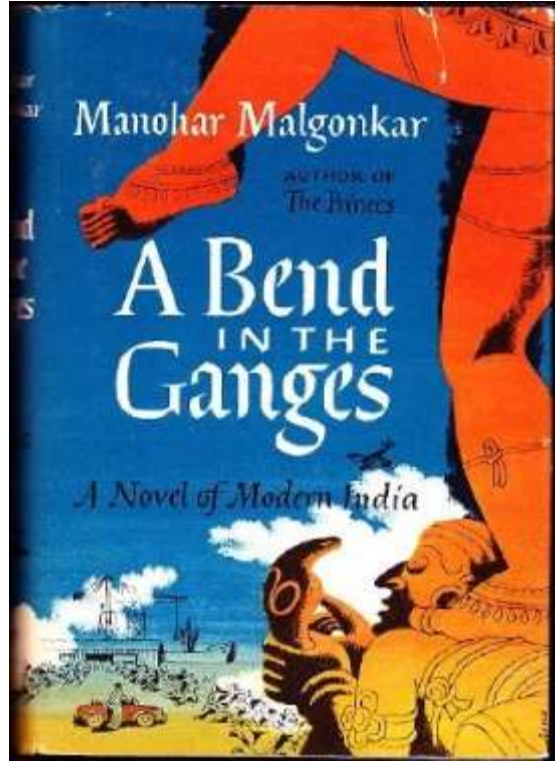


Writings of Manohar Malgonkar
With Special Reference to
A Bend in the Ganges

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Introduction

Indian English Literature has grown slowly and steadily in the twentieth century attracting the critical attention of diligent academicians all over the world.

One of India's foremost English writers, Manohar Malgonkar, breathed his last on 16 June 2010 at Jagalpet in Karnataka's Uttara Kannada district. He was 97. With his passing away, the last remaining links with the British Raj are slowly wearing away.

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Writings of Manohar Malgonkar With Special Reference to *A Bend in the Ganges*

Manohar Malgonkar was born in 1912 and had his education in Bombay where he graduated in English and Sanskrit. Manohar could trace his lineage to the royal family with roots in Goa. After graduation, he took to big game hunting and shot eight tigers. However, he soon gave up the sport and became a staunch conservationist of wild life.

He joined the Army and rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. He was part of counter espionage department and was a member of the General Staff in Indian Army. He left the Army after the Second World War and soon took to writing. Though he dabbled in politics, yet his first love was writing. At the age of 47 he wrote his first novel *Distant Drums*. The book won good reviews as Manohar made good use of his army experience in writing the book. The book laid bare the spirit of the Indian soldier and many consider *Distant Drums* an epitaph for the British Indian Army.

Malgonkar wrote five novels in English. They were *Distant Drums* (1960), *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princes* (1963), *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), and *The Devil's Wind* (1972).

In addition, he also wrote a lot of non-fiction works that included *Kanhoji Angrey* (1959), *Puars of Dewas Senior* (1962), and *Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur* (1971). He also wrote a highly authentic account of the assassination of Gandhi in the book *The Men Who Killed Gandhi*.

For many years, Malgonkar wrote a weekly column covering wide range of topics, which were published in Indian newspapers like *The Statesman* and *Deccan Herald*.

A Bend in the Ganges

Manohar Malgonkar's works will be remembered for their sensitivity and gripping accounts. *A Bend the Ganges* is a good representative novel of Malgonkar's works, which comes out as a powerful story. He was no run-of-the-mill writer, yet his works were popular with a large number of modern readers. His writing is deeply rooted in our geographical climate and cultural ethos.

Lt. Col. Manohar is compared with his contemporaries such as Khushwant Singh, Kamala Markandeya and Mulk Raj Anand. However, his writings had a different stamp as he wrote on the conflict between the imperial power and Indians differently. His characterization of the British was always positive.

Shiv Kumar Yadav looks closely at Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* and finds it a fine critical assessment of the Gandhian idea of Ahimsa or Nonviolence. This work has received various shades of opinion as regards its basic tone and tenor.

Malgonkar's Style & Approach

Manohar Malgonkar carved a niche for himself as a powerful Indian English writer and his books can still be purchased. Now that he is no more, let us salute the man who did the Indian Army proud with his books. "Malgonkar has thoroughly considered the complexities of the life, the time and the history and at the same time treated Gandhi's basic tenets Satya and Ahimsa as a political ideology in a fictional mode very safely and balancing way without being concerned by the Gandhian scholars," observes Shiv Kumar Yadav.

Malgonkar's treatment of Gandhi's non-violence can be summarized in the words of Madge Micheels-Cynes : "Non-violence doesn't always work, but violence never does."

M. Rajagopalachari feels that this book stands out as an example of Malgonkar's insight into life.

Development of the Story

TMJ Indra Mohan (2006) observes that 'Art emerges from subtle and involute tension between the remembered and the real, the potential and the actual, integration and dispossession.' This is rather a dictum for all Indian writers and especially for Malgonkar.

In the first chapter, Malgonkar begins his novel with the exposition of Gandhi's basic principles, namely, 'truth,' 'nonviolence' and 'swadeshi' and dignity of labour. We watch a scene where the mob is exhorted to boycott foreign goods and offer them to the fire.

Debi, Shafi and Basu are the important characters portrayed by Malgonkar. Debi is an embodiment of all Gandhian principles. He had a high sense of sacrifice and commitment, capacity for suffering, high sense of discernment, strong belief in Hindus and Muslims, belief in purity of love, not in the purity of body. He was unable to tolerate the killing of a pup. He turned 'violent' only after the soldier's attempt to rape his mother, and he ultimately resorted to violence against colonial injustice. Shiv Kumar Yadav compares this act of Debi to that of Bhagat Singh. "We find similar parallel in the history. Bhagat Singh, along with his colleagues, avenged the death of Lala Lajpathi Rai by assassinating the Deputy Commissioner of Police."

In the second chapter, we find the scathing attack on Gandhi's ideal of non-violence in the presence of Gandhi's follower. The follower believes in Gandhi just because 'Even Nehru has become his disciple,' Shafi Usman, a character said, "Non-violence is the philosophy of sheep, creed for cowards. It is the greatest danger to this country" (73)

Malgonkar's Anatomy of Ahimsa via His Characters

Malgonkar's anatomy of Ahimsa is a fine blending of resisting non-violence as a final truth in every context and accepting it as the highest ideal for humanity to be achieved yet.

Malgonkar outlines the characters of his novel Debi, Shafi and Gian in the distinct streams of philosophical, moral and political thoughts that were all pervasive during the Independence struggle especially after the advent of Gandhi. Debi represents the high principles and ideas of revolutionary groups who believe in leadership by example, sacrifice and commitment. On the other hand, Shafi represents the nationalist and patriotic leadership of Muslims, who later on, turn separatists. Gian represents those hypo-critic and morbid unprincipled and parasitic in nature, but they believe in Gandhi just because 'only he can bring freedom to India'. Gian's growth in the novel typically represents the Gandhian followers.

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Dr. K. Balamurugan, Dr. N. Rajesh and Dr. S. Thirunavukkarasu

Writings of Manohar Malgonkar With Special Reference to *A Bend in the Ganges* 163

Gian's effort of fighting against his 'irrational impulse' to offer his coat to the fire, drinking beer in slow sips in picnic, witnessing the murdering of his elder as coward and murdering of elder's murderer with the same axe, despite having made promise not to raise hand against anyone, showing hatred for Tukaram for his so-called , treachery, himself being a conman of Mulligan in Andaman, collecting the money and photograph of Sundari and her husband, Gopal and then cutting the photo of Gopal, causing punishment to Debi later repenting for that, collecting gold coins from the 'khobri' of Ghasita, the Ramoshi, his selling of gold coins and later on the statue of Shiva by telling a lie about his relationship with Debi, and winning the emotional proximity Of Sundari clearly show Gian's false personality.

Denouement

Malgonkar accepts that on an individual plane, one may succeed to ensure total acceptance of non-violence, as we find in Debi's confidence in Gandhi.

Malgonkar is at his best in sketching the character of Debi Dayal, a positive protagonist. Personally "I don't think he would retaliate with violence "...In his reply to Basu's question, "would you remain non-violent... if someone threw acid at the girl you loved? Would Gandhi?" But when one wishes to have its total acceptance at all the levels, then one will have to consider the values of Hafz Khan, Ghasita, the Big house of Konshet, the rapist soldier as well as the State and the ignorance of Shafi Usman, Balbanbahadur, the Indian Brigadier in Burma and also the helplessness of Tukaram and Sundari, and many more features.

All virtues of Gandhism are quite visible in his highly transparent character, Debi. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar feels that this novel reveals a sound historical sense and experiments in artistically fusing the personal and historical perspectives in fictional terms.

Conclusion

Malgonkar's effort is highly suggestive in portraying Debi Dayal's character, as he can only be a worthy disciple of Gandhi. It is not so surprising to find that when Gandhi feels

dejected and just before Independence in June 1947, he says, “I ask nobody to follow me. Everyone should follow his or her own inner voice.” Debi Dayal moves toward non-violence from violence and like Gandhi, he is also assassinated. Debi’s death is unlike Shafi’s during partition. Malgonkar wants to convey that Non-violence as a creed is futuristic in nature. It cannot survive the onslaught of the ‘mob’ until and unless the ‘mob’ gets enlightened. Gandhi passed his experiments with non-violence at personal level but his ideas are yet to become the greater vehicle of Peace for humankind. In Indian Writing in English, Malgonkar established himself to be a forerunner to write about the problems of Gandhian thought and its relevance to the contemporary society. His characters continue to exemplify the various shades of understanding Gandhi’s life and attempts to practice Gandhi’s principles in real life.

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Writings of Manohar Malgonkar With Special Reference to *A Bend in the Ganges* 165

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