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A Reception of Partition in Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*

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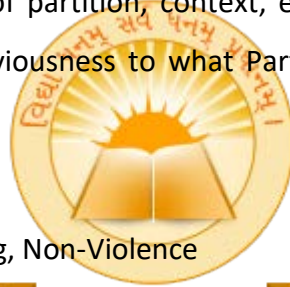
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Abstract:

The Partition of India promised its people both political and religious freedom-through the liberation of India from British rule, and the creation of the Muslim state of Pakistan. Instead, the geographical partition brought displacement and death, and it benefited the few at the expense of the very many. Partition was known one of the bloodiest events in the Indian history in the twentieth century. In this research paper, the researcher examines the reception of partition, context, execution, and aftermath of Partition. The researcher exposes the widespread obliviousness to what Partition would entail in practice and how it would affect the populace.



Key Words: Partition, Human suffering, Non-Violence

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Manohar Malgonkar (12 July 1913 – 14 June 2010) has been a reputed name in Indian Writing in English. Manohar Malgonkar was an Indian scholar of both fiction and nonfiction writing in the English language. Malgonkar was first deputed as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Maratha Light Infantry. He involved in most of these activities were during and after phenomena of Indian independence and the dreadful events of partition that often serves as the settings for his novels and other writings. The socio-historical milieu of that time serves the purpose of the setting and background for his several novels. Most of his novels deal with the theme of action and adventure. The author also tried his hand in the works of non-fiction, which include biography and history. Malgonkar spent most of his life in a remote bungalow, located on the outskirts of Belgaum, Karnataka. He had only one daughter, Sunita, who got her education from the famous Lawrence School, Sanawar. Unfortunately she met untimely demise in the year 1998.

The Partition of Indian and the communal violence that followed it were of so large scale that no sensible person can overlook the impact of these events. A vast majority of population of the nation was affected by the decision made by a few. It was disturbing to note that how apparently common and simple human population acquire the so dreadful mindset of mass killing and mass eruption of a community just on the basis of their community. Many creative writers and artists have expressed their disturbing views about these dreadful events in their composition in whatever capacity they could. The most lethal incident in the history of India left an indelible mark on the psyche of every Indian and particularly on those Indians who have been the victim of this most dreadful event. Indian writers could not remain untouched from this catastrophic event and used the medium of creative writing especially the novel form. The present novel *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), one such novel which has been one of the best novels of Manohar Malgonkar is one such artistic out cry of an author for documenting the dreadful events of partition and upheavals, mass migration and massacre that was followed. The reception of these dreadful events can be seen well reported in the present novel along with the descriptive narration and documentation of the dreadful events of partition. The author has referred to the river Ganga in his title of the novel. As it is believed in Indian that the river is sacred and washes away all the sins of whosoever plunges in the river. It is an irony that the same Ganga had to witness such a large scale massacre and human suffering. The novel, thus, is one of the significant novels of India that is written on the themes of the partition and the aftermath of the



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communal violence that followed it.

A Bend in the Ganges opens with the backdrop of Civil Disobedience Movement during the first half of the decade of 1930s and winds up by the describing the dreadful events of partition that took place in Punjab. The novel also deals the historical events such as Gandhi led Swadeshi Movement, the activities of the freedom volunteers, the commencement of the World War - II, the retreat of British Army from Rangoon, the Bombay dock explosion and the gory partition of India and Pakistan. These can be seen a great amalgamation of all these historical events that aimed at providing a grandeur of themes and an attempt to provide it the scale of an epic. It is in this context that scholar and critic, Mukherjee had to remark that *A Bend in the Ganges* is a political novel with panoramic in scope and epic in aspiration. (Mukherjee 59) Khushwant Singh praises the novel *A Bend in the Ganges*; a successful novel owing to the fact that novel encompasses the great many of national events. Khushwant Singh considers *A Bend in the Ganges* as a remarkable and rare novels written by an India author that can be called "...samples of good writing by Indian English writers of today". (Singh, 284)

Manohar Malgonkar is a revolutionary rightist who does not regard the theory of 'non-violence' proposed by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa and later on in India. He not only disregards the theory but also accuses Gandhi's theory of non-violence responsible for the dreadful events that followed the partition. He believes that the dreadful violence before and after partition was nothing but the outcome of the suppression of violence among the Indian communities in general and Hindus in particular. Malgonka has portrays this political stand point as a theme in his novel. Thus, he stands out in stark contrast with Khushwant Singh and other writer who dealt with the theme of partition from moralistic and humanitarian ground.

The novel, *A Bend in the Ganges*, depicts the fictitious biography of Gian Talwar the protagonist of the novel. Gian is an ordinary boy from peasant background. While receiving his education he came under unshakable influence of Mahatma Gandhi. He had to face much criticism due to his inclination towards Gandhi and Gandhian ideology, mostly by those who were practice socialism. These revolutionaries were against Gandhian ideology in general and the theory of 'non-violence; in particular. They try to convince Gian that no country on earth has got independence without bloodshed or force. They set examples of America, Turkey or even the ways in which Shivaji by winning the freedom by blood and not:



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“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 this country.” (Malgonkar 10)

It is interesting to know that these revolutionaries were fanatic but united so dearly irrespective of their religious a faith. They were from all predominant religions of India i.e. Hindu, Muslim and Sikhs. They in fact had formed a club called ‘Ram and Rahim Club’. The club emphasized on the grave requirement of unity among all fellow Indians as a precondition to drive out the British from the land of India. They believed that this was the best way to counter the malicious wave of religious fanaticism that was spreading across India.

However, the British knew the ways in which they had been ruling the country for several decades i.e. divide and rule. It is interesting to note that the Congress and the Muslim League, playing the pupates in the hands of the British in the name of freedom and independence decided to part the nation based on Hindus and Muslims separate camps. Both Congress of the time and the Muslim League the hatred between Hindus and Muslims is age-old and both these communities cannot go along as complementary to each other without the bitterness. Hafiz, once the foremost revolutionary and a leader of the movement, was now converted into fundamentalism and started speaking the language of fanatic Muslim considerations. Hafiz represents the voice of hard liner of Muslim fundamentalists who have a particular line understanding that is that of separatists’. Their opposition turned against the Hindus rather than the British which can be seen reported in the daily newspaper of the time. For instance, the *Dawn*, the *Awaz*. The *Sulah* and the *Subah* spread such opposition against Hindu dominant state in Duriabad. Hafiz started advocating separatist Muslim point of view. He could not realize that he had become a puppet in the hands of the British and had started speaking for their language of divide and rule. He shares his fundamental beliefs with Shafi in one of those undercover meetings. Hafiz blatantly put forward the logic advocating the popular fear that once the British rule would come to an end, the Muslim would have to succumb as the second and inferior citizens of India and the Hindus will dominate the lives, property and religion of Muslim. The Muslim minority would be in danger as against the overpowering majority of the Hindus. Jinnah’s conversion into a fundamental and fanatic Muslim was a bench mark for the sort of Muslim that divided India. They started demanding a separate and safe land exclusively for the Muslims. Jinnah’s spiting



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venom and distrust against the Hindus was started being taken as a role model by the fanatic Muslims of the time.

The outcry that the minority of Muslims will not be safe in an independent India as it would be a Hindu dominating nation. It is therefore that the Muslims needed a separate safe state of their own which they can call their homeland. Hafiz represented the general Muslim worldview of the time. They considered the partition to be inevitable for the wellbeing of the Muslims. Hafiz is very vocal about disregard of brotherhood of Hindu and Muslim and the feelings of national integrity among all fellow Indians. His religious fanaticism can be seen reflected when he expressed his deep dissatisfaction to Shafi Usman on the Muslim leaders being given seats in Congress party.

From the aforesaid utterances of Hafiz one can see the biased and myopic mindset of the Muslim League leaders. There can be seen the way in which these leaders influence the ordinary Muslims of the country. They spread hatred and suspicion in the Muslim minority against the rest of the Indians in general and Hindus in particular. They propagated that if the independence would be given to country with congress in ruling position than Hindus with marginalize Muslim; they might take revenge of the past atrocities that Muslim rulers practice upon the non-Muslims. Hafiz also went to the extent of saying that the Hindus rulers were a bigger threat for the Muslims than the British rulers. The freedom will make no sense for Muslim if it is followed by Hindu-dominated government.

Thus the communal tension increased among both the communities of Hindus and Muslims. This communal stiffness led to distrust among both communities. The fanatic Muslims took the side of biased Jinnah promoting the partition of the united India into India and Pakistan. The Congress was accused of being party dominated by the Hindus. It was believed to be hate mongers against the will of Gandhi. Much before India was divided into India and Pakistan communal riots gripped India and millions of people lost their family, properties, their homeland and lives as well. This communal rift among Hindu-Muslim led to communal violence and disharmony throughout the country. The characters like Basu and other Gandhians are seen lamenting the frightful unfolding of the events which were aimed against the British. The feeling of distrust among Hindus and Muslims grew deeper and wider and that was a partition of India:

“The country is to be divided. That is what Jinnah wants: that is what the Muslims want. But before that division comes, every town, every village, is being



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torn apart. The Muslims don't want freedom for India unless it means the carving out of a separate state for them. They fear the Hindus will dominate them. They insist that when the Congress ruled, just at the beginning of the war, they treated the Muslim, as a subordinate race." (Malgonkar 28)

Thus, it is needless to say that the author maintained strong sense of historical acumen. The horrific happenings of partition of India and Pakistan which has remained a national tragedy in the history of human civilization have been portrayed realistically and aesthetically at the same time. The novel has been proved to be documentation of those terrible events that followed the partition on both the side of the border.

Many creative writers and artists have expressed their disturbing views about dreadful events of Partition in their composition in whatever capacity they could. The present novel *A Bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgonkar is one such creative expression of an author for documenting the dreadful events of partition and upheavals, mass migration and massacre that was followed. Thus, the reception of the measures that the people took can be seen well reported in the present novel along with the descriptive narration and documentation of the dreadful events of partition the author has also documented the saner voices of the communities, those individuals who stood by the humanity and moral values even at the worst conditions and during the movements of crisis that were being unfolded at the wake of partition that changed the face of the nation forever.

Conclusion:

As it is observed that Manohar Malgonkar is a revolutionary rightist, he never regards the theory of 'non-violence' proposed by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa and later on in India. He not only disregarded the theory but also accused Gandhi's theory of non-violence responsible for the Partition of India. The communal violence that followed partition of Indian was one of the largest scales. No sensible individual can escape from the influence of these happenings. A massive common citizen of the nation was affected by the inconsiderate decision made by a few. It was further disconcerting to note that how seemingly cooperative and peace-loving common population acquire the such a terrible mindset of mass killing and mass eruption of a community just on the basis of their community. The receptivity of partition was



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observed in his novel in the form of Gandhi's theory of non-violence. The term 'Reception' stands for 'a reaction to something'. It is considered a reaction to social, intellectual, and literary developments in the history of literature. It is believed that the dreadful violence before and after partition was nothing but the outcome of the suppression of violence among the Indian communities in general and Hindus in particular.



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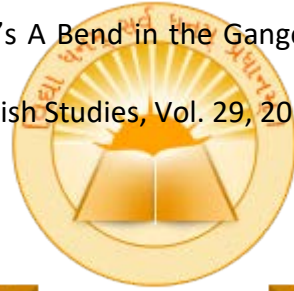
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