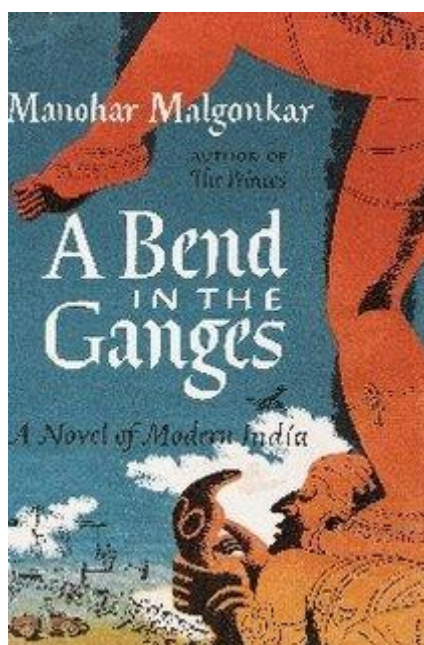


**The Ideologies of Indian History:
The Facets of Love in the Anatomy of Violence –
Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges***

Dr. K. Vijila, M.A., M.Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D.



Abstract

The primary aim of this article is to capitalize the ideologies of Indian history. Literature is nothing but written works, especially those works which could be considered as of superior or lasting artistic merit. Derived from the Latin word *litteratura*, literature means writing formed with letters; it most commonly refers to works of the creative imagination, including poetry, drama, fiction, non-fiction, journalism and in some instances, song. Simply put, literature represents the culture and tradition of a language or a people.

The Indian English Literature began to walk and soon it started to run on its path to success because of many Indian writers who were acknowledged by society for their development in the field of Literature. The Indo-Anglian fiction is concerned with social and domestic problems

A Bend in the Ganges depicts one of the most violent periods in recent Indian history, the revolt against the British rule. During India's struggle for independence, the two forces of Gandhi and Subash Chandra Bose were working for the same goal. They were pulled in contrary directions, with the result that the ideals of their different ideologies came into conflict. The novel is a study of the anatomy of violence that crept into our national life. As Dr. Chhote Lal Khatri comments, "Both *A Train to Pakistan* and Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* are successful experiments in artistically fusing the personal and historical perspectives in historical guise". (BG 39)

The Partition of India, and the riots before and after it, figure prominently in this novel *A Bend in the Ganges*. He portrayed the growth of communalism, and the reader is given to understand that the assailants at first were the Muslims. The Second World War and its effects on the Indians are referred to in all the novels. Most of the battles in his fictional world are fought at this time.

Keywords: Indian history, Communalism, Partition of India, Violence, Communal Riots, *A Bend in the Ganges*

Malgonkar and His Works



Manohar Malgonkar (1913-2010)

Courtesy: http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/215392.Manohar_Malgonkar

Manohar Malgonkar, one of the leading Indian novelists in English, was born on July 12, 1913 in a royal family that had its roots in Goa. He was a prolific writer. He grew up in a

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princely family and he was part of an elite culture. He had his graduation in Bombay University where he studied English and Sanskrit. Before becoming a professional writer in his forties, he worked as a big-game hunting guide, an army officer, an executive at a tea plantation, and in politics. Primarily hailed as a Maratha historian, he turned to fiction writing with a purpose of pure entertainment. Yet his roots are in history and his fictional world traces the tensions of Indian political history.

During the Second World War, he joined the Indian Army and enjoyed the position of Lieutenant-Colonel for quite some time. In 1952 he had his own business and started operating manganese mines. On being presented with a typewriter by his wife on his birthday, he took the clue and launched upon the career of a creative writer; till then his hobbies had been music, painting and hunting. This opened up a new window for his creative genius, and he has justified the hopes of his wife.

His novel *The Princes* was the literary choice of the U.S.A; and *A Bend in the Ganges* was found to be one of the three best novels of 1964 by E.M. Forster, and was compared with *War and Peace* by Richard Church in his review of the novel in *The Bookman*.

A Bend in the Ganges

The publication of *A Bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgonkar is a major event in the history of the Indo-Anglian literature. Even his first novel *Distant Drum* was lauded by Iyengar as a novel of unusual distinction. Within the span of four years he has produced four novels, the other two being *Combat of Shadows* and *The Princes*, and each successive novel has claimed better critical attention than the earlier ones. Already known for his books on the Maratha period of Indian history when he started his career as a fiction writer, he did not have to formulate his views about the cultural heritage of India and its present politics; his views were definite and had the authenticity of a true participant. His boyhood was spent in the jungles of Canada, and the formative years at the Bombay University, from where he graduated, before taking up the profession of game hunting, which he gave up after two years and became a fierce wild-life conservationist in government service.

Indian History and *A Bend in the Ganges*

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A Bend in the Ganges depicts one of the most violent periods in the recent Indian history, the revolt against the British rule. During India's struggle for independence, the two forces of Gandhi and Subash Chandra Bose were working for the same goal. They were pulled in contrary directions, with the result that the ideals of their different ideologies came into conflict. The novel is a study of the anatomy of violence that crept into our national life. As Dr. Chhote Lal Khatri comments, "Both *A Train to Pakistan* and Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* are successful experiments in artistically fusing the personal and historical perspectives in historical guise". (BG 39)

The Partition of India, and the riots before and after it, figures prominently in this novel *A Bend in the Ganges*. He portrayed the growth of communalism, and the reader is given to understand that the assailants at first were the Muslims and the Hindus joined in with equal fierce anger and hatred. The Second World War and its effects on the Indians are referred to in all the novels. Most of the battles in his fictional world are fought at this time.

Quest for Fulfilment

A Bend in the Ganges has the theme of the individual's quest for fulfilment in moral identity. The interest of the novel centres around vigorous characterization, but not in the dramatic effect created by the author. Malgonkar's characters have the force of life, and it is unjust to discount them as sketchy and confused. His characters represent the complexity of life, and compel the reader's attention with their intense quest for identity as self-discovery. Both Gian and Debidayal's destinies are shaped by two factors, the forces of history and the elements of their personalities. The novelist was interested in events and episodes for their news, value and sensation rather than for their effect on men and women. His sympathies were always with militant nationalism. In *A Bend in the Ganges*, Malgonkar by his artistic skill manages to hold the disparate material together. Apart from the fact that the action was too spread out and time span was rather long, there was also the problem of accommodating two protagonists, Gian and Debi, in the plot. The plot has a basic unity which is singularly held together, firstly by a series of sharp contrasts and correspondences between the two protagonists and secondly, through a carefully chalked out ever-recurring pattern of betrayal and revenge in the story.

Physical Conflicts and Combats

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A Bend in the Ganges incorporated and assimilated a number of historical individuals and incidents within its texture. Gandhi appeared not only vicariously through his speeches, as in the brief quote prefixed to the novel, but also in flesh and blood. It did not remain a mere chronicle. Going beyond a chronicling of the times along the lines suggested above, Malgonkar probes the political predicament of the masses and discovered the vulnerabilities in the psychological make-up of an average Indian which rendered him passive. The novel reflects Malgonkar's consciousness of the colonial and the communal experience by highlighting it in all human details by way of a chronicle. *A Bend in the Ganges* chronicles the fatal decade of contemporary history, a decade of hope and misery, of terror and slaughter, of thousands of Indians and Pakistanis.

Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* concentrates on the painful drama of the partition comprehensively. The novel depicts powerfully the horrible developments resulting in the partition, the triumph and tragedy of the hour of freedom. The bloody communal vivisection, which swept the country during the early days of our independence, is excellently presented in *A Bend in the Ganges*. The novel highlights the consequences of the partition, the division of the army, the fighting between friends and the fellows joining the opposite camps.

Malgonkar in his novel *A Bend in the Ganges* gives a clear picture of the rural life of India and the life of aristocracy living in villages. In a novel like *A Bend in the Ganges* focusing on the freedom struggle of India, Manohar Malgonkar's attempt to intersperse it with love and sex scenes seems to create a façade of sensationalism; and it seems to suggest that by means of this technique he was adding spice to his dry stuff. The powerful characterization, subtle nuances in style, the evocative descriptions and recreations of the milieu and the moment, mark this out to be a classic of modern Indo-Anglian fiction, representing a lost generation.

Violence and Non-violence on the Nation

Malgonkar explores the influence of violence and non-violence on the nation and the individuals in this novel and showed how the hidden capacity of man for violence is brought out by the destructive act of others. Non-violence is an ideal; violence is a reality with its roots in the human psyche. Violence might be of different forms. Murty observes:

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Cultured violence, self-protective violence, the violence of aggression, the violence of competition, the violence of trying to be somebody, the violence of trying a discipline according to a pattern, trying to suppress and bully oneself, brutal to oneself, in order to be non-violent. (Murty, 74)

The novel depicts powerfully the horrible development of a situation resulting in the partition, the triumph and tragedy of the hour of freedom, the screams of victims renting the morning air, the dawn of freedom getting the sub-continent drowning in pools of blood, the barbarous cruelties heaped on men and women, catcalls of the crowd and innumerable women being carried away naked, struggling and screaming at the top of their voices, the Muslims feared of being ruled by the Hindus in the absence of the British rule in the country where they had once been the rulers, their notion that the Hindus were more dangerous than the foreigners and ought to be their real target and their subsequent striking at them, (and the Hindus striking back with the same violence, fear and hatred) their struggle for a safe homeland, separate from India leading to the partition and the terror and pity of it, all these form the content of the novel.

A Bend in the Ganges was not only a novel of violence, struggle and patriotism but it also showed the harmony of love. The society was not only built with individuals and their struggle for a nation but it was strongly built with family. Love was filled everywhere in the world and so the world moved smoothly every day. If there was no love and familial relationship, the world would see its most dangerous side. As a coin has both sides, every living thing has both faces. One was Violence and another was Love. Both are essential to lead a successful life.

Past and the Present - Postmodern Approach

In characterizing a society, whether ancient or modern, there are two elements, rather closely interconnected, which are of prime importance: one is the economic system and the other the family system. Family is among the most important aspects of human society. It played a central part in the social organization of people throughout the world. Nevertheless, the organization of the family and that of the unit varied from society to society and through time.

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In a patriarchal society, the father, who generally was capable of maintaining and protecting its members in comfort, was the anchor of the family. Moreover, children were the key to a happy family life for most of the people. They were also integral to the definition of family life, and it was said that the raising of children was the primary function of the family.

Child birth, of course is a biological fact, but it is equally a social phenomenon. It requires readjustment of the roles performed by the people, including the relationship of the husband and wife to each other and to the child, since they would be the parents of the new born child. The children were brought up to become productive members of their society. To achieve this, they must acquire education within the family and later, within the institutions of the society as a whole.

The Facets of Love in the Anatomy of Violence

Since love plays a vital role in some shape or other in everyone's life and is the core and center of human relationships, it is quite natural for poets, dramatists and novelists to concern themselves with the same emotion. Literature is primarily concerned with love and it has been the theme for many writers. Love, being the forerunner of birth, it cannot possibly be excluded from any novels or any work of art which attempt to depict life. The novelist who does not study the peculiarly intricate relation between the mental and the physical aspect of love would never succeed in creating living characters and his work would be unconvincing, the very worst fault any literary craftsman's work could display. Despite its constant or recurrent use in literature, neither the writers nor the readers are tired of love, for every time it was used, it was endowed with a newness and freshness. Different writers had explored various aspects or the various facets of love. Probably no two literary works present identical conceptions of love. Beardsley C. Monroe observes:

“Bacon's prudential observations on marriage versus the single life and Byron's cynical comments about the alleged amorousness of woman-kind are attempts to find dependable generalizations about the relationship between the sexes”. (Beardsley C. Monroe, et.al, 47)

Of all human relationships, those involving love and sex have exercised the most compelling fascination for writers. These love stories, which human beings had always

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wanted to hear and would always want to hear again and again, differ enormously in quality. Throughout his career as a dramatist, Shakespeare was interested in the problem of love. He was never tired of depicting its various facets. He showed in *All's Well That Ends Well*, how love, despised by manly haughtiness, overcomes this by fidelity and devotion. The theme of *Antony and Cleopatra* is the fatal love which binds together the Roman triumvir and the Egyptian queen. While some find their love as a mad and a bad passion, others regard the same as depicting the search through love for the absolute and the infinite. It was a theme which Shakespeare had made admirable and heroic in *Romeo and Juliet*; the love of these star-crossed lovers is a transcendental constant, which raised them above the fear of death. Their love conquers everything, first the oppositions of the two great two families and finally death itself. They overcame all obstacles and difficulties and finally were united in death. Even in his final dramas like *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare gave us interesting studies in love.

Manohar Malgonkar, though seen as a political novelist and his novel *A Bend in the Ganges*, is often seen as partition, it also shows the love. Batra observes: “portray how mass passions were aroused during those fateful days that preceded and followed the sunrise of our freedom”. (Batra, 83)

Indeed a sensitive novelist like Malgonkar cannot remain unresponsive to the contemporary events. Being a close and honest observer of the freedom struggle, Gandhian policies and their effect on people, being a downright, straightforward critic of men and matters, he could not choose to deal with the problem of non-violence and violence. Indeed, *A Bend in the Ganges* raises many questions about Gandhi's non-violence and truth, and at the same time one cannot be blind to the fact that the novel finally affirms and celebrates the victory of love over self-destroying violence.

In *A Bend in the Ganges* Malgonkar introduces a domestic tale of two characters against the background of the tense years of the freedom struggle. Malgonkar's novel was exact about events in relation to time and close to the facts. While graphically depicting the horror and futility of the partition riots, Malgonkar gains in depth by probing the validity of ideologies of violence and non-violence and their relevance to life. Both Gian Talwar and Debi-Dayal espouse non-violence and violence as definite ways of life, and yet finally in

their confrontation with the inevitable reality of life they realize the futility of the abstract formulations. Both seek and finally find fulfilment in the humanizing power of love.

Genuine Love

Besides these two characters, the novel also contains two long-drawn love relationships which placed in juxtaposition to each other pronouncing certain necessities for successful marital relationships. They were the successful, happy married life of Tekchand and Radha, whose marriage was rooted in genuine love and sex, and the unsuccessful marriage of Sundari and Gopal, the cause of which was the lack of genuine sex and love in marriage. Hence it is obvious from these two relationships, Malgonkar seems to imply that a successful marriage is rooted in genuine love and in turn, is rooted in genuine sex.

The publication of the novel *A Bend in the Ganges* was a major event in the history of Indian English fiction. It was the fourth novel of Manohar Malgonkar and once again took us back to the turbulent period of independent India. It became popular and successful immediately. The novel was written on a grand scale and depicts the Gandhian Era in all its manifestations.

Society consists of all types of people. There are people who believe in peace, non-violence, love and mutual help. At the same time, there are also people who are quarrelsome, violent and selfish. Hence it is very difficult to root out violence from the society. It was there in the ancient times and it is very much alive in the present society also. The innumerable wars that had been waged the descriptions of which are found in the Iliad, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are a testimony to show how man is so easily prone to violence.

The Drama of Partition

The novel concentrates upon the painful drama of partition comprehensively and suggestively. It shows us how the terrorist movement was a symbol of national solidarity which was designed to oust the British from the Indian soil, degenerated into communal hatred and violence, and how the emphasis from the struggle between Indian nationalism and British colonialism shifted unfortunately to the furious and malicious communal hatred between the Hindus and Muslims, throwing into shade, the basic Indian fight for freedom

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from the British rule. The double conflict led to freedom and division of the country, but before it happened, a hell was let loose in many provinces of the nation.

Malgonkar owed the title of his novel from *The Ramayan*. Though the novel narrates the large scale violence during India's partition in 1947, the title very aptly signifies a very important turning point of the history of the nation. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his book, *Indian Writing in English*, refers to the line, given in the Ramayan, in connection with the title of Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*: "At a bend in the Ganges they paused to take a look at the land they were leaving". (431)

Though this novel may raise questions about Gandhi's non-violence and truth, one cannot be blind to the fact that it finally affirms and celebrates the victory of love over self-destroying violence. Nevertheless, what is emphasized in the novel is clear from what Malgonkar had himself said in the Author's note,

"Only the violence in this story happens to be true, it came in the wake of freedom, to become a part of India's history. What was achieved through non-violence brought with it one of the bloodiest upheavals of history". (Author's Note, *A Bend in the Ganges* 6)

Malgonkar explored the influence of violence and non-violence on the nation and the individuals in this novel and shows how the hidden capacity of man for violence is brought out by destructive act on others. Non-violence is ideal, violence is reality with its roots in the human psyche.

Malgonkar exposed the ubiquitous nature of violence and its roots in his novel, by analysing the life and growth of three individuals going through the gruelling mill of gruesome events.

Malgonkar attempts to pinpoint in the novel, the inadmissibility of any ideology being valid for many unpredictable and inexplicable situations of life. Ideologies divorced from the reality of life become sterile and antihuman. Life in the rich variety refuses to be moulded into a neat framework of a given ideology.

The novel opens with the ceremonial burning of British garments. The cries of ‘Boycott British goods’, ‘Bharat Mata Ki Jai,’ gave expression to the fire of freedom that was burning in the heart of Indian masses. The ceremonial fire that raged in the market square was, “Just one of hundreds of thousands of fires similar all over the country”. (BG 7)

Gandhi himself appeared on the dais. He did not speak, it being Monday - his day of silence. Gian, a young student from the college, felt overwhelmed at the sight of the apostle on truth and non-violence. He was swayed away by the conviction that non-violence is not for the weak and the path of Ahimsa is not for cowards. He threw away his blazer - his most elegant garment made of imported English material, into the fire showing the zeal of a nationalist.

Gian, a student from Konshet with limited means, surprisingly received an invitation for a picnic on the old river-bed at Birchibagh from one of the important boys at the college, Debi-Dayal, the only son of Diwan- Bahadur Tekchand, an elite of the town. He reached Kerwad’s house at the appointed hour, and was fascinated by Debi’s sister Sundari. Sundari took Gian to the museum – a pride collection of the bronzes. For a moment Gian became the Statue, lifeless, ageless, and unbreathing. As the spell broke, Gian found Sundari holding him by both the shoulders and her eyes staring with alarm. His announcement of becoming a follower of Gandhi was subjected to sharp criticism. Strangely, he was in the company of the terrorists headed by Singhviz, Shafi Usman in disguise. The revolutionaries criticized Gian for being a follower of Gandhi, but Gian took pride in coming under the influence of that hypnotic power because he fervently believed that Gandhi could lead India to victory. Singh’s agitated invitation to name any country that had shaken off foreign rules without resorting to war perturbed Gian, but he declared in sudden defiance that Gandhi was a God. Singh cited some examples of America, Turkey and of Shivaji and affirmed that freedom had to be won; it had to be won by sacrifice, by giving blood, not by giving up the good things of life and wearing white caps and going to jail:

“Look at America - the United States! They went to war. Turkey, even our own Shivaji. Non-violence is the philosophy of sheep, a creed for cowards. It is the greatest danger to our country”. (BG 18)

Non-violence is the Philosophy of Sheep

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The procession threw enough light on the two distinct ways in India's fight for freedom, the one on non-violence and the other on revolution, dreaded by Gandhi and his followers. As the events clearly showed, it needed superhuman discipline to follow the path of non-violence even in the face of the strongest provocation, very soon it took to violence showing the hollowness of his defiant statements. Shafi Usman in the disguise of a Sikh, talked of fight against the British, but very soon this flight changed its target. His own Hindu associates and the Hindus in general became the objects of his attack. The fervent advocate for shaking off foreign rule through violence ways degenerated into a narrow-minded communalist, siding a particular community against the other, and eager to have a bloody bath.

The Battle between the two Families

The bloody battle between the two closely related families, the big house and the little house has an important bearing on the theme of the novel. Vishnu Dutt was killed by the same Gian, who a little earlier, had taken pride in proclaiming himself a true disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. The two houses in the small village were in an unwarranted struggle. All this was a prelude to the main acts of horror that would later follow the partition.

The terrorist movement was very active in Duriabad. It was an integrated group of young men hailing from different communities and provinces, and all were united in the sacred cause of fight against the British rule. The members of the club were nationalists and followed terrorists. Shafi Usman alias Singh with his battle cry '*a million shall die*', was the leader of the club. His close associate was an outstanding figure, Debi-Dayal. All young men despised the foreigners. As Manohar Malgonkar states,

“Debi hated the British; that was what brought them together, Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs, men of different religions united in the cause of freedom as blood brothers; the freedom fighters”. (BG 68)

The “Ram and Rahim Club” stressed the need and the survival of national solidarity to oust the British from the Indian soil in the face of the hot wave of religious fanaticism that swept the country. To quote Malgonkar,

“They were all fervent patriots, dedicated to the overthrow of British rule in India. Anyone who represented that rule, British or Indian, was their enemy; anything that represented their rule was their legitimate target. “Jai-Ram’ answered by ‘Jai-Rahim’ was their secret mode of greeting. The name of Rama sacred to all Hindus, and that of Rahim equally sacred to the Muslims”. (BG 71-72)

The Indian national scene of that time revealed the signs of sharp religious differences between the Hindus and Muslims. But this group under the secular leader, Shafi Usman, remained unimpaired. The terrorist movement was the last shelter of those who wanted to carry on the struggle united. They were all willing to die for their motherland. They knew exactly that the religious differences were the root cause of the country’s slavery and that the British played upon their weakness and continued to rule India by dividing the Indians into different communally antagonistic groups. All the thirty seven members of the club kept themselves away from the fire of religious differences that burnt the country.

A Bend in the Ganges records not a jest in history, but one of history’s meanest affronts with a great wave of terror, the slaughter of thousands of Hindus and Muslims, as they journeyed towards their new homelands.

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