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**ISSN 2278-9529**

**Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal**  
[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## Manohar Malgonkar's Fictional Treatment of the Freedom Movement in His Works

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**Article History:** Submitted-29/10/2023, Revised-18/12/2023, Accepted-24/12/2023, Published-31/12/2023.

### **Abstract:**

History's connection with literature is well known. Among all literary forms, the novel has the closest connection to history and has far-reaching cultural consequences. Malgonkar was inspired to write historical works with the advent of nationalism. Present paper aims to understand the perception of Indian history in his *The Devil's Wind*, which is about the First Freedom movement, *A Bend in the Ganges* that deals with the partition, *The Men Who Killed Gandhi*, a chronicle of the assassination of Gandhiji and *The Princes*, a fictionalizing history of a princely state. These works predominantly deal with historical themes. Malgonkar makes an effort to depict historical battles and offers us with history that is, in many ways, superior to that provided by professional historians. The historical element is employed so cleverly in these novels that it is the human predicament in his writings that fascinates the reader.

**Keywords:** Historical Themes, Prince, Partition, Freedom Movement.

### **Introduction:**

'The historical novel has always been a literary form at war with itself. The very term, implying a fiction somehow grounded in fact- a lie with obscure obligations to the truth- is suggestive of the contradictions of the genre.'

- Richard Abraham Dixon

History's connection with literature is well known. The novel's connection to history has been the closest and has had the most far-reaching cultural consequences of any literary form. With the novel as an expanding genre and thinking on history and fiction providing an attractive environment for the novelist to include more and more of history into his works, the history-fiction interface has

evolved significantly in the twentieth century. With the growth of nationalism, a great deal of power-politics has intruded into the writing of histories, encouraging the authors to write their versions of history. In a way, this amounts to reinterpretation of historical elements by creative writers. The impulse to invoke the historical past in order to arouse national consciousness is an objective of historical fiction, and Manohar Malgonkar is perhaps no exception to this general statement. Certain significant events of history or periods of national crisis have always captured the interest of novelists. Two periods of Indian history have strongly appealed to Malgonkar's novelistic imagination. In his writings, he dramatizes and revives these two periods of tremendous stress. During the first period (1857-58), an explosion occurred which led to savage acts on both sides and brought about the end of East India Company's rule of India. The Sepoy Mutiny is the first effort by the new India to shake off British rule. *The Devil's Wind* is the fictitious treatment based on this occurrence.

The second period (1938-48), which was far bloodier and crueler, occurred with Gandhi's tremendous independence movement, which succeeded in challenging British policy and their conscience to the test. *The Princes* and *A Bend in the Ganges* depict this fatal decade of contemporary history, a decade of hope and misery, of terror and slaughter of thousands of Indians and Pakistanis. These two periods offered Malgonkar the usable past for fictional treatment, the past that helps us to understand our present world in all its complexities. His primary concern is the consciousness of the past in the present. Even his imaginary characters pass over into history, as they are usually embodiments of forces in Indian history. He portrays crucial events of the Indian national movement and their impact on the personal and social lives of individuals from 1857 to 1949 in his novels.

### ***The Devil's Wind* (1972):**

*The Devil's Wind* is Malgonkar's fifth novel, which is widely regarded as the first flawless historical novel of Indian-English fiction. It tells the narrative of Nana Saheb, a controversial figure from the historical Sepoy Revolt of 1857. It is historical in the sense that the theme is based on the most spectacular event in Indian history. The event of the revolt has been a source for many historical and fictional writings both in India and abroad. There are about fifty novels written by English writers on this event. Most of the works have depicted Nana as the villain of the day, thus reflecting only the British point of view. It is an exciting, romantic story of Nana Saheb, which proves the novelist's power of historical imagination. In this novel, Malgonkar claims to have told 'Nana's story as I believe he might have written it himself.' Nana Saheb, the adopted son of Bajirao II, the last Maratha

Peshwa, is an important historical character and the novel is written in an autobiographical style. Malgonkar has tried to write what he considered to be the usual twisted portrayal of Nana Saheb by British historians. The novelist endeavors to portray the historical conflicts and their impact on life, behavior, thought and action of people by through his characters.

When the mutiny breaks out in May 1857, Nana Saheb finds himself forced to accept a position of leadership to revolt against the British, even though he does not like bloodshed. When there was a senseless and purposeless massacre at Meerut in which many people were butchered, Nana Saheb was frightened. The dilemma in his mind is formed by multiple conflicts. After a long and ultimately futile struggle in which both sides commit many atrocities, he flees to Nepal. *The Devil's Wind* is genuinely a painstaking novel which combines the artist and the historian as well. It is both an epic and an autobiography of Nana Saheb. Malgonkar's purpose is to rehabilitate Nana Saheb, who was defamed as a monster by British propaganda, by telling the story from the Indian point of view in Nana Saheb's own words. He gives a convincing interpretation of the Indians' reaction to British provocations. Moreover, he describes their aversion and divergence at the time of the early 'rebel' victories and their increasing determination blended with despair as the tide turned against them. His antagonism to British rule in India is determined by British cruelty and ruthlessness. He represents the people's aspiration for freedom.

Malgonkar belongs to the first generation of Indian novelists, and a critical survey of his novels gives ample evidence of his vitality, variety, humanity, artistic integrity, and sound historical sense. The quality of his mind reveals his laborious accumulation of data, which imparts to his writing's actuality and authenticity. He has observed the world keenly and setting of the novel which more than anything else shows Malgonkar's mastery as a writer of historical novels. In this novel, he seemed to be interested in fictionally re-living India's past and re-evaluating Indian cultural history. His historical writings assume special significance as the post - colonial ventures. He has reanimated a portion of the country's past. He seems to have provided history through this novel, which is better than the history written by professional historians. He explored the psyche of the people involved in making history.

The historical narrative has the capacity to sweep into history. It has a greater capacity to reveal the truths of its time. Narrative historiography like *The Devil's Wind* 'dramatizes' historical events and 'novelizes' historical processes. An author of historical novels is as much a historian as a novelist. Though the protagonist belongs to history and Malgonkar makes no revolutionary departures from

historical facts, the novel is not history but fiction, and a work of art as such, which gives us a clear insight into the action of Nana. The novel presents the society of the time, the weak and divided kings and Peshwas during 1818 - 80 of a country that had fallen from grace.

Malgonkar's avowed purpose in *The Devil's Wind* is delineating Nana Saheb's natural character. The incidents, the majority of which are historical, are selected and arranged with this purpose in mind. The central conflict between action and inaction indeed serves the function of showing that Nana Saheb was no monster, as depicted by British historians, but a man of deep sensitivity. He is divided between his duty to his country and his duty to his British friends. His conflict ends with no real resolution but with reconciliation to the harsh realities of history. At the same time, the historical element is so ingeniously used in his novels that it is the human situation in his work that fascinates the reader. In *The Devil's Wind*, he also portrays racial, ideological and communal conflicts and their impact on the social as well as private lives of the people.

Like many historical novels, *The Devil's Wind* is part fact, part fiction: a historical document and a work of conscious literary art. 'Historical and fictional truth are not the same', says David Spines. Though this is the case, the search for truth is common in both disciplines. In the background of this general statement, this paper also intends to see the relevance of Malgonkar's writings to our times. The history-fiction interface in this study presents a comprehensive understanding of Malgonkar as a writer of inter-disciplinary character. His professional background as a defense personnel seems to have a bearing on his understanding and interpretation of historical elements in his writings. He stands rather apart from other Indian-English novelists, in that he portrays distinct phases of the Indian national movement and its stirrings with the irresistible tenacity of a historian turned fictionist.

#### ***A Bend in the Ganges (1964):***

It is his Magnum opus, which mainly describes the socio-political environment of India prior to independence with particular emphasis on the failure of ahimsa or non-violence. It was a significant event in the history of Indian English fiction. It takes us back to the turbulent period of the independent India. The novel is written on a grand scale and depicts the Gandhian Era in all its manifestations. Here Malgonkar introduces a domestic tale of two characters set against the background of the ten years of freedom struggle. The novel almost approaches an honest assessment of human sorrows that come close to the epic movement. The novel comprehensively focuses on the painful period of partition. It shows how the terrorist movement – a symbol of national solidarity - designed to oust the

British from 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 Muslims, throwing into shade the essential Indian fight for freedom. The double conflict led to freedom and division of the country, but before it happened, hell was let loose in many provinces of the nation. The novel depicts powerfully the horrible developments resulting in the partition, the triumph and tragedy of the hour of freedom, the screams of victims, bloodshed, the barbarous cruelties heaped on men and women, etc.

The novel focuses on the three young men, Gian Talwar, Debi Dayal and Shafi Usman, due to their involvement in the events of the years preceding and following the Partition of India. Gian believes in non-violence, whereas Debi and Shafi, members of a terrorist outfit, believe in violence. Dissatisfied with Gandhi's non-violent approach, they promote a new faith focused on brotherhood. The terrorist movement is active and a group of young men from different communities and provinces are united in the sacred cause against British rule. Gian and Debi Dayal represent the ideological conflict between violence and non-violence, which was a characteristic feature of life in the 1930s and 40s in India. Gandhi appears not only through his speeches but also in flesh and blood. Gian Talwar begins as a disciple of Gandhi and believes in truth and non-violence. However, he realizes the inadequacy of non-violence after the murder of his brother. He rejects the idea of non-violence and kills Vishnu Dutt, the murderer of his brother. The two significant characters, Gian and Debi Dayal could find their fulfillment neither in violence nor in non-violence, but in the overpowering bliss of love.

### ***The Men Who Killed Gandhi (1978):***

It is Malgonkar's non-fictional work which deals with details of the events surrounding the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, one of the key political figures in the Indian freedom struggle. It is a chronicle of the events that culminated in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, and the subsequent trial of the conspirators. Many issues were brought about by India's recent independence, chief among them being the tumultuous partition of India. Many riots, forced migrations, and other horrific incidents brought about by the country's partition left millions of Indians permanently damaged and made them doubt the judgment of the country's political elite, which included Mahatma Gandhi. Ultimately, a treacherous idea struck the minds of four of these annoyed and discontented residents of Poona. On January 13, 1948, the six people, Nathuram Godse, Narayan Apte, Karkare, Gopal, Badge and Pahwa decided to take the extreme step of killing Gandhi. The next fortnight, they

went about fine-tuning their plan. Nathuram Godse shot Mahatma Gandhi on January 30, 1948, in Delhi. Six men were involved in the murder; two of them were hanged, and three of them were given life imprisonment. Malgonkar was a resident of Delhi when these events happened, and he also had the advantage of meeting some of the family members of the conspirators. Consequently, he could obtain some important photographs and documents related to the assassination, of which many have been included in this book for the sake of the readers.

***The Princes (1963):***

It is a fictionalizing history and is Malgonkar's most successful novel, which offers an absorbing account of princely life in India. Its success is due to his skill as a storyteller and the fertility of his imagination. *The Princes* may be regarded both as a document of contemporary history and as a work of conscious literary art. It is part fact and part fiction. This is a novel in which the social and political developments of the native states of India are outlined against the background of the private lives, glamour and tragedies of Indian princes. Malgonkar was quite close to the princes who were known for living a luxury life, and no writer has cared to see the good traits of at least some of these princes. He does this by demonstrating how the narrative continues a harmonious blending of social and political history.

The novel evokes a vivid picture of partition days in India, when the aristocratic rulers of the princely states were put to untold suffering and hardship due to the changing political scene. Here, Malgonkar portrays not only the crisis of the state but also the crisis of the lives of both Hiroji, the old Maharaja and Abhayraj, the young prince. He presents both the real world and the dream world of the princes of India vividly. In this novel, he portrays both Indians and English, with all their strengths and weaknesses. Like a real artist, he respects them like fellow humans. About Malgonkar's historical novels, Uma Parameswaran says thus, 'fictional element in his hand is like a dust which creates a sunbeam and helps the sunlight to show that it is there.' It is often contended, not without reason, that the truly creative side of Malgonkar, we see historical fiction coming into its own. His knowledge of the real princes combines with his creative imagination to produce composite portraits with a sufficient amount of camouflage. It is to be remembered that while Malgonkar has the historian's perspective, he also has the artist's insight, and the two blend beautifully to give his novel a genuinely artistic design. As Indira Bhatt opines, "Malgonkar makes his mark by his strong sense of history and of the tensions between the individual and the historical forces of the time."

Malgonkar is an adept storyteller, and in his novels, he employs both narrative and analytical methods. He not only depicts the historical events but also explains why and how they happened. He gives us sense of the past's appearance, emotions, and feelings that drove people to decisions and actions. A sensitive novelist like Manohar Malgonkar cannot remain unresponsive to contemporary events. Being a close and honest observer of the freedom struggle, Gandhian policies and their effect on people, being a downright, straight-forward, uncommitted critic of man and matters, he could not but choose to deal with the problem of non-violence and violence. *A Bend in the Ganges* holds up the mirror to the explosive problems of mankind and nations. Beyond all doubt, it gains epic grandeur and universal significance. There appears to be two reasons that the novelist chose to depict this period. The first one introduces the essential ingredients of the political scene - the struggle for emancipation, the two parallel movements symbolizing two extreme cults - the cruel and non-violent, the injection of communal virus, the parting of the ways, the Muslim outcry for division, the Hindu answer, the Quit India's phase and finally the removal of shackles, climaxed by the creation of two separate states India and Pakistan. The second intention of the author is to probe into the ideology of non-violence and truth, offered by the Mahatma, not only as a political expediency but also as a philosophy and way of life. As AK Sharma observes, "*A Bend in the Ganges*, on the one hand, is a criticism of nonviolence, and on the other hand, it discredits violence."

### **Conclusion:**

Apart from the plot construction, Malgonkar is a keen observer of men's manners and moods, and his novels depict the workings of the minds of his various characters. It is by this manner of camouflage that he effectively creates his characters, which has been called 'the illusion of life' by Henry James. There is a solid historical sense everywhere in the writings of Malgonkar. His novels, taken as a whole, consolidate the proposition that Malgonkar is a novelist endowed with a beautiful knack for weaving plots of singular originality. He could achieve not only because of his inclination toward historicity but also because of his ability to mingle fact with fiction and record truths with elements of romance and adventure in his works. After all, he is a historian with a difference, a man who was blessed with a creative mind and a fertile imagination. Malgonkar is attracted to historical themes rather than psychological, social or anthropological ones. Regarding his attitude towards the past Malgonkar distinguishes himself from the early historical novelists in Indian-English literature.



At the same time, one can say that the historical element is ingeniously used in his novels, who takes care to see that it is the human situation that fascinates us. It is this quality that includes him among the significant Indian-English novelists of the second generation.

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