

**HEROISM, REALISM & SOCIAL CRITICISM IN MANOHAR MALGAONKAR'S
FICTION**

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ABSTRACT:

This paper attempts to explore the idea of realism in Indian fiction with specific reference to Manohar Malgaonkar's fiction published during three-and-a-half decades which are written in English. The objective of this study is to explore Malgaonkar's fiction which majorly provides a backdrop to the period of greatest upheavals in the recent times. The paper also observes that the Second World War and India's Independence are the two significant events of this duration which play a vital part in most of his works.

Keywords:

Colonisation, realism, partition, heroism

INTRODUCTION:

Malgonkar's novels saw the light of the day after India's independence in 1947. His urge for recreating the contemporary history through his writings is a part of his desire to awake the nation and to help it to build an individual character. His novels have heroes who go for heroism and their heroic deeds are in accordance with the traditions of historical periods. They are kings, princes, army personnel, tea-planters and aristocrats. They are bold, capable and daring. They go for shooting, hunting, drinking and sex revelries. But Malgonkar has always been trying to project a hero conforming to the ideals of famous personalities in the past like Nana Saheb, Tantya Tope, Shivaji and Kanhoji Andrey. Malgonkar's heroes, such as Kiran Garud, Debi-Dayal and Abhayraj, clearly reveal his desire. To make them look true and somewhat similar to great historical figures, he throws his heroes into such historical situations as may draw out heroism and idealism at their best.

The action in all his novels, except *The Devil's Wind*, takes place in a particular period from 1938 to 1950. The period which provides a backdrop to the novels of Manohar Malgonkar has been the period of greatest upheavals in the recent times. The Second World War and India's Independence

are the two significant events of this duration which play a vital part in his initial four works. *Distant Drum* (1960) covers a period from 1938 to 1950. It narrates the ‘Burma War’ during World War II along with the 1947 violence and bloodshed, besides the regimental history of the 4th Satpura Regiment. *Combat of Shadows* (1962) covers a period from 1938 to 1940 and it has a reference to the Second World War. *The Princes* (1963) depicts the ‘Raj-days’ and the princely states amalgamation into the Indian Union. The work *A Bend In The Ganges* (1964) also depicts the historical events prior to and after India’s independence. The novel depicts the Second World War scenario and it goes as far back as 1938. *The Devil’s Wind* (1972) is truly the first historical novel written in autobiographical form in which he recreate the history of 1857 days through the narrator-hero Nana Saheb.

SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES

The socio-political ethos of the subcontinent during the partition days and the life of the princes during the Raj-days leave a deep impact on the pages of his major novel. In the 1990s, ‘Partition’ may not be a very attractive subject to most Indian-English writers, but there was a time “when Partition convulsed the collective conscience of creative writers and resulted in books such as *A Bend In The Ganges* by Manohar Malgonkar and *A Train to Pakistan* Khushwant Singh”. On the other hand, the thrill and romance attached to the Raj-days still has some magnetic attraction which the latest arrival of Gita Mehta’s *Raj* (1989) has proved.

Malgonkar weaves his stories around the historical events of contemporary India. His heroes emerge from the tense historical situations. As a matter of fact, he finds many elements common between history and fiction. In an interview with James Y. Dayanand he says:

To my mind, history and fiction have not only many elements in common, history now forms the basis for most of my work.... I think, the bonds of all fiction are these facts and the facts are fantastic in Indian history, as they are in any history.

Thus his quest for heroes having heroic ideals leads him to events and upheavals of contemporary history. He can go as far back as 1857 in realising his desire. Malgonkar's heroes are largely egoists, and blue blood runs in their veins. Heroes and other subordinate characters, who fall in categories other than this, are treated by the author with disdain and indifference. Krishna Kant, Jugal Kishore, Kanak Chand, SarkarBabu and even the hero of *A Bend in the Ganges*, GianTalway, suffer at the hands of the author. KiranGarud, Abhayraj, Debi-Dayal and Henry Winton are the pampered heroes of the author. Nana Saheb's heroic stature is well-known to us and Indian history is a witness to it.

KiranGarud is a C.O. in the 4th Satpura Regiment. His heroism in the Second World War wins a military cross for him. In a hand to hand fight, he kills a Japanese soldier. During the riots in Delhi in 1947, he risks his life. His ticking off the British Colonel Manners brings him applause from all. Henry Winton (in *Combat of Shadows*), a public school product, is another extension of Kiran in some respects. He is known as a big time hunter. His collection of guns is marvellous. He risks his life when he goes after the one-tusked rogue elephant. He too intends to join the army during the Second World War, but his ankle injury stops him. AbhayrajBedar, the hero of the *Princes*, is a perfect replica of Kiran. He too goes in for hunting, shooting and sports. Like his predecessors, he takes part in the Second World War and gets a medal. In *A Bend in the Ganges*, the hero Debi-dayal is a member of a revolutionary group. He sets a plane ablaze and defies the orders of Mulligan Saheb at the Andamans. He lives dangerously and consequently he loses his life while travelling to Dariabad in a train along with Mumtaz. In *The Devil's Wind*, Nana Saheb challenges the British power, liberates Kanpur and becomes the hero of the 1857 freedom fight. He is a terror to Britishers, but he refutes the allegations of being responsible for the carnage at Satichaura and Bibighar. It is a known historical fact that Nana did not surrender and British government could not catch him.

QUEST FOR HEROISM & ADVENTURES

Of many heroic sports and entertainments, hunting needs special mention because it occupies a significant place in two of his novels and has a passing reference in two others. In *Combat of Shadows* and *The Princes*, hunting occupies a prominent place. Henry Winton in *Combat of Shadows* is a big time hunter and he goes after one-tusked elephant. Eddie shoots the python and Kistulal is killed by the rogue elephant. In *The Princes*, MaharajHiroji, who has killed fifty-eight tigers, is ultimately killed by a wounded tiger. He also arranges tiger-hunting for Mr. Gibson. Abhayraj is also very keen on hunting and he loses his temper when he finds that his lovely shotgun was used by the palace officer, Abdulla Jan. *Distant Drum* and *The Devil's Wind* provide only casual references to hunting.

All the major novels of ManoharMalgonkar when considered together present a unified vision and a controlling concept. This concept and vision are related to his quest for self-realization which is a recurring theme in his novels. It acts like a centre holding together many subsidiary themes. Most of the critics have ignored the basic themes in Malgonkar's novels, but one of the major critics of Malgonkar, James Y. Dayanand has explored the theme of initiation as one of the significant themes.

ManoharMalgonkar's novels show the growth of the hero. Two of his novels *The Princes* and *The Devils Wind* belong to the type of *bildungsroman*, which records the chronological and intellectual development of the hero. James Y. Dayanand has called *The Princes* the story of initiation. This growth of hero leads to some knowledge and self-realization. Without self-realization, any kind of growth or education is incomplete. This self-realization is the kernel of all kinds of human growth and development, and earlier we attain it the better.

TERRIBLE AWAKENINGS IN MALGAONKAR'S WORKS

The society which the novels by Malgaonkar represented was the society which he had reproached. They always wondered as to why the people were so blind to the hidden realities of their lives. Hence they always longed for awakening in the people. They wanted the people to wake up from their slumber and evaluate the trends of morality around them. The societal duties which the people

had to carry out had lost their actual meaning and the essence of the past Indian life had diminished. Hence, all his novels will indicate at some kind of awakening.

The characters are shown to be waking up to the hypocrisy lurking behind the institution of marriage. *A Bend in the Ganges*, right in the beginning, reflects upon the idea of what it means to cut a nation into three halves. The entire scene is commendable, because it is unquestionably characteristic of the previous bondage between the Hindus and Muslims which would have turned hostile. Ultimately the characters awaken to the fact that their lives would no longer be the same as before. Their so called nation obviously appears to be a false and an insincere notion. They also awaken to the fact that they simply a toy or a puppet the politicians can use. This shows that the commoners are not entitled to have any identity.

In the novel *A Bend in the Ganges* Teckchand awakens to the stifling moral rubrics of his society which were being skilfully regulated and endorsed by the political leaders. He is forced to make a compromise with the dreams and pleasure of his life only to retain life in his body. In order to simply survive, he decides to makes all possible sacrifices. He sacrifices his wishes, desires and happiness so as to sincerely comply with the upheavals of the Indian society which had turned bloodthirsty.

Another interesting awakening in Malgaonkar's novels is that the characters are painfully awakened to the fact that they were immersed only in illusions. The novels also depict that the characters are seen struggling to achieve a perfect and a happy societal life in the face of confusion, chaos and communal hatred. The families which otherwise were closely knit one comprising only mutual love and affection in the pre-independent India were all the societal sense complete ones. But the completion of the families suddenly looks cracked and they all understand that it was only an illusion they were under hoping for betterment of their lives soon after the British departed. .

The novels of Malgaonkar, therefore, are all about the terrible awakenings people come to terms with. The characters ultimately understand that the actual Utopian belief that was instituted in people was that the community was to be treated as an honourable institution that all could trust.

The partition, with all its brutality, changed this prevailing notion. The partition novelists, hence, have a demonstration of how the people are regulated by the hypocrisies of politicians and the media which is always inconsistent.

CONCLUSION:

In this discourse it has been my endeavour to show the themes and narrative skill of ManoharMalgonkar in his novels. His capacity to engage the readers with a variety of themes and a striking narrative skill is amazing. Out of his many skills, his innovative plot-structuring is the kernel of his narrative technique. It is the neat construction and the entertainingly told narrative which have placed him on a par with the major contemporary Indian-English novelists. *A History of Indian English Literature* by M. K. Naik makes a right assessment of Malgonkar as a narrative artist:

The novels of ManoharMalgonkar are conveniently created and interestingly told stories which anyway present a rather limited view of life and individual instinct viewed from the point of view of a very furious man of the humankind for whom there is very little to appreciate and respect on human instinct; a man for whom life is mostly equated with sex and the flesh and its appetites are more real than the finer perceptions of the mind and the heart and the larger concerns of human life....It is only when he adopts a broader view of things as in *The Princes* that he is able to raise above his self-imposed restrictions.

Malgonkar's environment and cultural heritage too have moulded and shaped his genius in such a manner that his imagination gets full exposure on the wide canvas of his novels. He is considered to be the most masculine of all the Indian-English writers because of his service in the army and passion for big game hunting.

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