
SEEKING THE SELF : A STUDY IN MANOHAR MALGONKAR'S A BEND IN THE GANGES

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Abstract :

*Manohar Malgonkar was one of the most eminent post-Independence writers of fiction in English. He also became a remarkable story-teller and a keen observer of social and political realities. He interested in the portrayal of characters and a view of the Beach in his **A Bend in the Ganges**. He offered manners and moods of men in an astonishing variety. His characters are dynamic as they try to change with the development of the story. To him, the problem of search for identity is very much related to the problem of existence.*

Keywords : The influence of violence and non-violence, Historical background, Gandhian pacifist, Mutilation, Freedom, Partition, Anxiety, Hatred, Revenge and Communal discord.

Introduction :

A Bend in the Ganges is considered to be Malgonkar's maturest work dealing with a vital aspect of the period of 1946-1947 that involves, the relevance of violence and non-violence. It offers the theme of partition holding up the mirror to the explosive problem of making and of nation. Here the novelist has presented the masculine world visualizing power that he tries to communicate his vision of experience.

Monohar Malgonkar has accounted for how the hidden capacity of man for violence is brought out in his novel, **A Bend in the Ganges** (1964). It is true that non-violence is an ideal but violence is a reality with its roots in human psyche. The novel may be compared with other novels regarding the horrors and bestiality of partition. Hence, K.R.S. Iyengar remarks :

Novels on 'Partition' horrors and bestiality are legion, but it is not often they transcend sentimentalism and achieve the discipline of art.

(K.R.S.Iyengar, 433)

The novel highlights how the movement- a symbol of nation solidarity-designed to brust the British from the Indian soil and how the emphasis from the struggle between Indian nationalism and British colonialism shifted to the furious and malicious communal hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims. It also deals with the horrible developments resulting in the partition and the tragedy of the hours of freedom clearly.

A Bend in the Ganges has three main characters- Gian Talwar, Debi-Dayal and Shafi

Usman. These characters offer a perfect study in contrast symbolizing two different ideologies- violence and non-violence. They offer their ways into Indo-Anglian novels of the Gandhian era inspiring the novelist after independence. It also centres round the revolt against the British rule in India. In this way, the Gandhian philosophy is very contrasted with the methods of those who like the philosophy of violence. Non-violence is very ideal but violence is destructive in different ways. As J. Krishna Moorty observed :

...Cultured violence, Self
Protective violence, the violence
of aggressive, the violence of
competition, the violence of
trying to be becoming somebody,
trying to suppress and
build oneself... in order to
be non-violent.

(Moorty, 74)

The novelist has revealed that Gian remains in a discipline of Gandhi. He doesn't involve in the national freedom movement. He hates the British but Hafiz and Shafi voice for having a separate land for the Muslims. The Muslims are determined to have a separate homeland, a pure Pakistan. A seizable reaction of Muslims prefers staying in India for they are assured of constitutional provision to their safety, freedom and religion. In Debi-dayal, the national awareness is supreme. He emerges as the defiant hero of the event when he is arrested and sent to the Andamanas. Gian and Debi-dayal appear in constant anti thesis. In one hand gian begins as a gandhian pacifist burning his foreign clothes but on the other Debi-dayal involves in the discussion of his friends.

Gian's experience with violence, his brother's murder changed him completely. He tried to decide to bring Vishnu-dutt to book in the court of law. He realized that Vishnu-dutt could be punished for his fault because justice favours the stronger. This incident forced him to take revenge. In this way, his principle of non-violence gave a way to revenge and he killed Vishnu-dutt with the same axe with which the latter had murdered Hari-very much in the primitive spirit of revenge. As Gian tells.

I have just killed Vishnu-dutt...
Killed him with the same axe
with which he murdered my
brother... you see, it was
important that he should
be killed with the same axe.

(Malgonkar,6)

Thematic Analysis :

Modern era is dominated by thoughts and vision regarding each and every aspects of the society. The riot between the two closely related families – The Big House and the Little

House offers the theme of the novel. Shafi-Usman alias Singh became the leader of the group of the freedom fighters. The Hindus show non-violence and tolerance but the Muslims demand separation. The discussion between Hafiz and Shafi voiced for having a safe land, Pakistan. In this way, the Partition of the country looked imminent. The violence was let loose among the Muslims and the Hindus. Both the communities were determined and defiant, so the cities and towns were riot –torn and the game of divide and rule was in full swing and was to attend its logical culmination.

Malgonkar illustrates the unfortunate consequences of imperialism in India. Through the character of Shafi, the novelist exemplifies how religion fanaticism poisons the very roots of idealism. His hatred for the Britishers has its roots in the atrocities committed by Dyer at Jallianwalabagh. Communal hatred, suspicion and fear to be ruled by the majority were everywhere. It brought untold misery to the millions of people and they had to live in horror. Hence, violence had different forms. The whole novel centres round the theme of violence. In the novel, the horrible consequences of the partition have been frankly described.

Aspects of Disillusionment :

The following are major aspects of disillusionment in **A Bend in the Ganges** :

- (a) The novel deals with the issues of the Beach. Millions of people became homeless, lost their belongings, fell victims to violence and insult.
- (b) The outbreak of violence at the time of partition is such that even sober, shrewd, honest and rich people like Tekchand are unable to gauge its evil effects. They had never expected that such happenings could be possible in the middle of the 20th century.
- (c) Basu had to suffer a lot due to the prevailing situation despised the philosophy of non-violence. To him, ‘an eye for an eye’ and ‘a tooth for a tooth’ was the only answer to that situation.
- (d) The novel has socio-political lives. It deals with the Chekovian theme of disintegration and disillusionment commanding a universal relevance.
- (e) The novel starts with the civil disobedience movement of early 1930 s and ends with the partition riot with Punjab. In this novel, the partition brought misery for the Hindus and the Muslims.
- (f) People like Tekchand are the prisoners of the past and so they cannot march a head into future like Gian and Sundari leaving their past.
- (g) The novel presents elites as well as non-elites. Its wonderful world of criminals is Andaman Islands. Sundari becomes successful.

Critical Study :

In the novel, **A Bend in the Ganges**, Gian falsely tricks Debi-dayal into illegal hording of money in jail. It tries to raise questions on the moral activity of the prisoner’s administration. Mumtaz knows her role as a wife for the solidarity of the family and her deep love for Debi-dayal makes him dependent on her. It is through her that he learns the value of love and passion. Malgonker has utilized the novel to prove his thesis how violence forms a strong strain in the fabric of human character. His attitude towards to Gandhi and his policies is similar to that of

the Post independence period where one finds a pluralistic approach. As G.S. Amur rightly observes :

In spite of wide canvas on which he has chosen to work, the effect he creates is one of intensity and not of diffusion. This is as true of the rural tragedy he presents in the early chapters of the novel as of the cataclysmic of the partition which forms the substance of the closing ones.

(Amur, 118)

Conclusion :

However, **A Bend in the Ganges** is not as great as Tolstoy's **War and Peace** but it has the general impression which is similar to that which moves **War and Peace** : The portrayal of the large tides of human life when something occurs to rouse them to insane fury. Like Narayan , Malgonkar favours the circular pattern in narration. Speed, movement and action are the primary traits of his narrative art. He is quiet and adept in the use of the flash back technique and it is used effectively in **A Bend in the Ganges** and also in **Combat of Shadows**.

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