Socio-Political Milieu of *The Devil’s Wind*: the Revolt of 1857

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Described as "the first perfect historical novel of Indo-Anglian fiction" by P.P.Mehta, *The Devil’s Wind* is a gripping story of 1857 revolt that tells the story of Nana Saheb, the heir of the last Peshwa of the Maratha Confederacy who played a leading role in that revolt. This novel provides a sympathetic portrait of a man whom the British portrayed as a great villain. Based on historical sources as far as possible, the novel is written in autobiographical mode in which Nana Saheb describes his life in his own words. Subtitled as Nana Saheb’s story, *The Devil’s Wind* has enough capacity to keep the readers engrossed in a gripping tale of the actual incidents leading to the 1857 Revolt. The novel was first published by the Viking’s Press, New York in 1972.

*The Devil's Wind* is a painstaking literary work that blends beautifully the artist and the historian. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, in his book *Indian Writing in English* writes:

Malgonkar reveals a good historical sense. His studies of the Maratha naval chieftain, Kahnoji Angrey, and the Puras of Dewas Senior give abundant evidence of his flair for historical biography, and works like *The Princes, A Bend in the Ganges* and *The Devil’s Wind* are but bolder experiments in artistically fusing the personal and historical perspective in fictional terms.” (Iyengar 434).

*The Devil’s Wind* is divided into three parts: Part I deals with the life at Bithoor, Part II shifts to the scene at Kanpur and Part III describes the downfall and escape of Nana Saheb to Nepal. In the first few chapters of the novel, Nana Saheb describes the character and personality of his foster father Baji Rao, who became the Peshwa of Poona in 1796. Since Bajirao had no legitimate child, he adopted Nana Saheb as his heir. Nana Saheb’s real name was Dhondu Pant which means ‘a stone’. This name was given to him by his real father Madhv Bhatt. Nana’s foster father, Bajirao was mean, cruel, vindictive and greedy but well read and shrewd in his financial affairs. He was religious too. He was a coward and had no qualities of leadership. Moreover, his over indulgence in sex made his position more vulnerable. He had numerous wives, concubines and pimps in his palace. Due to all these, Bajirao was bereft of supporters. He was despised by his own subjects and that was the condition the British were waiting for. Governor-General Lord Hastinge made Bajirao renounce all claims to his inheritance and sent him to Bithoor, a small village near Kanpur in 1818, alongwith an yearly pension of a hundred thousand pounds every year. But there too, Bajirao made no difference in his lifestyle and accepted his fall with remarkable equanimity.
Bajirao brought up Nana Saheb as a Prince having all the royal facilities. He was also provided with good education. He was taught Sanskrit as well as English. Tantya Tope was Nana’s fencing master. Another character of the novel is Mani; daughter of Moropant Tambe who followed Bajirao to Bithoor. She was an extraordinary girl with warrior like qualities. She was intended by Bajirao as the future wife of Nana Saheb.

Nana Saheb refers to a strange phenomenon in Bajira o’s life when he says that Bajirao used to dream of ghost of his ancestor, Peshwa (fifth) Narayan. The ghost used to torment him and curse him saying that the house of Peshwa would turn into ashes and his clan would be perished. And amazingly the curse proved true. Nana Saheb’s first wife died within two days of their marriage. His second wife Girija too, could not survive long after the consummation of marriage. Ultimately Nana Saheb left the idea of marrying Mani (who later on became ‘Rani of Jhansi’) because he was afraid that she too would fall a victim to his curse. The novelist says that Nana Saheb was then provided with a concubine named Champa. In 1846, when Nana was 22 years old, Champa gave birth to a girl child and they named her ‘Gangamala’.

Soon Champa also retired and she herself selected another concubine, Azizan for Nana Saheb. Meanwhile, Nana was married to another girl named Kashi. Since Nana Saheb was the only heir of Bajirao according to his will, when Bajirao aged 75, died in 1851, Nana Saheb faced the ugly reality. He was deprived of his pension and privileges by the Britishers. But the most disturbing matter was that he was deprived even of title ‘Maharaja’. Despite his friendship with Company’s officials, nothing went in Nana’s favour, not even the title.

Now Lord Dalhousie replaced Lord Hardinge and he started a new policy the ‘Doctrine of Lapse’, according to which no adopted son would be considered the heir of King. Lord Dalhousie used this policy to annex the Princely states and Kingdoms. Since Nana Saheb himself was the adopted, not the real son, he forfeited his claim to the throne due to this doctrine of Lapse. One more blow came to Nana Saheb when he came to know about withdrawal of another special privilege i.e. exemption of Bithoor and its retainers from the jurisdiction of the Company’s law courts. Against this law, he sent an appeal to London but in vain. At last he sent Azimullah to London to put up a personal appeal but he too could not get success. Though the main mission of Azimullah (i.e. to get appeal sanctioned by Queen Victoria) was unsuccessful but he visited most of London and brought imported items along with him. He also got the news of ongoing war between British and Russians.

Very soon, Lord Dalhousie annexed the province of Oudh under the Doctrine of Lapse and headed towards Delhi where Bahadur Shah Zafar, a Mughal Emperor in his eighties and only half alive, was ruling. His wife Zeenat Mahal played an important role in igniting the idea of Revolt against the British. She was a brave, courageous, ruthless woman with a genius for intrigues. Her co-conspirator was Moulvi Ahmadullah, popularly known as Mad Mullah. The British successfully tried to annex Delhi Red Fort from Bahadur Shah Zafar on the pretext of
absence of any legitimate heir. Secretly they had killed all the Princes. But Zeenat Mahal, undeterred by all this triggered the spark of Revolt

Nana Saheb went to Kanpur to receive the new military Commander Major General Sir Hugh Wheeler who succeeded Sir Charles Napier. Sir Wheeler’s wife was an Indian named Janaki, a village girl expert in dance. Huge Wheeler had spent 54 years in army and he was more Indian than British so much had he adapted himself to Indian lifestyle. Very soon Nana Saheb and Huge Wheeler were regular visitors to each other’s place.

There were many reasons that culminated into the Revolt of the Indians against the British. Some of the political, social, military and economic reasons that played an important part in the revolt of 1857 such as the ‘Doctrine of Lapse’ policy, introduced by Lord Dalhousie, which said that if any Indian ruler had no natural heir, then the state of the respective ruler would be annexed by the British even if the ruler had adopted a heir. A number of states were annexed due to that policy adopted by the British such as that of Satara, Jaitpur, Nagpur, Jhansi, Udaipur, Bagat etc. Other than this, end of pension and compensation to the peshwas and princes in India and subsequently abolition of their titles by Lord Dalhousie aroused anguish among them.

Discriminatory attitude of the British towards the lower castes and classes of Indian society, the British policy of religious conversion i.e forcing Indians to adopt Christianity, usage of cartridges made up of cow’s and pig’s fat which were to be used by the Indian soldiers which they thought would defile them, British government’s policy of encouraging Christian missionaries, all these reasons played an important part to turn the spark of revolt into the wild fire all over the country. Indians found the policies of the British unfair and discriminatory. And the obvious result of this growing gap between the Indians and the British was ‘revolt’.

The Indian Rebellion of 1857 began as a mutiny of sepoys of British East India Company’s Army on the 10th May 1857 in Meerut. The sepoys of the 3rd Native Cavalry had begun it. The sepoys were a combination of Muslim and Hindu Soldiers. There were over 200,000 Indians in the army compared to about 40,000 British. On the evening of 10th May most European officers were preparing to attend Church, while many of the European soldiers were off duty and had gone into canteens or into the bazaar in Meerut.

The Indian troops led by the 3rd Cavalry, broke into revolt. Crowds in the bazaar attacked the off duty soldiers there. There was bloodshed, firing all over many English man, women, children, Indians, soldiers were killed. On the morning of May 11, soldiers found Meerut quiet and the rebels had marched off to Delhi. The same morning the first parties of the 3rd cavalry reached Delhi. From beneath the windows of the King’s apartment in the palace, they called on Bahadur Shah Zafar to acknowledge and lead them. Bahadur Shah did nothing at this point but others in the palace including Hazrat Mahal, Mad Mullah and many others were quick to join the revolt. During the day the revolt spread. European officials and dependents, Indian Christians and shopkeepers within the city were killed, some by sepoys and others by crowds of rioters. In this
way, revolt was spreading in all directions, and that was the cause of concern for the British. They had to save their arsenals, ammunitions and arms from the rebels. Moreover they had to protect their wives, women & children. They made every effort to suppress the revolt.

Nana Saheb was receiving all the news through telegraph and his British Commander friends. During that stage of the Rebellion, Nana Sahib declared his loyalty to the British. He won the confidence of Charles Hillersdon, the collector of Kanpur. Nana Saheb was in a momentary state of dilemma whether to support the rebels or his British friends. He wanted to help his British friends and all the same he wanted to be with Indian rebels. But somehow Charles Hillersdon convinced him for help. It was planned that Nana Sahib would assemble a force of 1500 soldiers, in case the rebellion spread to Kanpur. On June 5, 1857 at the time of rebellion by the East India Company at Kanpur, the British contingent had taken refuge at an entrenchment in the southern part of the town. Amid the prevailing chaos in Kanpur, Nana Sahib and his forces entered the British magazine situated in the Northern part of the town. The soldiers of the 53rd Native Infantry which was guarding the magazine thought that Nana had entered the magazine on behalf of the British. However, once he entered the magazine, Nana Sahib announced that he was a participant in the rebellion against the British and intended to be a vassal of Bahadur Shah II.

After taking possession of the company treasury, Nana Sahib advanced up the Grand Trunk Road. He wanted to restore the Maratha confederacy under the Peshwa tradition. Hence he decided to capture Kanpur. On his way, Nana Sahib met the soldiers at Kalyanpur. The soldiers were on their way to Delhi to meet Bahadur Shah II. Nana Sahib wanted them to go back to Kanpur, and help him in defeating the British. The soldiers were reluctant at first but decided to join Nana Saheb when he promised to double their pay and reward them with gold, if they destroyed the British entrenchment.

On June 5, 1857, Nana Sahib sent a letter to General Wheeler, informing him to expect an attack next morning at 10:30 AM. The British were not adequately prepared for the attack, but they managed to defend themselves for a long time, as the attacking forces were reluctant to enter the entrenchment. Nana Sahib’s forces had been led to falsely believe that the entrenchment had gunpowder-filled trenches that would explode if they got close. The British held out in their makeshift fort for three weeks with little water and food supplies but they lost many lives due to sunstroke and lack of water.

As the news of Nana Saheb’s advance over the British garrison spread, several of the rebel sepoys joined him. By June 10, he was believed to be leading around twelve thousand to fifteen thousand Indian soldiers. During the first week of the siege, Nana Saheb’s forces encircled the attachment, created loopholes and established firing positions from the surrounding buildings. The British Captain John Moore retaliated. Nana Sahib retreated to his head quarter at Savada House which was situated around two miles away. Nana Saheb decided to attempt a direct assault on the British entrenchment but the rebel soldiers displayed lack of enthusiasm.
The firing and the bombardment continued until June 23, 1857, the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Plassey. But the sepoys were unable to gain an entry into the entrenchment by the end of the day. The British camp had been steadily losing its soldiers to successive bombardments and firing and assaults by Nana Sahib’s forces. It was also suffering from disease and low supplies of food, water and medicines. General Wheeler’s personal morale had been low, after his son Lt. Gorden Wheeler was decapitated in an assault. Nana Saheb and his advisor, Azim came up with a plan to end the deadlock. Nana sent his messenger to Gen.Wheeler promising for the safe passage of the British to Satichaura Ghat to depart for Allahabad, on 27 of June. The plan was accepted by Wheeler but when the refugees’ families were in boats at Satichaura Ghat, some of sepoys shouted that all white men should be killed. Nana Saheb was not present there at that time and as soon as he heard the news of firing at the ghat, he immediately rushed to the spot in order to curb the situation but in vain. The sepoys were in no mood to spare any English men but only women and children. Nana had to accept that situation though unwillingly. Then all the women and children were taken to Bibighar for safe stay but not for a long time as they were soon raped, mutilated and massacred by sepoys. Nana asserts that all that unfortunate events took place without his consent and permission. The killing was suspected to have been done by butchers under the directive of Hussainy Begum whose daughter was burnt alive by the Britishers in Daryaganj. Although Nana was not connected with any of these massacres, he was conscientious enough to feel concerned about Satichaura and Bibighar incidents. He regretted his decision to keep the women and children at Bibighar.

After that, sepoys advanced towards Kanpur where they had to face the newly arrived British column headed by Neill and Renaud who committed notorious barbarities among the Indian villagers just to instill fear by violence. Nana lost battles with the British at Fattepur and Kanpur. The battle of Fattepur was lost by the sepoys. Their cruelty was so shocking that people spoke of the whole villages and townships raped, not of single woman. British atrocities were equally brutal. Nana Saheb recollects the revenge of the British in the following words:

Then our men saw something else: a village being sacked with military thoroughness and its women dishonoured. Fattepur, by being in the vicinity of the place where our troops had offered battle, had its fate sealed. They saw it being cordoned off and set on fire. Those who tried to escape, even women and children, were thrown back into the fire or shot while escaping. Even as they were retreating, our sepoys looked back in horror and swore vengeance. If that was what the white man did to his victims, it was up to them to wreak a similar vengeance. (Malgonkar, The Devil’s Wind 202).

The British flag once more flew over Kanpur. Apart from victory and loss, the thing that was tormenting Nana was the blame and criticism he was getting from the Indians as well as from the British. He was feeling guilty and was ashamed of his helplessness. There was no option left for Nana Saheb other than to flee and escape from his own people. He buried some of his immense treasure in a well at Bithoor and then took his family and dependants in a boat announcing that
he was going to drown himself—taking the ‘jal-samadhi’. A few miles downstream Nana Saheb left the boat and went to take refuge in Nizam Ali’s house in Akbarpur. There he found Nizam Ali’s wife torturing and crucifying Eliza, the daughter of Sir Hugh Wheeler. He killed that woman and took Eliza with him. The deserting troops met Nana Saheb again but Nana Saheb lost battle after battle. Tantya Topi and Rani of Jhansi were actively fighting against the British on their part and they also took over Gwalior. Then followed catastrophic events – the fall of Delhi, the fall of Kanpur; etc. Even the guerilla tactics followed by Nana Saheb could help him for a long time and subsequently he had to give up before the strength of the British.

Nana was totally disappointed and felt helpless at the news of Tantya Topi’s execution and the death of Balarao. With his ambitions wrecked, he could ultimately find his fulfillment in the loving company of his beloved Eliza. And so Nana Saheb became a hunted man with a price-tag of one lakh rupees on his head. Nana Saheb escaped to Nepal and in his negotiations with the Prime Minister of Nepal, Rana Jung Bahadur, he had to lose his wife Kashibai, who voluntarily became Rana Jung Bahadur’s mistress. In the novel one can read the words as well was the feeling of Kashi in the following words:

I want to be a woman, not merely a repressed freak. I want to live, to become a mother, to experience physical love, violent, abandoned. I want to be in the great king’s court, not in a hermitage. I am past twenty and what else was there for me but the prospect of lifelong abstinence, to die before I ever learned to live? And, above all, I did not want to be the cause of my husband’s death. (Malgonkar, The Devil’s Wind 259).

Nana Saheb lived like a recluse in the Terai forest of Nepal for fourteen years. Here he found peace while living with Eliza. Nana found a new reason to live and he was rather enjoying his life with his new found companion. He expresses his deep feeling in the following words:

The ability to find pleasure in the simpler things of life heightened, the horizons of the mind contracted, and ambition shivered and died, unmourned. Eliza and I were like some symbolic couple, like Rama and Sita during their exile,…This surely was Nirvana, a state of being freed from the coils of life. Once again there was a woman to love and a child to address me as father. As the leader of this small herd, I led a richer, more satisfying life than I had as the master of the Wada at Bithoor or as the Emperor’s short-lived Peshwa. (Malgonkar, The Devil’s Wind 272).

But after fourteen years he had to leave Nepal. He went to the bank of the Ganges to perform Sraddha ceremony for his adoptive father Bajirao II. The faithful priest Kashi Ram Pande recognised him and informed him about the changed scenes of Kanpur. Jayaji Scindia of Gwalior managed to smuggle Nana Saheb out of India to Mecca and then to Constantinople. And there ends the story of Nana Saheb in the novel.

The way in which Malgonkar has constructed the plot of this novel and depicted the milieu of that period, this novel can be considered as the first perfect historical novel of Indo-Anglian
fiction. The protagonist of the novel is Dhondu Pant or Nana Saheb, who played a very important part in the 1857 Revolt. The other historical persons involved in that momentous event such as Bajirao II, Tantya Tope, Rani Laxmibai, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Hazrat Mahal, Zeenat Mahal, Sir Hugh Wheeler, Lord Dalhousie, Hillersdon and many others have been included in the story of the novel also. Thus this novel holds a special place among the historical novels due the unflinching affinity of Malgonkar to the historical facts. P.P.Mehta in his book *Indo-English Writing: An Assessment* critically evaluates *The Devil’s Wind* as a historical novel in the following words:

In some other historical novels, the background is history, a few characters are historical but the hero and the heroine are the fictitious characters who thus give ample scope to the imaginative development of the plot. But in this novel, (*The Devil’s Wind*) the central character is Dhondu Pant Nana Saheb, the last Peshwa who led the mutinous sepoys of Cawnpore. As such it is not easy for any author to change the story of his life being facts of the 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 we said before, a perfect historical novel. (Mehta, 238).

Malgonkar himself asserts that he has presented the hero of the novel i.e. Nana Saheb in a neutral shade without any biasness. Since, Nana Saheb has been presented as a villain, a coward and man responsible for a big massacre in Kanpur by the British, the French and other writers of different nations, so Magonkar took it as a challenge to portray Nana Saheb as a normal human being. The novel describes the story of Nana Saheb starting right from his childhood till his flee to Nepal and death and simultaneously covering all the personal as well as public aspects of his life.

As a brief recapitulation of the plot of this novel has shown, its backdrop is the Revolt of 1857. There are a number of historical accounts made by the English as well as Indians describing this important incident during the colonial rule in India. One main difference between the accounts given by the British and Indians is that while the British historians have presented this particular event as a ‘mutiny of the sepoys’, for the Indians it was a ‘revolt’ or ‘the first war of Indian Independence’. Some of the political, social, military and economic reasons that played an important part in the revolt of 1857 are as follows:

**Political reasons:**

1. The most important political reason for this revolt was ‘Doctrine of Lapse’ policy, introduced by Lord Dalhousie according to which if any Indian ruler had no natural heir, then the state of the respective ruler would be annexed by the British even if the ruler had adopted an heir. A number of states such as that of Satara, Jaitpur, Nagpur, Jhansi,
Udaipur, Bagat etc. were annexed due to this policy adopted by the British. This triggered political unrest.

2. Annexation of the states of Awadh and Hyderabad by accusing the Indian rulers on the flimsy ground of their inefficiency in governance was another political reason behind the 1857 Revolt.

3. End of pension and compensation to the Peshwas and princes in India and subsequently abolition of their titles by Lord Dalhousie further aggravated the crisis.

4. Policy of discrimination between the Indians and the English employees in government services by the British was another cause of discontent. The British policy ‘Pax Britanicca’ meant for the removal of Pindari and other such tribes from the army of Indian province was another reason due to which those tribes supported the revolutionaries.

Social reasons:

1. The British were proud of their white colour and intelligence.

2. Lord Dalhousie hurt the sentiments of Indians by prohibiting some customs of the society like satipratha, balhatya (female infanticide), sacrifice of human beings etc.

3. The orthodox Indians also did not accept the changes brought by the British such as the introduction of English as the medium of education, Railway system, post and telegraph etc.

4. Discriminatory attitude of the British towards the lower castes and classes of Indian society.

These in nutshell, were the main reasons behind the 1857 rebellion. And there is a reflection of all these reasons in the novel also. It very graphically describes the social and political milieu of India during 19th century. The same events and various conditions which led to the big turmoil of 1857 have been described in the novel The Devil’s Wind in depth: they form the backdrop of the novel.

Let us first focus attention on the social milieu of that period which has been vividly described in the novel, specially the palace life which is brought alive by the novelist. In the very first chapter of the novel, there is description of the Peshwa Baji Rao II, the erstwhile overlord of the great Maratha Confederacy, and his profligate life style. The Maratha confederacy which had ruled the greater part of India, before the British came, was headed by the Peshwas. Bajirao II became the Peshwa in 1796. According to historical records, he was mean, cruel, vindictive, avaricious but surprisingly well read and shrewd in his financial dealings. He has been shown almost morbidly religious. He was above all, a moral and physical coward, the only Peshwa held in contempt by his subjects. He married eleven women, of whom, only one bore a son but he died in infancy. After that only daughters were born and they did not qualify as successors according to the prevailing laws of that period. Historical records show that in 1818, the British deposed Bajirao II as the Peshwa at Poona and banished him to Bithoor as his only domain, with pension of a
hundred thousand pounds every year. The British chose for Bajirao, Bithoor, a small village on the right bank of the Ganges, which then held their biggest military establishment. It was hardly twelve miles from Kanpur, hence the British could keep a strict watch on him. The territory assigned to Bajirao was just six square miles, with only fifteen thousand inhabitants in it, whereas earlier he had ruled over fifty million. But all this reduced power did not make much of a difference to the dissolute Peshwa, as in Bithoor also he remained busy in his revelries.

In *The Devil’s Wind* also Malgonkar has depicted the exact milieu of India during that particular period i.e. a few decades before 1857. Malgonkar himself asserts this fact that he has tried his best to adhere to the facts of history, depicting the social and historical milieu of Indian society in his novel *The Devil’s Wind*.

The lavish lifestyle of the Peshwas as described in history has been vividly depicted in the novel also. In the following words Nana Saheb, remembers how his father led a life of extravagance:

> In Bithoor, he (Bajirao) got himself five new wives and as, often as not, spent his nights with the women picked up from the streets by his pimps. Thanks to the magnanimity of “Boy” Malcolm, he was still an immensely wealthy man, so that he continued to live as he had always done, like a Peshwa, and his elephants were sprayed with rose water and given their special feed of almonds and sugar every day just as they were used to be in Poona, and the horse cloths of his personal guard were still bordered with pearls. Incredible as it may seem, I have always believed that here my father was actually happier than he had ever been as the Peshwa. There were no responsibilities, no quarreling feudatories, no vast armies of mercenaries clamouring for wages; only limitless leisure to enjoy life and the money to buy anything he wanted—anything except freedom which he didn’t seem to miss. (Malgonkar, *The Devil’s Wind* 19).

These words, spoken by Nana Saheb, Bajirao’s adopted heir, create a graphic picture of the dissolute life led by the Peshwa. After Peshwa’s death, when Nana Saheb was supposed to inherit the title and pension of his father, the British refused to accept Nana as the heir to Peshwa dynasty and stopped the pension that was being given to Baji Rao. Inspite of all this, Nana Saheb’s palace in Bithoor was a spectacle of friendship and joyousness; British of all types and colors came to enjoy the parties and the company of Nana Saheb.

As the plot of the novel progresses further, the readers are immersed in it and become part of Nana Saheb’s life till the end. Malgaonkar could write about these historical events in such detail and with so much accuracy, simply because of his proximity to the erstwhile royal families of Gwalior and Indore. Manmohan Krishna Bhatnagar in his book *Indian Writings in English* says:

> With skill and reticence, Malgonkar reconstructs the picture of India, with Kanpur as its microcosm, growing suspicious, aggrieved, alienated, hostile, rebellious, enraged and vengeful by degrees. He presents a convincing picture of the Indian reaction to British provocations, describes their hesitance and disunity at the time of the early "rebel"
victories, and their growing determination mingled with despair as the tide turns against them.” (Bhatnagar 155).

A very important policy which can be called an integral part of that period’s historical milieu was the infamous Doctrine of Lapse. This novel also takes into account this policy of Doctrine of Lapse started by the British. The doctrine of Lapse was an annexation policy devised by Lord Dalhousie, who was the Governor General for the East India Company in India between 1848 and 1856. According to this Doctrine, any princely state or territory under the direct influence of the British East India Company (the dominant imperial power in the sub-continent), as a vassal state under the British Subsidiary System, would automatically be annexed, if the ruler was either manifestly incompetent or died without a direct heir. The latter supplanted the long-established right of an Indian sovereign without an heir to choose a successor. In addition, the British decided whether potential rulers were competent enough. The doctrine and its applications were widely regarded by Indians as illegitimate.

At the time of adoption of this policy, the Company had absolute, imperial administrative jurisdiction over many regions spread over the subcontinent. The company took over the princely states of Satara (1848), Jaipur and Sambalpur (1849), Nagpur and Jhansi (1854), Tanjore and Arcot (1855) and Awadh (Oudh) (1856) and Udaipur using this doctrine. The Company added four million pounds sterling to its annual revenue by use of its doctrine.

Lord Dalhousie gathered only hatred and repulsion towards him from the Indians due to his policies. He brought this Doctrine to annex as many as possible Indian territories to get a direct control over them. The same account has been reflected in this novel The Devil’s Wind, which shows how the British officials implemented this Doctrine. Nana Saheb rightly calls Lord Dalhousie and his policy, Doctrine of Lapse as an instrument to seize Indian territories:

…Dalhousie seemed to take the form of a sinister delight in arousing hatred…His ambition was to clear Indian rulers and he all but achieved it with his Doctrine of Lapse.

The Doctrine of Lapse was an instrument of confiscation so crude that it might have devised by a child, so tyrannical as to resemble an act of God. If a ruler died without a son, Dalhousie simply “annexed” his domain. (Malgonkar, The Devil’s Wind 54).

Nana Saheb recollects how Dalhousie pretended to be his friend but ultimately turned his hand away. Nana Saheb, along with some other rulers, never expected this betrayal and unfriendly behavior from Dalhousie. Earlier, he had permitted six hundred small rulers to retain their territories and titles. Among them Nana was the biggest one. He had personal friendship with the Company’s officials including Lord Dalhousie. Inspite of this, Dalhousie gave an indifferent and insensitive response to Nana’s request for retaining his title of ‘Maharaja’ and pension. This callous behaviour of the British has been expressed by Nana in the following words in the novel:
Lord Hardinge, whom we distrusted, had gone, and in place they had send Lord Dalhousie, from whom we expected justice if not the sort of magnanimity such as Elphinstone and Malcolm were capable of. I wrote a polite letter to Dalhousie announcing that, since Bajirao had styled himself as “His Highness Maharaja Bajirao,” I had ordered my own seals to be cast with a similar inscription.

Dalhousie’s reply was prompt and curt: “The Governor-General in council recognizes no such person as Maharaja Dhondu Pant Nana Saheb.” (Malgonkar, The Devil’s Wind 53).

Another important reason behind the 1857 Uprising, which finds elaborate mention in The Devil’s Wind also, was the forcible use of greased cartridges. As various records of history show that forcible use of greased cartridges was one of the triggers of this revolt. Using greased cartridges made up of cow’s and pig’s fat was not at all acceptable either to Hindus or to Muslims, as it was against their religious beliefs. Bipin Chandra in his immensely famous and widely read book on history India’s Struggle for Independence, writes about the reasons for unrest among the Indian sepoys:

The rumours about the Government’s secret designs to promote conversions to Christianity further exasperated the sepoys…The reports about the mixing of bone in atta and the introduction of the Enfield rifle enhanced the sepoys’ growing disaffection with the Government. The cartridges of the new rifle had to be bitten off before loading and the grease was reportedly made of beef and pig fat. The army did nothing to allay these fears, and the sepoys felt their religion was in real danger. (Chandra 34).

In the present novel also, the simmering anger of the Indian soldiers against this issue has been described in detail which correctly reflects the historical milieu during that tumultuous period. There is vivid description of how the religious sentiments of the Hindus and the Muslims were being hurt due to the new policies introduced by the British:

The Company had introduced a new rifle and a new cartridge. The new cartridge, made of paper, were smothered with grease, and to break them open before loading they had to be bitten.

In the barracks at Dum Dum someone told someone else that the grease was made from the fat of pigs and cows. And suddenly a wave of panic and indignation shook the land.

“Toba! This is treachery!” Azim pronounced.

“The cartridges are an instrument of conversion,” Tantya said to me with complete conviction.

“The hat men, having conquered the country, are now making the people Christians. Soon we’ll all be Issahies!” (Malgonkar, The Devil’s Wind 105).

The religious sensibilities of the Hindus as well as Muslims have been described in the following words:

To a Hindu, the cow is a sacred animal, the mother of the universe; to a Muslim, a pig is the filthiest of God’s creatures. A Hindu would rather starve to death than eat beef and
similarly, a Muslim would rather die than touch pork. A Muslim who tasted pork would never attain heaven; a Hindu who tasted beef would instantly lose caste, a fate worse than death. And now both the Hindus and the Muslims in the Company’s army were being compelled to put into mouths cartridges dripping with the fat of cows and pigs. (105).

Historical records of this period show that the religious organizations of the Hindus issued edicts prohibiting Hindu soldiers to use these defiled cartridges. This fact is reflected in the novel also:

…This time they were determined to force the issue. The Dharma Sabha of Calcutta, vigilant as ever to guard the sanctity of the Hindu religion, was equally obdurate. It sent around a circular to all Hindu religious organizations to declare as an outcaste any sepoy who used the new cartridge.

“At last the Sabha has woken up,” Tantya Tope pronounced, “after being quite deaf and dumb in the past. There are thousands of missionaries roaming the land, all of them paid by the Company to preach Christianity. We Hindu practice our religion in our homes and temples, and the Muslims in their mosques. But the missionaries stand on platform in market squares and denounce our creeds in the most violent and abusive terms...”

(Margonkar, The Devil’s Wind 107).

Thus it is clear that a very important reason for the growing resentment among the Indians was the fear of the conversion of their religion by the British. The Indian sepoys were working for the British army, under no circumstances did they want their religious sensibilities to be hurt. Gradually, the British tried to impose Christian religion on the Indian soldiers through their certain policies and this caused deep resentment among the Indian sepoys. This fact has been recorded by Bipin Chandra in his book India’s Struggle for Freedom:

It is certainly true that the conditions of service in the Company’s army and cantonment increasingly came into the religious beliefs and prejudices of the sepoys, who were predominantly drawn from the upper caste Hindus of the North Western Provinces and Oudh... The rumours about the government’s secret designs to promote conversions to Christianity further exasperated the sepoys. The official-missionary nexus gave credence to the rumours. In some cantonment, missionaries were permitted to preach openly and their diatribe against other religions angered the sepoys. (Chandra 34).

The same historical milieu is reflected in the novel also. A character of this novel named Azim counts the number of people who have been converted to Christianity and the number still growing. This environment of insecurity and agitation amongst the Indian sepoys has been shown in this novel in these words: “And now the white man had come out with this device to force them to accept them to accept Christianity, so that they would no longer be working for pay alone but would be bound irrevocably to their masters. They protested, courteously and hesitantly. (Malgonkar, The Devil’s Wind 106).
With the extension of the army’s operation not only to various parts of India, but also to countries outside, the Indian sepoys were made to march with the Company’s flag to distant parts of the world. In 1824, when the sepoys of 47th Regiment were ordered to invade Burma, they refused to comply. They did so because of their belief that the crossing of the sea would make them lose their caste. As a result, the regiment was disbanded and those who led the opposition were hanged. All these religious taboos which are a part of Indian historical and social records, have also been portrayed by Malgonkar in this novel, “The sepoys of the 47th Regiment thereupon represented that the act of crossing the sea would make them lose caste and instead offered to go to Burma overland.” (Malgonkar, The Devil’s Wind 106).

The discontent of the Indian sepoys was not limited to the matters of religion only but they were also unhappy with their emoluments. They were paid less and rarely felicitated for their efforts. An Indian sepoy in infantry got seven rupees a month and a cavalry was paid twenty-seven rupees a month, which was meagre in comparison with the privileges of their British counterparts. The number of English soldiers was quite less in comparison to the number of Indians, the ratio was four thousand white troops to three hundred thousand Indian sepoys, and the amount spent on one white soldier was equal to what was spent on a dozen Indian sepoys. Apart from the money, British soldiers were given preferential treatment in matters of promotion and rank, which is very important for the career of any soldier. T.R. Holmes records this plight of Indian soldiers, in his book A History of Indian Mutiny, “though he (sepoy) might give the signs of a military genius of Hyder, he knew that he could never attain the pay of an English subaltern and that the rank to which he might, after 30 years of faithful service, would not protect him from the insolent dictation of an ensign fresh from England.” (qtd. in Bipin Chandra’s India’s Struggle for Independence 78).

This discriminatory attitude of the British is reflected in the present novel also, when Nana Saheb is taunted by Sir Hugh Wheeler on the treatment of sepoys in the Indian Army, he says:

…we gave him jagirs, land grants. And there was no limit to how high he could rise—to commands of battalions or even armies. Now the best of your sepoys, someone who may be as good a commander as Bajirao or Hyder, can never rise above a subedar, a sergeant. That’s your highest-paid Indian—the ablest and the bravest veteran must serve under a baby-faced white boy with milk teeth… (Malgonkar, The Devil’s Wind 90).

Nana concurs with him and says ruefully: “The Company has consigned all Indians to a life of serfdom.” (Malgonkar 91). These words of Nana Saheb aptly sum up the anguish and helplessness of majority of Indians during that period.

The interference of the British was not only confined to the religious faith of the Indians but also extended to their way of living including their dress, uniforms, eating habits, education, salary and areas of life. This interference, of the British, in the personal and professional lives of the Indians, especially among the Indian sepoys, was creating disenchantment among the Indians for
the British. In *The Devil’s Wind*, Malgonkar minutely describes the new dress code introduced by the British for the Indian sepoys, which fuelled their discontent: “George Barlow had introduced equally misguided reforms concerning uniforms. Turbans were to have leather cockades, caste marks were banned and so were beards. To a Hindu, the mark on his forehead is a badge of distinction, something to be proud of, and to a Muslim a beard is the very hallmark of masculinity.” (Malgonkar, *The Devil’s Wind* 106).

The Indians were also annoyed at the introduction of English as the medium of their education in schools and colleges. They regarded this new reform of the British as another tool for suppression. The missionaries were setting up schools to propagate English language so that they could have a plentiful supply of petty officials who knew English. This milieu has been thoroughly depicted in the present novel where Azim confronts Tantya Tope on this issue. Azim vividly describes the devious policy of education of the British under which the missionaries frequently ask the children about God and then entice them with sweets that come with the copies of the Bible. In this way, they cleverly wanted to convert the gullible children to Christianity.

A key episode in the Indian rebellion of 1857 was the Siege of Cawnpore (Kanpur). Cawnpore was an important garrison town for the East India Company forces. By June 1857, the Indian rebellion had spread to several areas near Cawnpore, namely Meerut, Agra, Mathura, and Lucknow. Since the British General at Cawnpore Hugh Wheeler knew the local language, had adopted local customs and was married to an Indian woman, he was confident that the sepoys at Cawnpore would remain loyal to him, hence he sent two British companies (one each of the 84th and 32nd Regiments) to besieged Lucknow. The British contingent in Cawnpore consisted of around nine hundred people, including around three hundred military men, around three hundred women and children, and about one hundred and fifty merchants, business owners, drummers, engineers and others. In case of a rebellion by the sepoys in Cawnpore, the most suitable defensive location for the British was the magazine located in the north of the city. It had thick walls, ample ammunition and stores, and it also hosted the local treasury. However, General Wheeler decided to take refuge in the south of the city in an entrenchment composed of two barracks surrounded by a mud walls. There were four Indian regiments in Cawnpore: the 1st, 53rd and 56th Native Infantry, and the 2nd Bengal Cavalry. Although the sepoys in Cawnpore had not rebelled, the European families began to drift into the entrenchment as the news of rebellion in the nearby areas reached them. The entrenchment was fortified, and the Indian sepoys were asked to collect their pay one by one, so as to avoid an armed mob.

In this novel also the same milieu of those times as recorded in the history books has been created by the novelist. The novelist graphically depicts the Entrenchment near Kanpur in detail as seen through the eyes of Nana Saheb. He vividly describes the minute details of the place and the environment there:
The white men in the entrenchment, including noncombatants, such as musician, clerks, shopkeepers, surveyors, and others, numbered perhaps five hundred, and their women and children another five five hundred. In addition, there were nearly three hundred sepoys who joined their masters, and certain about three hundred servants, thus bringing the total to sixteen hundred. (Malgonkar, *The Devil’s Wind* 174).

The novel describes the firing at the entrenchment and the number of people killed there. It was a big massacre of white men and women as well as Indian sepoys. It all happened due to the confusion regarding who fired first. But ultimately, everybody including the innocent people had to pay the price whether they were English or Indian. From the entrenchment, the remaining people including Sir Hugh Wheeler and his family had to move for Allahabad crossing the Satichaura Ghat with the assured help of Nana Saheb. Malgonkar writes how Nana Saheb had deputed Balarao, Tantya Tope, Azim, and Nana Nawab to supervise, so that the people would safely move into the boats. Everything was going smoothly when suddenly again they started firing and there was pandemonium. There were screams and cries and sounds of bullet firing all over. Nana Saheb was overcome by an acute sense of helplessness. In the novel, Nana Saheb has been shown feeling disturbed and helpless after witnessing the massacre. Here, at this point, Malgonkar disagrees with the British historians who assumed Nana Saheb to be responsible for all that killing and firing. Malgonkar in his novel rather shows Nana as a man of conscience who was trying to pacify the situation.

The novel describes the unfortunate scene of Satichaura Ghat and Nana’s intervention to stop the firing:

Satichaura ghat, where the boats were assembled, had once been a cremation ground. About a hundred and fifty years earlier, two widows had burned themselves here on the same day, and since then it had been called Satichaura, or the embankment of the satis….

…and then there was pandemonium: screams and war cries and crack and whine of bullets. The blood looked purple in the mud and brown in the sand. The firing had stopped. About a hundred and seventy half-dead men and women were fished out of the water, some with grisly burns and bullet wounds….were moved to the Bibighar. (117)

From the above mentioned examples, it is clear that the novel vividly recreates the milieu of these troubled times in Indian history but part from the historical milieu based on famous happenings such as Kanpur massacre, Bibighar firing, the Doctrine of Laspe, issue of greased cartridges, the consequent revolt by the Indian sepoys etc., described in the novel by Malgonkar, the social milieu of that eventful period of Indian history has also been vividly recreated by the novelist. Some of the important aspects of this social milieu are the rites and rituals of the orthodox Hindus, the caste system, the relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims, the inter-racial relationships, the lifestyle of the Indian aristocrats, life inside the palace, the status of women, the education system, the marriage customs, the dress and architecture, etc. of that
period—all these facets of social milieu are interwoven in the texture of *The Devil’s Wind*. It is mentioned in the novel also how Bajirao performed many sacred rituals at the time of adopting Nana as his heir. Since Nana Saheb was not the real but the adopted son of Bajirao, so Bajirao performed all those rituals which are part of Hindu religion. He did it in order to seek blessing from his ancestors since he was a God-fearing man. At the time of adoption of Nana Saheb as his heir, Bajirao performed all the religious ceremonies as enjoined in the Hindus’ sacred scriptures. In the novel, Nana Saheb himself recalls, “ …besides, among us, the Hindus, a son adopted with the proper religious ceremonies is no different from a son’s one’s own—someone who ignites his father’s funeral pyre so that he may reach heaven and who inherits his worldly possessions. Equally, he is the heir to his father’s accumulated sins.” (14).

Another important dimension of social milieu is the condition of women, because it is an important indicator to understand the society of that particular period. The preset novel takes an peep into this important aspect also. As regards the status of women in India, it has been subject to many changes over the past few centuries. From equal status with men in ancient times through the low status during the medieval period, to the gradual improvement in 20th and 21st centuries, the history of women in India has been eventful. However, women in India during the 18th and 19th centuries were by and large regulated to a secondary status. This is reflected in the novels of Malgonkar also.

It is a fact of history that social practices like *Sati*, child marriages and a ban on widow remarriages were part of social life among some communities in India. The Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent brought the *purdah* practice in the Indian society. Among the Rajputs of Rajasthan, the *Jauhar* was practised. In some parts of India, the Devadasis or the temple women were sexually exploited. Polygamy was widely practised especially among Hindu Kshatriya rulers. In many Muslim families, women were restricted to Zenana areas. In spite of these conditions, some women excelled in the fields of politics, literature, education and religion. Razia Sultana became the only woman monarch to have ever ruled Delhi. During the British Raj, many reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotirao Phule etc. fought for the upliftment of women. There were many women who showed their valour in the male dominated society inspite of odds. For example, Kittur Chennamma, the queen of the princely state Kittur in Karnataka, led an armed rebellion against the British in response to the Doctrine of lapse. Abbakka Rani the queen of coastal Karnataka led the defence against invading European armies notably the Portuguese in 16th century. Rani Lakshmi Bai, the Queen of Jhansi, led the Indian Rebellion of 1857 against the British. She is now widely considered as a nationalist hero. Begum Hazrat Mahal, the co-ruler of Awadh, was another ruler who led the revolt of 1857. She refused the deals with the British and later retreated to Nepal. The Begums of Bhopal were also few of the notable female rulers during this period. They did not observe purdah and were trained in martial arts.
However, Malgonkar as a novelist, looks at this revolt from a different angle. He adamantly contradicts the British’s opinion that ‘the revolt of 1857’ was a ‘mutiny’ which was confined to just one group, region or religion. Malgonkar also disagrees with British point of view which has portrayed Nana as a nasty, pitiless and callous character. He instead presents him in a more humane light. Well known critic, B.P. Engade in his book Social Conflicts in Manohar Malgonkar’s fiction says that, “Malgonkar’s The Devil’s Wind is as much a historical account of the 1857 mutiny as Nana Saheb’s biographical account of his aspirations and failures in the political ferment of life…” (Engade 25).

He further writes:

Not only has Malgonkar based some of his incidents and characters on the available recorded historical material but has evinced keen interest in setting the record straight, as he perceived truth of the matter, trying to bust the canards. Malgonkar offers his own explanation against the official version to correct the historical aberration. Malgonkar is perhaps the first of the Indian novelist to deviate from the British and Muslim bias that not only inspired but augmented the agony of the partition. (23)

Thus it is evident that in the Devil’s Wind Malgonkar has depicted the socio-historical milieu of a very crucial period of Indian history, i.e. the period which witnessed the 1857 revolt. Not only has he beautifully reconstructed the social customs of those times such as the rites and rituals of orthodox Hindu society, the caste system, the relationship between different religions, status of women, life inside the palaces, the British army, and many other such aspects, but he has also brought alive the surcharged political scenario of that period including the Kanpur massacre, the Bibighar massacre, the fermenting rebellion due to the forced use of cartridges, the suspicion of the Indians against the British for their religious conversion etc.—all this has been vividly described by Malgonkar in The Devil’s Wind.

Works Cited