



## Historical realism in Manohar Malgonkar's *The Devil's Wind*

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### Abstract

Manohar Malgonkar (1913–2010) occupies an important place in the canons of Indian literature in English, particularly for his historical fiction with political undertones. But to focus on him only as a novelist or story-teller with historical leanings would be to limit his versatility and slot him as a spinner of tales. The corpus of his work is rich with eleven novels that have a blend of history, romance and military life, two light romances, a detective novel, a play, innumerable essays/articles, two historical accounts, a travelogue and a large number of short stories collected in several anthologies. Malgonkar's novels saw the light of the day after India's independence in 1947. His urge for recreating the contemporary history through his writings is a part of his desire to awake the nation and to help it to build an individual character. His novels have heroes who go for heroism and their heroic deeds are in accordance with the traditions of historical periods. Written in autobiographical mode, *The Devil's Wind* is the story of Nana Saheb placed within the happenings like the Doctrine of Annexation, the aggrieved Indian rulers, the oppressed Indian masses and their joint reaction to British hostilities. The historical context plays a pivotal role in *The Devil's Wind*, as Malgonkar skilfully weaves the intricacies of the 1857 uprising into the fabric of his narrative. The novel captures the spirit of rebellion, portraying the diverse motivations that fueled the insurgents. Through the characters, readers are transported to a time of political upheaval, social unrest, and The novel beautifully blends facts and fiction, art and history to create a character who is generous, noble, understanding and affectionate but weak, albeit, unwilling to shed blood.

**Keywords:** Realism, Tradition, Modernity, Historical Account

### Introduction

Malgonkar goes down literary canons primarily as a historical novelist conscious about presenting an authentic picture of the society he knows best. The title of the novel *The*



*Devil's Wind* symbolized rebellious ideas and anti-British feelings which swept over the country with the speed of wind and sparked off revolt from cantonment to cantonment and from one capital to another. *The Devil's Wind* by Manohar Malgonkar explores the profound symbolism associated with the harsh, unpredictable wind that sweeps through the arid landscapes of the novel. This force of nature becomes a powerful metaphor, embodying various themes and reflecting the complex human condition. Firstly, the devil's wind serves as a symbol of the relentless passage of time. Its ceaseless howling and gusting mirror the unstoppable march of days and years. Malgonkar uses this elemental force to remind readers of the impermanence of life and the inevitability of change. The characters in the novel, like the landscape they inhabit, are subject to the whims of this relentless wind, highlighting the transient nature of human existence. The whole of North India, especially from Bengal to Delhi, and areas in the central India began to burn. Massacre grim and galore the order of the day. Only Bombay and Madras regiments did not revolt and the Sikhs remained loyal to the British. From the Indian point of view, the title alludes to people's belief in the dying pronouncements of *Satis*, widows who cremated themselves on their husband's funeral pyres and the prophecy of saints after the defeat of Indians in the Battle of Plassey. They had predicted, *when the husband years had elapsed, the Company's rule would end. The Devil's wind would arise and unshackle Mother India.* (*The Devil's Wind*, 116) One significant fact about the title of the novel is that Patricia Wentworth, an English authoress, also wrote a novel on the Indian Mutiny in 1912 and titled it *The Devil's Wind*. It may be just a coincidence that Malgonkar also titled his novel on 'the revolt of 1857' *The Devil's Wind* or he may have borrowed the title from Patricia Wentworth as Malgonkar's novel was published only in 1972, Despite the similarity in the title and subject- matter of the two novels, both present more a study in contrast than in comparison in the treatment of the subject-matter.

## Major Thrust

*The Devil's Wind* is Manohar Malgonkar's sixth novel. He calls it Nana Saheb's story, and justifiably so, because it is more the story of Nana Saheb the last Peshwa than of the Mutiny of 1857. In the Author's Note Malgonkar points out, *This ambiguous man and his fate have always fascinated me. I discovered that the stories of Nana and the revolt have never been told from the Indian point of view. This, then, is Nana's story as we believe he might have*



written it himself. It is fiction; but it takes no liberties with verifiable facts or even with probabilities. (*The Devil's Wind*, iii). *The Devil's Wind* is also an autobiography because Nana Saheb narrates his story birth in the first person. Malgonkar makes use of the first personal narrative as an artistic device to reveal the motive of Nana Saheb behind all his actions both in public and private life. He say: *This, then, is Nana's story as I believe he might have written it himself.* (*The Devil's Wind*, xx) *The Devil's Wind* can be considered 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. In other historical novels, the drop is history, a few characters are historical, but the hero and the heroine are fictitious characters who thus give ample scope to the imaginative development of the plot. But in this novel the central character is Dhondu Pant Nana Saheb, the last Peshwa who led the mutinous sepoy of Kanpur. As such it is not easy for any author to change the story of his life; the events of his life being facts of history leave little room for imaginative manipulation. That is why the reader sometimes feels the story sagging under the load of historical facts. Perhaps the choice before the author was—to add imaginative episodes and make the story a historical romance or to stick to verifiable facts. The result is, as pointed out earlier, a perfect historical novel. But even when no liberties are taken with events and facts, they can be taken with the personality of the characters. And here we find our author doing his best to vindicate the character of Nana Saheb, justify his action, explain how certain atrocities took place in Kanpur not because of Nana Saheb's orders but in spite of his orders and wishes. Infact Malgonkar tries to put before us a completely different image of Nana Saheb from the conventional image put forward in the pages of history. The author prints three opinions about Nana Saheb—the British view, the French view and the American view.

As an epic, *The Devil's Wind* describes the fall and decline of the Maratha Confederacy right from 1796 to the complete destruction of Bithoor, the vestigial kingdom of the Peshwa in 1857. It also describes in the social and political condition which led to the outbreak of the revolt in 1857 and the principal participants in it. The Maratha confederacy, which, before the British came, had ruled the greater part of India, was headed by the peshwas or prime



Ministers. The peshwa had usurped the Maratha King's position and drooled in reality. Bajirao II, the adoptive father of Nana Saheb, sat on the prestigious guddi of the Peshwa in 1796 and was proved the last among the peshwas by his own misdeeds. He was cruel, callous and coward. He delighted in humiliating his feudatories and seizing their estates on the flimsiest of pretexts and, above all, he often cast his unholy glances upon their women. He was a sexual pervert and had *a fetish for observing beautiful women undress and titivate themselves.* (*The Devil's Wind*, 18) That is why, even his powerful hereditary chieftains were often up in arms against him. He had no natural qualities of leadership, least of all valour. Despite the fact that he was a descendent of Bajirao, his grandfather whose name he bore and was India's most talented military genius of all times, he dreaded the very sound of gunfire and could not face his enemies in the battle field. It was because of his cowardice that people called him "Running" Bajirao. *The Devil's Wind* could be contrasted with John Masters's *Night runners of Bengal*. Masters in his novel depicts the various events of the Sepoy Revolt in general from the British point of view. But Malgonkar deals with the life of Nana Saheb in particular against the drop of the events of the Sepoy Revolt evidently from the Indian point of view. He is understandably not very much pleased with the way Masters has seen "the rebellion as though it were a mutiny".<sup>8</sup> But in fairness it should, however, be recorded that in the aspects of story-telling and characterisation, both of them compel admiration.

## Conclusion

Manohar Malgonkar is a thoughtful man of modern India. He is gifted with penetrating intellect and fertile imagination. The historian takes no notice of the motive of the historical personage. Nor he focus his attention on the private life of the historical personage. But novelist focusses his attention both on the public and private life of a historical personage. He looks at and beyond his action to the motive and craving in his heart. in *The Devil's wind* where Malgonkar takes the story straight from history-book. Like Bulwer he utilizes his novel for the re-evaluation of the historical personage of Nana Saheb, who has been unfavorably treated by the British historians. He makes use of history as a subject here. Malgonkar describes the public life of Nana Saheb on the basis of documented facts. But he puts emphasis on the depiction of his private life and on the revelation of his motive behind



his every action in his novel *The Devil's Wind*. *The Devil's Wind* by Manohar Malgonkar offers rich insights into the human condition amidst historical turmoil. The conclusions drawn from the characters' journeys underscore the interconnectedness of personal choices, historical events, and the intricate tapestry of human relationships. The novel encourages readers to contemplate the enduring lessons embedded in the narrative, making it a compelling exploration of the complexities of history and humanity.

### **Works Cited**

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