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Afterimage in Historical Fiction: The event of 1857 in postcolonial cultural memory

by

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Knowledge of three separate scales of chronological time may be collected through reading of a historical novel – the past in which the characters are located, the past from where the author writes and, the present where the reader resides. It is detecting the pale and wide-ranging interconnections between these three hierarchies of time which is the main challenge to reading historical novels where, especially, history is not objective narration of facts but a narrative artefact. Essential mediums reflecting cultural processes which symbolise a time-period, historical novels hold significance for the study of events of the past and their later impact and meaning. This article, adopting a cultural approach to the study of memory considers historical novels as one of the many medias of cultural memory to examine remembrance of an event of the past as reflected in its afterimage and reception. Focusing on the afterlife of event of 1857, known widely in historiography as Indian or sepoy mutiny, revolt, rebellion or struggle, the article identifies the common themes among three historical novels in terms of which the event is remembered. It analyses the representation of 1857 in *Ghadar* (1934), *Jhansi ki Rani* (1946) and *Devil's Wind* (1972) and, the purpose behind such a selection in these postcolonial fictions. They, in their engagement with colonialism and its knowledge, describe the key routes taken by latter to firmly place itself in collective memory and in whom, as a result, the past is 'modelled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present.'

Knowledge of three separate scales of chronological time may be collected through reading of a historical novel – the past in which the characters are located, the past from where the author writes and, the present where the reader resides. It is detecting the pale and wide-ranging interconnections between these three hierarchies of time which is the main challenge to reading historical novels where, especially, history is not objective narration of facts but a narrative artefact. Historical novels, being an archetype of the social and cultural processes, which govern historiography of a period, hold significance for a historian to emphasise the communications between disciplines of history and literature and to study contours of consciousness of an age. Both history and literature are primarily narrative discourses resting on the imagination. History proposes to present evidence for demonstrable events to give an objective view of their successive unfolding while literature, by nature, has the power to magnify, obscure, neglect, or create characters and movements which could populate those events. The difference between the two rests in the degree to which they emphasise the fictive element of their work. Historians, argues Hayden White, ‘effect a disciplining of the imagination, in this case the historical imagination, and they set limits on what constitutes a specifically historical event’.¹ Their relationship is clearly intimate where ideas and images of history, states Allen Greenberger, are spread to the unfamiliar public by literature, serving to shape belief and policy.²

Postcolonial literature and its knowledge and engagement with colonialism expresses the many routes taken by the latter to firmly place itself in cultural memory, where in its full realisation it annihilates ‘people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves’.³ As the decolonisation of memory includes a process of recovery, history of an event or incident is continuously read and re-written and the resulting dissimilar expressions underline ideological persuasions of the writer. However, common to all writers of historical novels, clarifies Georg Lukacs, is the concern to bring the past and its conditions convincingly before the reader so that the ideas arising from it are not regarded as a historical curiosity but re-experienced as a dynamic phase of historical development which is significant and essential to the present.⁴ As imperialism began to wane in the early twentieth century, postcolonial literature emerged in the form of restrained anti-imperialist nationalism. The postcolonial novel was thus born which was earlier erroneously identified as being solely concerned with anticolonial themes. But, it cannot be denied that to achieve nationalistic ambitions and revive notions of lost pride in readers postcolonial writers borrowed literary conventions and nuances from colonisers to articulate their own perception of a free nation. They often took up anticolonial themes and ideas in their writings as a form of national or indigenous self-expression illustrating Elle Boehmer’s argument of ‘postcolonial fiction giving structure to, as well as being structured by, history’.⁵

This article locates itself in a framework of cultural memory closely reading and re-reading postcolonial texts to illustrate the meaning and significance invested in a particular event of the past. Three prominent historical novels on the subject of 1857 written by Indian authors in pre-and post-independence periods will be scrutinised to bring forth how they document and assess it. The first, *Ghadar* (revolution)⁶, published during the turbulent Civil Disobedience movement (1930-34), foregrounds the revolutionary life of Azimullah, Nana saheb's associate. Similarly, *Rani Lakshmibai* (1946)⁷ traces the bravery, courage and intelligence of Rani Jhansi since childhood to role as regent and eventual death on the battlefield. The third postcolonial historical novel discussed here is *Devil's Wind*, a unique first-person narrative of Nana saheb reasoning his life, aims and role in the event of 1857.

The aim of this article is to question how these three novels, written at different points of time, assess this event and approach its historical reviewing and reinterpreting. A major concern will be to investigate how they counter and criticise constructions which serve colonisers' interests by examining historical figures constructed as stereotypes by colonial knowledge while, at the same time, building their own adaptations of these figures characterised by negotiations of identity under subjection and imperial surveillance. To answer these questions which elicit features of the later impact and meaning of an event of the past, a method of close reading identifying collective ideas about the nature, causes and significance of 1857 is employed. In this way, a common stress on the entity of East India Company (hereafter, EIC), its purpose, and activities and role in initiating the struggle is noticed.

Source of discontent: The 'dishonourable' company

The staggering transformation of the Company from a simple trading establishment to a potentate controlling the fortune of millions of lives is commented on by Myna, daughter of Nana saheb in *Ghadar* where she wonders at the sudden changes in her country related to this ascendancy. She recounts the days when, befitting their status as peripheral traders, these strangers had jostled with others, going to the extent of dressing in Indian clothes, to gain favour of native kings. But now, she mourned, revealing her own deprived position, the latter bowed over hands of these foreigners. Musing on such a turn of circumstances, the influential position gained by EIC in the country over a hundred years seemed inexplicable to her. However, she palpably realised the restrictive effects of its control on public movement, action, and thought, where her own family had suffered loss of a kingdom and position of high power and further, was in danger of being cut-off from its allowance by the identical Company.⁸

Broadening the perspective of search for causes of the rise of EIC, Nana saheb of *Devil's Wind* stressed it assumed the garb of liberator 'in the classic pattern of conquerors' to gain a foothold in the polity of India exploiting weak and selfish rulers such as his foster father Peshwa Bajirao II who was tamely exiled to Bithoor, twelve miles from Kanpur, EIC's biggest military establishment in 1818. There, privacy was forfeit with spies infesting their palace reporting meticulously on each activity, gathering, and, personal and public preference with both father and son leading a life of constant dependence on Company goodwill:

Goodwill. How we pushed and pulled that word around in those days, like vultures tugging at a dead calf. We lived with it and went to sleep with it, holding it caged tenderly, in our thoughts. It was the one abiding aim of my early days and of Bajirao's last days. We cringed and smirked and suffered agonies for it; we intrigued, cowered before their meanest functionaries, pandered, entertained, bribed and were mercilessly exploited.⁹

Both of them furiously struggled to highlight their achievements and hide errors to stern Company officials so that the 'record piling up, in some building in Calcutta, would be favourable.'

The futility of these efforts was harshly brought home to Nana after his father's death which unmasked to him the deceitful nature of EIC. Already, crucial issues of his position and rank after the demise of Bajirao were unresolved, for long kept in abeyance pending 'appropriate season' by the Company. He then discovers he has no property to gift, and is offhandedly informed, even the palace and its surrounding lands are leased to him for use by the Company. Notwithstanding his position as EIC's greatest friend and the biggest among six hundred rulers who had been permitted to retain titles, it is underlined, Nana spent the next few years indecorously fighting for his pension and privileges. His prime minister Azimullah, leading these negotiations, remarks on the irony of the situation, in which a Company professing to the virtue of being 'honourable' in title refuses and denies its promises in deed.

Further, Nana realises the colours of EIC symbolise colonial manipulation with arrival of Lord Dalhousie, EIC's new head representative in India. His policies of greed and selfishness bring forth its character of colonialism and, ambition to achieve consolidation by purging numerous subordinate rulers. Nana understood the Company worked with a clear strategy carefully keeping up the façade of being a servant of Mughal empire while slowly but assuredly absorbing its sovereignty by methodically reducing other rulers to a subsidiary position. Towards this goal, one scheme was the Doctrine of Lapse 'an instrument of confiscation so crude that it might have been devised by a child, so tyrannical as to resemble an act of God' and another was wholesale annexation, as witnessed by Awadh in 1856. Now, having built enough strength for a direct

challenge it was confident enough to throw away useless fiction. 'They wanted the palace vacated, the Emperor packed off to some obscure village;' for the 'people of India to know that they, not the descendants of the Great Moghuls, were the Padishah.'¹⁰

Distinctive characteristic: cooperation and planning

Against this common source of discontent an image included in all three novels is of mechanisms and strategies employed by groups of people to plan their opposition. As Paul Connerton indicates, each beginning and action of a group, whether small or big and unknown to each other, is based on recollection, a common shared memory through which images from the past are legitimated and explained to the contemporary social order.¹¹ In this manner, chronicling a series of meetings between groups emanating from different regions of India, *Ghadar* pictures its protagonist, Azimullah, as the chief coordinator for these meetings which he could efficaciously plan without inviting suspicion due to skills acquired while travelling through Europe.

At these meetings, whose aim was to 'ready the country for revolution', his part was of a knowledgeable counsellor, without whose endorsement schemes would not be transmitted further down the organisation for completion. Consequent to such coordination meetings, a date for concurrent uprisings had been identified. In pursuit of this objective, continues *Ghadar*, Azimullah arranged to capture power in Kanpur by imprisoning top Company officials sending out invitations for a dinner-party which had been well-accepted. But the undue haste displayed in Meerut shattered harmony of well-laid schemes.¹²

Similarly, Lakshmibai of the eponymous novel is seen discussing current political conditions and profile of future radicals with her cousin Nana and close counsellor Tatyā Tope. Observing the dissipated condition of noble-houses which had subcontracted the work of their administrations to EIC, they concluded that 'the future of revolution' rested only with 'the people'. Accordingly, she opens classes for women in 'martial' skills such as horse-riding and sword-fighting, creating an all-women fighting battalion. In addition, their instruction provides her an opportunity to chart and map the kingdom unwatched. Lakshmibai also sets up a resourceful spy department staffed with confidants including her court singer who was ordered to travel to different cantonments to collect information about troop movement and embolden soldiers in joining forces with their group.

Again, an advanced level of planning is indicated when reviewing ground works in conference with Tope, Lakshmibai stresses that much preparation remained to be finished asking for prompt employment of manufacturers of war materials. Tope reported earnest work on this course had been initiated in Delhi, Meerut and Kanpur, assuring her prudent lessons of being prepared was learnt from the Vellore mutiny, disclosing to the reader too his historical awareness of previous

struggles. He believed they were in an advantageous position due to wrongful dismissal by Company authorities of the issue of greased cartridges which had caused considerable unhappiness among all communities. In a later meeting, Lakshmibai is authorised to select a date for revolt armed with information that adequate financial provision has been made against even a prolonged struggle. Subsequently, knowledge of impending revolution is disseminated through the symbols of *kamal* (lotus) and *roti/chappati* (bread). But, unfortunately before the message could be circulated fully, emphasises *Lakshmibai*, Barrackpore and Meerut sepoy rebel devastating well-laid plans.¹³

Bringing to light planes of organisation in another group, *Devil's Wind* asserts by beginning of the year forces loyal to queen Zeenat Mahal and *maulvi* (religious scholar) of Faizabad quickened their preparations and, at a meeting called by them attended by many feudal lords and princely rulers, a broad and resolute strategy for revolt was decided upon. The queen's personal seal, a white lotus, was decided to be used as a code sign with the *maulvi* detailing his plans for distribution of *chapattis*. The plan was received with much appreciation as, observed Azimullah, by allowing everything to remain 'vague and mysterious it aroused universal curiosity, and by avoiding appearance of a religious behest, it embraced both Hindus and Muslims.' Further, both leaders wrote letters asking for support to rulers of Persia, Kabul and Russia.¹⁴

A reason for failure: Disunity

Identifying collaboration by Indians with EIC as an important reason for latter's victory in 1857, *Lakshmibai* details a situation where a rival claimant to Jhansi's throne is quick to side with the Company after unsuccessful encounters with its queen. Nawab Ali Bahadur becomes an eager spy and cleverly employs one of his faithful within the palace to offer comprehensive reports from within and outside fortress wall. The regular flow of information provided by him finally proves crucial to breaking the siege of Jhansi by Company forces. Again, damage inflicted by another collaborator is highlighted when a nobleman, entrusted with responsibility of guarding a main palace gate instead, destroys all cannons under his command and provides a safe entry to enemy army.¹⁵

Similarly, *Devil's Wind* draws attention to Nanak Chand, a Kanpur spy and traitor who, in his guise of merchant, is spotted many times by Nana eliciting information from palace inhabitants. Chand confirms his status as an infiltrator to him when he offers to negotiate on his behalf with EIC in return for being paid a substantial bribe. Viciously snubbed, Chand extracts his revenge later by eagerly offering himself as a trustworthy witness to British forces plundering Nana's palace and offers to reveal its hidden treasure-hoards.¹⁶ In another instance, after repeated

encounters against EIC army composed mainly of Sikhs and other 'loyal' Indian troops, Nana reflects on the occurrence of collaboration wondering at methods of persuasion which committed the soldiers to destruction of their countrymen. Often, their presence in opposite camps turned to be a key factor in success. 'Disgust filled my mind: slaves were assisting their masters to conquer their own motherland and thus perpetuate their slavery. No country could live down such degradation of its people – we deserved our fate.'¹⁷

Contesting allegations: Uncovering a composite picture

In all three postcolonial novels under study a strong undercurrent of contesting colonialism through establishment of moral equivalence between races can be discerned. For this purpose, while addressing allegations of violence perpetrated by Indians during 1857, they stress on providing proof against the other side by pointing out incidents in which similar behaviour, apparently under duress, was displayed. According to *Ghadar*, the Satichaura *ghat* (riverbank) massacre was a result of miscommunication and confusion between Nana's men and a contingent of sepoys newly-arrived from the environs of Banaras. When Nana promises General Wheeler safe passage to Allahabad by the medium of boats in exchange for surrendering his entrenched position, it is resented by the latter who, wrathfully but helplessly watch departing foreigners after receiving strict instructions against any harm to them. But wrongly interpreting Wheeler being escorted away from the boats as a sign for firing their guns, they began to shoot, with immediate response from British soldiers.¹⁸

The same incident is rationalised by *Devil's Wind* as an outcome of British cruelties which they inflicted in their retributive anger. Soldiers who had been driven away by the fury of Colonel Neill's column after discovering their families and villages had been burnt to ash despaired on seeing the 'orderly departure of their intended victims' in Kanpur. Someone fired a shot and suddenly the scene erupted in confusion, a mass of screams and blood.¹⁹ Again, underlines *Devil's Wind*, incidents at Bibighar were similarly triggered by loss and pain of a poor and oppressed woman whose daughter had been burnt alive in Delhi by storming British forces. Only a combination of panic and rage 'twin serpents' released by Company's unchecked columns, could have caused Bibighar which, in its characteristic violence, would always have a power to distress. Yet, 'both were a form of primitive retaliation against the savagery of the advancing column, and have to be viewed in the same frame, as composite pictures'.²⁰

Similarly, queen Lakshmi was not the author of massacres of Britons at Jhansi fort, argues *Lakshmibai* but could be assigned to racial abuse and mistreatment of Jhansi residents especially by superintendent Skene. Instead, she was prompt in helping them even against advice, and

believed her fight to be against British men and not with their women or children. When requested for assistance, she immediately sent aid and provisions to relieve their besieged condition. She had little idea about plans of besieging soldiers who, after capturing the fort, collected and murdered their prisoners in the central garden. Moreover, she condemned and rebuked their brutal acts when they reached her palace seeking approbation and, turned them out of town towards Delhi with provision of her diamond necklace to prevent looting en route.²¹

On the other hand, all three novels underscored, Britain certainly did not hold higher moral ground with numerous instances extant of carnage which it inflicted on a captive population; deeds of unparalleled slaughter recognised little by perpetrators. To recover this lost gaze and counter allegations of narrow violence, *Ghadar* points out July 17 as a 'red letter day,' when 'thousands of patriots were wiped out and the name of a murderous and violent General inscribed in the annals of English history.' Havelock, resolved on avenging the death of Wheeler, began his agenda by hanging masses of men and subsequently giving general orders permitting indiscriminate looting and destruction of whole towns. As conclusion, he ordered all Brahmins to gather at Bibighar and clean the blood-filled floors first with tongue and then with broom 'until they realise before being hanged that all their religious sentiments have been brutally crushed'.²²

It was a particularly ruthless British officer who set fire to the state library of Jhansi which contained priceless handwritten manuscripts and inscriptions in multiple languages including Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic, sorrowfully records *Lakshmibai*, apart from the palace and associated buildings. It reiterates how British soldiers were unreservedly permitted to loot, plunder and overrun towns, after taking control of them, with general pillaging continuing for many days in which men of even advanced age were not spared but caught and summarily hanged.²³

The fear produced in countryside by marching British columns is chillingly illustrated in *Devil's Wind* by highlighting conduct of a certain commander and deputy who are increasingly being reported as 'monsters' to Nana. At first dismissive, considering them only as exaggerations and rumours born out of panic, he is forced to admit their veracity in subsequent descriptions. Soon, the name of Renaud, who made a practice of killing villagers simply because they did not look at his passing column and of Neill, who ordered no prisoners but slaughter of all men 'were like wounds on our brains'. Remorselessly, their names became even more familiar for their methodical retribution:

They selected at random what they termed "guilty villages," to be cordoned off and set on fire – anyone who tried to escape was shot down. They organised volunteer hanging parties

to hunt for “guilty men,” which term included anyone whose behaviour seemed even remotely suspicious...men were speared like hogs....By now, these hunting parties had developed a competitive spirit, and bets were laid openly as to which one would spear the highest number of *pandies* on a given day.²⁴

Within two days of their arrival in Kanpur, Bibighar was ‘avenged measure for measure’ by newly-promoted Neill. Nana’s palace is looted and burnt with many of its inhabitants still inside and his extensive menagerie is unsparingly raided for meat, pelts, or any other resource.

Instances of British cruelty were not found wanting in Delhi too, continues *Devil’s Wind*, relating an incident in which the besieging force, frustrated with days of fruitless labour, fell on its own camp followers. Officer Hodson gained popular appeal by killing Mughal princes in cold-blood, it recalled, while Company commissioner Metcalfe appointed himself executioner. After the siege broke, packs of men set out to punish, destroy, and dishonour, where “the word ‘rape’ itself acquired plurality, a collective connotation, and people spoke of villages and townships raped, not of single women.”²⁵ In Lucknow, the large-scale demolition of city by forces commanded by Campbell ‘cannot be balanced by a hundred Satichauras, cannot be washed away by banning all mention of it from history books, cannot be atoned for by a hundred years of the most unblemished administration’, rages the novel, where every soldier ravaged, looted and plundered inflicting mutilation on humans and bricks-and-mortar alike, for weeks without ebb. The village of Ajnala would complete this list of inhumanities where British commissioner Cooper killed more than five hundred people after imprisoning them in windowless rooms.²⁶

Constructing figures: a historical personality

The socio-political base of a cultural memory is reflected in the interplay of mutually antagonistic elements in the construction of its historical figures which is lucidly reflected in the attempt of historical novels under discussion to build a comprehensive historical personality for their chosen protagonists influenced by a perspective of nationalist historiography. These constructions taken together with those produced by European literature of an opposite description presents an illustrative demonstration of the functioning of duality in concepts of ‘hero’ or ‘villain’. In this way we see the focus of *Ghadar* while drawing its main character is to trace his career as a revolutionary introducing Azimullah as son to poor parents who, with the help of intelligence, expertise gained by wide reading, and ambition, becomes prime minister to Nana sahib in Kanpur. He is chosen with unanimous consent for his skills of argumentation, persuasion and tact to reason Nana’s case in London against EIC’s decision of discontinuing his pension.²⁷ Other additional qualities which made Azimullah perfect for the assignment, thought Nana of *Devil’s*

Wind, was his admiration of English ways which he often imitates, dressed in costume, and his mastery of their style of dancing which he performs to general amusement.²⁸

Azimullah presents Nana's situation with immense capability and proficiency in London, continues *Ghadar*, by giving impassioned and well-received speeches in Parliament and organising protest marches on the street. But despite all his efforts, Nana is denied assistance in his petition against the Company. Azimullah chooses to return to India by an alternate continental route which would give him opportunity to witness the principal conflict of contemporary Europe, the Crimean war. There, he makes a comprehensive tour of battlefields, observing war from both sides of the divide and tabulating relative strength of each combatant – English, French, Ottoman, and Russian. Judging from these he concludes the English displayed remarkable incompetency and indecisiveness and stood on brink on defeat but for economic resources gained by political control over India. These resources, out of which even their French allies were fed and clothed, gave them a decisive edge over their opponents. With these thoughts preoccupying his mind in which an image of a debt-ridden, starving Indian peasant predominated, he returns to Kanpur.²⁹

After his return from Europe, reiterates *Devil's Wind*, Azimullah's temperament alters substantially with periods of prolonged silence or outbursts of sudden anger. 'He no longer boasted of familiarity with the sahibs or their ways, or admired their punctuality or imitated their mannerisms.' In addition, he transforms his clothing style by exchanging English designs for plain Indian clothes and begins to closely analyse the British management of India in relation to observed lapses and losses in Crimean war, seeing their rule could be dislodged by a well-planned revolution. With his analysis complete, Azimullah announces his intention of joining forces with others who recognise the material structure of imperialism.³⁰

In contrast, the historical figure of Nana sahib is depicted principally as an example of Bhabha's 'mimicry' in both *Ghadar* and *Devil's Wind*, where colonial discourse encourages the colonised to 'mimic' the coloniser adopting dissimilar cultural habits, assumptions, institutions, and values. The product thus enjoined is not a simple reproduction of cultural traits but displays both threatening and mocking qualities since it often appears to parody the object of mimicry. It follows that mimicry threatens colonial authority and discourse since it reveals their limit of influence and ways of transmission.³¹ This potential of devastation is realised in the fictional Nana when he regresses, in the latter half of both novels, not without turmoil against former friends and associates leading to breakdown of 'mimicry' and 'reconversion' to singular roots and culture.

In *Ghadar*, Nana is an archetype of a vacillating and foolish prince who chooses not to note manipulations against him by close associates. He feigns ignorance of the poverty forced on each

class in the country, including his own, by unforgiving administration of the Company rather than disturb preparations for his numerous and well-received house parties. Instead, he regards EIC as a beneficial entity which succeeded in, he was gleeful to note, ejecting Mughal emperors from their dominant position over the country. Similarly, he chooses to ignore his minister Azimullah's subversive activities against Company rule, believing them to be hopeless efforts against its omnipotence. He entertained notions of EIC representing the British race and its characteristic values of truth and justice and so thought India to be fortunate in owning such a regime which dispensed peace and prosperity. Accordingly, he counts many of its representatives as close friends and gives them regular entertainments not wavering in this hospitality even after it discontinues his annuity.

It is at one of these festivities that his notions are challenged when an English soldier embarrasses his daughter Myna but any measure of apology is denied from the governing community. This injustice suffered at close personal quarters leads Nana to bitterly recall, emphasises *Ghadar*, composing elegies to the English system of justice, his regular interactions with EIC and amounts spent on amusing its representatives who unhesitatingly accepted extravagant gifts and heartily ate and laughed at his table. Moreover, Myna argues, as she had many time before, against his ideas pointing again to the difference in race which could not be bridged even by his status and wealth. Notwithstanding, Nana awaits judgement by his friend and garrison commander Wheeler and on his dismissal of the incident as a 'lover's tiff' vows vengeance against the Company. In this hate Nana is not blind, stresses *Ghadar*, bearing little resentment towards the resident Anglo-Indian community. On the other hand, he displays concern for those families who would be caught in the middle of war and, later in the novel, hesitates to bomb Wheeler's entrenchment which would undoubtedly result in a mass killing.³² This portrayal of Nana sahib as a sympathetic and rational individual demonstrates construction of an intelligent and compassionate historical figure redeeming humanity of rebels and giving an alternate tone to his predominant representation.

Similarly, Nana is an educated, cultivated and intelligent man in *Devil's Wind*, sensitive in his daily connections, and although he commits himself to combat Company rule, recoils from the carnage to be inflicted in coming months on people both European and Indian. Admitting his 'loyalties were hopelessly intermixed, and my hatred far from pure' he was, at the same time, convinced of the moral righteousness of revolution. But, his friendships with several Anglo-Indian families, more than those with his own kind, force him to consider their situation and its unfairness: 'They had done no harm to me, or indeed to India. Why should they have to be sacrificed for all the wrongs piled up by the East India Company over a hundred years?'³³ Nana, underlines *Devil's Wind*, sees his role in the forthcoming struggle as a reasonable voice, a

‘mediator and negotiator’ consulting moderation to both sides hoping to be remembered ‘in history as the man who had tempered a revolt... who helped his own people achieve freedom...with only the minimal bloodletting; the man who, above all, understood and practiced old-fashioned chivalry’.³⁴

This is an important differentiation seen between the figure of Nana sahib as sketched by colonial literature showing him as an absurd and dull person and a figure who rationally distinguishes between malpractices of the Company and Britons employed by it. In both *Ghadar* and *Devil’s Wind* a dramatically different picture of Nana is drawn where, from an obnoxious, ignorant, and lustful ‘fiend’ the figure metamorphoses into an educated, intelligent and rational person capable of decision-making without influence of passions such as vice, greed or animalism. He has sufficient faculty and a sense of historical consciousness though imprisoned by difficulties of his heritage to analyse and judge contemporary political and socio-economic conditions. In short, both novels illustrate the postcolonial emergence of Nana from being assumed as a beast to being perceived as a rational man.³⁵

Dejected after being accused for Satichaura and Bibighar massacres and facing imminent defeat, maintains *Devil’s Wind*, Nana is forced to flee Bithoor and eventually to Nepal where he leads a peaceful and happy life for fifteen years. He returns to India in 1873 to perform *shraddha* ceremony of his father on the bank of the Ganges in Bithoor. While there, he secretly pays a visit to Kanpur and is saddened and sorrowful at the indiscriminate loss of life and way of living. But leaving all this behind Nana Sahib travels to Mecca and finally to Constantinople where he at last finds complete peace and harmony. The mystery of the last days of Nana Sahib’s life has always provided free rein for fictional imagination. For example, in Jules Verne’s version, *The End of Nana Sahib, or the Steam House* which appeared in 1880, Nana returns to the Deccan, lives among the tribals of the Vindhya hills and meets his death accidentally at the hands of the British. In Perceval Landon’s account which was part of his travel memoirs *Under the Sun* (1906), the life of Nana Sahib was composed as a tragedy when he is spotted at a place about thirty miles from Rajkot, in 1895, as a mad wanderer to whom no one pays much attention and, moreover, who is the object of mirth. Landon paints a particularly cruel portrait of the Nana:

there is hardly a more desolate picture in history than that of Nana Sahib – old, discredited, half-witted, but still claiming the horrible honour of being himself, contemptuously set free by those whom he had so foully injured to wander still the roads, the laughing stock of his own people, vociferating his claims to idle wayfarers, who soon passed on to their own business with a

smile for the homeless and broken old man whose brains God had filled with illusion.³⁶

The figure of Lakshmibai in the eponymous novel is invested with virtues of intelligence and sagacity and from a child is active, clever, excelling over her companions Nana and Tatyia in skills of horse-riding, wrestling, sword and gun-fighting. She displays exemplary bravery, maturity, and presence of mind and leadership qualities in a harrowing incident experienced at age of twelve. After early marriage, her soldierly qualities are praised as being 'better than any man' by the kingdom of Jhansi's learned and powerful men. Affected closely by rules of doctrine of lapse, enforced strictly by EIC, she is seen discussing contemporary political situation of the country with her friend and cousin Nana. She argues the Company was successful in methodologically spreading its corruption due to a weak centre at Delhi which was seeing a succession of weak Mughal emperors. Against popular view, according to *Lakshmibai*, she does not consider it unassailable nor does she ascribe 'good luck' as reason for its ascent to power but believes its predominance could be shattered with a combination of determination and unison among the people of India. Subsequently, when her own state is put under conditions of lapse she cleverly accepts a pittance as pension to ward off suspicion and quietly prepare for the forthcoming struggle.

She is careful in formulating plans which would create least disturbance to daily life or wrongfully implicate an unwitting participant in one of its sub-schemes exhibiting a distinct sensitivity towards interests of common population in her preparations for war. Again, one of her close companions is a poor weaver whom she spots for bearing an arresting resemblance to herself and for her bold and strong-willed behaviour at a spring festival. When she unintentionally wounds a priest's heifer and faces censure Lakshmibai intercedes on her behalf supporting tolerance and moderation. Later in the novel, Jhalkaribai repays this kindness by bravely posing as the queen to assaulting British forces who gain entry after help from a nobleman who treacherously opens palace gates for them. Lakshmibai's sympathies are displayed once more when, at a meeting after she wrests control of town from Company control which sees participation from key administrative and military officials, she stresses on the need to prevent destruction of property and attempts at pillaging and offering the common people a secure environment.

The Rani courageously defends her town with extreme skill and extensive preparations against the English forces but, is betrayed by some treacherous commanders. To protect the people and property, she takes the fight outside Jhansi and is cut down while fighting bravely.

Attribution of such sympathies to the historical figure of Lakshmibai is an excellent example, points out Prachi Deshpande, of how the modern historical novel 'did the work of history, in terms of authoritatively depicting the past as it (surely) had been while simultaneously moulding it to fit a desired nationalist imagination.'³⁷ Similarly, Joyce Lebra-Chapman in her extensive exploration on creation of Lakshmibai's myth and legend argues that these professed inspirations situate her squarely in the mould of revolutionary nationalism which found its ideal in the epic figure of Arjun, hero of *Gita*, or, in the example of Shivaji, founder of Maratha confederacy in the seventeenth century. Further, she argues, revolutionary nationalists, in contrast to mainstream leadership, saw her as a model for ideals of self-sacrifice towards the nation. During the decade of 1930s especially, her life was held up as an example to future generations and nearly every poet in Bundelkhand praised her sacrifice for freedom which would accumulatively result in freedom for India.³⁸

¹ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 66.

² Allen J. Greenberger, *The British Image of India: A Study in the Literature of Imperialism, 1880-1960*, London: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. vii.

³ Ngugi Wa Thiongo, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 2.

⁴ Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel*, (1955), Trans. by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983, pp. 20-21.

⁵ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 196.

⁶ Rishabh Charan Jain (1911-85) was one of the first Hindi novelists apart from being a publisher, journalist, translator and film distributor. His other works include *His Highness*, *Her Highness*, *Paise Ka Saathi*, *Bhagya* etc.

⁷ When Rani Lakshmbai first came out in the 1940s, it was immediately banned for its incendiary content and was finally published only in 1946. Vrindavanlal Verma (1889-1969) was an eminent Hindi poet, novelist and playwright who based much of his work on his native Bundelkhand area. His other historical novels included *Gadh Kundar* (1927), *Virata ki Padmini* (1930) and *Musahibju* (1943). Vrindavanlal Verma, *Rani Lakshmbai*, (1946, reprint) New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2006.

⁸ Rishab Charan Jain, *Ghadar*, (1930, reprint), Delhi: Gyan Prakashan, 1962, p.

⁹ Malgaonkar, p. 26.

¹⁰ Malgaonkar, p. 44.

¹¹ Paul Connerton, *How societies remember?*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 2-4.

¹² Jain, p. 33.

¹³ Verma, pp. 18-19.

¹⁴ Malgaonkar, pp. 57-61.

¹⁵ Verma, *op.cit.*, pp. 49-65.

¹⁶ Malgaonkar, *op.cit.*, pp. 28-72; 235-40.

¹⁷ Malgaonkar, *op.cit.*, p. 232.

18

¹⁹ Malgaonkar, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

²⁰ Malgaonkar, *op.cit.*, p. 207.

²¹ Verma, *op.cit.*, pp. 37-38.

²² Jain, p. 103.

²³ Verma, p. 67; 70-71.

²⁴ Malgaonkar, p. 200. Colonel James George Neill (1810-57) of the Madras European Fusiliers had given lengthy instructions, recorded by J.W. Kaye, to his second in command Major Renaud while marching from Allahabad to relief of Sir Hugh Wheeler in Kanpur. Among them, prominent are: '(1) Attack and destroy all places *en route* close to the road occupied by the enemy, but touch no others; encourage the inhabitants to return, and instill confidence into all of the restoration of British authority... and everything make known that will raise the British name.... The villages of... and neighbourhood to be attacked and destroyed; slaughter all the men; take no prisoners. (2) All Sepoys found, without papers, from regiments that have mutinied, who cannot give good accounts of themselves, to be hanged forthwith... (3) Futtehpora to be promptly attacked, Patan quarters to be destroyed, all in it killed; in fact, make a signal example of this place... shell them with shrapnel. The cavalry should cut up fugitives... The object in attacking villages and Futtehpora is to execute vengeance, and let it be amply taken'. J.W. Kaye, *Lives of Indian Officers*, Vol. II, London: A. Strahan and Co., 1867, pp. 374-76.

²⁵ Malgaonkar, pp. 232-33.

²⁶ Interestingly, a well excavated three years ago in Ajnala, Punjab revealed numerous skulls, coins, medals and jewelry said to belong to rebels killed by Cooper. 'The Black Hole,' *The Indian Express* (New Delhi), March 16, 2014. For more details on Cooper's own admissions see *The Crisis in Punjab* (1858).

²⁷ Jain, p. 4.

²⁸ Malgaonkar, pp. 36-37.

²⁹ Jain, pp. 54-60.

³⁰ Malgaonkar, 58-63.

³¹ Homi Bhabha, especially pp.

³² Jain, pp. 1-8; 15-17; 44.

³³ Malgaonkar, pp. 115-16.

³⁴ Malgaonkar, pp. 127-28.

³⁵ For detail on the colonial stereotype of Nana sahib see Patrick, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988 and Kim A. Wagner, “‘Vengeance Against England!’: Hermann Goedsche and the Indian Uprising,” in Crispin Bates and Marina Carter (eds.), *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Vol. 3: Global Perspectives, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2013, pp. 150-69.

³⁶ Perceval Landon, *Under the Sun*, London: Hurst and Blackett Ltd., 1906, p. 288. Landon was the organising secretary for *The Daily Telegraph* Mutiny Dinner in 1907, discussed in chapter four.

³⁷ Prachi Deshpande, ‘The Making of an Indian Nationalist Archive: Lakshmibai, Jhansi, and 1857,’ *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 67, No. 3, August 2008, p. 862.

³⁸ Joyce Lebra-Chapman, *The Rani of Jhansi: A Study in Female Heroism in India*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986, pp. 143-46. For more studies on Lakshmibai’s life see Tapti Roy, *Raj of the Rani*, London: Penguin, 2006; Rainer Jerosch, *The Rani of Jhansi: Rebel Against Will*, Delhi: Aakar Books, 2007.

Author Bio: Sonakshi Goyle is an independent postdoctoral researcher of modern history engaged in studying memory through forms of commemoration which reveal the process of memory formation and memory distribution. To undertake such a research of memory, Goyle adopts the theoretical framework provided by a cultural turn in memory studies which has seen full bloom in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Cultural memory defines itself as that strand of memory studies which emphasises the relation between memory and cultural media, whether in the form of texts or visuals and thus regards the cultural field of media as the prime ground for knowledge formation and dissemination of memory. This study of memory on the event of 1857 follows from Goyle's doctoral thesis awarded in 2015 by the Centre for Historical Studies of the Jawaharlal Nehru University and, is part of a forthcoming book on the memory and commemoration of 1857 in colonial and postcolonial India.

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