



**HISTORICAL REVISIONISM AS A TOOL OF POSTCOLONIAL NATIONALISM IN MANOHAR
MALGONKAR'S *THE DEVIL'S WIND*, BHAGWAN S. GIDWANI'S *THE SWORD OF TIPU SULTAN*
AND RETURN OF THE ARYANS**

Panchali Mukherjee

Assistant Professor and Head of the Department of Languages
T. John College
Bangalore 560066.
panchali.mukherjee@gmail.com panchali@tjohnngroup.com

Abstract

The research paper attempts to study the idea of historical revisionism in the light of Manohar Malgonkar's *The Devil's Wind* and Bhagwan S. Gidwani's *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* and *Return of the Aryans*. The paper further attempts to examine historical revisionism on the following grounds: access to new data over a period of time, language, culture, ideology and historical causation. The paper highlights certain instances in the above mentioned novels which help to illustrate the idea of historical revisionism on the basis of these aspects. The paper takes into consideration that these texts are written in the post-independence India and are based on postcolonial history. Thus, these novels help in rehabilitating the concerned historical characters and in offering counter historical theories which subvert colonial interpretation of Indian historical characters and Indian history. It also examines the fact that historical revisionism is a tool or a weapon of postcolonial nationalism and the way in which this brand of nationalism operates in relation to this idea and helps to highlight the concern of postcolonial history in the context of these novels.

Historical Revisionism:

Historiography refers to the study of the methodology and the development of a corpus of historical works based on a specified topic. The historians have used narratives as a rhetorical device to provide an account of history. The narrative used by the historians to provide an account of history is organized in a chronological way. It focusses on a single, coherent story which is descriptive. It is concerned with specific historical personages. Historiography focusses on "Historical Revisionism" as a specified topic in the context of which the methodology and the development of a corpus of historical works may be studied. "Historical Revisionism" in historiography involves the reinterpretation of orthodox views on evidence, motivations, decision-making processes surrounding an historical event. Historical revisionism assumes that the interpretation of an historical event or period as accepted by the majority of scholars needs significant change. Nationalism produces contradictory historical theories. The different spheres of history change with a change in the nationalistic perspectives related to them. Postcolonial Nationalism is an ideology that is born in the nations that had been



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colonized and exploited in the past. It helps to resist the colonial or neo-colonial domination that is essential for the nation and its culture to establish its identity. Culture plays a role in historical revisionism as it helps in focussing on the historical events which are on the periphery so that they come into prominence. The issues of causation in history also get revised with new research in the field of history.

Christopher Hibbert in *The Great Mutiny: India 1857* states that Nana Saheb's responsibility for the massacre at the Satichaura Ghat could never be established although he was responsible for the massacre:

At the Satichaura Ghat in Cawnpore, the women and children who had survived the massacre, about 125 of them, were pulled out of the river and collected together on the sand by some of the Nana's men.

Seven of them, four British and three Eurasians, were carried off by troopers of the 2nd Cavalry. But when Nana Sahib, whose responsibility for the

massacre at the Satichaura Ghat has never been established, heard of their abduction he ordered that they should be returned. (Hibbert 194)

Manohar Malgonkar in *The Devil's Wind* resorts to historical revisionism, as he tries to rehabilitate the image of Nana Saheb by presenting him as a national hero

of India. Postcolonial Nationalism is the ideological basis for such kind of a rehabilitation of the image of an Indian historical personage that makes an arch villain of colonial history to a national hero in the postcolonial history. There is a subjective rendering of history. The author's depiction and interpretation of the particular historical event helps to rehabilitate the image of Nana Sahib as he absolves him of the responsibility of causing the massacre at Satichaura Ghat in contrast to Christopher Hibbert's view. The author states that the sepoys were responsible for the massacre at Satichaura Ghat. In the words of Nana Saheb, the narrator:

I know that at Satichaura it was the sepoys of the disbanded regiments who were responsible for the massacre. (*The Devil's Wind* 218)

Sir Walter Scott's historical novel *The Surgeon's Daughter* (1827) presents Tipu Sultan as a lascivious tyrant who gets attracted to Menie Gray's portrait; he is the stereotype of an Oriental ruler. Richard Middlemass is shown to be Menie Gray's lover, who is disguised as a black servant in Ram Sing Cottah's house. Tipu Sultan is being duped by Richard Middlemas and Madame Montreville as they had promised Tipu Sultan that they would procure Menie Gray for him. Thus, Richard Middlemas tells Madame Montreville:

“Yes, fell woman,” answered Middlemas, “but was it I who encouraged the young tyrant's outrageous passion for a portrait, or who formed



the abominable plan of placing the original within his power?”

(*The Surgeon's Daughter* 81)

Gidwani, in contrast to Sir Walter Scott's portrayal in *The Surgeon's Daughter* shows that Tipu Sultan's code of conduct was not to harm women and children during battles. Tipu Sultan respects the womenfolk of the ruler of Balam:

... The nonchalance and abundance with which Tipu's little army had burst upon the hide-out was such that the zenana guards had no doubt

that they had to deal with Hyder Ali's main army. Those who could not run away and hide themselves in the forest surrendered. The wife of the ruler of Balam with her infant son, three daughters and other ladies came forward and sought Tipu's protection. Tipu dismounted bowed to the ladies and assured

them of their safety and honour. ... [Maqbool Khan] waved his congratulations

to Tipu and went right into the tent, dragging the frightened wife of the ruler of Balam out, while his soldiers stood by, ready to seize other helpless victims so that all of them could be taken in a victory parade before Hyder Ali who would

no doubt reward those who had brought such prizes. Tipu called upon Maqbool

Khan to desist. Maqbool smiled with the contemptuous familiarity of an old

soldier but did not release the captive. By then, the three princesses and other

ladies were also being dragged out. Tipu repeated the command. Maqbool

ignored him altogether. Tipu Sultan lifted his gun and shot Maqbool Khan through the head. (*The Sword of Tipu Sultan* 138-139)

Postcolonial Nationalism is the ideological basis for such kind of a rehabilitation of the image of an Indian historical personage that converts a colonial portrayal of the licentious image of Tipu Sultan to a postcolonial portrayal of a national hero and a protector of women's modesty. The author's depiction and interpretation of the particular historical event helps to rehabilitate the image of Tipu Sultan and show him in a noble light.

In *Return of the Aryans*, Gidwani disputes the "Aryan Invasion Theory" which states that the Aryans originated from Central-Eastern Europe invaded the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent or migrated there and spread further across all of northern India. Finally, they settled in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent. The Aryan migration into the Indian subcontinent is primarily drawn from linguistic evidence as well as from a multitude of data drawn from Vedic religion, rituals, poetics, social organization, chariot making technology, divergence of skin colour and divergence



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in the physique of the races inhabiting the northern and southern parts of India. It was propagated by the British and aimed at proving to the Indians that they had always been ruled by the foreigners. It was always the foreign invader who brought progress and enlightenment to the Indians. This implied that Indians must never aspire for self-rule unless the intention is to bring back darkness, decadence and ruin. Bhagwan S. Gidwani in *Return of the Aryans* resorts to historical revisionism and subverts “The Aryan Invasion Theory”. In Gidwani’s novel, after the death of Sindhu Putra the slaves were evicted from the lands where he had settled them. Thus, the ex-slaves became arya meaning non-people or exile from rya and began the migration to faraway lands.

Lands, to which the various armies moved, were not carved out from territories of any lords and chiefs. They were “abandoned lands, far from the rule and jurisdiction of lords; out of the way, virgin, unclaimed, where rock and weed once abounded, with no sustenance for man, beast or bird but then men came, inspired by the god from the Rocks, and they made the land lush, green and fertile with their incessant toil and vowed for ever to serve the land with virtue and merit – and though each land bore its separate name, all such lands together came to be known as punya-bhumi (land where virtuous acts are performed – sacred land).” (*Return of the Aryans* 699)

The historical novel explains that the Aryans who left Bharatvarsha travelled in various directions as they were searching for the “punya-bhumi” which is

free from evil (*Return of the Aryans* 706-705).

The author gives an account of the Aryans on the move, their strange adventures, experiences, successes, frustrations, encounters with nature, disasters and survivals. The Aryans from Bharatvarsha moved to Iran, Sumer, Assyria, Syria, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Soviet Union, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Lithuania, Baltic States, Poland, Italy and Germany. They performed deeds of nobility and honour by helping people in foreign lands. Their deeds were based on the concepts of “daya” meaning compassion, “dana” meaning charity and “dharma” meaning righteousness. But they never found the “punya-bhumi” and realized that their homeland, Bharatvarsha, is the best land in the whole world. So they decided to return to their own homeland. Man can attain the “punya-bhumi” in the land of his birth itself by putting in effort rather than fleeing from his homeland (*Return of the Aryans* 712). Postcolonial Nationalism is the ideological basis for the subversion of the ‘Aryan Invasion Theory’ and foregrounding of the ‘Indigenous Aryan Theory’ thereby establishing the superiority of the Indian civilization over other civilizations of the world. The author’s depiction and interpretation of the particular historical event helps to subvert the colonial ‘Aryan Invasion Theory’ and assert the post-colonial ‘Indigenous Aryan Theory’ thereby establishing the fact that India does not need a foreign rule for progress and enlightenment but are capable of self-rule that would usher in progress and development.



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Access to new data: A large amount of historical data is lost and when they are discovered and publicized they give new views on the well-established historical events. The archives where historical records are stored take decisions based on space and interest regarding obtaining and keeping of original historical materials.

Manohar Malgonkar's *The Devil's Wind* reconstructs Nana Saheb's life and elucidates his involvement in the Indian uprising of 1857 thereby portraying it in a new perspective. This new perspective is based on a large amount of historical data that the author gathered from oral historical narratives that he came across. The author states:

In the villages they sang ballads extolling him as a patriot and parents privately warned their children not to believe the history taught in schools.

(The Devil's Wind ix)

Bhagwan S. Gidwani undertakes the task of reconstructing and rehabilitating the image of Tipu Sultan thereby depicting Tipu Sultan in a different perspective. He embarks on this voyage of resurrecting the image of Tipu Sultan by accessing historical data from books on Tipu Sultan, copies of Dutch records, records from Ottoman archives, Iranian papers and records from Portuguese archives that he got from his friends. He accessed historical data from the archives and libraries of India such as The National Archives of India at Delhi, Madras Government Records Office, Asiatic

Society and libraries at Calcutta, Madras and Pondicherry. He visited British Museum, India Office Library and Public Record Office in London for historical data on Tipu Sultan. He went to Bodleian at Oxford, National Library of Scotland and a host of other libraries, record offices and museums in Britain; *Archives Nationales*, *Bibliothèque Nationale* and *Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères* in France. The historical data was in the form of books, unpublished records, published and unpublished manuscripts, records of secret meetings and top-secret consultations, memoranda and minutes on the affairs of the East India Company, Council deliberations of military and political affairs in all the three Presidencies (Bengal, Bombay and Madras), private collections and confidential correspondence of the British Governors and Governors-General as well as records that showed the thoughts, feelings and actions of the English empire-builders (*The Sword of Tipu Sultan* xiii-xv). The author accesses historical sources available on Tipu Sultan in various countries such as India, Britain, France, Netherlands, Turkey, Iran and Portugal in order to get an unbiased and balanced view of this historical personage who had been much maligned by the British for their self-interest. He not only accesses the sanitized official records of history regarding Tipu Sultan but also other sources such as unpublished records, unpublished manuscripts, private collection and confidential correspondence in order to get an impartial account of Tipu Sultan's life.



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Bhagwan S. Gidwani obtained pre-history sources and 4600 songs of the pre-historic times from the various countries to subvert the ‘Aryan Invasion Theory’ and foreground the ‘Indigenous Aryan Theory’ (*Return of the Aryans ix-x*). He states:

In order to write the book I have had to rely on the oral history tradition – the songs of the ancients from prehistory which still remain in the traditional memory of the people of Angkor, Sind, Bali, Java, Burma, China, Bhutan, Nepal, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Italy, Russia, Lithuania, Germany and India. (*Return of the Aryans xi*)

Language: The historical theories may get revised as more number of sources in different languages becomes available so that the established historical theories may get reviewed in the light of the new sources. Manohar Malgonkar in the case of Nana Saheb whereas Bhagwan S. Gidwani in the case of Tipu Sultan and ‘Indigenous Aryan Theory’ have accessed historical data regarding the above mentioned historical personages and the historical theory from a number of sources available in different languages. Manohar Malgonkar accessed oral narratives regarding Nana Saheb which were retold in the form of ballads or anecdotes in Indian vernaculars or their dialects by one generation to the other in order to rehabilitate the image of the historical personage. Bhagwan S. Gidwani accessed historical data regarding Tipu Sultan from various historical sources in French, Dutch, Persian, Turkish and Portuguese

thereby enabling the author to translate and collate the historical data received from these sources in order to get an impartial and balanced view of Tipu Sultan and his reign that encounters the lopsided view provided by the British (*The Sword of Tipu Sultan xv*). In the case of *Return of the Aryans*, Bhagwan S. Gidwani accesses the historical data regarding ‘Indigenous Aryans Theory’ from the songs dating to pre-historic times written in an archaic language with a strange idiom and unfamiliar images which is instrumental in subverting the ‘Aryan Invasion Theory’ as propagated by the British as an essential justification of their rule (*Return of the Aryans xi*).

Ideology: A change in the ideology changes the historiography of the historical events. The post-colonial history has three branches: the Post-Independence Nationalist history, the Marxist history and the Subaltern history. The Post-Independence Nationalist history challenged the aspects of colonial historiography and released the historical writing from the negative colonial theories about the Indian past. “‘Nationalist’ histories of this latter kind are defined by a single category, for instance, that of religion Muslim and Hindu nationalisms drew from anti-colonial, nationalist ideology for legitimacy, but converted their interests into a nationalism that confined itself to the articulation of a single concern – interpreting history in terms of monolithic religious identities” (Thapar 20).



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The historical novels namely *The Devil's Wind*, *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* and *Return of the Aryans* are based on postcolonial history as 'Postcolonial Nationalism' which is the underlying ideology in these novels helps to rehabilitate the historical characters from the indigenous culture namely Nana Saheb and Tipu Sultan who have been much vilified by the British and also to subvert the 'Aryan Invasion Theory' of the British that supported British rule in India. *The Devil's Wind* and *Return of the Aryans* is based on people's history or history from below or folk history. Thus, Manohar Malgonkar states in the "Author's Note":

... In the villages they sang ballads extolling him as a patriot and parents privately warned their children not to believe the history taught in schools. What the British had tried to pass off as a mutiny was, to most Indians, a national uprising for achieving independence. (*The Devil's Wind* ix)

The author has based his novel on oral folk history and gathered his historical data from the ballads which were sung in the villages. The author bases his historical novel on oral historical narratives which are a part of folk history because the official historical records in the archives vilify Nana Saheb.

Similarly, Bhagwan S. Gidwani has based his novel *Return of the Aryans* on oral folk history and gathered his historical data from the songs of the ancients from prehistory which remains in the traditional memory of the people of Angkor, Sind,

Bali, Java, Burma, China, Bhutan, Nepal, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Italy, Russia, Lithuania, Germany and India (*Return of the Aryans* xi). This is so because the pre-historic songs highlight the advancement that the indigenous culture had attained much before the arrival of the British in India thereby questioning the justification of the British rule in terms of a civilizing mission.

Historical Revisionism based on 'Postcolonial Nationalism' is an ideology that helps the postcolonial nations such as India to establish their identity, reinstate the superiority of their culture, to glorify their past, rehabilitate the indigenous historical personages and subvert flawed historical theories in the light of the new data obtained from various historical sources and through other languages. Historical Revisionism becomes a potent weapon for the realization of the nationalistic ideologies and is instrumental in formulating a discourse that subverts counter hegemonic ideologies in the form of a colonial discourse thereby foregrounding the postcolonial discourse. This postcolonial discourse is manifested through rehabilitation of indigenous historical personages and subversion of flawed historical theories.

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