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**A BEND IN THE GANGES: AN INDICTMENT OF VIOLENCE**

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**INTRODUCTION**

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Manohar Malgaonkar (1913-2010) was born when India was struggling for its freedom from the rule of the Britishers. While growing up he witnessed many great historical events that changed the course of nation's history. The political and social conditions had a great influence on his personality and his writings. He witnessed Jalianwala Bagh and Civil Disobedience Movement which left indelible impressions on his mind. Malgaonkar has a great sense of history which he incorporates in most of his literary works. He has written historical books on *Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur* and *Puars of Devas Senion*, *The Devil's Wind* is also a historical novel which depicts the Indian uprising of 1857, it delineates the real character of Nana Saheb in a great detail, *Kanhoji Angrey* studies the life of a Maratha naval chief. In his novels, he tries to recreate the contemporary history with a purpose to awaken the nation and highlight the heroism and idealism of our great historical figures such as Shivaji, Kanhoji Angrey, Nana Saheb and Tantya Tope. His novels deal with the part of Indian history in which Indians were trying to overthrow the British rule and to gain freedom from its supremacy.

*A Bend in the Ganges* is set during the period just prior to the onset of the freedom and partition. Malgaonkar depicts the violence that inevitably accompanied the freedom struggle. The three central characters Gian Talwar, Debi Dayal and Sundari like millions of other fellow Indians were deeply affected by the violence of the time. In this novel, Malgaonkar brings out the two facets of Indian Independence Movement. One is the attitude of Gandhi ji and Nehru ji with their peaceful and non-violent methods represented by Gian, other is the dissatisfaction of the terrorists with such methods represented by Debi Dayal. Debi Dayal, Shafi Usman, and Basu are college students who proclaim themselves to be the freedom fighters resort to terrorism to save India from the existing situation. They form the Hanuman club to carry out the subversive activities under the garb of forming physical culture. The Hanuman Club acts as a microcosm of the Indian society with the Hindus and Muslims united at first to fight against British, and at last when they were about to leave, fighting against each other where Basu represents the Hindus, Shafi the Muslims and Debi an embarrassed observer.

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They are dissatisfied with the Non-cooperation Movement of Gandhiji and unhappy with its outcome. They are representatives of those who advocate radical solutions for the ills India is suffering from. Debi, for instance, has some unpleasant experience with a British soldier and comes to hate them all. His father is pro-British and for this he hates his father too. He even steals explosives from his father's store to carry out the terrorist activities. Shafi tells his companions about the crawling order of General Dyer, "This is the sort of insult we have to avenge" (75). They consider themselves to be the revolutionaries who hate the British rule and the non-violent nationalists. Then there is the attitude of ordinary Indians who have great faith in the rule of the British as portrayed through Hari, Gian and Tukaram. Tukaram expresses his concern:

Have you become Congress wallah? Joined the cranks who want to send away the Sahibs? What will we do without the sahibs; they don't take bribes, like our people" (35).

Gian is pro-British initially, impressed by a speech given by a young man, he not only gives up his foreign garments and dresses but also becomes a follower of Gandhi ji. Shafi tries to manipulate Gian to terrorism at a college picnic. There they have a discussion on violence and non-violence which gives an interesting insight to the readers to think for themselves. Although Gian is adamant about not joining the group and that he shall never indulge in violence, the promise is not kept. Here Malgaonkar condemns the people's superficial adherence to non-violence. The violence affects the lives of all the characters regardless of their choice to be violent or non-violent. Shafi's proclamation that a million shall die turns out to be true. In the discussion about violence and non-violence, Shafi asks Gian to give a single instance when a country won freedom from foreign yoke through non-violence. To this Gian has no convincing answer, and Shafi sums up, "College boys fall more easily for Gandhi's type of movement, it is much more face saving" (19). Those Indians who adopted the non-violence also came to be the victims of violence. India was soaked in bloodshed and millions of Indians experienced one of the worst carnages humanity has ever experienced. Gian, a disciple of Gandhiji, who once staunchly advocated non-violence also adopts the violent means at the end. It turns out that non-violence was an expedient strategy to achieve freedom and not a way of life. Gian was a believer in Gandhi ji's non-violence only until his brother is murdered before him and he could not do anything. Gian faces this dilemma of choice between violence and non-violence. The conflict of the choice goes on his mind for a

while and ultimately he decides to take a revenge on his brother's death. Indira Bhatt observes:

Manohar Malgaonkar presents the Gandhian ideologies and examines the lives of those who held them- whether their lives were deeply affected by their political beliefs and had a sustained faith in them. (75)

There were two forces of Gandhi and Subhash Chandra Bose working for the same goal of Independence. Malgaonkar takes an objective view of the turbulent years of struggle and independence and resolutely stands outside the subject to examine these conflicting ideologies of non-violence and of INA. *A Bend in the Ganges* depicts one of the most violent periods in Indian history but this does not imply that Malgaonkar believed in the violent means. He just places the characters against the historical background. Malgaonkar shows man as capable of violence which is often brought by the destructive acts of others as in the case of Gian, Basu and Debi Dayal. For these reasons the novelist has been blamed for illustrating the relevance of violence in the novel. For instance Basu thinks of retaliating for the mutilation done to the face of his wife, Debi hated all Britishers for the wrong done to his mother by a British soldier and Gian takes revenge on his brother's killing. But the critics fail to highlight that it was the social reality that existed in India at the time. A novel written about the freedom struggle and the agony of partition could not possibly be written without the mention of violence and bloodshed. The portrayal of violence does not imply that Malgaonkar supports violence or terrorism. He just reports the national events and incidents that took place at various places in India at the time like in a documentary.

The novel presents the changing times and the clash of ideologies, and a gradual emergence of modern India. Malgaonkar observes a steady decline in the moral values and social justice owing to erosion of values. He writes about the great national events and historical figures that are instrumental in the revolt against the existing social order. Malgaonkar is well known for blending the history with fiction, the characters of the novel are involved in great events which brought changes in the national scene. They do not simply endorse the existing social order but actively play role in the resistance against the British rule. The turbulent turmoil of the partition brings changes in the lives of all the principal characters. Gian grows to be a mature person and finds fulfilment in love for Sundari; Debi Dayal gradually withdraws from the political life into the life of domestic happiness and realises that the peace lies in the love for Mumtaz. Unfortunately Debi Dayal and Mumtaz lose their lives while travelling in a train

to Dariabad. His questioning the validity of non-violence leads one to charge for supporting violence. It is important to note that if Malgaonkar does not propagate Gandhi's principles of non-violence he also does not uphold violence or terrorism as a solution to the problems of India. He puts the two views objectively in front of the readers and it is up to the discretion of the readers to decide for themselves. In an interview, Malgaonkar remarks, "Many of the situations, I have described in *A Bend in the Ganges* I have myself witnessed. And that part of Indian history, I have lived through" (qtd in Sharma 4). This clearly points out that he only depicts what he witnessed and experienced.

Thus, the portrayal of violence is a part of depiction of the ongoing diverse movements at the time. There was a great deal of chaos in the Indian political scene of the time. Shafi points out how Gandhi and Jinnah have both played into British hands and destroyed secularism. The chaos and turmoil in the political scene of India is also reflected in the narrative of the novel. Shafi himself is played into the hands of Hafis Khan and is turned into a religious fanatic. He does nothing to save the hindu members of the Hanuman Club. As a result, Debi, Basu and other hindus are arrested and imprisoned. At one hand the events in the novel suggest the inefficiency of non-violence and on the other hand it also points out the inadequacies and consequences of violence. Like any good fiction, Malgaonkar does not tell that he is indicting violence, he lets the reader feel the indictment through the miseries that the characters undergo, the outrage and fear in their minds. To sum up, Malgaonkar laments the bloodshed in the nation that ostensibly professed to be non-violent. All suffer owing to violence, even the ones who adopt violent measures themselves become the victim of violence, and this is why he indicts the unfortunate inhumanity of the people and violence of the time. The portrayal of violence is just an endeavour to bring out the reality of the time. The novel is remarkable for stirring up the reader and exposing various ills of the society affecting the social order.

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