

Theme Of Partition In A Bend In The Ganges**Dr. Priyanka Singla**Associate Prof. of English
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Much has been written on the gory saga of Partition of India in many languages by the writers from both India and Pakistan portraying in their creative writings the traumas of pain, violence, humiliation, displacement, recovery, resettlement and many other issues related to it. Still, every story about Partition fills a huge gap in the universe of possible narratives. Perhaps people can eventually earn from telling the story so that it can't happen ever again. There will never be enough novels either by Indians and Pakistanis or by Diasporic Indians and Pakistanis to tell the tales of each of 17 million people who became refugees as the two countries celebrated their Independence from the British. There will never be enough novels to tell the tales of those who died- five million people. In A Bend in the Ganges, Malongkar raises a very pertinent question- Is it possible to measure loss and bereavement? He makes a very serious effort to understand the cause of the violence whose brutal eruptions rend the veneer of civilization and culture. In exploring the nature of this violence, he also explores the trauma accompanying this violence. The present paper is a humble attempt to bring forth the impact of Partition on different aspects of the lives of people, including the concepts of boundaries as depicted in this novel.

Keywords: *Partition Literature, Violence, Trauma, Physical and Psychological Boundaries, Diaspora, Displacement.*

Historical events have often been made the subject matter of different literary writings. The creative writers, in an attempt to bring out different implications of historical incidents, present an imaginative recreation of the reality concerning history. The writings concentrating on the role and influence of historical occurrence in people's lives have a special appeal for the people. The Partition of India immediately after Independence is, no doubt, a major historical event

impacting life on a large scale. The literary writings dealing with the theme of Partition have a special significance for the people who have undergone the harrowing experiences of this tragic event, and also for the people who have learned about it by listening to the witnesses of this event and through different books who have developed much interest in such kind of literature due to its presentation of the immediacy of experience. Apart from this, in its metaphorical sense Partition becomes a reference point to realize and understand the implications of different forms of partitions that continue to take place at a micro level almost every day involving displacement, dislocation and separation from one's nears and dears and the home. The broader canvas that this subject offers has resulted in a number of fictional works pertaining to this theme which inform certain features that make them almost a specific genre.

The notable trait of fictional works dealing with the Partition is the depiction of communal clashes, violence and its implications. The details about the initiation of these clashes often tend to show how the peaceful atmosphere of communal harmony was suddenly disrupted and vitiated: the communities that had been living together peacefully since ages turned into enemies. The incidents involving riots, arson, rape, murder and bloodshed are placed against the background of the political and geographical Partition of the country. The focus in these writings is generally on the puncture of a harmonious social fabric. The repercussions of this historical situation ultimately make the people, who were either involved in abetting violence or suffered it, more sensitive to realize its futility. A significant aspect of the Partition Literature is its investigatory nature. Different writers deploy certain devices to explore the intentions and role of political readers related to the process of Partition. The fall-out of Partition and the political management of the affairs related to the Partition receive a concentrated treatment through narrators and authorial intrusions. The writers use these elements to revisit Partition and highlight its impact on the masses. It involves a deep nationalist playing of the strains of the freedom struggle. It focuses on the question of freedom in an ironical way- Is this the freedom people struggled for? It also adds a didactic strain through the warning against political motives of the powers by expressing a deep wish to become one. In the process, it brings out the actual against the probable and the reality versus the dream. These thematic concerns are expressed through certain techniques that find repeated occurrence in different fictional works.

The most frequently used fictional technique in these works involves taking slices from history and weaving stories around them. It helps build historical perspective and present history as fiction. It employs the use of locational elements, significant historical days, and major incidents, mention of important political meetings and speeches of political leaders. Sometimes, newspaper headlines are used as a point of reference. These elements help locate the fictional discourse in particular time and at a specific place. Critics have studied *A Bend in the Ganges*, with a view to bringing out the plethora of perspectives and the political implications informing Partition. These critics have analyzed the nature of violence along with its possible political causes and the impact this violence had on millions of people who experienced the trauma of this event. Manohar Malongkar's novel is more or less confined to critical works dealing with Indian Writing in English in general and Partition in particular. It is racy, packed with events, has frequent surprises and twists in the plot, and a liberal dose of love and romance, not to forget its representation of action- packed history. However, the novel is no cheap- thrill bestseller, but actually a work of deep political introspection. It is one of the best works of Malongkar.

The Indian literary scene before Independence was full of euphoria where, a handful of writers romanticized life and its ways. With India gaining Independence, this scene underwent a complete change as it removed its hypocritical skin and appeared with a new and real face. The euphoria and romanticism were out, with frankness and reality taking its place. With Independence came Partition and its aftermath, which had a ghastly effect on one and all. Malongkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* depicts one of the most violent periods in the recent Indian history, the revolt against the British rule. The Gandhian philosophy is here contrasted with the methods of those who believed in violent means. The novelist introduces the central conflict right at the beginning, for this is the major theme round which is built up all the action of the novel- it starts with the terrorist movement and ends with the communal riots of the post-Partition period.

There is extensive political documentation in *A Bend in the Ganges* right from Gandhi's Non- Cooperation Movement till the time of Partition. But, Malongkar's aim in doing so was not to give an erratic national calendar; he is rather concerned with the Why's of

Partition. Central to the novel are two fundamental questions that the author explores at great length- Can Hindus and Muslims be really united? Can we vouch for the efficacy of non-violence as a way of life? But, these questions and the documentation of the times are worked out through the strategy of the double- heroes who represent two opposing political ideologies- Revolutionary terrorism and Non- violence, respectively. Debi Dayal, the committed revolutionary terrorist and Gian Talwar, the professed follower of Gandhi- are both directly involved in political action. And it is through the differing responses of the two protagonists to the political upheaval of the times that the author seems to build up a debate as to which ideology was more suited for tackling the immense complexities of the freedom struggle and also the anomalies that underlay the Hindu- Muslim question.

The thematic concerns of *A Bend in the Ganges* negate a most cherished a most cherished assumption of the post- colonial theory that “post- colonial literatures mostly have, as their theme, resistance to the ex- colonizer, as averred by Ashcroft et al (17). Malongkar’s novel is manifestly more inward- looking than protest- oriented. Instead of hitting out against the British oppressors, it explores the socio- political dynamics of Indian society with special focus on the two contending communities- the Hindus and the Muslims. It questions why Partition happened in the first place. Was it simply because of the divide and rule policy of the British, or were there also inherent- though invisible- fissures in the very structure of the Indian society which made Partition possible? The novelist himself is convinced that religious differences among the races of India were the root cause of the country’s slavery, and the British had learnt to take the fullest advantage of these differences, playing the Hindus against the Muslims and the Sikhs against both. The result was Fundamentalism which was ironically growing in strength even as the nationalist movement gained momentum.

Violence and bloodshed went hand in hand with forced mass migration. It didn’t matter who one was or what one felt or thought or wanted. Choice had no place in the new scheme of things. One just had to flow with the tide. At the end of the novel, one finds Debi Dayal’s father Tekchand, the richest and the most renowned man in Duriabad, bitter and raging at the turn of events. The development of the Hindu- Muslim conflict that culminated in Partition was

inextricably bound up with the nationalist movement. Ironically so, Fundamentalism grew even as the nationalist movement gained momentum in India in the years before Independence. Organized struggle for Independence, properly speaking, began with the Gandhian era in Indian history. Malongkar's narrative, interestingly, also starts roughly at the same time- beginning with the Civil Disobedience Movement of the early 1930s and ending with the post- Partition riots in Punjab.

Between the two poles is packed all the excitement of two decades: the boycott of foreign goods; the secret activities of terrorist groups; the outbreak of the Second World War; the Japanese occupation of the Andamans; the British retreat from Rangoon; the long march of the evacuees from Burma; the Bombay dock explosion; the dismemberment of India. These political events, in fact, shape the plot of the novel. The protagonists are personally involved in all these events, in some way or the other. Their lives are driven by these stupendous happenings which just carry them along. Both the protagonists, however, live through the events differently, particularly because they have very different perspectives about the reality facing India. Debi Dayal is a committed revolutionary, while Gian accepts Gandhi's philosophy; albeit uneasily. Through them, Malongkar focuses on certain key issues that lay at the heart of the ideological clash between Gandhi's Satyagrahis and the revolutionary terrorists. The doctrine of non-violence and all that it stands for is very aptly summed up in Nehru's speech in the very First Chapter of the novel in which we find Gian attending a meeting where Gandhi and Nehru had come. Nehru at least acknowledges that the terrorists are also patriots- albeit of a different kind- even though they have no place in their army. The terrorists, on the other hand, as represented by Shafi Usman- Debi's leader and mentor- are deeply contemptuous of Gandhi and his followers and condemn them outrightly.

The inefficacy of non- violence as an all- embracing philosophy of life had become quite apparent by 1946. Very few Indians seemed to set store by it any more. In the very next chapter, we find Shafi Usman thinking just the ditto dialogue of what Bose had said in the previous chapter. For Shafi, there was no possibility of the Hindus and the Muslims living together. For the Muslims, Independence was worth nothing unless it also ensured freedom from

the domination of the Hindus. They would never live in an India where they were only a tolerated minority. *A Bend in the Ganges* records the transformation of Revolutionary Terrorism into Fundamentalism and shows how a historic non-violent struggle against an imperial power ironically gave way to unprecedented violence and savagery.

A Bend in the Ganges is one of the most powerful novels dealing with the background of the Indian Independence carried further to the Partition riots. Here, the writer passes a comment upon the struggle which at times is worthy and at others is worthless. Malongkar shows them both in his novel, the fight- first against others and then with our own people. It is a gripping novel in which events move fast and the reader is kept in suspense to the last page. Dramatic movements, situations full of suspense and large scale epic events take place against the backdrop of communal disturbances of 1947. It is an action packed novel built around the most momentous events in the recent history of India. It ranges from domestic to national bloodshed. Domestic bloodshed is symbolized in the passion and the quarrels that flared up between the Big House and the Little House. Malongkar presents this quarrel metaphorically. Gian's brother Hari is killed by Vishnu Dutt and Gian as a sort of personal vendetta, in turn, kills Vishnu Dutt. This personal bloodshed in a Himachal Pradesh village opens the novel and the national bloodshed- the massacre of thousands of men, women, and children, the Hindus as well as the Muslims- forms the dramatic finale of the novel.

The background of the plot is equally authentic and possesses a sort of documentary validity to it. Malongkar has selected a most unusual background- the terrorist movement, the Andaman jails, the native head hunters, the great explosion in Bombay Harbour and the communal upheaval in Punjab. *A Bend in the Ganges* thus becomes a story of blood and tears. The unusual situations and events acted against the most dramatic years of the Indian history make this novel a great and powerful one ever produced in the post- Independence period. Over and above the dramatic and thrilling situations, the novel touches epic dimensions in as much as it describes the vast struggle for independence over a quarter of a century: the terrorist movement: the Second World War and lastly the communal massacre that uprooted nearly two million people of the Punjab- all this tells a tale of tears and sorrow touched with rare

imagination and authentic realism. The underlying theme of the novel- the violence that followed India's achievement of freedom and its unexpected repercussions on the individual psyche, is kept at the centre, and round it are ranged the scenes of several human dramas. The conflicts in this novel, while they are in one sense generated by the characters themselves, are, from another more comprehensive perspective, the logical consequences of the circumstances, both historical and social, within which they live. The integration of theme and characterization with these situations of conflict has been superbly executed.

Apart from the Hindu- Muslim question and the viability of non- violence, another question that Malongkar explores is that- though the Indian struggle for Independence was drawing to its inexorable end, were Indians really prepared for the burden of Independence; whether they were equal to the task? Malongkar clearly thinks not. He is all praise for the 'steel frame' of the British administration in India and suggests that it was this that was holding India together. Without this, India would collapse and there would be utter chaos, what with the Hindus and the Muslims waiting to pounce upon each other. The Indian officials could never be the substitutes of the English ones. The reader meets quite a few repulsive examples of them in the novel. Indeed, Malongkar shows clear signs of not only preferring the existing British administration to a possible Indian one, but also prefers the British character- as represented by the British officers and judges- over the Indian character which is shown as weak, selfish and unscrupulous and not at all worthy of the solemn task of governing. What comes across most forcefully in the reading of *A Bend in the Ganges* is the novelist's pre- occupation with the 'why's' of Partition. As an amateur historian, Malongkar was less interested in the specific happening that was Partition than in examining the subterranean faultiness that lay concealed under the event. The novel, thus, delineates with insight, penetration and utter analytic precision the uneasy transformation of a colonized nation into a sovereign state, the difficult passage from the familiar shackles of bondage to the disturbing challenges of freedom.

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