

CHAPTER V : CONCLUSION

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In the foregoing chapters it has been tried to evaluate M.M. Kaye's Shadow of the Moon as

- I) a historical novel
- II) a work of art - a novel in which fiction and facts are interwoven artistically.
- III) a record of socio-cultural aspects of Indian society of the time.

The conclusions, given below, are based on the detailed discussions in these chapters. In this concluding chapter it has also been attempted to make the observations based on the comparative study of the other writers, specially John Masters , a British writer, and Rajkumar Bhramar, his Indian counterpart.

Kaye's knowledge of Indian history written by the British historians, her familiarity with the changes in the Anglo-Indian relationship and her own intimate relations with India make her write authoritatively on the important event of 1857 rebellion. Kaye narrates the story of the nationwide uprising, placing the events chronologically with fair combination of facts and fiction. Kaye, in her discretion, only reduces or increases the importance of some events and characters in the novel. For example, all important English historians like J.W. Kaye , G.W. Forrest contemptuously talk about the story of Mangal Pande. M.M. Kaye like other British historians fails to understand the importance of his martyrdom because she writes from the British point of view. Kaye mentions it negligibly as a part of the conversation between two British officers.

- 'Oh, they're all right,' said Major Maynard easily. 'But I'll bear in mind what you say and keep short eye on'em. Personally, I'm inclined to think that worst is past. I hear they hanged that Jack who touched off the Barrackpore business — Mangal Pandey ? And the Jamadar as well. That ought to stop the rot.'¹

The negligence of the story of Mangal Pande on the part of the novelist speaks of her attitude towards the historical past chosen by her for the creative purpose. It is the attitude of a coloniser.

For her the 1857 uprising was a mutiny, as a sepoy war under the leadership of the discontented princes. The history of this period reflected in her novel is authentic so far as her two British sources are concerned. She has obviously not referred to the Indian historians, which is a limitation of her historical novel. She could not help being British in her depiction of the historical situation. However she is objective enough in holding the Company's officers responsible for the uprising through their carelessness, irresponsible behaviour and their religious and political policies. Her fictitious characters such as Alex are based on responsible, brave and heroic historical figures like Nicholson, and there are their irresponsible counterparts such as Conway.

The plot of Shadow of the Moon Cannot be separated from the historical events and situations dealt with in it, which accounts for its success as an art form. The fictitious characters are directly related to the historical personages and the fictitious sub-plot is skilfully developed in the light of the past events. They cannot be criticized as wooden and unconvincing because they gain their life and authenticity from their associations with the historical figures. I do not

therefore agree with the observation of a critic in Times Literary Supplement, who says :

The events of war are clearly described and the author makes the point that British garrisons in every station were hampered by the presence of women and children, who must be protected even if their protection immobilized a possible striking force. But perhaps this book would have been better as a popular history of mutiny for the fictitious characters are wooden and unconvincing. ²

The novel gains in significance as the writer is successful in creating the ethos of mid-nineteenth century India in her novel. The writer deals with the problems and achievements of the British in India, not only as rulers but also as people who form relationship with the Indians.

The complexity of this relationship is brought out in the characters such as Juanita and Walidad and the Eurasians such as Sabrina and Marcos. In her character creation the writer does not do much justice either to the historical personages or to be fictitious ones. The Indian characters are mostly servants in the British households, members of nobility or rebels. Niaz is a little favourably drawn because of his loyalty to the British. Mangal Pande and Nana Sahib, though heroes from Indian point of view, are mere rebels.

M.M. Kaye portrays her characters against the background of the nature and Indian climate. For instance, Henry Grantham had sent his grand-daughter i.e. Winter's mother Sabrina to India under the care of her uncle Sir Ebenezer and aunt Emily. Shortly after her arrival in India, Sabrina found herself in love with a Spanish aristocrat Marcos. The affair between them came to be known to Sir

Ebnezer, when Marcos received the dispensation from Rome. Winter declared her love to her aunt Emily, which had brought a great deal of anxiety and illness to her. Sir Ebnezer took Sabrina responsible for the declining health of her aunt and strongly opposed the marriage. Sabrina found herself in a dilemma. For her, on one side, there was Marcos and on the other side there were her uncle and aunt. The description of the month of March provides a suitable background to the dilemma experienced by Sabrina. She was torn between two worlds. As the month of March witnesses the late winter and the beginning of summer, and the nature is as if in two minds, in the same way Winter was torn between her love for Alex on the one hand and her affection towards her kin on the other.

Kaye describes the March :

March brought with it a steadily rising temperature, dust storms, and the monotonous,; maddening call of the *Koil*, whom the British had nicknamed the 'brain-fever bird' ³

On the hot evening towards the end of March, while a dry wind rattled the dying leaves of the bamboos and *neem* trees, and the pariah dogs of the city bayed a sultry yellow moon rising through the hot dusk, the letter they had been waiting for so long arrived from England.⁴

In India, in the month of March, the wind carries away the dead leaves. The days are hot and nights are cool. People prefer to remain indoor and go out in the morning and in the evening. Sabrina had to face the angry and nervous faces of her aunt and uncle by the rising temperature of hot March days and being an orphan found herself like a dead leaf surviving in winter season and still uncut in the summer. On the other side, in the solitary hours at night, she could have

found the cool state of mind, and might have driven away by the cool and soothing night waves of the March.

Shadow of the Moon is a record of socio-cultural aspects of Indian society of the time. M.M. Kaye appears very familiar with Hindustani. The use of the words like *Angrezi, Bairagi, Charapoy, Durbar, Ekka, Jehad, Kotwal, Mahout, Neem, Pankha, Purdah, Sadhu, Sattee, Taklief, Zenana* etc. create a familiar atmosphere for the reader. This knowledge of language helped her greatly to understand the manners and etiquettes of the Indians, specially the Muslim nobility. Her long stay in India had developed close acquaintance with Indian cultural life. She has been able to give minute details of Indian culture of the mid-nineteenth century.

Her knowledge through observations, associations, and reading makes her write confidently about it. Her acquaintance with Indian custom like *Sattee*, human sacrifice, her knowledge of Indian religions, cults, and their codes of conduct, the Indian festivals, rituals and the interactions between their followers, which make the Indian culture so complex, can be seen in the descriptions and narrative paragraphs in her novel.

Her claim as an Anglo-Indian novelist rests not just on its Indian historical background but also on keenly observed and recorded Indian culture in it. The conventions such as when a Muslim woman can take off her *Purdah*, the prayer words of Hindus and Muslims, the details of food and clothing, the climate and

its effect on the people, the superstitions of the Indians are the details which very naturally built up into the situations and events. The way she describes some of these cultural details, she appears to appreciate them and wonder about them. But at the same time she is able to create a feeling of horror when she gives objective details of the ceremony of a sacrifice of a white child to *Kali*, the readers are transfixed as was Alex witnessing this sacrifice.

One noticeable cultural aspect of the Indian society of this time was the custom of Suttee and the reformist movement of people like Raja Ram Mohan Roy. This and the role of British officers like Lord Bentinck also find appropriate place in the novel.

Shadow of the Moon vis-a-vis ^hBramar's Faulad Ka Aadmi and John Masters' Nightrunners of Bengal :

Rajkumar Bhramar, who is a prolific writer in Hindi, deals with the 1857 rebellion, in his historical novel, 'Faulad Ka Adami'. The title refers to the hero of the novel and an historical personage - Azimulla Khan, who was wise, handsome, personal secretary of Nana Sahib Peishwa, and a pet student of an English teacher Mr. Paton. The initial part of the novel deals with Azimulla's personal life, his meeting with Nana and his eventual appointment as the Secretary to the Peishwa. In the next part the rebels prepare themselves for the war under Nana's leadership. In the last phase when the rebellion is in full swing, Azimulla's teacher Mr. Paton comes to his student and requests him for

shelter and help. After some days when the situation turns in favour of the British, Mr. Paton comes to the British camp with the help of Azimulla Khan, where he calls Azimulla a betrayer and he is blown from a canon's mouth. Here the writer's aim is to show hypocritical nature of the British.

All the British and the Indian historians, while recording the 1857 rebellion, unanimously acclaim Nana's first position among all the war leaders, but they fail to understand the role played by Azimulla, who being the advisor and secretary to Nana, was the main spring of all the activities conducted by Nana.

Mr. Bhramar and M.M. Kaye, refer to the same event of 1857 rebellion in their novels, but differ in their approach to the past, treatment of the characters, and their attitude towards the event. Kaye, for the sake of plot development, selects some historical events recorded by the British historians and for novelization of the fragment of the past adds a pure fictitious love story to it. On the contrary Mr. Bhramar tries to go beyond the historical records and attempts to assess the contribution of the persons like Azimulla Khan, to whom historians have failed to understand and justify. Azimulla's knowledge of English language, his close association with British families and his wise advice helped Nana while plotting war against the British. Mr. Bhramar, in his 'Faulad Ka Aadmi' imaginatively recreates their relationship and logically presents their discussions with considerable authenticity in it. This clearly indicates that Kaye, without much inquiry of the events, prefers to go according to the British

recorded history, but Mr. Bhramar's interest lies in the search of the basic instincts by going beyond the historical records.

M.M. Kaye and Mr. Bhramar while selecting historical personalities and creating some fictitious characters, concentrate on British and Indian personalities respectively. Kaye, in Shadow of the Moon, mentions two types of British officers, i.e. careless, lusty and irresponsible officer like Conway and dutiful, ideal officers like Alex. Kaye also talks about two types of Indians. In this respect, she speaks favorably of those who cared for the British and sacrificed their lives for the Company. But she criticizes those who desired the fall of the Raj. On the contrary Mr. Bhramar admires rebels and their leaders for their strategies to destroy the British power in India and disdainfully rejects the British rule. Mr. Bhramar hates the British for their hypocritical nature. For example, Mr. Paton, in his needy time, was helped and sheltered by his pet student Azimulla Khan. But when the British position improved, the same Paton called Azimulla *Kutta* and was pleased to see Khan dead before his eyes.

While doing comparative study of Faulad Ka Adami and Shadow of the Moon, the third important difference that strikes us, is the writer's attitudes towards the revolt of 1857. Kaye, while writing Shadow of the Moon, totally relies on the British recorded history of India. As it is recorded by the British historians, the 1857 nationwide uprising was an act, of mutiny from their side so Kaye uses the word 'mutiny'. But Bhramar prefers to call it as the first war of

Independence, and condemns the use of the word 'mutiny', which belittles the Indian revolt for independence.

M.M. Kaye, who is closely associated with India, tries to show herself an impartial writer by reflecting on the bright as well as the dark aspect of the British image in her novel. She is careful not to harm the total image of the British in India.

John Masters, a renowned Anglo-Indian novelist, also deals with the 1857 rebellion in his novel Nightrunners of Bengal. As M.M. Kaye also narrates the events of Indian rebellion in her Shadow of the Moon, there is much similarity between the depiction of the events by both the novelists. They select the same events to provide the basic structure to the novel, for instance, the story of greased cartridges, the mysterious distribution of chuppattis and the story of Mangal Pande, etc.

According to both the writers, *Bairagis*, *Gurus* or *Fakirs* played very important roles in the rebellion. Kaye charges the *Fakirs* and *Bairagis* for circulating the story of greased cartridges among the sepoys. Masters also blames *Gurus* for inflaming the sepoys and people against the British :

The voice said, "This is the night. Shiva - or Allah— has promised destruction, and this is the night. The Silver Guru said, 'Until God's promised destruction strikes the wicked.' Who are the wicked? We are the wicked because we have not defended our gods. The English have hanged Brahmins, stripped our princes, attacked our gods in their temples - and we have done nothing. We have helped them. Now they are going to kill us. They do not need us any more. ⁵

Thus Masters and Kaye treat these religious priests, as responsible persons for the rebellion as they inflamed the Indians. In the same way there appears a *Maulavi* in Rajkumar Bhramar's Faulad Ka Aadmi, who requests people to stand against the British in his inflammatory speeches.

Both the novelists in their work show that all the British officers in India were totally ignorant of the design of the cartridges, which were made in England. Both the novelists blame *Bairagis* and *Fakirs* for inventing and circulating the stories of castebreaking cartridges. Both the novelists present British officers as innocent as far as the design of the cartridges was concerned. For example, in Nightrunners of Bengal Captain Savage reports Major Anderson about his discussions with his company regarding greased cartridges :

I spoke to my company beforehand, reminded them how along we'd known each other — was it likely that I or any of us was going to try to destroy their religion? — asked them to trust me. ⁶

In the same way British officers in Shadow of the Moon, are shown to be ignorant of the intention, method and manufacturing of these cartridges. Alex asks Colonel Gardinersmith :

That is one of the cartridges for the new Enfield, sir. Can you tell me what they are greased with ? ⁷

John Masters and Kaye, both, concentrate on the British characters and treat Indians as secondary figures. Many times the sense of humiliation towards Indians comes out of their expressions. For example , Joanna in Nightrunners of Bengal finds her son in the hot sun and requests her husband :

Rodeney, put his hat on, please. He'll get sunburnt and brown, like a subordinate's child." ⁸

They think of Indians only as cooks, washermen, dogboys, watchmen, sepoy and ayahs. They talk in favour of those Indians who support the Company Raj and sacrifice their lives for the sake of British. For instance, the assistant like Niaz in Shadow of the Moon and Dewan in Nightrunners of Bengal. Both the writers think of India as a sunbaked continent and talk about the interminable heat in the country.

The descriptions of rebels' destructive and inhuman activities given by both the novelists are in the same manner and tone, and it can be said that the both intend to heighten the brutality of Indian sepoy and play down the British brutality after the rebellion. For example, in Nightrunners of Bengal John Masters describes Indians brutalising a British woman :

Two sepoy dragged Joanna round the lawn by her ankles. Her hair trailed on the grass, and her embroidered white nightdress rode up over her thighs. She shrieked and moaned as they bayoneted her in the breasts and belly and face.

He was on his knees again, running on his knees, bursting towards her. A third blow exploited in his head, and the word expanded; he could see her just hundred feet away, spread naked and dying under their bodies ... She must be unconscious and nearly dead, whom he had sworn to love and protect, Joanna whom he did not love and had not protected, his wife and Robin's mother, who had not liked to be left alone with Indians. ⁹

Masters differs from Kaye in understanding the importance of the martyrdom of Mangal Pande. M.M. Kaye takes little notice of it and mentions it only as one

of the historical details, but Masters mentions Pande's unbelievable influence on the rebels.

We will burn the court to get them out, and kill them there. Kill the others in their bungalows. Kill the sahibs you do not know, that pity may not stay your hand. Pity – and die. Remember Mangal Pande. Haven't we wives and children ? Who is not with ourselves is against us. Arm yourselves ... Remember Mangal Pande. That will be the sign, listen for it, wait for it. —Remember Mangal Pande ! ¹⁰

Masters thinks of the sacrifice of Mangal Pande as the mainspring for the mutineers, but Kaye mentions it simply as the hanging of a sepoy in the 34th Regiment. Masters even differs from the British historians who describe Mangal Pande as an addict, and records that, he was under the influence of *bhang* when he fired at the officer, on March 29, 1857. In this connection G.W. Forrest records :

Mangal Pandey stopped loading. Baugh draw his sword and rushed in to secure him. The sergeant - major came to the assistance of his officer. The fanatic, mad with bhang, held both his assailants at bay, and severely wounded them with his sword. ¹¹

The next difference that strikes us is the timespan chosen by both the novelists as background to the event of the 1857 rebellion. Kaye dives deep into the past and starts narrating the story since 1799, the start of the abolition conspiracy of Oudh. Thereafter she moves on rapidly and mentions only those events which are concerned with the 1857 rebellion. But John Masters' Nightrunners of Bengal starts from the last eve of 1856, which completely misses the historical significance of the background of the rebellion. Kaye

provides the long term and the immediate causes behind the rebellion by going back upto 1799.

The title of the novel, Shadow of the Moon, has literal as well as symbolic significance. At the literal level, the title refers to the Mosque, situated in front of the room of the Gulab Mahal in which Winter, the heroine, was born to Sabrina. For Sabrina, the shadow of that iron moon, in the sunlight or in the moonlight, came to symbolize fear and loneliness.

At symbolic level the title refers to the re-emergence of the Islamic rule in India for a very short period. The horned Moon with a star is an emblem of the Muslim religion. The word shadow indicates the dark days experienced by the British during 1857. Thus the title suggests the struggle by the Indians, especially by the Muslims, for the re-establishment of the Moghul rule in India. In this respect Niaz, a Muslim assistant of Alex, expresses his views :

The British had conquered the conquerors : Maharatta, Rajput and Sikh; and now, if the British themselves were to fall, chaos would follow. Out of that chaos might not the moon of Islam rise once more, and the followers of the Prophet rule in the land as they had ruled it in the great days of Akbar - of Jehangir - of Shahjehan - of Aurangzebe, 'Holder of the world' ? ¹²

We can see that Kaye's Shadow of the Moon fares better in comparison with Masters' Nightrunners of Bengal, because it is rich both in historical development and cultural details. As a historical novel Shadow of the Moon is a very good example of how human relationships develop and sustain during the momentous large scale events that took place in the history.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- 9 Ibid., p.233.
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