lodged with the police. This becomes the immediate cause of his hatred of the man.

After Jeffrey Dart's admonishing he takes it too much to heart as he didn't mean any harm to Gauri. It also makes him afraid, and so, hesitant of facing him when he comes to his bungalow with her for the post of a teacher. His behaviour reflects his racial and personal hatred of the man.

He does not take her as a teacher because she is an Indian. Kishore's main function, as Amur observed, is "to constitute a political threat to Winton's career in India and to hasten his downfall."¹⁰

Surely, his complaint to the police was his way of retaliation. There are only two face-to-face meetings between the two. The second time he comes to Henry is to give him the news of his resignation to contest the bi-election to the Assembly. More than his helplessness to fight with the British manager, it is his hatred of the latter's superciliousness that is reflected in his words: "It is so easy to be rude to someone who cannot be rude to you, Mr. Winton". To his courteous behaviour the latter shows curtness, and then he reminds him once again of his superciliousness and racial hatred: "Now you are being rude to me again merely because I happen to be a subordinate . . .

With all his moral depravity he is correct in his appraisal of Henry's apathy when he tells him. "We all have our feelings, Mr. Winton. Your failing is that you cannot bear Indians: yet your tragedy is that you are doomed to work in this country . . ." (Combat 111-12).

This analysis of the reason for Henry's alienation from the people of India is in the nature of the advice which Cockburn often gives him. Much of Cockburn's advice Henry tries to follow, but coming as it does from an Indian and a politician, he does not heed to it. He is secretly afraid, and that is why he feels it irksome to meet the challenges of the man. He is not ready to face the fact that he is "no different from the Indian whom he hated for his substandard morality," a fact which the other wants to make him conscious of. Instead, he mocks at the Indian politician's method of non-violence. Through this last meeting of the two Malgonkar exposes Indo-British relationship in its political nuances in greater detail. He shows the Englishman's impatience with the Indian politician, and the latter's annoyance at the continued supremacy which he hopes to fervently overthrow as an expediency.

To Kishore, Henry is a rogue-elephant he tried to catch with the scarecrow that is Gauri. But the White elephant does not fall into his trap. So, he comes adequately armed to meet him. (The metaphor of arms and ammunition in connection with the Indian and the British takes the story to the realm of the political fight between the ruler and the ruled.)

With his shower of bullet-like retorts, he drives Henry into his room. The picture of the Whiteman as the hunter, and the Indian as the hunted, a hint of which is given in the first episode of Henry shooting towards the place where Gauri was hiding, slowly turns upside down as Malgonkar portrays the political scene. There is also another side to this encounter. While the hunted Indian is going to become the hunter, he takes up the very values of the hunter-Whiteman as his legacy. As Kishore says, he is going to be a minister with the very same qualities of Henry, crooked, corrupt, and immoral.

Though Kishore takes on the bad qualities of Henry, like his sense of revenge and personal hatred, he is no enemy of the British. He submits to Dart's attempts to buy him off. He hates Henry only for his stance of moral rectitude. But the hatred that the two perpetrate for each other goes a long way. "Once he starts hating Kishore for his active role in inciting labour trouble for him, there is no end to it, even though the latter submits his resignation and goes to be a powerful political leader."¹² He sees Kishore's hand in everything that is unpleasant at the estate. Kishore, on the other hand, as the minister, shows the very same spite that Henry showed him as his subordinate. It is he who does not allow Henry to join the War and escape from Silent Hill. There is no difference between the Indian minister that Kishore is, and his British master that Henry was. If at all, the Indian's revenge on the White man seems a little unwarranted.

Combat of Shadows is "a novel that tackles the E.M.Forster subject of a Britisher's alienation from the Indians and the corruption of the British by imperialism and their own hatred and ignorance of India." Because of his hatred of their leader, he is found threatening the ignorant and innocent coolies with eviction and loss of job. He is not ready to discuss their problems or allow them the right conceded to British labourers. It is his false pride and sense of superiority that prevent him from a gentlemanly talk with them.

He does not try to pacify them; instead, his efforts are in the line of adding fuel to fire. Unable to vent his venom of hatred on Kishore, he spends it on Gauri and her brother by striking them to bleeding. This arouses her burning rage, and results in swearing revenge-"I shall kill you for this, you white monster!" (*Combat of Shadows*, 39).

Like Ronny Heaslop in *A Passage to India*, Henry also has no perception of the prospects of personal relationships between the English and the Indians, and the only bond that he conceives of is that of the ruler and the ruled. So, after the strike, he accepts more firmly "the Kipling structure of social position and race"¹⁵ which had been his before. His moral values give him a life of stress and strain under the demoralizing circumstances. So, he abandons his commitment to honourable conduct and decency. And it creates drastic consequences.

Henry's initial attitude towards the Anglo-Indian world is one of aversion. But he is attracted by Ruby's sexy appearance. On the other hand, what brings her to the Englishman is "the throbbing, compulsive craving of Anglo-India to seek living kinship with the West," and to prevent "further assimilation with the smothering, enveloping peoples of the Indian soil" (*Combat* 103). Malgonkar's portrayal of the problems of the Anglo-Indians finds corroboration in V.R.Gaikwad who analyses the formation and development of opinions and attitudes of the community in the pre-Independent years towards the two groups they came into contact with. Pointing out the shift in their attitudes and opinions with the changing socio-political conditions in the country, Gaikwad says that the highest pro-British attitude was found in 1937. Since they feared that rapid Indianization would result in the loss of their ethnic and cultural identity, they attempted identification with the ruling Whites. But the Whites treated them with amused tolerance and merciless ridicule, not as their social equals.¹⁶ In the novel Henry is not ready to marry Ruby or accept her as his social equal because of his racial prejudice. But she wants to marry him to wash away the contamination of India. For the fulfilment of this dream, she is ready to go to any extent.

The novel moves round "the foci of Winton and Eddie,"¹⁷ and when the latter is appointed under the former, "the two worlds fully confront each other."¹⁸ Henry's hatred of

Eddie is the result of his racial pride, and feeling of superiority, manly jealousy and suspicion. He does not want himself to be known as a rival to the Anglo-Indian in love. Though he hates him as the lover of Ruby, he is compelled to take up his cause at orders from Dart. Before the strike he finds himself in a tight comer. "It was ironic, Henry thought, that he would now have to oppose his own workers to fight for Eddie Trevor" (Combat 124). It is Henry's hatred of Kishore that makes him fight for Eddie, thus showing his preference of the Anglo-Indian to the Indian. This is a case of desire in aversion apart from other cases of desire and aversion. By creating such a tight comer for Henry, Malgonkar portrays the contradiction and complexity in human relationships.

Apart from being an excellent work of art, the novel is also a social document wherein the political image is marked by fear and distrust, and the social image by jealousy and vendetta. The appointment of Ruby and Eddie, the Anglo-Indians, is disliked and revolted against by the Indians.

Indian self-rule is detested by Henry and Dart. Malgonkar works out the action in terms of the three interrelated racial groups to portray Henry's fall. The moral disintegration and defeat of the Whiteman is set in motion through his encounter with the Indians. It is carried on through his relationship with the Anglo-Indians and the British, and finally all the three groups are found thirsting for his blood.

Thus, it can be seen that Malgonkar deals with the personal, political, and cultural aspects of the historic encounter between the two races. At the personal level it is one of close friendship resulting in love and friendship for one another. It takes the form of a collision between Indian spiritualism and Western pragmatism. There is a graphic representation of the confrontation resulting in the former being challenged and changed by the latter. He portrays it as having merits and defects, but the latter are rather veiled. So, the author is blamed for putting a premium on the British at the expense of the Indians. But the fact is that he is appreciative of good qualities irrespective of colour and race. The defects of imperialism are highly implicit in his novels, and so the treatment of Indo-British relationship in the context of colonial relations becomes a profile, not a panchromatic affair.

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