

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Social Disintegration: A Reading of Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges***

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## Contents

<b>Chapter One: Influence of Separatist Movement on Malgonkar</b>	<b>1-7</b>
General Background	1
Malgonkar as an Anglo- Indian Novelist	1
Review of Literature	3
<b>Chapter Two: Postcolonial Issue in Literature</b>	<b>8-19</b>
Postcolonial Study	8
Postcolonial Criticism	9
Postcolonial Identity	13
Postcolonial Criticism and Literature	16
<b>Chapter Three: Social Disintegration: A Postcolonial Reading of <i>A Bend in the Ganges</i></b>	<b>20-47</b>
Resistance to Alien Domination	20
Oppression versus Operation	24
Japanese Intervention	26
Betrayal to Nationalism	28
Cultural Subordination	32
Two Ideologies	34
Partition Disillusionment	43
<b>Chapter Four: Partition and Melancholy</b>	<b>48-50</b>
Works Cited	

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## Chapter One

### Influence of Separatist Movement on Malgonkar

#### General Background

The decades of 1940s and 1950s were the most turbulent years in the human history. World war, violence and partition were rampant during those years. As the literary practitioners could not remain aloof from such matters, Manohar Malgonkar is no exception whose *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) is one of the most important epic sagas in depicting partition violence and disillusionment in the post colonial period. The novel narrates the last years of British rule in India and the growing violence of Indian resistance to the British rule. This novel even reveals the experience of the partition and its bloody consummation upon the people. It has the vivid description of partition riots. The British colonial rule ended in partition plaguing modern India. Malgonkar in this novel has shown that the spirit of nationalism which fought for the sake of independence not only created two nations, i.e., India and Pakistan but also distorted the social fabric. The author has frankly depicted the bloody disputes over land, murder, terrorism, atrocities, brutalities and the wolfish activities which were rampant at that time. The author has undergone the agony of partition, harrowing experience and violence during the fight for independence. *A Bend in the Ganges*, Malgonkar's one of the prominent novels, is close to the facts. Malgonkar has graphically depicted all the negative activities of the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs who start arguing, siding and conspiring with each others. The novel has pragmatically depicted communal violence and confrontations.

#### Malgonkar as an Anglo- Indian Novelist

Manohar Malgonkar (born 12 July 1913) is the author of five English novels: *Distant Drum* (1960), *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princess* (1963), *A Bend in the*

*Ganges* (1964), and *The Devil's Wind* (1972). He is also a historian, having written three books of Indian history: *Kanhoji Angrey* (1959), *Puars of Dewas Senior* (1962), and *Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur* (1971). He has written several scripts for Indian movies. Malgonkar has also written fifty short stories and over a hundred articles. Malgonkar, an author of fiction and nonfiction, has shown his craftsmanship by depicting the Indian history of partition and violence.

One of the results of British impact on India was the rise of Indian novels in English. Indian writers of fiction adopted the western form and medium to their own story telling. Till then, the Indo-English novelists avoided contemporary social and political realities. The advent of Gandhiji on the political scene gave a new bend in the area of novel writing and Malgonkar was quick to appreciate it. His novels, thrillers, biographies, travelogues, a short period plays, and a large number of short stories are coloured with Gandhian principles. Malgonkar has earned great fame and name with his five novels and four volumes of short stories. Like other commonwealth writers, he is also "handcuffed to history" (Singh 51). He mentions the imperial embrace and its effect on the Indian way of life, language and ethics. The themes such as the partition of India, riots before and after it, are vividly mentioned in his novels *Distant Drum*, *Princess* and *A Bend in the Ganges*. Moreover almost all of his novels are descriptions of the Second World War and its effect on the Indians.

*A Bend in the Ganges*, set in a small town of West Punjab prior to partition, attempts to explore violence and non-violence in personal and social context. The author in this novel shows a constant fight between violence versus non-violence which took place during the partition of India with the representation of characters such as Shafi, Gian, Basu and Debidayal. For Shafi, the revolutionary, "non-violence is the philosophy of the sheep, a creed for cowards" as the other

freedom fighters like Debidayal and Basu think. Gian, a disciple of Gandhi, soon comes to realize that his acceptance of non-violence could not serve him as a philosophy of life.

Tekchand, the prosperous industrialist, is hardly conscious of the political problems of his country.

The rural tragedy Malgonkar presents in the early chapters of the novel is of the catastrophic event of the partition. *A Bend in the Ganges* derives its form from the contrasting nature of Gian and Debi Dayal who are the two main characters of the novel. The former stands for non-violence in the beginning and the latter is a member of the violent group led by his friend Shafi. The formation of the violent group in the novel results into disintegration. The initiation of tragedy and violence is symbolized from the beginning chapters of the novel with Dada's discovery of the image of Shiva, while digging his field at Piploda. And, his conversion from the worship of Vishnu, the God of protection, to Shiva, the God of destruction, is the initiation of inevitable violence. As the novel progresses we see further operations of the destructive element the defeat of the terrorist movement and the breaking up of Sundari's marriage which support the situation of violence and disintegration.

However, the novel also presents postcolonial insights such as resistance to the British Government, operation against oppression, two contrasting ideologies, and cultural subordination.

### **Review of Literature**

Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* has elicited a host of criticism since its publication. Its richness is reflected in its criticism from multiple perspectives. The critics have shed light from multifaceted perspectives. Its language, idea, style, themes and other features have made *A Bend in the Ganges* distinct from other novels especially belonging to the latter twentieth century



partition literature of India. Malgonkar's writing in the novel is simple and heartrending.

Highlighting the authorship of Malgonkar, Elena J. Kalinnikova says:

Malgonkar's works are remarkable phenomenon in Modern Indian English Literature. Actuality of problems, realistic approach to them, skill to impart dynamism to action, beautiful style all these put Malgonkar in the ranks of most popular and readable authors. (190-91)

Malgonkar's art of characterization is another notable feature. His characters mentioned in the novels are dynamic, astonishing and of different variety. In this connection it is apt to quote Syed Mazahir Hussain, " Malgonkar's characters hail from different communities, countries and social status"(34). Likewise Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, has been made the scapegoat of violence and partition in *A Bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgonakar. In this connection Gomathi Narayan writes:

Perhaps the most striking instances of search for a scapegoat is offered by *A Bend in the Ganges*, where Gandhi, the consistent opponent of partition and advocate of non-violence and Hindu Muslim unity is made responsible for the violence of partition. Though Gandhi's revilers in the novel represent different political parties, all of them agree in making him the scapegoat for the holocaust of partition. Shafi's oracular pronouncement, "A million shall die, I tell you – a million! For each man who should have died in the case of freedom, Gandhi will sacrifice ten. That is what non-violence will do to this country" (19) is endorsed at various places in the novel by Debi and Basu. (168-180)

Manohar Malgonkar's sense of history finds exemplification in the portrayal of the two forms of Indians' struggle for freedom the violent and non-violent struggle in *A Bend in the Ganges*. This

novel often focuses upon the Terrorist Movement of the 1930s. The novel casts irony at Gandhi's principle of non-violence by questioning the validity of non-violence. Extensive experiences of Malgonkar's careers, i.e., an officer in the British army, businessman, planter and politician are intertwined in his novel. Moreover, the partition of his country, a historical event of great importance, which brought tremendous changes in India, has been depicted in a unique manner in the novel. Regarding the partition disillusionment, Malgonkar in the epigraph has remarked:

When freedom came to India, it brought a kind of havoc rarely seen even in war  
Twelve million people were rendered homeless, three hundred thousand were  
slaughtered more than a hundred thousand women were abducted, raped,  
mutilated. How the bottled-up violence of ordinary men and women came to the  
surface at the very moment of victory is the theme of this novel.

Thus, as stated above, the partition of India, agony of common people on the pretext of independence and the growth of communalism are prominently figured in his novel. Unlike other partition novelists, Malgonkar does not blame anyone particularly, for partition. As Kalinnikkova has maintained, "He attacks both the British colonizers and the extremist Hindus and Muslims"(190-91). The magnitude of partition is described through the theme of separation both in familial and friendly circles in the novel. The breakage of familial and friendly relation apart is the metaphoric representation of partition. Likewise, the drawbacks of Indian familial relationships have been evinced in the novel. The lack of parental love causes great emotional disturbances in Debi, who is recruited to terrorism. The stresses and strains of Debi Dayal are not only because of his personal grievances, but also because of the difference of opinion with his father Tekchand who never cared to win his son through love. So he joins in interracial alliance. Malgonkar portrays the outcome of intercultural and interracial alliances.

Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* occupies a distinct place in the list of the Anglo-Indian fiction. This novel is a sublime presentation of the whole struggle for Indian Independence and its aftermath. It presents the conflict between two ideologies: Terrorism and non-violence. As many critics fail to make proper appraisal upon Malgonkar's art of writing, Muhrjee has acclaimed that *A Bend in the Ganges* is "no better than a skillful reportage" (59).

Despite various assertions, it is realized that history and story may seem to move apart in *A Bend in the Ganges*, as Dayananda believes, especially when the political upheavals and communal riots match ill with the small domestic area within which the characters move (105).

The socio-historical milieu of the time forms the backdrop of this novel. The historical force seems to be inalienable in the novel. The actions, destinies and personalities are shaped by the forces of history. In this regard Meenakshi Mukharjee believes:

Both Gian and Debidayal's destinies are shaped by two forces the forces of history, and the elements of their personalities. Gian, who adopts his policy to suit every circumstance by cringing, deceiving, humiliating himself, bending with every wind, finally withstands the storm, while Debidayal is broken because he refuses to make a compromise with circumstances.(59)

In this way the brute force of history puts an end to Debidayal in spite of his loftiness and leaves Gian free in spite of his opportunism. So historical force cannot be alienated while making a close scrutiny of this novel.

The rise of revolutionaries had affected all aspects of life at that time. According to Rajagopalachari, the novelist "gives the impression that he wants to tell the whole story from the point of view of revolutionaries who condemn non-violence" (57). He does so to show the deep rooted effect of revolution in all aspects of Indian life. Similarly, Malgonkar's novels are notable

from anti-colonial perspectives too. In this regard Mathur says, "He presents a multifaceted account of the colonial encounter with the British at the centre, and the Indians and Anglo-Indians around them" (28). *A Bend in the Ganges* successfully presents historical theme in fictional terms. The formations of the Muslim League, atmosphere of mutual hatred, Gandhi's "Quit India" movement are historical facts employed in the novel.

The breakage of communal riots resulted in the massive exchange of population, the mad killings, rapes and abductions. The novel has also presented the cruellest and most barbaric scenes raising several queries: Why does he valorize such cruel and barbaric scenes? Why does he emphasize on inconsistency in Gandhian ideology? Why does he highlight the communal riots? Is the novelist inclined to subvert the Gandhian principle of non-violence or to valorize terrorism that took place at the dawn of partition?

The critics mentioned so far have pinpointed various points about Malgonkar's art of writing; none of them seem to highlight partition violence and the post-colonial situation in the novel. Thus here I want to show how partition violence and its aftermath have affected the socio-political strata of Indian society.

## Chapter Two

### Postcolonial Issue in Literature

#### Postcolonial Study

Postcolonial study is the study about “the critical analysis of the history, culture, literature and modes of discourse that are specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France and other European powers” (Abrams 245). It is the study of cultural, social, and economic conditions of colonized places. In this connection Abrams says:

Postcolonial studies sometimes encompass also aspects of British literature in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, toward through a perspective that reveals the ways in which the social and economic life represented in that literature was tacitly underwritten by colonial exploitation. (245)

Postcolonial study is the perspective which includes the discourse of minorities. To cite from Greenblatt and Gunn "Post colonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of the Third World countries and the discourse of minorities with in the geographical divisions of east and west, north and south" ( 437). To bend Jurgen Habermass to our purpose we could also argue that post colonial project at the most general theoretical level, seeks to explore those social pathologies when he says "loss of meaning, conditions of anomie" that no longer simply "cluster around class antagonism [but] break up into widely scattered historical contingencies" (348).

Postcolonial study is the act of resistance to the colonizers too. As the postcolonial perspective resists the holistic attempt of social explanations formed by colonized discourse, it creates the literature of its own in a way of resistance. Moreover, it forces recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres.

Thus, Postcolonialism deals with effect of colonization on cultures and societies. It is now used in wide and diverse ways to include the study and analysis of colonized discourse, colonial resistance and colonial legacies in both pre and post independence nations.

### **Postcolonial Criticism**

Basically, postcolonial criticism defines formerly colonized people as second grade population who have been subjected to the political domination of the colonizers. Postcolonial critics draw examples from the literary works of African American writers as well as from the literature of aboriginal Australians. Likewise, formerly colonized population of India is too notable study of post colonial criticism. The development of postcolonial criticism has been clarified by Tyson here:

Although postcolonial criticism did not become a major in literary studies until the early 1990s, the cultural analysis of colonialism on which it draws has played an important role in anticolonial political movement everywhere and took its place as a field of intellectual inquiry when colonial regimes began to topple after World War II. As a domain within literary studies, postcolonial criticism is both a subject matter and a theoretical framework. As a subject matter, postcolonial criticism analyzes literature produced by cultures that developed in response to colonial domination, from the first point of colonial contact to the present. (418)

Regarding the subject matter and study area of post colonialism Lois Tyson elsewhere describes thus:

Post colonial criticism seeks to understand the operations politically, socially, culturally and psychologically of colonialist and anticolonialist ideologies. For example post colonial criticism analyzes the ideological forces that, on the one

hand, pressed the colonized to internalize the colonizer's values and, on the other hand, promoted the resistance of colonized peoples against their oppressors, a resistance that is as old as colonialism itself. (418)

Thus present day literature of the formerly colonized countries is a great subject of study which can be analyzed from the anticolonial perspective, oppression at the colonial period and resistance to it.

In *Post-Colonial Drama: theory, practice, politics*, Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins write:

the term postcolonialism – according to a too-rigid etymology – is frequently misunderstood as a temporal concept, meaning the time after colonialism has ceased, or the time following the politically determined Independence Day on which a country breaks away from its governance by another state, not a naïve teleological sequence which supersedes colonialism, postcolonialism is, rather, an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies ... A theory of postcolonialism must, then, respond to more than the merely chronological construction of post-independence, and to more than just the discursive experience of imperialism. (95-98)

Postcolonialism, as a literary theory, deals with literature produced in countries that once were colonies of other countries, especially of the European colonial powers Britain, France, and Spain; in some contexts, it includes countries still in colonial arrangements. It also deals with literature written by citizens of colonial countries that portrays colonized people as its subject matter. Colonized people, especially of the British Empire, attended British universities and with their access to education, created this new criticism. Much debate has since taken place regarding

how to effectively and fairly incorporate the subaltern voice into social studies. With such a huge mass of criticism against the idea of studying "others," many social scientists felt paralyzed, fatalistically accepting it as impossibility. Spivak, an Indian post-colonialist thinker, rejects this outright. "To refuse to represent a cultural Other is salving your conscience, and allowing you not to do any homework"(62-63).

By holding people in the grip and emptying the natives' brain through all form and content, colonialism is not satisfied. This goes to be more oppressive and distorts, disfigures and destroys the native severely. Simultaneously colonizers fight for the national culture and liberation of the nation. By this way colonialism is heading to the direction of problematic situation in which rebellion governs. As Slemon notes:

Colonialism obviously is an enormously problematic category: it is by definition transhistorical and unspecific, and it is used in relation to very different kinds of historical oppression and economic control. [Nevertheless] like the term 'patriarchy', which shares similar problems in definition, the concept of colonialism . . . remains crucial to a critique of past and present power relations in world affairs. (31)

Thus, colonialism creates the problematic situation initiated by the reaction of oppressed people. Even the colonized ones produce reactionary documents.

Some post-colonial theorists make the argument that studying both dominant knowledge sets and marginalized ones as binary opposites perpetuates their existence as homogenous entities. Homi K. Bhabha feels the post-colonial world should valorize spaces of mixing; spaces where truth and authenticity move aside for ambiguity. This space of hybridity, he argues, offers the most profound challenge to colonialism (Bhabha 113). Spivak states that usefulness of



essentialism has been put forward. Reference is made to essentialisms' potential usefulness. An organized voice provides a more powerful challenge to dominant knowledge - whether in academia or active protests.

Che Guevara in one of the speeches to the United Nations stated: "The final hour of colonialism has struck, and millions of inhabitants of Africa, Asia and Latin America rise to meet a new life and demand their unrestricted right to self-determination." Once in his speech Soyinka declared, "Contact, resistance, accommodation and assimilation and of course suppression- these have always constituted the history of cultures and their arts."

Females' status in postcolonial era is more unsystematic, more appalling and demoralizing. Females are doubly suppressed i.e., by the colonizers and patriarchy of the then colonized countries. Postcolonial feminists argue that oppression relating to the colonial experience, particularly racial, class, and ethnic oppression, has marginalized women in postcolonial societies. They challenge the assumption that gender oppression is the primary force of patriarchy. Postcolonial feminists object to portrayals of women of non-Western societies as passive and voiceless victims and the portrayal of Western women as modern, educated, and empowered.

"Postcolonial feminists today struggle to fight gender oppression within their own cultural models of society rather than through those imposed by the Western colonizers" (Bulbeck 282). Similarly Mills opines females' situation in postcolonial period as: "Postcolonial feminists can be described as feminists who have reacted against both universalizing tendencies in Western feminist thought and a lack of attention to gender issues in mainstream postcolonial thought" (98–112).

## **Postcolonial Identity**

The critical nature of postcolonial theory is directed to destabilizing western way of thinking. Therefore, it creates a space for the subaltern or marginalized groups, to speak and produce alternatives to dominant discourse. Often, the term postcolonialism is taken literally, to mean the period of time after colonialism. This however is problematic because the "once-colonized world" is full of "contradictions, of half-finished processes, of confusions, of hybridity, and liminalities" (*Dictionary of Human Geography* 561). In other words, it is important to accept the plural nature of the word postcolonialism, as it does not simply refer to the period after the colonial era. By some definitions, "postcolonialism can also be seen as a continuation of colonialism, albeit different or new relationships concerning power and the control production of knowledge" (*Dictionary of Human Geography* 561).

Often, previously colonized places are homogenized in western discourse under an umbrella label such as the "Third World". Postcolonialism demonstrates the heterogeneity of colonized places by analyzing the uneven impact of Western colonialism on different places, peoples, and cultures. This is done by engaging with the variety of ways in which "relations, practices and representations" of the past is reproduced or transformed and studying the connections between the heart and margins of the empire. Moreover, postcolonialism recognizes that there was, and still is, resistance to the West. This resistance is practiced by many, including the subaltern, a group of marginalized people, and least powerful. Postcolonial theory provides a framework that destabilizes dominant discourses in the West, challenges "inherent assumptions," and critiques the "material and discursive legacies of colonialism" (*Dictionary of Human Geography* 561).

Postcolonialism is a way of reading and rereading texts of both metropolitan and colonial cultures to draw deliberate attention to the profound and inescapable effects of colonization on literary production. Postcolonial identity and situation of the people can be seen from the following perspectives too:

### **Anticolonialism**

The colonized people struggle to erase the colonizers' ideology and practice of colonialism.

Anticolonialism signifies the point at which the various forms of opposition become articulated as a resistance to the operations of colonialism in political, economic and cultural institutions... Anti-colonialism has taken many forms in difficult colonial situations: it is sometimes associated with an ideology of racial liberation" (Ashcroft et al. 15).

### **Ambivalence**

"A term first developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action" (Young 161). Ashcroft et al. maintain:

Adapted into colonial discourse theory by Homi Bhabha, it describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. (12)

### **Cultural Conflict**

Conflict occurring between individual social groups that are by cultural boundaries can be considered 'cultural conflicts'. But individuals, even in the same society, are potentially members of many different groups, organized in different ways by different criteria e.g. by kinship into

families or clans; by language, religion, ethnicity or nationality; by socio-economic characteristics onto social classes; by geographical region into political interest groups; and by education, occupation or institutional membership into professions, trade unions, organizations, industries, bureaucracy, political parties, or military (Bhabha 9).

Cultural identity is a determining factor of worldwide importance. Apart from being accepted, this basic reality has to be fully and immediately accepted in its many forms and in all its complexity. Samuel Huntington (1996), who conceptualized a post- cold war world divided into seven civilizations namely Western, Confucian, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-orthodox, Latin-American and possibly African. He has forecasted that it is destined in some way for their civilization to clash with one another by virtue of their respective essential differences.

Huntington sees Islam and West in an especially contentious relationship but the scenario he envisions basically involves "the West against the rest" (363). The present world scenario shows that the world is not only being divided between the Islam versus the rest or vice-versa but also small cultural or tribal groups have been coming up to the point of collision. Everyone seems to be ready to fight against the other group. People have learned but more than necessary from Huntington ( Kandel 274). Kandel further states:

Cultural conflict has, in many instances, taken the form of religious conflict in different countries like India where Muslims and Hindus fought very badly in the name of saving their sacred religion and religious movements causing many thousands of people to be killed and leaving a very deep wound in the hearts of people never to be healed. That happened in Britain and France among the Catholics and Protestants for so many years. It is what is happening between the

two religious sects of Islam in different Muslim countries including Pakistan and Arab countries. (248)

### **Postcolonial Criticism and Literature**

Post colonial situation has been a great concern of study in the literary field as it has been pervasive in all genres of literature. When the post colonial critics debate about the terminologies and limitations of postcolonial issues, most of the critics interpret postcolonial literature in terms of a number of overlapping topics. Here Tyson too includes some common topics which are as follows:

1. The native people's initial encounter with the colonizers and the disruption of indigenous culture
2. The native people's initial encounter with the colonizers and the disruption of indigenous culture
3. Othering (the colonizers' treatment of the members of the indigenous culture as less than fully human) and colonial oppression in all its forms
4. Mimicry (the attempt of the colonized to be accepted by imitating the dress, behaviour, speech, and lifestyle of the colonizers)
5. Exile
6. Post-independence exuberance followed by disillusionment
7. The struggle for individual and collective cultural identity and the related themes of alienation, unhomeliness (feeling that one has no cultural "home" or sense of cultural belonging), double consciousness (feeling torn between the social and psychological demands of two antagonistic cultures), and hybridity (experiencing

one's cultural identity as a hybrid of two or more cultures, which feeling is sometimes described as a positive alternative to unhomeliness)

8. The need for continuity with a pre-colonial past and self-definition of the political future. (427)

She further states "Most postcolonial critics analyze the ways in which a literary text, whatever its topics, is colonialist or anticolonialist, that is, the ways in which the text reinforces or resists colonialism's oppressive ideology" (427). Similarly another influencing postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, who even suggests the study area of postcolonialism, suggests "world literature might be studied in terms of the different ways cultures have experienced historical trauma, perhaps such traumas as slavery, revolution, civil war, political mass murder, oppressive military regimes, the loss of cultural identity, and the like" (qtd in Tyson 428). Bhabha is more specific here: "The centre of such a study," Bhabha says, "would neither be the 'sovereignty' of national cultures, nor the universalism of human culture, but a focus on...the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present" (12).

Regarding postcolonial discourses Homi K. Bhabha says: Postcolonial critical discourses require forms of dialectical thinking that do not disavow or subtle the otherness (alterity) that constitutes the symbolic domain of psychic and social identifications (439). Similarly, to clarify the nature of conflict in the postcolonial period, it is apt to quote from Das:

It is the nature of the conflict within which a caste or tribe is locked which may provide the characteristics of the historical moment; to assume that we may know a priori the mentalities of castes or communities is to take an essentialist perspective which the evidence produced in the very volumes of Subaltern Studies would not support. (320)

That is, we might study what world literature tells us about the personal experience of people whom history has ignored the disenfranchised, the marginalized and unhomed. Another attempt to find a common denominator in postcolonial literature is made by Helen Tiffin:

[the] subversive [anticolonialist] manoevr[e]...characteristic of post-colonial texts" does not lie in "the construction or reconstruction" of national cultural identity, but rather in "the construction or reconstruction" of national cultural identity, but rather in "rereading and rewriting of the European historical and fictional record... as it is impossible to retrieve a precolonial past or construct new cultural identity completely free of so much of the rest of the world. (95)

Postcolonial Theory - as epistemology, ethics, and politics - addresses matters of identity, gender, race, racism and ethnicity with the challenges of developing a post-colonial national identity, of how colonized people's knowledge was used against them in service of the colonizer's interests, and of how knowledge about the world is generated under specific relations between the powerful and the powerless, circulated repetitively and finally legitimated in service to certain imperial interests. At the same time, postcolonial theory encourages thought about the colonised's creative resistance to the colonizer and how that resistance complicates and gives texture to European imperial colonial projects, which utilized a range of strategies, including anti-conquest narratives, to legitimize their dominance.

## Chapter Three

### Social Disintegration: A Postcolonial Reading of *A Bend in the Ganges*

#### Resistance to Alien Domination

Resistance in a violent or non-violent way is the ultimate compulsion for the colonized to overthrow the colonial rule. When domination of colonizers reaches in the apex, the colonized finds no ways except revolution against it. By the last phase of the colonial era in India stunning violence prevailed, and the people were resisting the British rule. Manohar Malgonkar creates his fictional characters equipped with their different ideologies and makes them grow and die without sticking to their ideologies. In the dramatic opening of the novel Gian Talwar as well as the men and women standing around the fire shout the slogans thus:

"Boycott British goods! Mahatma Gandhi Ki jai!

Victory to Mahatma Gandhi"(1).

That shows clear cut resistance to the British colonial rule. On the one hand the fictional character Gian has strong affinity to the movement of Indian nationalism which has been clarified thus:

Why do you wear khaddar? Singh asked.

Why did he wear khaddar, the rough homespun of the Indian peasant? Gian almost laughed. It was the uniform of the Indian National movement; it proclaimed you a soldier in the army that was dedicated to truth and non-violence.

I am follower of Gandhi, Gian said. (10)

On the other hand Debidayal does not approve of peaceful agitation of Gandhian concept, thinking that to be useless. Singh rejects at the followers of non-violence movement here:"Gandhi is the enemy of Indian's national aspirations" (11). Debidayal wants to oppose the



Britishers through his indulgence in violent activities. That is the reason he encourages the burning of British garment. He joins the leaders Shafi Ushman, Hafiz Khan and others who follow non- Gandhian philosophy i. e. violence. They claim themselves to be the true freedom fighters. They want to conduct violent activities to overthrow the British rulers and restore freedom in India. Such characters inspired by war psychology think of achieving independence in India by violent means. Irrespective of their religious difference, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, they are united against the British colonial rule. The freedom fighters stand beyond the ground of religion:

The others watched him, spellbound; the leader who was a Muslim and now looked like a Sikh. His transformation gave added significance to their movement. A man's religion meant nothing. Here was a man who had been born a Muslim but had now become a Sikh; he even wore a kada, the steel bangle of Sikh religion. (70)

Religious transformation is nothing. Despite their religious background the freedom fighters stand in one forum to fight against the British Raaj. It is Shafi, a Muslim who converts his religion to impress his mates. But later he turns out to be the greatest and most dangerous Muslim leader. It is the group of non-Gandhians who believe in the success of freedom through their united struggle. The freedom fighters' motif to the British rulers can be generalized thus: "Debi hated the British, as they all hated the British; that was what brought them together, Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs, men of differing religions united in the cause of freedom as blood-brothers: the Freedom Fighters" (62).

They, therefore, form a Hanuman Physical Culture Club in order to galvanize their activities in a systematic fashion. However Debi's hatred for the British is connected with his

personal life too. As Debi one day saw a British soldier trying to assault his mother, Debi pounced at the soldier and kicked him like a puppy. By this way, he rescued his mother from the disdainful treatment of the British soldier. Debidayal, a terrorist of first order, identifies himself with the Indian struggle so ardently and hates the British so fiercely that he has practically no private life of his own. In spite of being the son of a millionaire, he does not long for a cosy and comfortable life. He believes in terrorist activities like cutting the telephone wires, derailing trains, etc. The anti- colonial demonstration reaches the climax in this manner:

Now they had graduated to bigger tasks: burning remote Government buildings, burning wooden sleepers on railway tracks and removing the fish-plates which joined the rails. They possessed several sets of German-made pliers for cutting wire and heavy spanners which exactly fitted the fish-plate bolts, all neatly stored behind the sandbags on which their feet now rested. During the two previous weeks, they had managed to remove no less than seven fish-plates from the railway tracks. So far, their most spectacular achievements had been to burn down a forest rest-house in the jungle and to derail a goods train. (69)

The culmination of terrorist activities can be seen in Debidayal's life imprisonment in the cellular jail at Port Blair in the Andaman Island. As he is a dedicated patriot, he does not want to submit himself to the prison rules. Rather he refuses to salute Patrick Mulligan, the jail superintendent of the Cellular Jail, writes anti-British slogans like *Hitlor ko Jai*, and *Angrez Murdabad*. As the colonizers feel the threat from the colonized, they try to suppress the latter through fair or foul means. Needless to say, if the colonizer happens to be a Britisher, he, in keeping with his racial policy, enjoys the 'Divide and Rule' policy to achieve his ends. This dialogue between Gian and Mulligan is apt to quote here:

Remember I shall make it worth your while.

Thank you, Sir.

All you have to do is to keep your eyes and ears open. But your special responsibility will be to keep a watch on just one man...keep him under surveillance without his knowing it –Debi-dayal. (171)

That is exactly what Mr. Patrick Mulligan does so when he finds out that Debidayal indulges in anti-British activities. The noteworthy feature of the whole narrative is that Mulligan having understood Gian's way of treacherous existence corrupts him. In contrast to Gian, Debidayal, despite of dangers to him attacks the British representatives thus:

But the very next morning, as the pumping gang was being marched to the seawater trough, they saw on the white embankment wall behind the timber godown, a charcoal drawing of a fat, solar-tooped figure, dangling by his neck from a gallows, and under it the slogan:

Angrez-raaj Murdabad! (167)

This is a fine example of anti-British activity continued by Debidayal despite the declaration of public flogging. But on the other hand Patrick Mulligan corrupts the mind of Gian and takes him on his side. Falling on the temptation of being *feri*, Gian spies over Debidayal's activities and reports them confidentially. Consequently, he reports to Patrick Mulligan that Debidayal has written anti-British slogans on the walls and culverts and he has hidden some money in a jack fruit tree outside the jail. Debidayal in addition to these activities, has irritated the officers by killing a Gurkha guard namely Balbahadur by kicking his scrotum. Thus, Debidayal breaks the prison rules deliberately.

### **Oppression Versus Operation**

Gian Talwar, a follower of non-violent operation, and Shafi, Debi, Hafiz, Basu are the members of the freedom fighter's forum. They conduct various operations against the British colonial rule. Although Gian Talwar and Debidayal are colleagues, they have been successfully divided by the British officer. Only Debi becomes the butt of Patrick Mulligan's oppression. He decides to punish Debi-dayal by arranging a ceremonial flogging. There is no humane behaviour for the prisoners. To quote the author's description in the novel:

The Jail Manuals which had to be made available on requests, had discovered that the days of the coffin cage and bar fetters belonged to a less civilized past; now the most severe punishment that a convict could be given was flogging. (130)

He is flogged so severely before the huge audience of prisoners that he becomes unconscious.

Swish-slap! Swish-slap! the cane came curving down with a hiss, landing with a thick, wet, report, and with each stroke, the victim's body twitched, almost without violation now, more with the force of the stroke than with the victim's reaction.

Twenty-four! Twenty-five! (181)

Debidayal is betrayed by his own college-mate, Gian. Moreover Debi is humiliated by the authorities, but he is not disheartened by any of them. Being totally at the mercy of his officers, he bides his time for a while. The more Debidayal is oppressed, the more violent he appears against the British officers. He does not seem to be a coward rather he scolds his friend Gian who betrays him calling him the scum of the earth. But Gian Talwar provides a good contrast to Debi-dayal and Shafi Ushman by standing on Gandhian values at least initially in the novel. He is a traditionalist, puritan and even coward since his student days.

The convicts are not behaved humanely. They are obliged to work in perfect silence in a machine like motion continuously in the sparkling sun. Whatsoever the convicts are insulted roughly in this way: "Get a move on, there!-next time. I catch you with your mouth full; you'll be up for flogging. Come on, come on; don't dawdle, sons of whores, sister rapers; stop eating or I'll send the whole lot of you to the kanji-house!" (148).They are even not allowed enough time to eat. They are exploited, tortured and attacked brutally.

The above mentioned instances clarify how brutal the physical oppression is for the colonized ones. Similarly the female characters Sundari, Malini, Mumtaz and Basu's wife are those sorts of women who undergo severe suffering during pre-and post independence era. Sundari's husband Gopal takes a prostitute because of Sundari's frigidity at their first honeymoon. By this way Sundari is the butt of male victimization. But she finds none of the men to be good. Neither her father understands her inner psyche nor her husband Gopal does. Here the marital life of Sundari sharply contrasts to the happy life of her parents. As "Malini's intrusion on their day, she experienced a sudden prick of jealousy" (142), decides to take revenge and break against traditional concept of husband devotion and takes Gian with her to the beach to mock at her husband. The traditionally permitted ideologies of Indian societies that a wife should be meek, submissive, responsible to child-bearing are subverted. In her depiction woman Malgonkar has deconstructed the traditional concept of Indian women. In spite of marrying a man as a husband according to Indian tradition, Malini and Mumtaz flirt with many men and develop their character as notorious prostitutes.

### **Japanese Intervention**

The Japanese intrusion compels the hasty escape of the British colonizers but the very selfishness of the British colonizers' can be seen thus:

But the British themselves had left, almost casually, like tenants vacating a house. They had never had any stake in the house itself. On the other hand, even in their hurry, they had labored to build all the vaunted gifts of their occupation not caring how the people of the land itself would live after they had gone. (253)

They destroy every infrastructure without caring how the people will live without anything else in the area. They empty the house as the tenants do at the time of changing their rooms. As everything is not built with British' labour, they should not have destroyed the infrastructures which were built by exploiting the Indians.

By now the war between the Japanese and the British comes to an end with the British losing. This international phenomenon affects the conditions in India and Andaman Island. The success of anti-colonial Japan naturally reverses the situation in the colonized countries. To cite the author: "The new masters of the Andamans did not do things by halves; nor did they waste much time. On the very day of their arrival, even as the citizens of Port Blair were celebrating their liberation, they got down to work" (209).

However, the arrival of the Japanese did not completely liberate the Indians. Rather they started to grade the males and females of the colony and their separate identifications were made. What the Indians wished and what the Indians got is remarked by the author here: "Yamaki looked so much like a Japanese version of Mulligan that many people thought he had been specially selected for taking over command of the islands, and spoke of it as just another example of Japanese thoroughness" (209).

When the Japanese soldiers come to occupy Andaman, the British officers like Patrick Mulligan and their opportunist followers like Gian Talwar escape from there. Now, the anti-imperialist groups begin to enjoy a new freedom and sympathy from the Japanese soldiers.

Debidayal feels a new hope in his life when the Japanese Commanding Officer, Colonel Yamaki asks him to join the Indian National Army led by Subash Chandra Bose. Debidayal is only too happy to agree with him. Thus, being liberated by the Japanese soldiers from British control, Debidayal assumes a new name Kaluram, and escapes to India as a refugee. He is appointed as a stockman at the Silent Hill Tea Garden in north-western Assam. "And so Debidayal waited, marking time for the war to finish, filling out his new personality as Kaluram, a refugee from Burma who had been made assistant stockman at the Silent Hill Tea Garden in north western Assam" (263). He has been transformed from being a prisoner to an assistant stockman.

Above all, Debi is in a dilemma. Neither does he want the Japanese nor the British. Ultimately he wants to free India from any kind of colonial regime. As he is headstrong in fighting the battle for the sake of India, his motherland, his inner psyche has been pointed out by the author here

He was grateful for his new-found anonymity and remoteness, and yet he was gnawed by an inner uncertainty. What had happened to him, he who loved to be in the midst of strife, to make him want to shun it now? He wanted nothing of either the British or the Japanese. For the moment he was prepared to sit back and wait, while the two titans fought out their battle for India. (262)

### **Betrayal to Nationalism**

Debi-dayal's act of nationalism opposes Gian's dishonesty. Gian, a follower of Gandhian ideal, has turned into a weak person. He is craving for the mercy of the British and thriving on it. It was due to people like Gian that the mission of freedom could not be successful. Debi scolds Gian thus:

You are scum; you are far worse than Balbahadur because he at least is openly hostile you spout truth and non-violence. You are the sort of man through whom men like Mulligan rule our country, keep us enslaved; you are a slave working for the masters, proud of the service he renders, hankering after the rewards. (192)

Gian becomes an informer, collaborates with the British and betrays Debidayal by passing secret information about Debi to the British officers. Gian does not have any rigidity of ideology, though he was warned that his scholarship might be terminated by the principal Mr. Hakewill:

He had taken to wearing khaddar and had identified himself with the national movement. Mr. Hakewill had himself warned him that he might have to forgo his scholarship if he dabbed in anti-British activities; yet when the time came, he had come forward to testify on his behalf. (122)

But his Indianness and spirit of nationalism no longer sustain in him as he involves himself in these kinds of activities: "He went on working in the victualling office as a clerk, censoring whatever mail came in, and keeping an account of the stores, a leper in a world of criminals; this lowly spy for the British raaj" (182).

On the one hand, Gian betrays the nation for the sake of his selfish motif; on the other hand, Debi however gains a heroic dimension in his character. The personal rivalry acts as the cause of rift between Debi-dayal and Gian Talwar and weakens the anti-colonial struggle, the communal rivalry between Muslims and Hindus acts as a greater cause of rift:

The Congress and the Muslim League had come to a final parting of ways, with Hindus and Muslims separated into opposite camps, learning to hate each other with the bitterness of ages. Even their own leaders had begun to take sides. Hafiz had already written to him from Bombay complaining about the callousness of the



Hindus towards the Muslims, suggesting that they should re-orientate their activities. How long would it be before the flames of communal hatred caught up with them? (75)

Communal hatred has intensified the situation and weakened the freedom fighters' forum.

As the British Government is forced by inevitable circumstances to give freedom to India, it wants to divide the Hindus and the Muslims from each other. The Muslim separatism is obviously represented by Shafi Ushman. He was once a member of the Hanuman Physical Culture Club and co-fighter of Debidayal against the alien Government. But now he comes under the influence of Hafiz Khan with British encouragement, the Muslims of India want to be free from the Hindu control after the departure of the British from the sub-continent. 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 backs on the Hindus otherwise we shall become their slaves!" (83).

The seed of enmity is sown in the midst of anti-colonial activity by developing a separatist philosophy. As Shafi Ushman hears the suppressed anger for the Hindus from Hafiz Khan, he looks at the Hindu leaders like Debi-dayal and others with suspicion and hatred. For sometimes when the situation is not favourable to him, he spends his days in an out of bounds. In that brothel managed by Akkaji, Shafi Ushman has taken a fancy to a pretty Muslim girl Mumtaz and spends his nights with her.

The Muslim separatism has obviously annoyed Debi-dayal beyond measure. His friend Basu inculcates in him the need for unity among Hindus and alignment with the philosophy of the Hindu Mahashabha. Basu further narrates Debi-dayal how his wife was attacked because she was a Hindu:

She had gone nowhere. She was here, leaning out of the window, looking at the lovely sight you see below, one of our greatest bustee, with the hooligans of both sides going for each other. That was when someone threw bulb at her face.

Possibly some Muslim buck with an urge to seduce her, working it off. That is what made me join the Mahasabha, parloe or no parloe. I could not keep out. We have to become aligned, in sheer self-defense. Hindus against Muslims. (283-284)

Independence is worth nothing for Shafi and other Muslims unless a separate state for Muslims is carved out of India. Now the Muslims are ready to fight against the Hindus in the wake of independence. The author is more direct here: "Now the fight was no longer against the British, but against the Hindus who were aspiring to rule over them. It was Jihad, a war sanctioned by religion; a sacred duty of every true believer" (289).

Having predicated the horror of communal frenzies, Debi-dayal is convinced about the inevitability of fighting with the new enemy arisen from within India itself. He wants to take revenge upon Shafi Ushman by snatching away his pet girl Mumtaz from him. He, therefore, manages to buy her to Shafi Ushman's annoyance. 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:

The bulb dropped harmlessly a few feet away exploding with a crash. Only then the pain came over him with a full rush; at first it was like thousands of ants crawling on his hand, still clinging to it, stinging, and then it was as though he had thrust his hand into a roaring fire. I'll make up for this, Shafi, Debidayal shouted into the night. (305)

Later on, when Tekchand is about to leave with his family in search of Delhi, Shafi Ushman takes his gang with him to attack them. In the ensuing fight, he shoots Mrs. Tekchand and escapes from there. Thus, Shafi Ushman finds satisfaction in fighting for the Muslim cause.

Driven by the revenge motive, Debi-dayal buys the Muslim girl, Mumtaz more out of revenge for Shafi Ushman than out of real sexual attraction for her which is clear in this dialogic conversation between Mumtaz and Debi: "You paid the price, she said. You must have liked me. Now why do you want to cast me away? I never wanted you for myself, he told her. I did just to hurt Shafi" (307).

Later being entrapped with the coil of worldly life Debi decides to marry her despite his religious restriction. Meanwhile India achieves independence. But a separate state: Pakistan is also created simultaneously. Consequently the refugees are exchanged between India and Pakistan. Debidayal who was attached to a Muslim girl, leaves for Pakistan in the disguise of a Muslim with Mumtaz. But at last unfortunately his Hinduness is discovered. And he is mercilessly killed by the mob of Muslims in the newly created Pakistan. For the death of Debi-dayal, Mumtaz has lamented in this way: "Debi! Debi, my darling! I shall never live without you! I am coming with you to. . . I am coming . . ." (363).

### **Cultural Subordination**

In the postcolonial situation the culture of the colonizer seems to have been imitated. Having been to the colonizers' universities like Oxford or Cambridge, the scholars of colonized countries did not fit in their own culture. To borrow from the author:

The core of set was formed by the more sporting princes; the inner circle comprised young Indians from Oxford or Cambridge who now could not fit

themselves into any truly Indian backgrounds, also the sons of rich Marwaris feeling their oats. (108)

Gopal Chandidar is such a character in the novel who despite his Hinduness, has been a Westernized youth. He is an Indian only by nationality but culturally he has been westernized. In this connection the author is more direct here: "He represented the modern generation, staunchly opposed to the structure of the joint Hindu family with its rule by the elders, its clinical segregation of the male and female" (108).

He has learnt the game of poker and wanders with Malini. He severely attacks the cultural institution of marriage. To excerpt from the text: "He must be careful not to besmirch the family's prestige. Even aunt, the Maharani of Begwad, sent him a long telegram telling him that he must not marry Sundari. Gopal had taken no notice of their clamour" (112).

During the colonial period the colonizers directly or indirectly forced the colonized ones to follow their culture. Here Gian is the true example of a man who is culturally transformed. Rogers, an Englishman in the colony motivates him to speak English when he says: "You son of a thank you! he hissed. Just because you speak English, I'll give you the Kaptan-Shib's cigarettes to smoke you\_\_\_\_\_!" (128)

Though born in a true Hindu family, Gian does not follow any Hindu culture, i.e., worshipping of Shiva or Vishnu, who were worshipped by his forefathers. When he was a child he was taught the holiness of religion by his Aji. As they were going to worship Aji always told him "Remove your shoes and wash your feet... and then go and do your *namaskar* to Shiva" (24). Not realizing the childhood introspection to religion and falling in influence of English culture he never pays any veneration to Hindu Gods, rather he sells the statue of Shiva for this selfish motive. When he shows his statue of Shiva to Dewan-bahadur Tekchand, he bargains

with Gian regarding the statue of Shiva: "Well, Mr. Talwar, I have decided to make you an offer. And I think you will find that the price I am offering is fair. He was still standing close to the statue, still holding the magnifying glass in one hand" (231).

Gian's situation since the clash of the big and little house has been very pathetic. His physical house as well as his cultural house has been completely destroyed. He is in search of a job and wants to rehabilitate himself. As he remarks: "I am trying to rehabilitate myself" (233). His situation of unhomeliness is very dangerous throughout his life due to which he nowhere seems to make his identity.

Dewan-bahadur Tekchand, though he belongs to Indian nationality never seems to support the nationalist movement. When he provides Gian a job in his company, he provides an identity card "His name according to the new card was Gian Joshi" (243) not Gian Talwar.

The inconsistency in lexical items too shows cultural influence. In the novel at various places Malgonkar includes the songs in Hindi and also other lexical items. But instantly he gives the meaning in the next line in English:

*Mufat-ki undi, aur mofat-ki brandy,*

*Aur mofat-ki rundi hazaar!* Came the words of chours. Listen to that Rogers said. Free eggs freed brandy and thousands of mistresses –also free (124).

*Bolo Jawanon kya-kya milat hai*

*Kale Panike bazaar?*

A dozen or so voices joined him in the chorus:

*Arre Kale Panike bazaar, arre Kale Panike bazaar!*

*Mofat-ki undi, aur mofat ki brandy,*

*Aur mofat-ki rundi hazaar! (119).*

Similarly, the officers of the military are also submerged in their culture. "The Japanised Indian officer" and "an Anglicised Indian officer" (261) do not have their own proper identity and their cultural home.

### **Two Ideologies**

The appearance of Gandhi in the political scene has been significant. Gandhi's non-violence has been a great issue for writing. In this novel *A Bend in the Ganges* Malgonkar seems to question the utility of violence and non-violence. He nowhere seems to highlight any ideology.

The novel begins with the exposition of a group of people offering British goods to the fire. Here we find Gian Talwar's hesitation to offer his blazer to the fire and he wants to fight against his irrational impulse but the mob encouragement helps him to fling the coat into the flames. Very soon in the next chapter, *The Green Flash at Sunset*, we witness a scathing attack on Gandhi's ideals of non-violence in the presence of Gandhi's follower Gian, who believes in him just because "Even Nehru has become his disciple...the whole country" (12), Singh another character of the novel said, "Non-violence is the philosophy of sheep, creed for cowards. It is the greatest danger to this country" (12). So the basic tone of the argument is very clear in the beginning "Non –violence an instrument of coward or brave? Gandhi's *Ahimsa* results from a high capacity for rejection and suffering. Gandhi declares, "I have therefore ventured to place before India the ancient law of self –sacrifice... The *rishis*, who discovered the law of non-violence in the midst of violence, were greater genius than Newton. They were themselves greater warrior than Wellington" (81). Denying the charge of being a coward, he writes, "I do believe that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise

violence. ... But I believe that non- violence is infinitely superior to violence" (qtd in Pandey 81).

Malgonkar gives the impression that non-violence is an unrealistic ideal which cannot be followed. He argues that only in specifically defined conditions non-violence can become an efficacious strategy. The following exchange between Debi and Basu is significant in this context:

'Non-violence is all very well, if the other party too plays by the rules. It may prove an effective weapon against the British because of their inherent decency. How far would it have gone against Hitler?' Yes, tell me what would non-violence do against the brute force?

'I don't know' Debidayal said weakly. 'This Jews are said to have tried it.

'Yes, and what happened to them. Did you see the pictures of Buchenwald? Of Belsen?

Read the accounts? They were exterminated like some kind of pest .... (285)

This interpretation of the ineffectiveness of non-violence emphasizes the context in which *Ahimsa* is to be practiced. For the proper application of non violence both the parties should play an honest and fair role. However, Non-violence is not a closed myth. But it must be interpreted in the light of the context. There is a failure of non-violence in front of brute force.

As a political ideology of a sovereign nation, non-violence is found wanting. As non-violence cannot be totally annihilated, here lies the contradictory nature of non-violence. Debidayal, the positive protagonist has nothing to say at Basu's rhetorical query: "If non-violence is the bedrock of our national policy, how is the fighting spirit to manifest itself only in our services?" (286). Debi is dumbfounded and goes unanswered.

Gian wears khaddar because it is cheap, but he secretly dreams of material comfort. "The gap between the world he secretly longed for and the world he fitted into was wide enough" (17). Nevertheless, "he is thankful that khaddar has now become synonymous with nationalism" (17).

Malgonkar thus makes a distinction between non-violence as faith and as a practical political or individual creed. Non-violence can be an anxiety, a burden, even a scar on an average man. Gian resents the sacrifice of his elder brother, Hari, who had him educated: "What right had anyone to burden another with so much that could not be repaid, making him powerless, breaking down his defenses with unwavering kindness, saddling him with life long self-denial?" (21). This internal inconsistency of Gandhi's thought is often reflected in the novel via the characterization of Gian. He is presented as an opportunistic man who never sticks to any principles or ideologies. The author is crystal clear here: "But he was so clearly not the type; a man without principles, his non-violence a cover for cowardice, for a total absence of patriotic fervour" (162).

Later on Gian, the advocate of non-violence, was sentenced to life imprisonment for murder. Sometimes circumstances force a man to take resort to violence. Gian is not a violent man basically. His innate fear of violence does not make him non-violent.

Debi, a member of terrorist activity evaluates Gian as:

Was Gian the man, Debi wondered, the non-violent disciple of Gandhi who had been convicted for murder? He cursed and shook his head in disgust. Gian was certainly not the man. He was typical of the youth of India, vacillating, always seeking new anchors, new directions, devoid of any basic convictions. He had been dedicated, so he had told them, to truth and non-violence. He had already jettisoned non-violence; how far would he go with truth? (149)



Here, by way of the characterization of Gian strict non-violence and truth are questioned. Even the contrasting nature of Gian wanting one thing and doing other is the ambivalent situation caused by the impression of the British is brilliantly seen. Gian who abandoned non-violence is the representative character of typical Indian youths who being in the cyclone of dilemma could not direct their lives in any particular direction.

Debi is bitter at Gian's act of destruction of non-violence and truth for which he sharply criticizes Gian: "Do you remember talking about truth and non-violence? Debi-dayal asked. You gave up non-violence when you killed a man, I don't know when you abandoned the truth" (191).

Constant peeps into the psyche of Gian reveal how his non-violence is a sham and hypocrisy. Gian is shown wondering why he has "embraced the philosophy of non-violence... from physical cowardice, not from courage? Was his non-violence merely that of the rabbit refusing to confront the hound?" (44). This early impression of Gian is borne out by the role he is assigned to play in the narrative later: his toadying to the English to secure petty comforts for himself in the Andaman prison even as Debi Dayal suffers in lonely splendour; his resigning himself to living for ever in the Andamans even though Debi Dayal makes a heroic attempt to flee. Gian undergoes further deterioration, to worsen the worst thus:

Was it his youth that made him so shallow, he wondered, or was it a part of the Indian character itself? Did he in some way, represent the average Indian, mixed-up, shallow and weak? Like some out of *A Passage to India*, Aziz, or someone even more confused, quite despicable, in fact, like that boy whose name had forgotten, Rafi, that was it. Was he like Rafi? His non-violence had crumbled the moment it met a major test, and now even his nationalism was wavering, just

because the British officials he had come into contact with so far had been men of sterling character. (122-23)

In this passage Gian's uncertainty has been revealed where he has been compared with other characters such as Rafi. His weakness, shallowness and indeterminacy have been shown in a vivid manner. His contract with the British officials has destroyed his earlier fame of nationalism.

Gian is a selfish and amoral character. His act of using the family idol of Shiva as a pawn for selfish designs, betraying the confidence of Sundari, Debi's young sister are his selfish and amoral activities. His mere submission to the English and his act of treachery seem to mock Gandhian ideals of truth. Gian finally fails to resist his act of falsehood. When Sundari exposes him, Gian sounds convincing, "I had just begun to believe in myself taking courage in the fact that somewhere in spite of all his weaknesses, there is in every man something that he can value. You have 'now destroyed that faith" (324).

From a fake Gandhian, covering up his cowardice with a grab of non- violence, Gian grows into a truly Gandhian fighter with non-violent weapons like love, sacrifice, the willingness and the capacity to fight evil, even with violence, if need be, in his armoury Gian is given an eminently Gandhian motive at this juncture: "to try and prove is only to myself that there can be some good in the weakest of human beings" (345-46). Gian reveals his new-found qualities quintessentially Gandhian in his encounter with Shafi and his communalist goons, as he measures up to them and gets the better of them eventually. It is also not without significance that whereas Debi Dayal, the idealized proponent of violence dies, it is the grown and matured Gian who survives and drives the convoy to safety.

Gandhi is aware of the hypocrisy of his followers and that's why he declares that he is his own follower and that is enough. Historical evidences are there about Gandhian followers (Congress Leaders) who come to power in 1937-39. Regarding their corrupt practices, Bipin Chandra writes:

Gandhiji began to feel that we seem to be weakening from within. Full despondency, Gandhiji repeatedly lashed out in the columns of 'Harijan' against the growing misuse of office and creeping corruption in Congress ranks. I would go to the length of giving the whole congress organization a decent burial, rather than put up with corruption that is rampant he told the Gandhi Seva Sangh workers in May 1939" Nehru too wrote to Gandhiji in 28 April, 1938, "I feel strongly that the congress ministries are working inefficiently... They are adapting themselves for too much to the old order and trying to justify it... We are sinking to the level of ordinary politicians who had no principles to stand by and whose work is governed by a day to day opportunism". (339)

Debi is an embodiment of all Gandhian features. except that he is violent in the beginning. He believes in the unity of Hindus and Muslims, in the purity of love, not purity of body. Debi, who is unable to tolerate the killing of a pup, turns "violent" only after the soldier's attempt to rape his mother and finally indulges in violence against colonial injustice. Debi Dayal wondered whether all the exposure to what Gandhi had described as a man's inhumanity to man had converted him to his doctrine of non-violence? Or was it just his feeling of revulsion against his fellow Indians, men like Shafi, the Brigadier and Gian Talwar?

He did not know the answer, the rights and wrongs were so inextricably mixed up. He was conscious of some great change that had come over him. Visualizing the imminent civil

war, Debi comments: "It almost makes one think that non-violence is perhaps the only answer" (284). On the other side, Gandhi's helplessness regarding the non-acceptance of nonviolence by the public had been clearly deciphered by Basu:

Non-violence! How can anyone be so blind? How can you go on striving for perfection and at the same time believing it's already there? You can't change the human race overnight. Non-violence is merely a pious thought, a dream of philosophers... will he ever recognize that mankind is not prepared for true non-violence-will never be prepared... would you remain non-violent if someone threw acid at the girl you loved? Would Gandhi? "Non-violence is all very well, if the other party plays by the rules", tell me what would non-violence do against brute force? (284-85)

Sundari, a non-violent creature, also indulges in an ideological violence, only to give repartee to Gopal Chandidar, a faithless husband, and Gian Talwar, a false lover, through the "arrangement" she does on the beach and thus gets herself cured of her injured ego. She feels herself back after the beach incident.

So this was her way of getting her own back, delivering the death blow to their marriage as she had once offered to destroy a puppy, ready to hold it down, squirming, to watch it wriggling in a bucket of hot water, she was watching him now. She had always pretended that she had not seen Malini and herself that day; now, after all those years, she was telling him that she had (321-22).

To Gian Talwar she said in a terse tongue after the same incident at the beach: "I asked you to come, merely to tell you how much I detest you" (323).

Malgonkar also sees the policy of non-violence like Gandhi, merely as politically expedient as far as the people of India are concerned. At best, they had accepted it as an effective weapon against British power. Nowhere in the novel it is explicit that freedom is achieved through non-violence. Rather we find the question of Debi Dayal to Basu, "Do you think the Congress movement has been just as much of a failure as ours?" and gets a reply like this, "It is an even greater failure. But will they ever admit it?"(285). But Gandhi strengthens Malgonkar's position, by accepting the truth. To quote S.S. Gill: "Gandhi himself said, "I see it as clearly as I see my finger: British are leaving not because of any strength on our part but because of historical conditons and for many other reasons" (24).

M. K. Bhatnagar writes, "it is not merely *ahimsa* which is anatomized, and found wanting in certain respects, "*himsa*" also comes to, in the final analysis, self-destructive" (112). So, in Malgonkar's view, violence or non-violence as a principle or a creed cannot have absolute acceptance rather it must be judged in the light of a more precious human value, and that is justice. Malgonkar accepts that on an individual plane, one may succeed to ensure total acceptance of non-violence.

But when one wishes to have its total acceptance at all the levels, then one will have to consider the values of Hafiz Khan, Ghasita, the Big House of Konseth, the rapist soldier as well as the state and the ignorance of Shafi Ushman, Balbahadur, the Indian Brigadier in Burma and also the helplessness of Tukaram and Sundari and many more things. None of them seem to have faith in their ideology. In this matter Gian's situation is more pathetic and satiric:

In a sense, it was he, Gian Talwar who had brought about its ruin. But then, in destroying the Little House, he had brought about the destruction of all that surrounded it, even the Big House, for had he not with his own hands killed its

last male heir while he was still sonless? He had dug up the roots of his own family. (159)

Gian, a strict follower of non-violence in the initial stage comes to be the destroyer of his Little and the Big houses which is against his doctrine of life.

On the other side, we find Malgonkar's justification for the other tenets of Gandhism. To hate evils not the evil doers and purification of character. G.S. Amur comments on the revolutionary character of Gian:

Gian may have jettisoned non-violence and truth, the great ideals, very early in his life but, what is remarkable, he survived the crisis and ultimately found his freedom in a purely existential discovery of the value of love which turned his falsehood into truth and his weakness into strength. (108)

As we have close scrutiny over the characters of the novel we can summarize Malgonkar's treatment of Gandhi's non-violence in the words of Madge Micheels "Non-violence doesn't always work but violence never does" (1).

### **Partition Disillusionment**

Malgonkar views the Partition as the outcome of the suppression of violence in Indian people by Gandhi's creed of non-violence. He has portrayed it from a political angle. Forgetting the national perspective of fight, a large section of the Muslims were influenced by the Muslim League and rivalry against the Hindus started. To cite the author:

The Hindus and the Muslims were traditional enemies. They would never be able to live together. That was what the trial spell of provincial government had demonstrated. Now the Muslims must fend for themselves. They were unquestionably the superior race. They had conquered the whole of India, ruled it

for centuries before the British came. It was unthinkable that they should now allow themselves to be relegated to a position of inferiority, crushed by sheer weight of numbers. (288)

The Muslim League proclaimed that it would either divide or destroy India, and Pakistan, a Muslim nation would be carved out of India. There came the partition after the independence coloured with bloodiest violence.

About the political partition Shakti Batra comparing Malgonkar with Kushwant Singh remarks:

Unlike Khushwant Singh Malgonkar presents the political side of Partition from the point of view of Gian, the ardent disciple of Gandhi and his creed of non-violence: Debi Dayal the extremist and Hafiz Khan and Shafi Ushman.

Malgonkar's account takes the form of a cool, impersonal debate among the characters, it looks like a scientific analysis of the situation rather than something, which emerges out of the characters themselves and their conviction. This detachment also marks his narration of the partition riots, when they are compared to similar descriptions by Khushwant Singh. (123)

This detachment is evident in the conversation between Debi Dayal and Basu in Calcutta. "What a pass we have come to, fighting among ourselves, just when we should be concentrating on the British," Debi lamented, "it is almost as though just when they were leaving the country, the British have succeeded in what they set out to do. Set the Hindus and Muslims at each others throat. What a lovely sight!"(283). Much later while traveling in the refugee train with Mumtaz Debi Dayal is stunned by the horrors of Partition. Many questions rise in his mind:

How had they come to this after living as brothers over so many generations, how had they suddenly been infected by such virulent hatred for each other? Who had won Gandhi or the British?... Or had they both lost through not having allowed for structural flaws in the human material they were dealing with? Had Gandhi ever envisaged a freedom that would be accompanied by so much suffering and release so much hatred. Had he realized it might impose transfer of population unparalleled throughout history? (349-50)

Close to independence, Debi comes across a Hindu town where an eerie silence prevailed, where the Hindu women had been raped without resistance from their men-folk.

Malgonkar has also given a vivid account of the partition disillusionment. In a chapter entitled "The Anatomy of Partition," the novelist has described how every citizen was caught in the communal holocaust and sporadic disturbances. Teckchand, a venerable old man, standing at the window of his bedroom balcony has observed the great human tragedy:

Every citizen was caught up in the holocaust. No one could remain aloof; no one could be trusted to be impartial. When men and women of your own religion were being subjected to atrocities, you could not be expected to remain friendly with adherents to the religion of the oppressors. The administration, the police, even the armed forces, were caught up in the blaze of hatred. Willy-nilly, everyone had come to be a participant in what was, in effect, a civil war.

Tens of millions of people had to flee, leaving everything behind; Muslims from India, Hindus and Sikhs from the land that was soon to become Pakistan: two rivers of humanity flowing in opposite directions along the pitifully



inadequate roads and railways, jamming, clashing, colliding head on, leaving their dead and dying littering the landscape. (325-326)

Finally, in the midst of violence, mutilation, rape and murder only Sundari and Gian survive fleeing together from what has become Pakistan with no future left for them. This is how the sunrise of freedom found millions done to death and tens of millions dispossessed of all that they owned and cherished and brutally tossed on both the sides of newly created boundary.

In the backdrop of this situation, the author in the last part of the novel describes the suffering of Teckchand and the members of his family. Debi-dayal leaves India for Duriyabad in Pakistan to rescue his parents, while his mother is killed by Shafi, his old adversary. To state clearly the days of partition is like a bad dream and sooner the people of this subcontinent forget those days is better for them.

The novel presents the dehumanizing process in man's character in the shortest terms. Debi dayal along with his newly married Muslim wife, Mumtaz finds himself moving homeward on a train. The train is not the type he knew of as a child, but a rolling flat crammed with humanity, huddling close to one another, clutching their meager bundles of possessions and staring vacantly. These are refugees, frightened people now, who hope that the terrorists will not come for them and abduct their wives and daughters and mutilate their sons.

The citizens who longed for post independence exuberance were at despair by seeing the most barbaric cruelties of primitive man. In this way Malgonkar highlights the religious confrontation poisoned by the seed of religiosity and antagonism.

The communal holocaust can be summed up:

The most barbaric cruelties of primitive man prevailed over all other human attributes. The administration had collapsed; the railways had stopped functioning

because the officials and technicians had themselves joined the mass migration. Mobs ruled the streets, burning, looting, killing, dishonouring women and mutilating children; even animals sacred to the other community became the legislative targets of reprisals. (326)

Above all, freedom has not come. The freedom fighters had dreamt and sung about the freedom in India which would have strengthened the unity of nation for generations. But the freedom born in the hour of communal disturbances of unprecedented ferocity, chaos and utter ruin is just a fissured freedom and a flawed freedom, which only leads to the disintegration of India.

## Chapter Four

### Partition and Melancholy

Whenever there is oppression in a nation, rebellion commences to end it up. For the purpose of liberating the nation from alien power, different organizations are formed to oppose it. The constant struggle of freedom fighter comes to an end with national fragmentation in postcolonial situations. *A Bend in the Ganges* has portrayed how rebellious spirit breaks out in the people against oppression. The novel concentrates on the struggle between the British and the Indian popularly known as "Quit India Movement". The main purpose of this movement was to chase away British Raj from the Indian sub-continent. The issue in the novel is the consciousness of Indian nationalism which arose against the British colonialism and its cruelty.

Significantly, *A Bend in the Ganges* attempts to disclose the national tragedy in India initiated since the British colonial rule. The partition tragedy has been presented almost in the last chapters "The Anatomy of Partition," "The Sunrise of our Freedom," and "The Land they were Leaving" of the novel constitute the climax of the novel. The interwoven strands of divergent plots focus upon the Partition disillusionment where the characters Gian Talwar, Debi Dayal, Sundari, Shafi Ushman, Mumtaz, Teckchand and his wife all of them are caught in the communal holocaust in the wake of independence and partition. The hope of glory that the freedom fighters longed for, turns into anguish at the dawn of independence. In "The Sunrise of our Freedom" we find millions doomed to death; they are mutilated or shamed and tens of millions are dispossessed of all property they had owned and cherished, and brutally tossed on the other side of the new artificial border between India and Pakistan.

In other words, with horrible violence and bloodshed the human beings are dehumanized in the novel. The tragic division of the nation into India and Pakistan has been a panic for the

Hindu Muslim communities which were living in peace. This novel however, has shown how the two communities are poisoned by the dogma of two-nation theory. The ultimate outcome of the double conflict is both freedom and the division of the country. Malgonkar has shown that India had to make boundless sacrifice for the sake of freedom from the British Government. The problem of communal hatred between Hindus and Muslims and the exchange the refugees between the two countries have been portrayed by the author in a very vibrant manner.

Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* attempts to prove that the terrorist movement was also as magnificent as the nationalist movement guided by Gandhi. The followers of Gandhi were selfish and cowardly like Gian. On the other hand the terrorists were more passionately devoted to the foundation of freedom.

The novel faithfully describes the communal riots of the post 1947 period and the hostilities between the Hindus and Muslims in consequence of the country's partition. Malgonkar rejects both senseless violence and cowardly non-violence in this novel. It is sometimes we use violence in order to achieve something remarkable in our life, though brute violence never seems to do any kind of good in human life. The characters Shafi, Basu, Hafiz and Debi who adopted the precept of violence never succeed in their life. Rather they fall in some kind of disillusion and frustration. What they dream to achieve through violence seems to have been negated.

On the other hand absolute non-violence is a kind of failure in our life. Practically the principle of absolute non violence cannot be adopted. No single man can survive with the principle of absolute non-violence as every man is action oriented. As we see in the novel, Gian who had close affinity to Gandhian non-violence and nationalism, grows out to be violent and treacherous when he gets a chance. Similarly, Basu also rhetorically questions that no man

delays to take revenge upon the opponent. It is generalized that neither violence nor non-violence is good in absolute terms. Thus we need to do the balancing act upon them.

The story explores the human context of non-violence, violence, disintegration and communal disharmony in an impressive way. The novelist focuses on the overpowering nature of love which makes the people realize the utility of violence and non-violence through two major characters, Gian and Debidayal. Malgonkar dismisses violence as a way of life revealing its self-consuming nature through Debidayal. On the contrary he makes Gian an ironic symbol of non-violence whose principle is nothing more than a cloak for weakness. Thus, he concludes that no single, compact ideology can be a universal remedy to many inexplicable problems of life.

Conclusively, Malgonkar, in the novel, does not support any singular ideology or principle; rather he wants to show that no single principle can be the final truth. What he focuses upon is absolute violence and non-violence is meaningless before human instinct and behaviour. Thus, we need to possess both ideologies simultaneously for getting out of the grip of problems. Openmindedness helps retain social and cultural harmony.

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