

## Theme of Partition of India in Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*

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Manohar Malgonkar, unlike the others, often dealt with historical themes. He has written novels, thrillers, biographies, travelogues, books on history, a period play, and a large number of short stories. He has been accused of concentrating his attention "more on the exotic and melodramatic than on the worthwhile aspects of Indian life" (Verghese 121). The aspects of Indian life he portrays in his major novels are Indo-British encounter especially in the army, the disintegration of princely India, the Freedom Movement, the Terrorist Movement, and the Sepoy Revolt-and life in the Assam Tea Gardens. Though these are the themes in his novels, they are so only superficially. What he is chiefly concerned with is the portrayal of man's predicament in a world where values are changing too fast for his comprehension and adjustment, as N.S. Pradhan perceptively observed: "What he exposes is the crisis in Indian life brought on by the winds of change in the traditional Indian society. What he argues for is a sincere adherence to our traditional values like honesty, integrity, and a sense of justice" (136). Malgonkar was a contemporary of writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, Khushwant Singh and Kamala Markandya. He was a prolific writer whose prose and grip of the English language was as good as any of his contemporaries. There is no doubt that he was one of the last of a generation that has living memories of events that changed our nation's history and society in the most profound way.

Malgonkar creates a vivid picture of that time and he brings out the stark reality with freedom. The partition of India proved horrible. Violence ruled the roost and three hundred thousand people were slaughtered as well as a hundred thousand women were raped and abducted. Some were even mutilated. Twelve million people became homeless. Malgonkar creates an excellent background of this scenario in his novel. The theme of the novel is as to how this violence affected the lives of ordinary people- men and women at that time. Malgonkar creates three central characters which are brilliantly depicted. There is Gian a follower of Gandhi, Devi Dayal and his sister Sundari. Sundari is depicted as a ruthless woman who holds nothing sacred.

There was a controversy among the Indians whether they should follow the path of non-violence preached by Gandhi or to resort to violence and terrorism. Manohar Malgonkar who was a Colonel in the army naturally affirms the validity of military action as opposed to non-violent Gandhian persuasion. G.S. Amur is right when he says that "It concedes the reality of violence but shows it to be self-consuming and destructive" (104). It is this martial vision that finds expression in the major character of the novel, Debidayal. He does not approve of the peaceful agitation of Gandhian concept as he deems it to be useless and unfruitful. He wants to express his anti-colonial philosophy through indulgence in violent activities. That is the reason why he encourages the burning of British garments. He joins other

leaders of non-Gandhian principles like Shafi Usman and tries to consolidate their views and activities in order to overthrow the British and help India achieve political independence.

If the personal rivalry acts as the cause of rift between Debidayal and Gian Talwar and weakens the anti-colonial struggle, the communal rivalry between Muslims and Hindus act as a greater cause of rift in the same. It is part of common knowledge that the British Government, when forced by inevitable circumstances to give freedom to India, wanted to divide the Hindus and the Muslims from each other. Inspired by the British encouragement, the Muslims of India wanted to be free from the Hindu control after the departure of the British from the subcontinent. The Muslim separatism is, of course, clearly represented by Shafi Usman, who was once upon a time a member of the Hanuman Physical Culture Club and a co-fighter with Debidayal against the alien government, comes under the influence of Hafiz Khan and begins to drift away from the Hindus. Hafiz Khan brainwashes him as follows:

I am not a Leaguer only because the league does not believe in our methods. But there is no denying that Jinnah is a great man. He has pointed out the way. We must turn our back on the Hindus; otherwise we shall become their slaves! (89)

From then on Shafi Usman begins to develop a separatist philosophy and looks at Hindu leaders like Debidayal and others with suspicion and hatred. For some time when the situation is not favourable to him, he spends his days in an Out of Bounds' house in an *in cognito* condition. In that brothel managed by Akkaji, Shafi Usman has taken a fancy to pretty Muslim girl, namely, Mumtaz and spends his nights with her.

The Muslim separatism has obviously exasperated Debidayal beyond measure. His friend Basu inculcates in him the need for unity among Hindus and alignment with the philosophy of the Hindu Mahasabha. Debidayal is convinced about the inevitability of fighting with the new enemy arisen from within India itself. He wants to take revenge upon Shafi Usman by snatching away his pet girl Mumtaz from him. He, therefore, manages to buy her for Rs. 10,000 most unexpectedly and much to Shafi Usman's chagrin. Shafi is so much angered by Debidayal's action, that he throws acid at Mumtaz's face to disfigure her permanently, but it falls upon Debidayal's hand. Later on, when Tekchand is about to leave with his family for Delhi, Shafi Usman takes his gang with him to attack them. In the ensuing fight, he shoots Mrs. Tekchand and escapes from there. Thus, Shafi Usman finds a satisfaction in fighting for the Muslim cause.

But Debidayal finds himself in a dilemma. He buys the Muslim girl Mumtaz more out of revenge for Usman than out of real sexual attraction for her. But when he learns from her that she has nowhere to go, his basic sense of morality prevents him from leaving her in the lurch. Caught in the coils of *samsar*, decides to marry her. As India achieves independence, the separate state of Pakistan is also created simultaneously. Consequently, the refugees are exchanged between India and Pakistan. Debidayal has attached himself to a Muslim girl in spite of his hatred for Muslims on political grounds. He leaves for Pakistan in the guise of a Muslim (With a pseudo name Karim) with Mumtaz, but at last unfortunately his Hinduness being discovered, he is mercilessly, killed by the mad mob of Muslims in the newly created Pakistan.

The important aspect of *A Bend in the Ganges* is the partition of the two souls—Hindu-Muslim or India- Pakistan was initiated and completed .The novelist dwells upon the after effect of the partition in details. He projects with pitiless precision a picture of the bestial horrors enacted on the Indo – Pakistan border region during the terror hunted days of August. 1947. The partition and the freedom brought miseries and misfortune to millions of people on both the sides of the border. The novelist has very powerfully shown the plight of the

displaced when he describes the people being carried away to Pakistan in the train. They were the Muslims; the counterparts of the displaced persons on the other sides were the Hindus and the Sikhs. Both sides were making for a border that was yet to be officially demarcated. Those people were, at that moment stateless citizens. They were hounded out from the land of their birth as much by collective fear of racial massacres.

Malgonkar has shown how India had to sacrifice a huge lot for earning its freedom from the British Government and how it had to suffer the pains of partition into two countries. The problem of communal hatred between Hindus and Muslims and of exchanging the refugees between the two countries has been portrayed by the author in a very authentic fashion. The birth of two nations as a consequence of the departure of the colonial power as portrayed in the novel is indeed of great historical importance. The individual characters like Debidayal, Shafi Usman and Gian Talwar become important in so far as they play their individual roles in the epic drama of anti-colonial struggle. The novel shows how India achieved what she wanted, but she had to make a great sacrifice for the achievement of a grand success over the enemies. It can be said to be an epic story of Indian freedom struggle containing the tragic loss of Pakistan from it.

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