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RESEARCH ARTICLE

BOTH MANOHAR MALGONKAR AND KHUSHWANT SINGH AS EMBODIMENT OF 'THE REALIST AND THE HUMANIST' ARTISTICALLY DEPICTING THE IMPACT OF THE PARTITION AND COMMUNAL DISHARMONY IN THEIR FICTIONAL WORLD : AN APPRAISAL

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ABSTRACT

This paper lays focus on the fictional forte of Manohar Malgonkar and Khushwant Singh, with an emphasis on the communal riots between Hindus and Muslims, as it becomes unbearable and unforgettable for them as Indo-Anglian writers, and to the extent, they both converted contemporary history into literary creations by artistically depicting the impact of the partition that began to cast its shadow of communal disharmony and violence.

INTRODUCTION

Khushwant Singh and Manohar Malgonkar are the well-known writers of the Post-independent period of India by forcing themselves to write about the communal discord in our country which took place between 1930 and 1948 when there were riots between the Hindus and the Muslims. These two writers are said to have brought out in their works how the atrocities were done by the Hindus and the Muslims to each other. The achievement of Independence in 1947 marked a watershed in Indian literature for the new social and political consciousness. The novels by such writers as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, K.A. Abbas, Kamala Markandaya, Khushwant Singh, K. Nagarajan, Chaman Nahal and Manohar Malgonkar wrote about the national movement and political turmoil. The changing political and economic scenario provided new subjects to writers – especially the tragedy of the partition and the ghastly events that followed it, the rise of castes, regionalism and communalism, the terrorist violence, exploitation of the have-nots and the communal discord.

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It is said that the Independent movement of India was not merely a political struggle but an all-pervasive emotional experience for Indian writers in the nineteen forties and fifties. No Indian writer writing in English in those decades could ignore these burning problems in his works. Since Independence, more than a dozen significant writers have been frequently contributing to the steadily growing number of Indo-English novels, a selected few writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya, K.A. Abbas, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Raja Rao; Mulk Raj Anand did focus on the human issues, of whom Khushwant Singh and Manohar Malgonkar specially concentrated on such themes as partition, its ghastly consequents and communal violence and discord to a great extent. Khushwant Singh, novelist, short story writer, historian, essayist, journalist and editor, was born at Hadali in West Punjab (now in Pakistan) on 2nd Feb. 1915. He was the second sibling of Sisiobha and Lady Singh who were closely associated with the building up of New Delhi. Khushwant Singh had his primary education in Delhi and then college education at Government college, Lahore. He did his L.L.B. at King's College, London. He become a lawyer and practised Law at the Lahore High Court for seven years. The he accepted teaching assignment in the United States as a Visiting Professor at Swathmore College and at Princeton University. After that, he did his best to establish himself as a prominent writer.

As such, he became a writer of repute. The first major breakthrough in Khushwant Singh's literary career came in the year 1950 when he published his remarkable collection *The Mark of Vishnu and other Stories*. All these were based on real life experiences. It was with the publication of his first novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956) that the critics declared the arrival of Khushwant Singh on the contemporary literary scene. The novel *Train to Pakistan*, first entitled as *Mano Majra* brought recognition and wide acclaim for Khushwant Singh. This novel even won for him the Grove Press India Fiction Prize for the year 1956. Singh's criticism and comments on life and personalities aim at reaching the humanistic ideal. The novelist is harmoniously combined with the social critic in his creative self. He occupies a special position in his adherence to and interpretation, of Realism. His creative faculty is tinged with and mellowed by his deep humanistic moral values. In the words of Chetan Karnani, "As a creative writer, Singh is an embodiment of synthesis of the realist and the humanist – which is indeed the essence of his achievement" (141). Among the novels written on the background of the partition of India and the consequent violence and bloodshed, only a few stand out in bold prominence. Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is the most talked about novel on the theme of partition and communal violence. The blurb of the novel does inform the readers that it is a brilliant, brutally realistic story of political hatred and violence, of mass passions during these fateful days that preceded and followed the partition of India.

Another writer by name Manohar Malgonkar was born on July 12, 1913 in Bombay. He had his schooling during 1919-1931 and college education at the Bombay University during 1931-1935 by obtaining his B.A. (Hons) degree in English Literature and Sanskrit. It was at the age of 46 that he turned to writing after trying various careers like 'hunting' during 1935-37, as his profession, as a fairly high official in the central Government Service in 1937, as a 2nd Lieutenant in the British Indian Army during 1942-1952 and as a representative for an American Business firm in Delhi in 1952. Only after trying various careers, he took to creative writing rather seriously. The main sources of Malgonkar's creative writing have been his varied experiences and extensive study of Indian and western authors. While personal experiences directly helped him in getting the raw material for his novels, the influences from Indian and western authors indirectly helped him in presenting the novel in proper shape and form. His very first novel *Distant Drum* (1960) did analyse the mind of the army of India at the most critical period in its history when on account of the partition, riots were taking place and the Hindus and the Muslims were sharply divided on almost every issue, and his *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) is nothing but an epic presentation of the Indian struggle for freedom from the late thirties to the partitioning of the country in 1947. His objectives were to probe Gandhiji's ideology of non-violence in relation to man's hidden capacity for violence.

Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* concentrates upon the painful dream of the partition comprehensively and suggestively, thereby showing convincingly how the terrorist movement' – a symbol of national solidarity – designed to oust the British from the Indian soil, degenerated into communal hatred and violence and how the emphasis from the struggle between Indian nationalism and British colonialism shifted unfortunately to the furious and malicious communal hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims. The novel depicts powerfully the horrible developments resulting in the partition,

the triumph and tragedy of the hour of freedom, the screams of the victims renting the morning air, the dawn of freedom greeting the sub-continent in the pools of blood, the barbarous cruelties heaped on men and women catcalls of the crowd and innumerable women being carried away naked, struggling and screaming at the top of their voice. The Muslim fears of being ruled by the Hindus in the absence of the British rule in the country where they had been the rulers, their notion that "the Hindus were more dangerous than the foreigners and ought to be their target and their striking at them, their struggle for a safe homeland separate from India leading to the partition, and the terror and pity of it – all these form the contents of the novel" (Sharma 32). Manohar Malgonkar is a voracious reader, who does obviously reveal his mind in an article published in *The Time Literary Supplement* regarding the influence of western authors on his creative writings of the early influences, the impact of John Morris and Meadows Taylor on Malgonkar is of great significance because it brought to his notice the fact that the Indian themes might be transcribed through the alien medium without any appearance of artificiality. G.S. Amur puts it in the following words:

"It was Taylor who demonstrated effectively and for the first time how Indian experiences could be handled in a foreign medium and the fact that he was an Englishman did not make much difference. Taylor seems to have been an important influence on Malgonkar" (Amur 19-20).

Another writer who exercised great influence on Malgonkar was E.M.Forster for whom Malgonkar has high praise thus: "No other author has shown such a deep

Understanding of the character of the educated Indian as E.M.Forster" (P 20).

No doubt, multiple factors, including cultural and literary influences, have shaped Manohar Malgonkar into a delightful novelist. The following words of Y.Dayanand are a tribute to Malgonkar's genius:

"His fiction is Indian in the deepest sense; it shows Indian experiencing Indian culture free of fake profundity and mysticism. Not to read Malgonkar is to cheat yourself of a writer of considerable charm and skill" (P 156).

The partition of the country and the inhuman violence that accompanied it were shocking and saddening experiences for the creative artist as it was for the national leaders and the right-thinking citizens. The same and agony of the partition was something unbearable and unforgettable for Indo-Anglian creative writers like Manohar Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh and many others. Being interested in the history of their motherland, they wanted to record it in their novels so that it could serve as an eye opener to their fellowmen and to the generation to come. Both these writers wanted their compatriots to place time-honoured values above religious fanaticism and communal affinity. Religious fanaticism and communalism have unfortunately become the common, penetrating ills of the Indian society and it is the foremost duty of every right-thinking citizen to fight these ills uncompromisingly and generate an atmosphere of peace and harmony.

There is no shadow of doubt that the Indo-Anglian novelists like Manohar Malgonkar and Khushwant Singh took up the noble task of converting contemporary history into literary creation. With the sole intention of drawing a lesson from the country's past history, they are said to have exposed the motives of persons who operate behind the scenes to generate and foment conflicts and also to underline the desire of persons to live in amity. They did also highlight the need for them to rise above religious barriers and treat one another with kindness, sympathy and affection. Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* are "Partition Novels" presenting photographic portrayals of communal violence and communal discord. Unlike the other novels on the recent history of the sub-continent, these novels offer solutions that would go a long way in putting an end to the ruthless and senseless mass destructions as the one in the wake of the 'Partition'. Both these novels make a strong plea for fraternal amity among various communities and for a sense of self-sacrifice which alone can save mankind from total destruction. *A Bend in the Ganges* makes a study of how that violence erupted in the lives of ordinary men and women, where as *Train to Pakistan* describes how a mixed 'community of Sikhs and Muslims is caught up in the mass hysteria and how the central character averts a gruesome tragedy by his extraordinary gesture of self-sacrifice.

The word 'communalism' refers to a condition of suspicion, fear and hostility between members of different religious communities. Bipon Chandra defines thus:

"Communalism is the belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion they have, as a result, common social, political and economic interest" (P3).

Empirically speaking, communalism is 'a community' in action and it becomes both a virtue and a vice; a virtue when the community or its component groups act in a non-aggressive way and a vice when they act in an aggressive way. Thus, Communalism is the sense of the identity of a community represents two trends in society; first a 'community' in action' to promote social heritage; secondly in its narrow sense, it would mean a community in action to promote social tension. Religious fanatics and anti-social elements very often become the tools of political parties add fuel to the fire of communalism. A defiled cow in a temple or a piglet in a mosque can spark a chain of violent communal clashes. Innocent citizens become victims of the violence. Because of communal discord, internecine wars burn down our own homes. Mutual trust turns into mutual hatred, suspicion and perpetual thirst for revenge. In a significant statement entitled "The Pre-History of Communalism" in *Religious conflict in India 1700-1860*, Christopher Bayly draws attention to the 'incidence of communal conflict in India over the period 1700 to 1860. "Communal discord was not a feature of Indian's rural scene but it was engineered first by the British Government under the policy-divide and rule and then by the nationalist leaders though unintentionally" (Kumar 41). In the contemporary times, a great body of historical fiction has emanated on the erudite scene. Many Indian English novelists have turned to the past as much as to trace the deepening mood of nationalism as to cherish the memories of the bygone days. An historical novel is nothing but an evaluation of a segment of historical reality as projected by the novelist and historical events.

The most important historical event of our age was the 'Partition'. On March 22, 1947, Lord Louis Mountbatten arrived in Delhi with a clear mandate from the Labour Prime Minister Clement Atlee to transfer power to a Unitary government. He spent five hours talking to the Hindu and Muslim leaders about the British Government's proposal for the division of the country into two sovereign States – Indian and Pakistan. Generally speaking, a great national event, traumatic and far reaching in its ramifications, often provides very rich material for writers. For example, 'the French Revolution', 'The American Civil War', 'the Russian Revolution', 'the two World Wars' have provided the novelists with rich material for writing fiction. Likewise, the 'Partition of India' was a very traumatic experience, especially for those who were caught up directly in it and a number of our Indo-Anglian novelists have built some of their novels on this experience either directly as a theme or indirectly as a background to their narrative.

With the announcement of partition, people of India and Pakistan began to dread, it took time for them to understand that a great tragedy has been accompanied by freedom. Millions of Punjabis and Bengalis were uprooted from their ancestral homes and were set to wander eastwards or westwards. The two nations, India and Pakistan were engulfed by the most massive migration in human history. From one end of the Punjab to the other, a terrified people were fleeing their homes with whatever possessions they could carry. Partition was not just a historical event but one which touched the lives of millions of common people throughout the country. Thousands were slaughtered on the way; equal number felt victims to cholera and other diseases. Within overnight, people were transformed into refugees to seek a safer place for their living. The terrible anguish of those days in India and Pakistan have been meted out with almost biblical balance, an eye for an eye, massacre for massacre, rape for rape, blind cruelty for blind cruelty. Only death and carnage seemed to be proceeding ahead. A terrible chapter of blood and tears was being added in Indian history. The partition of Indian subcontinent on the communal basis caused one of the bloodiest upheavals in the history of human race, rudely shocking the conscience of the civilized people all over the world and made them shudder with anguish and dismay at man's wolfish cruelty to man in the name of religion.

The human tragedy caused by the Partition has found expression in *Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Khushwant Singh. The Partition of the province (Punjab) caused immense losses in life and property through uncontrolled rioting, plundering and murder. The locale of action is a small imaginary village, Mano Majra, on the banks of river Sutlej, the last village on the Indian side. The fine feelings and past relationships are forgotten in the trauma and tragedy, which befell on the unfortunate victims of that train. The novel is down to earth in its graphic details and descriptions of human atrocities. *A Bend in the Ganges* purportsto tell about the factors responsible for the creation of Pakistan and also to probe into the ideology of Ahimsa. The tragic experience of the partition is shown through this novel, as: "Hindus and Muslims were traditional enemies. They would never be able to live together. Non-violence is the philosophy of the sheep and the creed of cowards. Picking up the partition and its repercussion in *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh exposes the impact of it on a small village, Mano Majra the village allegorically stands for India. Here he tries to present the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim

ethos and identity. By convincingly giving the true Indian response to the event through this novel, Singh does not focus on the political realities and the abduction, mutilation, murder and displacement. But he rather presents the disturbing and agonizing impact that this event has on those who have not been the direct victims of the partition:" (Bhatt 22). According to the Hindus

"the Muslims were to blame. The fact that is both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and spread and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped. From Calcutta, the riots spread North and East and West to Noakhali in East Bengal, where Muslims massacred Hindus; to Bihar, where Hindus massacred Muslims. Mullahs roamed the Punjab and the Frontier Province with boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims killed in Bihar" (TTP 9).

Train to Pakistan presents the Indian perception of the traumatic experience, without any bias. Khushwant Singh himself states:

"I think it is a documentary novel of the partition and extremely tragic event which hurt me very much. I have animosity against either the Muslims or the Pakistan, but I felt that I should do something to express, that point of view" (Shahane 68).

Though he was not a sufferer of the riots, he knows the trauma the partition had unleashed. He has spent a part of his life in the rural area of Punjab and was a witness to the holocaust that followed the partition of the country. It was indeed one of the bloodiest upheavals of history that claimed innumerable innocent lives and loss of property. He is simultaneously inside the action as a participant and outside it as a dispassionate observer. *Train to Pakistan* is at once grim and pathetic tale individuals and communities caught in the Swirl of partition. Singh has his own vision of courage and action moulding the moral design of his novel. "It is his love for humanity that inspired him to write. He has an eye for details and a vision of life, which has been sustaining him in his works" (Mohan 65). The train here in this novel embodies the motif of life which is symbol of movement and activity. It is a dual symbol, on the one hand, it symbolizes life and action, on the other it stands for death and disaster. The action of the novel spans a few weeks of the fateful days of August and September in 1947 in Mano Majra, a border village, with a river Sutlej and a bridge over the river. Through the frontier between India and Pakistan becomes scene of rioting and bloodshed, where a group of dacoits armed with spears, carburies and torches appeared there and embankment in Mano Majra seems to be disturbed.

In the beginning of the novel, Singh gives a brief but adequate account of the heart rending national tragedy. He does not take any side with the community but maintains a balanced and unprejudiced account of the partition. He said that the Muslims blamed the Hindus, for starting the killings whereas the Hindus or the other hand put the whole blame on the Muslims. The truth was that people of both communities were killed. People on both sides were shot, stabbed, speared, tortured and raped. It indicates the borrowing processes of this change – the awful ghostly experience of human beings involved in a historical impersonal and almost dehumanized process. The people of the two nations started to flee abandoning their ancestral homes and moved toward their community in order to

safeguard themselves and reached a secured place. The smooth and peaceful life of Mano Majra is disturbed by the murder of Hindu money lender, Lal Ram Lal by Malli and his dacoit gang. The ways in which the police bungled the murder gave rise to tension and confusion among the villagers. The murder was interpreted in such a way that in no time, it gained communal overtones. The train which symbolizes life and action in the pre-partition days represents death and disaster after the partition. Life of Mano Majra villagers was disturbed by the trains that passed at odd hours. In this nightmarish world, a strange train arrived from Pakistan, which had "ghostly quality" (Shahane 93). It had no lights and appeared to be a symbol of darkness and death. The arrival of the train was followed by secretive and ominous activities of the police and the Sikh soldiers. The train was loaded with corpses and Hindu and the Sikh refugees from Pakistan. The dead bodies of Hindus and Sikhs were given a common funeral with the firewood and kerosene oil collected from the villages. Khushwant Singh also points that the political people of both nations do not show any sign of taking action to stop the bloodshed and communal frenzy.

Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* is notable for its thematic complexity. The story component is presented against the background of India's struggle for Independence and the tragedy of the partition riots. It is an exploration into the human context of non-violence, disintegration and communal disharmony, discord on an epic scale. The action in *A Bend in the Ganges* which moves from personal vendetta to national bloodshed illustrates the unreality of non-violence reaching its climax in the partition holocaust. The theme of violence and revenge find full articulation in the partition. This novel clearly shows that the creed of non-violence and truth is merely a political expedient as far as the Indians were concerned. Human nature itself is prone to violence and revenge. Almost all the episodes in the novel illustrate this reality of human nature. Malgonkar explores the violent reality of violence but at the same time, shows how it is destructive and self-consuming. *A Bend in the Ganges* is a novel in which the theme of the partition is one among many others introduced by the author. Bloody dispute over land, murder, terrorism, prison life in the Andamans, Japanese occupation of Burma and the Islands of Andamans – all these have been brought into the fold of this massive novel. The exile of Muslims from India, Hindus and Sikhs from the land that was soon to become Pakistan was horrible. The novelist has beautifully picturized this picture in this novel. To conclude, it may be said that both Manohar Malgonkar and Khushwant Singh have artistically depicted the impact of the Partition that began to cast its shadow of imminent bloodshed and communal disharmony.

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