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Beyond the Victor's Narrative: The Novelist's Quest to Rehabilitate Indian Heroes

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Abstract:
History is always written from the defeater's point of view. So, it is not astonishing that British accounts of events and personages in Indian history are slanted to cast a glorious light on British actions and personages while denigrating native Indian ones in contravention of historical truth and psychological realism. To the British the supremacy of the Empire was paramount and anyone bulking their imperial design was a renegade who deserved to be maligned. In fact it has been said that British portrayals of Indian heroes who challenged the British turned out only schizophrenics. For their part, Indians, devoid of any historical sense because their spiritual preoccupation and cultural ethos, were indifferent to such maligning of Indian Nationalists. Indian historians had neither the means nor the milieu to retrieve the past and rehabilitate the maligned monarchs. It is was only after Independence that Indian historians re-read Indian history and enabled Indian creative writers, Including Indian English novelists, to retell the past from an Indian point of view, rehabilitation maligned nationalist Indian Monarchs in the process.

Key words: rehabilitation, conqueror, malign, nationalist, historian, challenge.

Introduction:

It is true that verisimilitude is an essential tool to write history for a stipulated period in a particular nation. If it fails, the future generation may study a false history. In this regards, the novelist has an additional role as a historian to enlighten the truth. Through this paper it is discussed how the novelist being as a historian. A few comparative studies of the Anglo-Indian novel and the Indian English novel have indeed been made, such as Bhupal Singh's A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction (1934), Allen J. Greenberger's The British Image of India-A study in the Literature of Imperialism: 1880-1960 (1969), K.Viswanathan's India in English Fiction (1971), Shailendra Dhari Singh's Novels on the Indian Mutiny (1973), Kai Nicholson's A presentation of Social Problems in the Indo-Anglian and the Anglo-Indian Novel (1972), Benita Parry's Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination 1880-1930 (1974), Gomathi Narayanan's The Sahibs and the Natives: A Study of

Guilt and Pride in Anglo –Indian and Indo-Anglian Novels (1986), Udayon Misra's The Raj in Fiction (1987) , Ralph J.Crane's inventing India: A History of India in English-Language Fiction (1992), and M.K.Naik's Mirror on the Wall: Image of India and Englishman in Anglo-Indian Fiction (1993). Each of them, in its own way, has contributed in varying degrees to the comparative study of the two literatures born of the Indo-British encounter.
One intriguing area of these literatures compels critical attention, namely, the considerable number of Anglo-Indian and Indian English novels dealing with the same events of Indian history and portraying the same historical figures. Till recently, most books of Indian history were British-authored. Quite naturally, these books of Indian history were written from a patently British point of view. In the introduction to his book *A Star Shall Fall: India 1857*, P.J.O. Taylor says, "history in any case is always written by the victor" (9). The British were the conquerors of India and the Indians had no inclination to scribe their history. So, it was only the British version of history that was recorded.

It was only much later, as Indian nationalism struck root, developed and spread, that Indian English writers sought to inculcate nationalist fervour in the hearts of Indians. For this they needed to go back to India's past to draw lessons for the present. However, they could not write historical novels, because "the British-authored historical records of the usable past were incongruous distortions and the British caricatures of great Indian heroes had produced only schizophrenics"

Early Anglo-Indian novelists, like the British historians from whom they took their source material, wrote with the primary objective of glorifying the British rule in India. This is quite clear from the numerous Anglo-Indian novels on the First Indian War of Independence of 1857. Almost all these novels seek to glorify the valour, the skill and the strategy of the British in dealing with the Indian rebels. One means that most of these novelists adopt to achieve this aim is to blacken the Indians and paint them as treacherous villains, and never as a subject race attempting to assert their nationalism. Naik rightly says, "By and large the average Anglo-Indian Mutiny novel follows a set pattern in which the chief motifs are Indian treachery and cruelty, incompetence and cowardice on the one hand and British heroism, courage and strength on the other.

Such prejudiced objectives, coupled with the British ignorance of the real India, could not but handicap the Anglo-Indian novelists considerably. They could not attempt to write truthfully or objectively about India. So they generally chose to pen romances set in India, which would call for no more than mere mention, or, at the most, vague description of some Indian scenes and fanciful descriptions of some Indian events, which had been mentioned in the British press. Since these novelists wrote for a British audience that had little knowledge of Indian geography, history or society, they could get away with the most fanciful accounts. Moreover, they were quick to perceive that the more picturesque their accounts, the more popular their books became. So, even knowledgeable novelists like Steel and Philip Meadows Taylor concentrated on the picturesque aspects of the Indian theme rather than on the reality.

As a result, most Anglo-Indian novels, including those dealing with historical events like the First Indian War of Independence of 1857, are largely romances, which use Indian and Indian history only as a flimsy backdrop. Even the Indian scenes describe largely the lives of the British characters within their own small sequestered circle, except for a few Indian servants who merely stand or move about. If at all the Indian characters play a noticeable role, it is either as downright villains or as absolutely loyal allies of the British. As Parry says, such romantic writers reveal more of themselves than of India (6). Bhupal Singh aptly says, "Artistically Anglo-Indian fiction is a record of the ephemeral"

Some Anglo-Indian novelists, who chose to write with the objective of underscoring the theme of the white man's burden in the Indian context, invariably looked upon India as a land of monsters desperately in need of England's civilizing mission which, to them, only christianising their Indian subjects and redeeming them from their barbarian tradition, beliefs and culture through the light of the Gospel (Rubin 11). These writers influenced Anglo-Indian minds considerably and their influence can be seen even in Anglo-Indian novels dealing with historical events like the First Indian War of Independence of 1857. Greenberger rightly says, "The British could never paint their picture of India in anything other than the darkest colours" (204). Rubin asserts that the bad press for India was sustained by British fiction for over a century and that the old racism continues into the present.

The fictional objectives of Indian English novelists vary considerably. Novelists like Malgonkar and Gidwani, in novels like *The Devil's Wind and The Sword of Tipu Sultan,* overtly seek to rehabilitate Indian heroes maligned by Anglo-Indian writers. Khosla, in *The Last Mughal,* has no such committed objective but merely tells the story of Bahadur Shah from a human angle and produces a novel that is heavily biographical in content and picturesque in quality. The novel only fortuitously rehabilitates Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar.

It is evident that the imperialist Anglo-Indian novelists deliberately maligned Indian nationalist heroes and monarchs. This was so prevalent a practice that, Anand Kumar Raju, in "Fiction and the Uses of History: A Thematic Study of Bhagwan S. Gidwani's *The Sword of Tipu Sultan,"* while enumerating the aims of the Indian English historical novelists, includes the attempt "to rehabilitate a historical figure who has been presented in a distorted fashion by prejudiced historians" (132). That is exactly what Gidwani and Khosla have done in respect of Tipu Sultan and Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar in their novels *The Sword of Tipu Sultan and the Last Mughal* respectively. And it is this rehabilitation that the present dissertation sets out to study.

The qualified objectives of Anglo-Indian novelists have devalued Anglo-Indian fiction considerably. Largely because of their own ignorance of the real India, and exploiting the general British ignorance of India, Anglo-Indian novelists have turned out insubstantial romances of ephemeral artistic value to tickle the literary interests of an ignorant reading public. Fanciful romance has served as the most suitable medium for novelists patently

seeking to glorify British manhood, policy and strategy for the greater glory of the British Empire. Romance has also lent itself easily to the objective of blackening Indians through despicable stereotypes.

On the contrary, Indian English novelists write about Indian events and Indian historical personages with a much greater knowledge of Indian history and society than Anglo-Indian novelists possess. Their source material is much more modern and more reliable. However, they too cannot delve deep into inter-racial relationships because no such phenomenon ever really existed, at least not on the public plane. The Indian English novelists are not handicapped by the urge to glorify a race and can be content with writing with verisimilitude and objectivity. They are able to do this with a high degree of reliability, because they write from the depths of their own culture and sensibility. Even the novels that seek to rehabilitate maligned Indian heroes do not violate the universal laws of artistic plausibility and verisimilitude. They are impartial and objective and, in some cases, the historical imagination of the novelists discovers deep significance for the present and the future in the course of historical events.

Steel, in her novel *On the Face of the Waters*, presenting an authentic picture of the Delhi phase of the Indian Mutiny of 1857, portrays Bahadur Shah, true to history, as a passive and involuntary leader of the Mutiny. Khosla's novel *The Last Mughal* is as authentic as Steel's and portrays Bahadur Shah as she does, but invests the old Emperor with an element of patriotic urge. Where is evidently seen in Chapter II Reestablishing maligned Emperor: G.D Koshla's *The Last Mughal*. While Steel portrays Zeenat Mahal, the youngest queen of the old Emperor, as a clever intriguer motivated by patriotism, khosla paints her as a thoroughly selfish woman with no patriotism at all.

While Steel persistently refuses to view the Indian Mutiny of 1857 as a popular movement, Khosla consistently represent the rivalry among the Mughal princes for recognition as Heir Apparent and how the British exploited War of Independence. Both Steel and Khosla faithfully represent the rivalry among the Mughal princes for recognition as Heir Apparent and how the British exploited it. While Steel presents the Indians as thoroughly disunited, Khosla portrays the Indian populace as quite united in opposing the British, but the Indian princes and officials as selfish and treacherous.

Both Steel and Khosla present British atrocities against Indians and Indian atrocities against the British. However, while Steel is vague about the responsibility for the killing of British women and children inside the Palace, Khosla firmly exonerates Emperor Bahadur Shah of it. Steel shows some Indians being kind to English people and some Englishmen being well-disposed towards Indians. Khosla's novel makes no mention of this. Steel's detailed picture of the milieu of the time is not to be found in Khosla's novel. While Steel sees a religious undercurrent beneath the Mutiny of 1857, Khosla does not see any religious significance in it.

Khosla's method of rehabilitating Emperor Bahadur Shah is by relating his behaviour to the milieu of the time. The codes of the Mughals, which engendered and encouraged endless intrigues and rivalries kept Prince Abu Zafar on tenterhooks and in continuous fear of losing his claim to the throne and even his life. So, when, at a very advanced age, he saw the opportunity to ascend the throne, he grabbed it with alacrity. Then he went on an orgy of enjoyment. Since the administration was virtually in the hands of the British paymasters and he was only a pensioner, he saw no reason to exert himself in that quarter but was content to lead a life of indolence and pleasure. He never had to take any decisions and so, when the sepoys confronted him with the need to take their own course. In the final analysis, he was a man more sinned against than sinning.

Dhondu Pant Nana Saheb never succeeds to the throne of his adoptive father, Bajirao II, the last Peshwa. But having been brought up as a potential successor, he subsequently puts the grooming to effective use, atleast for sometimes, during the first Indian war of independence of 1857. However, his forte is not doing, but suffering. He is not born to be a hero, and he fades away into history. However Malgonkar's re-reading of history redeems Nanasaheb from the execration poured on him as the butcher of Kanpur and rehabilitates him as a pioneering nationalist.

Indian English historical fiction may be said to have come of age with the publication, in 1972, of Manohar Malgonkar's novel *The Devil's Wind: Nana Saheb's Story.* The novel is noted for its originality of conception and execution. Mehta hails *The Devil's Wind* as "the first perfect historical novel of Indo-Anglian fiction" (282). It tells the story of Dhondu Pant Nana Saheb, the central figure in the Kanpur theatre of the Indian Revolt of 1857, celebrated as the first Indian War of Independence by Indians and dismissed as a Sepoy Mutiny by the British. Malgonkar's purpose in the novel is to rehabilitate Nana Saheb, maligned as a monster by British propaganda. This humanitarian is retrieved and rehabilitated in Chapter III entitle, Retrieving peaceable Humanitarian: Manohar Malgonkar's *The Devils Wind: Nana Saheb's Story.* In the author's note prefixed to *the Devil's Wind,* Malgonkar says that, in order to rehabilitate Nana Saheb, he tells the story of the revolt from the Indian point of view and as Nana Saheb might have written it himself.

Numerous accounts of the uprising of 1857 have been written by the British. In the preface to his book *Novels on the Indian Mutiny,* Shailendra Dhari Singh speaks of "not less than fifty novels written by English men and women about the Indian Mutiny" (n. pag.). Most of them seek to dismiss the uprising as a mutiny by some disgruntled sepoys, who indulged in barbarous atrocities against the British, not sparing even women and children, and were eventually routed by heroic British soldiers and subjected to just chastisement. Many attempt to portray Nana Saheb as the butcher of Kanpur. This partisan portrait has become so established that even fairly objective accounts of the uprising do not absolve Nana Saheb of responsibility for the Kanpur massacres. This is not surprising, for, as Malgonkar states in the author's note. There are "contradictory notes in the archives too" (*Wind* 5).

Malgonkar, however, is not a historian, but an artist, licensed as well as required to exercise his historical imagination and reconstruct the events, subject to artistic principles. As such, he reconstructs the picture of a nation, with Kanpur as its microcosm, growing suspicious, alienated, hostile, rebellious, enraged and vengeful by degrees in response to British acts of indifference, insult, ill-treatment and injustice over decades, rising in disorganized pockets where and when inflammatory incidents occurred, finding a vent for frustration in cruelty to their tormentors and their native parasites, forcing leadership on nominal figures, failing for want of unified command and effective weapons and ultimately being crushed mercilessly by enraged tyranny. The emphasis in Malgonkar's novel is on the inevitability of the events-their historical necessity. The novel implicitly asserts that the so-called Sepoy Mutiny was indeed a popular revolt by investing it with all the characteristics of one. Malgonkar, in the author's note, asserts that his reconstruction of the uprising "is fiction; but it takes no liberties with verifiable facts or even with probabilities" (*wind* 6). He does not conceal atrocities indulged in by Indians, but explains that they constituted "a form of primitive retaliation against the savagery of the advancing (British) column" incited by "a combination if panic and rage" (*Wind* 212).

The third part of the novel, entitled "Gone Away," proves the power of Malgonkar's historical imagination. As G.S. Amur points out in *Manohar Malgonkar,* the mystery surrounding Nana Saheb's later life has provided free scope for contradictory accounts (131-32). Choosing his threads carefully, Malgonkar has woven an imaginative tapestry of Nana Saheb's later life that neither ridicules him nor places him on a glorious pedestal, but shows him fading into obscurity, a man more suffering than acting. Parameswaran, in "Malnohar Malgonkar as a Historical Novelist," asserts that Malgonkar's history is more authentic than that found in most history books "because it examines the social and psychological motivations of people who made history" (331).

Malgonkar displays consummate artistry: the inner conflict in Nana Saheb's mind seems to keep time with the external conflict presented in *The Devil's Wind;* the novel teems with highly dramatic moments; the narrative maintains a consistent point of view-that of Nana Saheb, the autobiographical narrator; since Nana Saheb was a key figure in the uprising of 1857, "the narrative is given a sweeping breadth and penetrating depth" and "we get an inside view of history" (Parameswaran, "Malgonkar" 336).

The chatacterisation in Malgonkar's *The Devel's Wind* is masterly. Whether it be of individuals or of groups, Malgonkar paints a consistent picture, whose artistic validity cannot be questioned. A remarkable feature of Malgonkar's characterization is the fine distinction he draws between characters acting as individuals and the same characters acting as members of their group. He employs psychological insight and analysis so extensively that the novel often impresses the reader as an interior monologue clarifying Nana Saheb's motives and reactions.

Philip Meadows Taylor, in *Tippoo Sultaun*, and Gidwani in *The Sword of Tipu Sultan*, differ from each other in their approach to history and in their method of fictionalising it. Their attitudes to Tipu are diametrically opposed and so are their methods of portraying him, and, consequently, the final portraits of Tipu which they realise are contradictory. The two novelists differ even in portraying the other characters and in recreating the India of Tipu's time.

The key to contradiction between the portraits painted of Tipu by Philip Meadows Taylor and by Gidwani lies in their contradictory motives, which have influenced their authorial methods. Philip Meadows Taylor is determined to portray Tipu as a cruel monster, a Muslim fanatic and a ridiculous lout. On the contrary, Gidwani is committed to rehabilitating the maligned monarch and presenting him as a humane person, a tolerant monarch and a prudent administrator. This study rehabilitated the tiger of mysore in B.S. Gidwani's *The Sword of Tipu Sultan.*

Th. Suresh Singh's *The Prince and The Rose* discusses how Thoidingham Suresh Singh attempts to rehabilitate the prince of Manipur Tikendrajit in his renowned historical novel *The Prince and The Rose.* Koireng, popularly called Bir Tikendrajit, is one of the unforgettable nationalists of Manipur. The British records and manuscripts portrayed him as a murderer, accused of waging war against the queen empress of India and charged of abatement of murder of the leading British officials including Mr. Quinton, the chief commissioner of Assam, Mr. Grimwood, political agent in Manipur and lieutenant W.H. Cossine, Asst. Secretary to chief commissioner of Assam. But Suresh Singh depicts him as a unique hero in Indian freedom struggle. With the inborn nature of a patriot, he aggressively defied the acts of the mighty British imperialist power. In short, Bir Tikendrajit was a crusader who resisted the expansionist intentions of the British and he fought fearlessly against the British colonialists. In *The Prince and The Rose,* Suresh Singh has immortalized the maligned Tikendrajit for his patriotism and bravery. In fact, Tikendrajit has been called the "Lion of Manipur".

By re –examining history in his historical novel *The Sun Behind The Cloud* Basavaraj Naikar rehabilitates Bhaskararao Bhave as a great Nationalist hero and wipes out his image of being guilty of treason as charged by the British government in India. This Restorion of the great Nationalist will be seen in this paper. Similar to Nana Saheb, Bhaskararao Bhave was also a good friend of the Bristish East India Company and its officials in the beginning, but later on the British began to usurp the hereditary powers of the native rulers and interfere with the cultural values of the land. Once it was clear that alien rulers did not care cherished the rich tradition of our country.He became an irreconcilable enemy of the British.

The immediate provocation for Bhaskararao Bhave was the alien rulers imposing harsh condition on Indian kings: the Disarmament Act and the Doctrine of Lapse. These Acts spurred him up to fight against the British for his own survival as a ruler of Naragund. In the ensuing war against the alien white rulers Naragund fell and along with the destruction of

the Surapur cause by the British.The trial of the Naragud rebels, The imprisonment of Bhasakararao Bhave and his being sentenced by his hanging are all facts of history based on British records but Naikar prefers to continues his narration based on local legends which say that Bhave escaped, begot a son and lived and died in Kasi.

Bhaskara rao Bhave is mentored by his father who moulds him and index him into kingship and also faith in divinity.Later, the king gets good counsel from his ministersand he ruled the state with their cooperation and he was honest to his citizens and faithful to his motherland. Tragically, Bhave may be said to be maligned by his own citizens who had been unfaithful and lacked integrity, as we have seen from the discussion of the novel in the previous pages. He is also maligned by the British rulers as a rebel and villain, but Bhasvaraj Naikar rehabilitates him as a great nationalist, a warrior and a humanist, in his historical novel *The Sun Behind The Cloud***.**

All the five novelists have re-examined Indian history and recreated it from an Indian Perspective. While doing so, they have rehabilitated the five patriotic Indian monarchs. There is a test to find out historian or novelist namely verisimilitude. While a novelist who has utilized more truth and less imaginary thread is more historian and less novelist. On the other hand he who used less truth and more imagination being as a more novelist less historian. By this study it is proven that Novelist also as Historian.

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