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SENSE OF HISTORY IN MANOHAR MALGONKAR'S NOVELS

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Manohar Malgonkar was a great Indian English historical writer. He was a historian too. His novels are *The Distant Drum* (1960), *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princes* (1963), *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), *The Garland Keepers* (1986), *Spy in Amber* (1971), *Open Season* (1978), *Shalimar* (1978) and *Bandicoot Run* (1982). His collections of stories are *A Toast in Warm Wine* (1974), *Bombay Beware* (1975) and *Rumble Tumble* (1977). He has written many books of histories on the Marathas. Both M. Rajagopalachari's *The Novels of Manohar Malgonkar* (1989) and G.S. Amur's *Manohar Malgonkar* (1973) are authentic source for the study of this author. A.N. Dwivedi's "The Historian as a Novelist" throws sufficient light on Malgonkar's history, art of fiction, mode of narration and style. Malgonkar is a good novelist in the line of Hari Narayan Apte, R.C. Dutt, Sir Jogendran Singh and John Masters. Like John Masters, he depicts the powerful picturesque life of the past. Though his output is less compared to R.K. Narayan and others his range of vision, style of narration, and plot-construction are brilliant. His own 'felt-experience' in the fields of adventure, civil service, army, politics, love and romantic life helped him catch the 'colour of life', especially of the historical personages and the elite.

Indeed, Malgonkar greatly influenced by John Marquand in craft, form and style, writes like him. His historical novels *The Devil's Wind* resembles John Master's *Nightrunners of Bengal* about Indian Mutiny of 1857. Malgonkar states, "John Masters writes about the rebellion as though it were a mutiny, he writes about us Indians as the enemy, and he wanted, naturally, the British ruler of the Companies to be perpetuated, whereas my viewpoint is so opposite in this novel at all times, that there was no possibility of any agreement." (Iyengar 423) John Masters *Coromandal*, *Bhowani Junction* and others too resemble Malgonkar's novels. This author writes, "I keep writing of India...because I feel no author should write outside his own living circumstances. If he does, it is phoney" (Rajagopalachari 25). In a way, Malgonkar holds the view that history and fiction have many aspects in common and asserts that history is the basis of his novels. His aim in writing historical novel might be to make history readable. Indeed, his works *Kanhoji Angrey* and *Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur* display his keen sense of history. Malgonkar's novels are a harmonious blend of history and reality. However as Shakti Batra blames Malgonkar for his sense of detachment from the characters, many of his characters save of the novel *The Devil's Wind* are life-like and filled with flesh, blood and spirit. Malgonkar is a different sort of historical writer. In this sense, he can be called a patriotic writer as his opinion of the country and people are jingoistic. Malgonkar's most important novels are five -- *Distant Drum*, *Combat of Shadows*, *The Princes*, *A Bend in the Ganges* and the latest *The Garland Keepers*.

The author's *Distant Drum* is the first and rather his best novel. The novel is presented in two movements. The first covers Kiran Garud, the hero's relationship with Bina Sonal and his service at the ridiculously red-tapism-bound D.W.P. Office. The second movement displays a series of incidents like Manner's episode, Kiran-Margot Hedley's love affair, Kiran's military training at Dehradun School, Burma Wars and Delhi riots all reflecting the protagonist's growth as a soldier and his moral maturity.

Critics think *Distant Drum* is a 'documentation of army life' and the protagonist's quest for identity and fulfillment. The criticism on the success of the novel is a mixed bogey. G. S. Amur says the novel achieves a limited success, but praises it as a technical tour de force. Malgonkar's next novel *Combat of Shadows* deals with man's quest for self-realization. But the person who is in search of fulfillment is not

Henry Wilton, the protagonist of the novel, but Ruby Miranda, the heroine. The novel is a portraiture of dark aspects of British people. Malgonkar exposes the evil characters of Honey, the Manager of Brindian Tea estate, Assam. Henry is a man of wavering mind with his excessive weakness for women. He loves Ruby Miranda the Anglo-Indian local school teacher. He marries Jean Walters. As the days pass on, Ruby becomes unhappy about Henry's betrayal and Jean is not satisfied with Henry's affair with Gauri, an estate coolie, and his lust for the eyes of the real chandni chowk whore, black and bold are continued. So Jean falls in love with Eddie Trevor and Ruby Miranda who loved Eddie decides to take revenge upon Henry. Henry is always in search of sensual pleasure. For this to avoid rivals, he kills them. He is a womanizer.

The next novel *The Princes* depicts the life of a prince whose ancient glory is fast fading because of the merger of the princely states. The hero Abhayaraj seeks bliss in the crumbling order of his kingdom. Other characters are the Maharaja, the Maharani, Kanakachand, an SC ex-classmate of the hero, who becomes an MLA and Kamala, Munnie and Zarina. It begins with the Maharaja who decides not to sign for merger of Begwad, their state. The Maharaja represents the old order. So does his son. When the Maharaja goes on hunting a tiger just to kill his hundredth prey, he is killed by it. While his wife who was treated by her husband as a sort of discarded woman elopes with Abdulla, Jan the police officer to Pakistan. In this way, she rebels against the traditional system of marriage in Hindus. He joins military life and fights against the Germans and he is compelled to sign the Merger of States Act just 49 days after his ascension to the throne.

As they say quest for morals and self-realization begun in the novel *Distant Drum* continues in *A Bend in the Ganges*. Gian and Debidayal opposite to each other in caliber and character seek fulfillment in martial life. The novel depicts the immediate condition of the Independence of 1947 and the subsequent Partition of the country. The novel delineates conflict that persisted between Hindus and Muslims. G.S. Amur rates *A Bend in the Ganges* superior to *The Prince* and E.M. Forster chose it as the best book of the year 1964. Malgonkar's truly historical novel *The Devil's Wind* is the story of Sepoy's Mutiny of 1857, in which, Nana Saheb, the adopted son of Bajirao Peshwa II, took an important role to establish Indian rule at Delhi. Along with Tatya Tope, the manager of his estate, Nana Saheb kills hundreds of British people. This leads the British to call him "Napoleon Bonaparte as the hate object of a nation." A.N. Dwivedi thinks the title of the novel *The Devil's Wind* is very relevant, as it alludes to the rise of a rebellion in the North exactly a hundred years after the Battle of Plassey (1757), in 'fulfillment of a dire prophecy'.

Malgonkar presents the hero, purely from an Indian point of view. There are many characters, Indian, foreign, male and female. Nana Saheb, like the earlier Peshwas is addicted to drink and sex. His dream of freedom which leads him to initiate a fighting is sketched with historical authenticity. Malgonkar's other fictional works are the espionage thriller- *Spy in Amber*, *Bandicoot Run*, and the film scripts *Shalimar* and *Open Season*. His latest novel *The Garland Keepers* is a picture of infringement of human rights during the time of Emergency. Manohar Malgonkar's works are remarkable phenomenon in modern Indian English literature.

References:

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