CHAPTER IV : RECREATION OF THE CULTURAL PAST OF INDIA IN SHADOW OF THE MOON

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The historical novel not only deals with the historical events in the past, but also with the socio-cultural ethos of the contemporary society. The writer of historical fiction has to recreate the social atmosphere with the help of imagination, and with the help of the resources available at his hand. The writer has to note carefully the important social changes in the social structure and public bahaviour, in the course of time.

It is commonplace to say, after Aristotle that literature is more philosophical than history. However, this commonplace observation acquires great artistic significance for the historical novelist. Like a historian, s/he does not merely record broad events and the role played by the prominent personages. S/he aims at recreating the society of the self chosen period and making it live for the reader, with all its social, cultural and political cross currents. It is done by presentation of the life of imaginary characters who are made to live within that society and feel the joys and fears, love and hatred shared by the society.

The historical novel writer, for the reawakening of the past, tries to imagine the contemporary society, its men-women, their manners and etiquettes, their ways of living, food, customs and traditions, costumes and so on which is necessary to create the culture of that particular society. The cultural atmosphere in every novel provides a suitable background to the plot, by which the reader can easily visualize the contemporary community. A successful historical novel

writer makes his reader a citizen of his self-chosen society of recent or remote past. M.M. Kaye, in her novel Shadow of the Moon, attempts to portray the 19th century Indian life of the north-east provinces. Kaye, as mentioned earlier, was born in India; brought up in England and had spent several years of her life in India. She had seen and experienced India at close-quarters, and had developed close association with the Indian civilization and culture. Her forefathers had also served the Raj and conveyed the stories of their lifetime to her generation. So Kaye had the first hand knowledge of the society, which she has portrayed in the novel. Her long stay in India and also in some of the eastern states enabled her to write authetically about the Indian civilization, people, their culture and their life-style.

The novelist throws light on the three major religions in India, i.e. Hindu, Muslim and Christian. These three religions have their own codes of conduct for their followers. The Indian society is made up of these followers, which makes it culturally a complex heterogeneous society. M.M. Kaye has paid close attention specially to the two major sections, Muslims and Hindus, their social behaviour and religious prejudices. She talks about their customs, traditions, beliefs, superstitions and also their interactions as groups. The Europeans during their long stay in India, for more than three centuries, had established close relations with noble Indian families, especially with Muslims. There after some returned to their own countries, but some rarely visited their motherland and found India

their home forever. They got assimilated with the Indian culture. M.M. Kaye introduces a Spanish person to us :

> Juanita's father, the Conde de los Aguilares, was a wealthy and eccentric Spanish nobleman who, as a young man had travelled much in the East. Arriving in Oudh almost half a century earlier he had been greatly attracted to the Country and the people, and in particular to a nephew of the ruling King. The two young men, Spaniard and Mussulman, had become fast friends ... Ramon de Ballasteros, Conde de los Aguilares, never returned to Spain. Oudh became his home, and the rich barbaric, colourful kingdom his country. [1]

The adjective 'barbaric' used by the novelist betrays her typical Christan and European (or British) reaction to Indian society. Civilization for them meant western civilization. This might not have been a uniform feeling for the thousands of Europeans who were born and brought up in India. For them their own country was just like any other foreign country. They had their Indian playmates to play with. It is important to note that, some of them could speak Hindustani, or any such Indian language, before they could speak their own. Conde de los Aguilares married Anne Marie, who was the only daughter of a French emigrant. Though, she was born in France, she was brought up in India.

> She had been barely a year old when her parents had fled with her from France, and having lived ever since in the East, the Hindustani and court Persian of Oudh were as familiar to her as the Tamil and Telegu of the South, or the English tongue or her own native French. ... Her friends were the slender, olive-skinned, dark-eyed wives of the princes and of nobles of Oudh, and her fourth child Juanita was born in the house of Aziza Begum, wife of her husband's great friend, Mirza Ali Shah. [2]

Such European settlers far away from their kith and kin had come to regard their Indian friends and families as their kin folk. Their frequent visits and participation in each others' festivals and rituals strengthened their ties further. These relations, established by preceding generation, were carried on by the succeeding generations. Then the time came, when once playmates of different race, religion and sex, as grown-up teenagers found themselves in love with each other, and it was no surprise that they entered marital relations.

> Only two of Anne Marie's seven children survived their infancy; her son Marcos and her daughter Juanita ... By then he was a slim young man with the dark, hawk-like handsomeness that is so frequently seen among the great families of Aragon and Castille, and his sister Juanita had married her childhood playmate, Wali Dad, son of Ali Shah and Aziza begum. [3]

The marriage of a Christian girl with a Muslim young man raised a great storm. It was opposed and criticised by both the religious authorities. But at last it was approved and settled by both the families.

> The marriage had aroused considerable opposition from both Christian priests and Mohammedan maulvis, but had in the end received consent and approval of both families. [4]

It indicates the cultural understanding between two families and their love towards each other. Though the religious authorities condemned the marriage and thought of it as a violation of the religious code of conduct, criticising it as an act of cultural pollution, Ali Shah considered it proper and advocated the marriage saying :

> 'There is no god but God,' said Ali Shah to the maulvis, 'but is not Hasrat Isa (Jesus Christ) also numbered among the Prophets? And are not Christians also 'children of the Book? [5]

Every religion has a set of rules in the form of Do's and Don'ts for its followers. These rules may or may not be interpreted logically. Every religion has different marriage systems. They have their own colour symbolism. For example, Hindu offers a red or a green sari for the bride, Muslim prefers the bride to be in a black veil and Christian like their brides in white dress. On the contrary white veil stands for the widowhood in Muslim religion, and white sari among Hindus. M.M. Kaye shows her keen observation of this colour symbolism in different cultures. Winter - the heroine of the novel, arrives in Lunjore and prepares herself for the marriage with Conway Barton, who is the Commissioner of Lunjore district. Hamida, being a muslim woman, the only companion and the caretaker of Winter, is surprised to see Winter in the white dress. To show the essential difference between two cultures Kaye writes :

> She had brought her wedding dress with her, but she did not wear it, for she had no loops to support its spreading folds, and no desire to explain at this juncture why she should be without crinoline. She wore instead the pale gray riding-habit in which she had arrived, and carried the bunch of white jasmine that grew by the porch. Hamida had tucked the jasmine blossoms into her black hair, and dropping the filmy bridal veil over her head frowned, saying that white veils were more suited to widows than to brides. [6]

Hamida, being a Muslim girl, has fixed set of associations. She is surprised to see a bride in a white veil, because in her culture white veil stands for the widowhood.

M.M. Kaye mentions one more cultural aspect of Islam and that is of the pardah system. Islam prefers to keep its womenfolk away from the sight of the society. During the historical period chosen by the novelist this custom (of *purdah)* was strictly and universally observed in the Muslim society. But these muslim women could appear without veil before their close relatives. M.M. Kaye possesses an admirable knowledge of such Muslim customs. Winter is directly related to Ameera because her father's sister was Ameera's mother. So when Winter marries Alex Randall, Ameera appears before him without veil.

> Alex had not seen Ameera before, except as a veiled figure on the night of his wedding.[6]
>
> 'But thou art the husband of my cousin now, so for a time I will forget that I am of India, and a Mussulman, and be of my mother's people, who keep no *pardah*,' said Ameera smiling at him. [7]

The Hindus, like Muslims, have a number of customs, traditions and even cults of believers or non-believers. The eighteenth and nineteenth century was the time when the Hindu priests, i.e. Brahmins were trying to keep their traditional grip on the society. The people were made victims of a number of blind beliefs and superstitions, created by the priests. They had full faith in sorcerer's treatment. Natural calamities were interpreted by the people as the anger of one deity or the other, and with the help of the priests they used to propitiate such deities.

The so called Hindu priests wanted to keep their supreme position in the society and were interested in money making. Education was available for only

the Brahmins and not for the kshudras. People, would not cross the seven seas, because it was a sin, and the child marriage system was deep-rooted. Animal sacrifice for propitiating a deity was very common, but even humna sacrifice was secretly practised. There was a hideous and cruel custom of '*suttee*' which Kaye mentions in the novel, Alex narrates one such experience :

> And so has that girl who would have burned herself with her husband on his funeral pyre if I had not heard in time and prevented it. But is she any happier for being forced to keep her life? If she had committed *suttee* she would have gone with her man, and her name would have gone with her man, and her name would have been honoured in the villages : her very ashes would have been sacred. Now she can never remarry, but will live out her life a childless drudge, despised and neglected. [8]

The narration shows that Alex was quite aware of what he was doing. His action was an interference in the private religious life of the Hindu community. The novelist, through Alex, shows her deep knowledge of this Hindu custom and the predicament of the high-caste Hindu woman. The question raised by Alex 'but is she any happier ... ?' shows that the novelist was quite aware of the complexity of the *Suttee* problem. The women themselves believed it to be their sacred duty to terminate their life on the funeral pyre of the dead husband. The novelist knows that the life of a Hindu widow was a hell because she could not remarry, nor would the society allow her to live peacefully. The novelist simply shows these cultural aspects of the time, but does not comment on them.

In India the custom of animal sacrifice has been going on for thousands of years. The ancient rishis and priests used to sacrifice any beast or pet animal in

the pit specially meant for sacrificial purposes or before the God to win the favour. Indians find themselves very much familiar with such stories and even with the human sacrifices which can now be rarely heard. M.M. Kaye skilfully uses and mentions this inhuman Indian custom of human sacrifice for the sake of plot development. Alex Randall, on his way to Delhi from Calcutta, is informed by Niaz of freedom fighters' secret meeting at Khanwai. Alex determines to attend the meeting and asks Niaz to get the code word, by which they would be able to attend the meeting. The code word for the entry was 'a white goat for Kali'. Alex arrives at the place and prefers to sit back. Kaye describes the sight:

> He could hear hard breathing all about him and smell the rank smell of unwashed human bodies, and as his eyes became accustomed to the dimness he saw that many of those present were Sadhus- holy men of all sects and persuasions wild-eyed and ash-smeared, naked or wearing the ill-cured skins of animals, their long hair matted and hideous. Bairagis, Sannyasis, Bikshus, Parivrajakas, Aghorins whose custom it is to steal and eat the flesh of corpses; devil worshippers, mendicants and mystics. [9]

The incident prescribed is the product of imagination of the novelist, but it is rendered believable by recounting various Hindu sects, and the practice of human sacrifice prevalent among them. The code word, 'a white goat for Kali', the secret aseembly, references to the smell and the dimness of light and the discriptive details about *Sadhus* ,etc. give the air of authenticity to the whole experience gone through by Alex. People had forgotten their castes, religions, disputes and other such differences. They had unanimously agreed to pull down

the Company Raj. M.M. Kaye points out the unity among all the leaders of different races and religions and states :

> But it was not the presence of the Hindu ascetics that made him afraid. It was the unbelievable, impossible fact that there were others in that ill-lit underground vault. Not only Sikhs, but Mussulmans also; followers of the Prophet to whom all Hindus were dogs of unbelievers, crouching side by side with the worshippers of Shiva the destroyer, of Vishnu and Brahma and Ganesh of the elephant head, of many - armed mother Kali the drinker of blood, and of a hundred other gods and godlings. It was true, then. Mussulman and Hindus were prepared to combine against the men of 'John Company'- against the white-faced foreign conquerers whose dominion had lasted for a hundred years. [10]

It indicates Kaye's admirable knowledge of Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Hindu regards Brahma as the creator of the five elements - Earth, Water, Fire, Air and sky. They treat Vishnu as the protector and guardian, and for them the Shiva is destroyer. References to these show Kaye's close acquaintance with the Hindu myths and mythologies. It also points out that the British believed Muslims and Sikhs to be their friends and well-wishers while Hindus as potent enemies. Kaye continues the description of the meeting. There were three speakers, a Mussulman from Oudh; a Hindu and a Sadhu, who addressed the meeting. They all appealed to the audience to rebel unitedly. They described British as oppressors, cheaters, robbers and exploiters. The Sadhu, the last speaker, exhorted all for armed rebellion. He said.

> Spread the word! Carry it into every town and every village. Tell every man to be ready; to procure arms and secrete them; to steal them if necessary ! To sharpen his sword, his axe or his knife and to tip his *lathi* with iron. The coming year was the year of the Prophecy in which the Hundred Years of subjection would be

> accomplished. Man, woman and child, the oppressors must be slain, so that not one would remain to carry the tale to the West. [11]

The meeting at Khanwai took place in some month of 1856. The speech by the Sadhu refers to the prophecy of the hundred years. As it is mentioned earlier the battle of Plassey, which took place in the year 1757, laid the foundation of British rule in India. Though the British won the battle, the defeated Indians believed the end of the Company Raj by the end of the year 1857. The story of the Prophecy is also referred to J.W. Kaye in his pioneering work on the Indian mutiny of 1857.

> The new year dawned and there was something suggestive in the number of the year. In 1757, the English had established their dominion in India by the conquest of Bengal. For a hundred years they had now, by the progressive action of continued enrichments, been spreading their paramount rule over the country, and there were prophesies, said to be the ancient date, which foretold the downfall of the English power at the end of this century of supremacy.[12]

The mutinous spirit of the sepoys and freedom fighters was inflamed by these prophecies. The Prophecy of a hundred years prepared the rebels psychologically for the uprising. The appeal of such a prophecy was very strong for the superstitious India, masses of whatever caste and creed. The speech of *Sadhu* was then followed by an important ritual of sacrifice. But before that the priest sung the holy hymm to Kali :

> *Kali!Kali! Oh, dreadful-toothed Goddess! Devour, cut,destroy all the malignant cut with an axe! Bind,bind, seize ! Drink blood! Secure, secure! Salutation to Kali !* [13]

The hymn was accompanied by drum beats. The hymn does not strike strange to the Indian mind, as it sounds like a translation of some 'heard' prayer. The hymn is a song of admiration, sung by the worshippers of god. Kaye must have seen the idol of *Kali* and the fact that this Hindu goddess appreciates human sacrifice was then a common knowledge. In selecting *Kali* as the deity, Kaye has shown how she was quite conversant with prevailing Indian religious culture.

The hymn was followed by the ritual of a sacrifice. There were two priests to perform the ceremony. One of the priests flung something on the brazier, in order to create a suitable meditative atmosphere. M.M. Kaye portrays the event saying :

> The other priest who had moved back into the shadows returned, dragging something that struggled feebly and gave a small bleating cry. A sacrifice of course, thought Alex. *'A white, goat for Kali'*. They would cut the creature's throat with suitable ritual ... The smoke from the brazier faded and the flame leapt clear, and as it did so a man near it sprang to his feet with a hoarse cry ... Someone in the crowd pulled the man back, and the knife flashed and fell. There was a bubbling, agonizing cry, shrill and high and almost instantly drowned in the concerted groaning howl of the crowd. ... But it had not been an animal's cry, and Alex stumbled to his feet and stood pressed against the slimy stone of the pillar, and saw what it was that had cried out. ... It was not the body of a white goat that lay on the slab of stained and reeking stone below the flickering brazier, but the naked body of a child. A white child. [14]

The narration of the event of the sacrifice is minutely described by the novelist. The story serves two purposes, one is to give a glimpse of the prevailing Indian cultural, and the other is to show the deep level of hatred nursed by the Indians

against the British. At the same time it presents inhuman and orthodox image of Indians to the foreign readers.

The other important custom dealt with in detail by Kaye is the custom of adoption of a son. Hindus believe that if there is no son to lead the funeral and perform the last rites in the event of the death of a man, his soul does not get the *Moksha*. The religion asked its followers to think of the emancipation from rebirth as an ultimate aim of life. It is one more reason behind the craving for the male offspring. There is a remedy, suggested by the religion, if someone does not have a son if there is not a direct heir, to continue the lineage and perform the funeral, one may adopt a son as his successor. M.M. Kaye has often narrated such customs through the Indian characters. Here Niaz explains the custom of adoption and the religious motivation behind it :

> 'It has long been a custom of Hind,' said Niaz slowly, ' for a man who has no heir, to adopt one who shall succeed him; since the son, say the Unbelievers, delivers his father from the hell called *Pat*. If there be no son to perform the funeral rites, they believe that there can be no resurrection to eternal bliss. Therefore their priests and lawgivers have permitted the adoption of sons where the male line has failed. Comes now the order of the Company saying that where there is no male heir of the blood the lands and the title of a prince shall not pass to any adoptive son but pass instead into the possession of the Company, and that man's line shall die out and cease. Thus many states, by right of lapse, have been swallowed up into the man of the Company and their ancient names have become as dust ...' ' Satara ... Nagpur ... Jhansi ... Sambhalpur... their greatness has departed. [15]

The company, at any rate wanted to annex the princely states in India. The Indian custom of adoption and the blind belief associated with it proved to be

useful to the British. The depiction of the Indian custom is authentic. Kaye has made use of another Indian custom, a custom of sending a message secretly by using code words, colourful flowers, fruits, ornaments etc., the things which bear some meaning in them. The flowers generally stand for peace and good wishes, the bangle stands for a gift by a brotherlike man, the ornament indicates the love of a person towards his beloved and so on. This Indian custom of using some oddments to carry the message secretly, is sometimes more than a message. A *Rakhi* sent by a woman to man signifies a sisterly appeal for protection. The account of distributing pieces of chuppattis is the use of one such custom. A few months before the uprising the story of the spread of the chuppatis was disscussed by the people with keen interest.

Chuman Lal, the kotwal of Jalodari, shows Alex a piece of chappatti, which was brought to him a day before by an unknown runner from the village nearby. The *kotwal* informs Alex :

> 'It was brought to me last night by a runner from Chumri, which is four *koss* to the north. He brought with him five of these things, together with a fragment of goat's flesh, and told me that I must prepare five more, breaking one of these which he had brought and mixing a little of it with the new five. These I must dispatch by a runner to the next village, sending also a portion of goat's flesh, to be given into the hand of the headman of that village, saying to him that he must do likewise and send in turn to the next village. And with it must also be said certain words that the runner from Chumri had spoken to me : "From the North to the South, and from the East to the West." [16]

The event as described by Chuman Lal, clearly indicates that the chuppattis were sent every where in the country with a piece of goat, and the number five also indicates something. In this respect, Alex started thinking over it, as such custom was unfamiliar and quite strange to the British mind :

> Did the things also carry any specific message? Or were they merely a means of creating an atmosphere of suspicion and alarm, and thus providing a fruitful breeding ground for deeper and more savage hates and fears? Five ... Did that mean anything? Alex knew the Indian custom of sending a message by means of handful of oddments ____ flowers, leaves, fruits, bangles; things that each carried their own meaning in the language of signs, and in common use as messages between lovers ... Five chuppatis ... The fifth month? That would be May, and Kishan Prasad had said 'in the hot weather.' [17]

The story of the spread of chuppattis in India can be verified with the record kept by R.C. Majumdar. He states :

> The chapati (small unleavened bread) is the staple food of a large section of people in India who do not take rice. It is proved an undisputable authority that about the beginning of the year 1857, these chupatis were passed on from village to village over a wide area. [18]

Taking into consideration the story of the spread of chuppattis told by Kaye and the evidence mentioned above, we can say that Kaye has very effectively mixed the fact and the fiction. But Majumdar is quite suspicious about the spread of goat's flesh with the chuppattis. In this connection he expresses his doubt, and says :

> According to Mainuddin pieces of goats flesh were also distributed along with the chupatis. But not much is known of this, though it might throw interesting light on the source or origin of the chupatis. For Hindus over a large part of India would not think of handling goat's flesh and the idea could have emanated only from the Muslims. [19]

There is much more authenticity in the view expressed by Majumdar. M.M. Kaye, for the sake of narration, might have put both the stories together, but its factual presentation indicates Kaye's awareness of the Indian custom.

M.M. Kaye, during her long stay in India, came in contact with a number of Muslim families, by which she could closely observe their behavior, culture, and could get an accurate information about their customs, traditions, religious orders, and the festivals like Ramdan. The following passage reflects how she made use of it in her novel :

> As the sun sank below the horizon they had stopped in order to eat and drink, for the Mohammedan fast of Ramadan had begun with the new moon, and while it lasted Niaz and all other followers of the Prophet might not eat or drink between sunrise and sunset. Alex too kept the fast when he was away from the cantonments and out among the villages, for he had found it to be good training, and there were times when he needed to keep it. [20]

Such passages not only add local colour to the novel, but also throw light on the chracters in the novel. The foregoing account of Ramadan fast also informs us that Alex, though he was a British, used to keep the fast. It indicates the flexibility and generous nature of the British officers who were ready to follow local customs of the other religions to earn love and friendship of the Indians. It also points out the reason behind the popularity of the officers like Nicholson.

There are a number of orders given by the Prophet Mohammad, in the Koran. Islam expects to build up an ideal social structure by these orders.

Islam asks its followers to keep complete faith in the Allah, and orders to arrange campaigns for the prevalence of the Islam. The concept of *Jehad* is one of the important religious orders. The *Jehad* means fight for the spread of Islam, and in some conditions, the fight for the re-establishment of the Islamic rule. The passage given below informs us about the religious nature of Niaz, who is a faithful assistant of Alex. He is a true follower of Islam. He has strong desire to see the Moghul rule, once again in India. M.M. Kaye narrates the meeting of Niaz with Alex :

> It was Niaz who had brought him a copy of a pamphlet that was being circulated in the city calling on all the Mohammedans to prepare for a *Jehad* - a Holy War, 'This thing is in the hands of all mussulmans', said Niaz, 'and in the mosques also they preach a *Jehad*. I have heard too that it has been promised that Ghazi-ud-din Bahadur Shah, the King of Delhi, shall be restored to his own, so that once more the Mogul will rule in Hind. [21]

In addition to the information of *Jehad*, Niaz expresses his own point of view as a mussulman, when he is asked by Alex :

> ' I will fight at thy side and take thy orders when the bloodshed begins ___I do not say "if it begin".— but I too would like to see a Mussulman rule once more in Delhi, Sunni though he be, while we of my family be Siahs.'
> Alex said : 'Art thou so sure then that it will come to an uprising?'
> 'As sure as thou art! ' And were it not for thee I myself might well cry *Deen* ! *Deen*! for the faith . [22]

The conversation reflects Niazs's personality and his conviction as a true follower of the Prophet. He is honest and straight forward in his expression but at the same time he is loyal to his English sahib. He represents all those Indians, who were torn between such feelings of loyalty on the one hand and patriotism

on the other. In the creation of characters such as Niaz the novelist has shown accurate knowledge of the Indian ethos during the period of mutiny.

There is one more character in the novel who has strong desire to see the Moghul rule in Hind. Walayat Shah, the husband of Ameera and citizen of Oudh, is ready to fight for the sake of his religion. He is discontented with the British since the annexation of Oudh. M.M. Kaye was able to catch another nuance of *Jehad*, a nostalgic feeling of the Mohammedans for the empire they had lost :

> Walayat Shah, brooding on present calamity and past glory, listened to the words of those who preached a *Jehad*, and dreamed the Mohammedan dream. For now a *Jehad* meant far more than the spreading of the Faith and the slaying of unbelievers. It meant revenge; and perhaps, once more , an Empire . [23]

Walayat Shah represents popular feeling among the Muslims about their role as rulers of India. The feeling was such deep rooted that according to Ameera, who is the wife of Walayat Shah, he was changed towards her because her mother was a British.

There are different kinds of funeral in different religions. Hindus put the dead body on the pyre and prefer to burn it. On the other hand among Muslims and Christians, burial of the dead body is the last ritual. There is an essential difference between both the Eastern and the Western cultures. Conde de Ballestores, the father of Winter, expresses his surprise at the death of his wife, Anne Marie' :

> Anne Marie died in the first week of February ... As it must be in the East, the funeral took place within a few hours of Anne Marie's death; but to the Conde, although he was familiar with this abrupt disposal of the dead, the short space of time between his wife's death and her interment was particularly shocking. In Spain her body would have lain in state in the family chapel with candles flaring at the head and foot of the coffin while weeping mourners passed by, incense burned and priests song masses for her soul, and only after several days would she have been carried in procession to her last resting - place in the family vault. [24]

There are two different customs of funeral described by Kaye. The first is Indian and the second is Spanish, i.e. Christian. The basic difference between both the cultures is of the immediate or the slow and gradual disposal of the dead body. Though Conde was familiar with the custom of the East, he was shocked, because he could have controlled himself if the funeral had taken place according to the Christian order. The novelist has, thus, juxtaposed to different cultures and the emotional disturbance it created in the mind of Conde, who perhaps for the first time felt the difference when his wife died.

The death of Niaz is a heartrendering experience for the reader. Niaz, the true follower of Islam, was shot dead by the rebels. Long back he had given the word to his master - Alex that he would die for the British, so he sacrificed his life to keep his promise. He was not only the servant or attendant of Alex but a close friend of Alex. The funeral was performed by Alex according to the Muslim custom. M.M. Kaye meticulously describes the ritual :

> Alex pulled down the end of Niaz's *puggari* so that it covered his face, and folded the quiet hands across his chest. They were beginning to stiffen already. It must be getting late. He rose and turned the *charpoy* so that the dead man's head was towards Mecca. There was no more water, so he could not wash as the ritual

prescribed, but he rubbed his hands partially clean on his soiled handkerchief, and spoke the words of the Du'a over the quiet body there being no one else who would ever speak them for Niaz :

'May the Lord God, abundant in mercy, keep thee with the true speech : may he lead thee to the perfect path; may he grant thee knowledge of him and his prophets. May in the mercy of God be fixed upon thee forever ... '[25]

Alex, who was deeply influenced by the virtuous character of Niaz, found himself in deep sorrow at the death bed of Niaz. He uttered the words of prayer and performed the ritual according to the knowledge he had. Kaye is quite careful when she talks about other's festivals and rituals. Her long stay in India and her association with the great variety of Indians, similarly her readings in Indian history and culture certainly helped her to write authoritatively about the customs and manners of the Indians.

The rebels were not ready to spare a single British and also even an Indian who was working for the British. Niaz, though he was an Indian muslim, was mercilessly killed by the rebels. Indian rebels did not trust even their own people, and even the leaders. Kishan Prasad, a Brahmin and a man of great learning is shown as one of the plotters of the uprising and the leader of the freedom fighters of Oudh. A year ago, while returning from England, Kishan Prasad had fallen into the sea, and was saved by Alex. Though Alex knew Kishan Prasad to be anti-British, he had saved him out of human consideration. This sense of obligation never left Kishan Prasad, because for him " the life he was living was just like debt., which he has to pay one day." And the day came,

when Kishan Prasad entrapped Alex, with the help of two other rebels, who were eager to kill Alex. But Kishan Prasad forbade them and said :

> 'Stand back!' cried Kishan Prasad, 'I am a Brahmin; and if you would kill this man, you will have first to kill me.' The babble died abruptly and the men drew back, for they were Hindus, and to kill a Brahmin would be a sacrilege unspeakable, dooming them to the nethermost of hells, and to become outcasts among their fellow-men.'[26]

Here, Kaye notices one more Hindu belief concerned with the Brahmins. It is mentioned earlier the caste system has been deeply rooted in the Indian society. It is said that Brahmin is born out of the head of Brahma - the creator of elements, and Kshudras are born out of the foot, so they have to serve the Brahmin. Moreover they must not kill a Brahmin and the cow, as both are sacred to Hindus. If any one committed such grave sin, the society would ostracize him and sever relations with him . It is believed that the criminal's soul enters the hell instead of the heaven. In narrating this incident the novelist has shown how personal relations and obligations played their part on the backdrop of very broad historical happenings. There are occasions when people are confronted with choices. Niaz had to choose and succumb to death. The rebel Kishan Prasad was hampered in his mission by personal obligation. The novelist has thus very successfully exploited the incidents of personal life affecting the individuals in their historical role and forcing choices on them.

In conclusion, we can say that this novel enjoyes unique place in Anglo-India literature because it is very largely successful in capturing the socio-cultural

life of specially the North-Indian states of the mid-nineteenth century. It is significant because the novelist, M.M. Kaye, was the insider in the sense that she had spent considerable part of her life in India, making herself familiar with Indian mind character and culture as well as heterogeneous religious culture of this country. She had also been part of India through her grandfather, father and husband. In another sense she was an outsider looking at India objectively, specially India during the period of the mutiny. Eventhough British, she has been fairly successful in maintaining this objectivity. This novel is therefore a very significant record of the history and culture of India of the mid-nineteenth century and also the relationship between the British as rulers and the Indians as their subjects.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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