

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: A CRITICAL STUDY OF BASAVARAJ NAIKAR'S THE SUN BEHIND THE CLOUD



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ABSTRACT

This research paper titled – "Historical and Political Consciousness: A Critical Study of Basavaraj Naikar's The Sun Behind the Cloud" leads to the exploration of the idea of the historical and political consciousness dealt symbolically and metaphorically in the said novel. The novel – the Sun Behind the cloud by Basavaraj Naikar portrays the picture of the revolt of 1857 when Indian freedom – fighters across the country started raising their strong protest against the tyranny and oppression of the British rulers, the East-India Company, led by Lord Dalhousie. This movement gained momentum under the leadership of Rani Lakshmi Bai, (the queen of Jhansi) Tatya Tope, the last Mughal emperor - Bahadur Shah Zafar, Begum Hazrat Mahal. Lord Dalhousie, the British ruler projected the policy of misappropriation and divide and rule. Thus, this novel loosely deals with the genuine idea of the historical and political consciousness. This fire kept sparking up from Meerut city, when Mangal Pandey happened to be the first protester who raised his rebellion against the British administration. Bhaskararao Bhave, the chief protagonist of the novel, a very bold and adventurous hero, hailing from Naragund Kingdom, happens to bring about a historical and political revival of the unsung heroes of the past and the legacy of the mighty regional monarchs who very adventurously kept fighting against British imperialism in the South India. The historical and the political consciousness unveils the natives' resentment against unjust and oppressive legislation. Bhaskararao Bhave brought about rebellion against the Doctrine of Lapse (which disallowed Indian rulers from adopting legal successors) and the Disarmament Bill. This novel not only brings about allegations on the British colonialism but it also criticizes and satirizes the impotency and hollowness of mapping of India during the pre-independence period. The tragic failure of Bhaskararao Bhave's patriotic fight gets attributed to the British diplomatic policy of divide and rule and the destructive betrayal by his own people and officers.

The story of the novel keeps revolving around the interplay of destiny and martyrdom. The chief protagonist of the novel, Bhaskararao Bhave, coincidentally gets a narrow escape from the British imprisonment, when a loyal cook offers himself to the gallows and the hero is drifting away to Nepal in disguise to meet Tatya Tope.

Thus this novel fictionalizes the colonial conflict between Bhaskararao Bhave of Peshwa dynasty, the brave king of Naragund and the authorities of the tyrant rulers of East India Company during the revolt of 1857. Officials like Banya Bapu and Krishnaji Pant happen to commit treachery against him. His dream of independence gets shattered, making him "a mute witness to the triumph of the British Raj".

The title of the novel is very much metaphorical and symbolic. The Sun metaphorically stands for independence and self-identity and it is eclipsed by the dark clouds of the British Empire, operated by East India Company. The Sun was temporarily obscured by the dark clouds of the British sovereignty reflecting the cyclical and transformative nature of the historical progress.

Keywords: Metaphorically, tyranny, oppression, momentum, misappropriation, sparking up, rebellion, revival, unsung heroes, legacy, revolt, betrayal, regional monarchs, imperialism, resentment, oppressive legislation, successors, Disarmament, impotency, hollowness, attributed, destructive treachery, eclipsed, transformative etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research paper titled – "**Historical and Political Consciousness: A Critical Study of Basavaraj Naikar's The Sun Behind the Cloud**" tends to highlight the real face of the British period, the picture of a dependent India, ruled by the tyrant British officers like Lord Dalhousie and others. In India, there has been a very rich tradition of the distinguished historical novels as this one in the Indian English Literature. In the historical novels, the writers happen to collect some historical facts and then proceed to their imaginative reconstruction. A good historical novelist has to explore the particular period powerfully and it gives a verisimilitude. A historical novelist is aimed at introducing the human characters reflecting their life and manners of a bygone age. Such a work can prove to be much more realistic than history, because it does recreate the spirit of the time, not do it dryly and subjectively. A historical novel is not concerned with only facts or chronology, not mere spectacle or pageant, not merely the humor and satire of the ancients but while presenting physical, intellectual and spiritual environment and the spirit of the ancient people.

In the present scenario, English has become a very common language of expression to the writers of the various nations of the world. The British Empire expanded its empire across the world from the East to the West, from the South to the North, occupying almost maximum countries of the world making the largest majority of the people English - knowing and English speaking. Consequently, even in India, the writers are today using English as the medium of expression to communicate a wider audience and a larger number of readers. Among the modern Indian writers of the contemporary period who happen to employ English as the medium of their expression, Basavaraj Naikar happens to figure out in that list. Naikar does not look like a traditionalist confining his vision and attitude only to the exploits of a particular king, but rather he looked back nostalgically to the past and tried to present before his readers a live picture of the unprecedented battle of Independence by the Indians against the British, simultaneously exposing the past glory of a historical and political centre named Naragund in the Deccan. The author is having an emotional attachment with the period he is introducing about in the novel, as he himself has said in his preface that his grandfather Virabhadranayaka happened to be one of the leading army-officers and also a very trusted person and a very loyal friend of Bhaskararao Bhawe, king of Naragund, whose rise and fall, success and failure are beautifully narrated in this novel. This one came out to be his maiden historical novel in English, although there are a number of critical works and translations in his own native tongue, Kannada, as well as in English to his credit.

The Sun Behind the Cloud (2001) tends to expose the historical and political consciousness reflecting the picture of pre-independent India during the British Empire. It also introduces a native king's rebellion against the mighty British rulers during the time of 1857 revolt, being the first and the most decisive battle of independence by the Indians during the first half of the 19thC. This novel is a marvelous recreation of the age and the locale where the incidents occur. A historical novel gives an artist's view of a thing and not a photograph. This one is an imaginative recreation of events or characters giving out the secret aroma of the past.

As W.H. Hudson comments: - "The historical novelist is evidently compelled to rely upon indirect information for the specific characteristics of any period he undertakes to describe and

it is the sheer power of realistic imagination which will often enable a writer to see more clearly and depict more convincingly a scene he has only heard or read of than could an ordinary person who had himself witnessed such a scene or even taken part in it."¹

As a historical novelist, Naikar has very successfully done to provide us with the human side of the great events. He uses his creative imagination to present his own vision of the world. Walter Allen very rightly observes: -"Every novelist, then, gives us in his novels, his own personal idiosyncratic vision of the world."²

A wide knowledge of history and a romantic interest in the past are the essential eligibility of a historical novelist. Undoubtedly Mr. Naikar, in this novel, has gathered the relevant historical facts and the authentic information from the various sources about the significant events of Bhaskararao's time. This is evidenced by the various dates of occurrences mentioned in the different parts of the novel. Naikar has not divided his novel into various sections or chapters, giving subtitles, as done usually by the novelists.

The entire novel does have a harmonious organic unity having a very symmetrical beginning, middle and the end. It introduces the story of a rebel king of Naragund from his birth to the death during the time of the revolt of 1857, when India was under the sovereignty of the British rulers, East India Company. The various incidents concerned with his success and failure, rise and fall have been smoothly dealt with in the systematic chronological order. Naikar has most commonly employed the common method of narration, which is the epic method in which the author distances himself from the main story and keeps narrating it as an omniscient narrator. R. J. Rees has beautifully described this method in his own inimitable manner: "Plain narrative is, of course, the technique most commonly employed by the novelist. He takes the position of an omniscient observer, and describes not only the events of his story, but the thoughts and feelings of his characters, taking a sort of 'God's-eye view' of them".³

There are some beautiful dialogues employed in many places. There are also some relevant variations in the employment of these dialogues. This novel contains many characters. Naikar has very smoothly articulated only such characters that are relevant to the main action of the novel. A historical novelist generally follows the golden rule for rendering a subordinate position to the real historical persons and incidents and to allocate a prominent place to the imaginary characters and invented situations. In the historical novels, historical characters are allocated a minor part or a subordinate position. But Naikar's novel is somewhat different from the traditional historical novels. Here he has brought about the portrayal of the biography of a majestic freedom-fighter. Hence, he has concentrated all his attention on the chief protagonist — Bhaskararao Bhawe. He has very skillfully gathered all the necessary information related to it. Naikar very relevantly puts down in the preface to *The Sun Behind the Cloud*: - "I made a systematic study of the topic by reading the major recorded material in print and tried to reconstruct the history of the colonial encounter in a realistic manner without resorting to sentimentalism or glorification."⁴

¹ William Henry Hudson, *An Introduction to the Study of Literature* (1913; London; George G. Harrap, 1961) P.136

² Walter, Allen, *The English Novel : A Short Critical History* (1954; Middlesex, England : Penguin, 1962) P.17

³ R.J., Rees, *An Introduction to English Literature* (London : Macmillan, 1968) P.131

⁴ Basavaraj, Naikar, *The Sun Behind the Cloud* (New Delhi : Atlantic, 2001) P.08

In fact, there occurs a scope for the glorification of the principal character as the author himself has an emotional connection with him. For, his "great-grandfather Virabhadranayaka happened to be one of the army-officers of Naragund and a confidant of Babasaheb."⁵

Yet the novel does not deal with the glorification of the hero. With his imaginative eyes of the history, Naikar has presented before us a complete man in the physical form. By referring to the minor and insignificant incidents he has been able to point out the various "facets" of Bhaskararao. Thus we can have an idea of his valor and adventure when on the holy occasion of the Holi festival, he jumped, riding his horse, over the burning effigy of 'Lord Kama' that blocked his path; and also he dared to challenge the orders of the British Deputy Commissioner of Dharwad to surrender to the British Government with all his arms and his soldiers. His heroic valour is also further illustrated by his bold attempt to capture Manson and compel him to sign the order of adoption.

Naikar is very well aware of the human shortcomings of his protagonist. Bhaskararao is very much adventurous, fearless and patriotic, yet a bit sensuous and lusty by nature. Mr. Naikar delivers, at least, two illustrations of his hero's weakness for feminine captivation and enthrallment. He does mention Bhaskararao's lusty affair with a lady named Bhimasani and later, his lust for Annapurna, daughter-in-law of Gangadhar, a famous merchant and Bhaskararao's friend. Even Marlowe has done the same in humanizing his king Edward II.

Apart from projecting the graphic figure of the protagonist, Naikar has done much better to bring about the portrayal of the loyalists and the conspirators. Among the loyal characters portrayed in this novel are Bhimaraya, Visnu Kulkarni, Virabhadra Nayaka, Raghunatharaya and others etc. All these characters are the bright examples of trust, loyalty, obedience and heroism and they never deserted their king during adversaries. But on the other hand, there are some treacherous characters who committed betrayal against the king and they joined hands with the Britishers and brought about the destruction and downfall of the king. These faithless characters portrayed in the darkest colors are Krishnaji Pant, Bania Bapu, Chandra Lal Despande and others. Their meanness, selfishness, cupidity, opportunism, and betrayal are very clearly reflected in their behavior and activities. Naikar has shown his sound observation and a very smooth perception in his imaginative portrayal of these characters.

As a fine character-painter, Naikar has very beautifully brought about the portrayal of the British officers like Manson, Thomson, Malcolm, Oglivey in a psychological and smooth way. British officers, despite being outsiders, were duty-bound to carry out the orders and commands of their superior authorities. Consequently, they had a very sympathetic attachment to their natives who had been arrested for some serious criminal allegations of rebellion; they were bound to give these natives the brutal punishments including the capital punishments to satisfy the ego and eccentricity of their superior British officers. It was very much realistic and convincing response to their senior officers.

This novel does consist of some female characters but a very little attention has been paid to the development of these characters. Yamunabai and Savitri do stand as pathetic figures leading a very miserable life. Coincidentally when Bhaskarrao recently escaped from the palace for his self-security, the two women got terrified and for the security of their dignity and self-respect, they unfortunately committed suicide by drowning into the river Malaprabha.

Kashibai happens to come in the end of the novel when she is handing over her beautiful young niece to Bhaskarrao in wedding. He is an old man of 62 and she is too young of 22 surprisingly. The remaining female characters portrayed in the novel have very minor roles.

⁵ Ibid, VIII

The title of the novel— The Sun behind the Cloud is very much complex, symbolical and ambiguous. The Sun stands as a symbol to both Bhaskarrao , a great patriot and vast empire of the East India Company. It is very well-said by the author himself in the preface of this novel. "Bhaskarrao means 'the Sun' who shines brightly and then is hidden behind the clouds as it were. Similarly, the East India Company or the British Government which believed that the Sun never sets in the British Empire was behind a cloud as it were until it annexed the Kingdom of Naragund and began to shine brightly"⁶

Considering the spirit of the novel, the second interpretation of comparing the British Government to the sun seems to be rather irrelevant. This is beyond doubt to say that the writer does not have any such intention to bring about the glorification of British government. He has done his best to show how an Indian king very adventurously stood up against the mighty Britishers for gaining the independence of his own people. The word 'Bhaskar' stands for 'the sun' and this sun of Naragund went under the cloud of ignominy of defeat and lost all his brightness of Kingly splendor and power and ended his life incognito, unwept and unsung, just as the sun eclipsed by a dark cloud may pass, unobserved by the people, to the western direction and set. In this relevance, the title of the novel is very much significant, symbolical, metaphorical, harmonious and well-justified. There are many native words used in the novel and it makes the better comprehension of the text by a foreigner. Thus all these characters as mentioned earlier have a very good mutual relationship.

E.M. Forster, very rightly comments —"The final test of a novel will be our affection for it, as it is the test of our friends, and of anything else which we cannot define." And we feel affection for Naikar's novel for the qualities already mentioned. The patriotic Bhaskarrao's betrayal by some cowardly, selfish and unscrupulous impostors has been dealt with, with extraordinarily skill ".⁷

Thus, it can be very briefly summed-up to say that this novel introduces the theme of the historical and political consciousness memorializing and reclaiming the forgotten and unsung story of a great freedom fighter of Karnataka - Bhaskarrao Bhave who raised his rebellion against the ruling administration of the British Government during the time of 1857 revolt. This novel typically focuses on colonial resistance, cultural memory and the post-colonial historiography reminding us the real story of 1857 Indian War of Independence, through the representation of Bhaskarrao Bhave, the ruler of Naragund, Karnataka, and the chief protagonist of the novel.

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⁶ Ibid, VIII

⁷ E.M., Forster, Aspects of the Novel (1927; Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1968) P.30