Chapter -IV
POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE
Post-Independence Indian English Literature

The novelists of the previous epoch constituted a cosmopolitan group representing various regions, communities, interests and views. They belonged to almost every community in India, the Hindu, the Muslim, the Sikh, the Christian and the Parsi, and represented every shade of opinion—orthodox, liberal, progressive, Gandhian, communistic and socialistic. The Indian English novelists of the present era inherited the cosmopolitan character and permeated a new sensibility in their works which reflect the hopes and aspirations of an independent nation which had suffered long under callous foreign rule. There is also a note of sadness and melancholy, of frustration and alienation which resulted when the people saw their hopes and aspirations in free India discarded and ignored. K. R. S. Iyengar remarks

“After the advent of independence, the more serious novelist has shown how the joy of freedom has been more than neutralized by tragedy of ‘partition’, how inspite of the freedom there is continuing (or even galloping) corruption, inefficiency, poverty and cumulative misery; how, after all the mere replacement of the white sahib cannot effect a radical cure for the besetting sins of India. When independence came, the serious novelist in a sense found his occupation gone, for the traditional villain of the piece — foreign rule — was no more in the picture. Making a new start as it were, the novelist shifted his lantern this side and that, made his probes, and found little to satisfy him. The old narrow loyalties were seen to wax as eloquent as ever. Communal, linguistic, casteist passions were seen to come into the open with accelerated frequency. While talk of ‘emotional integration’ filled the air, the terra firma only witnessed the agonizing spectacle of a divided house with a deceptive floor and a precarious roof.” The novelist has a difficult task to accomplish in such precarious times. He has to present a real picture of society with all its corruption and evils with a view to reforming and revitalizing it. Indian English novelists have excellently performed this task.

Indian English novelist draws his sustenance from his heritage. He searches his roots in his cultural matrix. Literature can never be divorced from society and nationality. Nationality is almost bound to be present in a writer’s work; even the attitudes he has, the subjects he chooses are, to a large degree, the result of his
experience of society. National identity is inescapable in literature. Ralph Fox writes in this connection. “The novelist, therefore, has a special responsibility both to the present and the past of his country. What he inherits from the past is important because it shows what are the sections of his country’s cultural heritage which have meaning today. What he says of the present is important, because he is assumed to be expressing what is most vital in the spirit of his time, it may be objected that the novelist is not concerned with other people’s attitude to his war What he inherits, what he expresses, is strictly his own affair”.

Dorothy Spencer rightly regards the Indian English fiction as a major source for “a systematic study of cultural change, with Indian world view as the focus which can increase the Western readers “Knowledge of acculturation process.” Love and reverence for our ancient heritage is a recurrent note in fiction, the regard for the past is the pivot of Indian culture. Our culture, our past, our traditions are deeply ingrained in our blood and continue to envelop our entire consciousness whether we like it or not. Although modernity and tradition come into clash in many Indian English novels of this era, the value of rediscovery of a relevant past has been affirmed repeatedly;’ In Bhabani Bhattacharya’s Music For Mohini, Jaydev’s mother asks “‘How can we lay without past? Time is our earth, the earth which feeds our roots. Raja Rao rightly points out in The Serpent and the Rope, India is a unique country ‘Where the past and the present are for ever knit into one whole experience.” Some of the old practices and traditions which have little rational significance are important in Indian cultural matrix. Such traditions have symbolical importance in the changing cultural and social context. They give us a feeling of continuity, of the past flowing into the present. In Bhabani Bhattacharya’s So many Hungers “the sacred Tulsi plant in the yard, the image of God in a niche of the wall and breath of ancestors in the air” symbolically stand for the continuity of the best of Indian cultural traditions. Raja Rao in Kanthapura, The Cat and Shakespeare, R. K. Narayan in The Guide and The Vendor of Sweets, Anita Desai in Cry the Peacock and Sudhin Ghose in The Flame of the Forest reveal the continuity of India’s cultural heritage.

This intimate attachment with the country’, hoary cultural heritage imparts a touch of seriousness and philosophical resignation to some of the novels. Consequently the ideal of renunciation which is the crux of our culture and which has been glorified in the Bhagvad Gita has become an important theme in modern English novel. Raja Rao repeatedly deals with detachment and renunciation as an ideal in
several novels. Moorthy, the protagonist in *Kanthapura* is portrayed as endeavouring to realize detachment and renunciation. He is attracted towards Ratna, a young widow, but he overcomes his desire for her works with her in the Satyagrah Movement in a calm and detached manner. He has not yet fully conquered his passion. He feels revulsion on entering an untouchable’s house. At such movements he is swayed by his emotions and prejudices. He is still in the process of conquering his senses. Govindan Nair in *The Cat and Shakespeare* has attained this ideal and has realized the state of *Jivan mukta or sthita-prajna*. Ramaswamy in *The Serpent* and the Rope is in an emotional crisis when he realizes: “There must be something that exalts and explains why we are here, and what is it we seek.” He leaves Paris and come back to his origin to find a deeper meaning of life, an explanation of “Why we are here, what is it we seek.”

In fact, past has been depicted as our identity in novel. People, especially Indian expatriates and those who have lost their cultural moorings and are completely under the sway of materialistic Western ideals, ignore and discard their cultural identity. The Indian English novelist reveals the anguish and despair, feeling of rootlessness and loss of identity in such characters. Alienation and rootlessness is a recurring theme in modern novel. The duality of culture, known as East-West encounter, generates its own tensions which have been artistically dealt with in novel. Characters torn between the traditional values they have acquired and absorbed from childhood and the new values bestowed upon them by their education and their changing cultural milieu are pathetic figures but some of them surmount over their tensions and conflicts through a definite act of will.

Ramaswamy in Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and The Rope* is ultimately disenchanted with the West and finds peace and consolation in his roots. R.K.Narayan’s novels are based on the search for identity through a knowledge of self. Almost all his novels represent conflict between tradition and morality. The young quarrel with the old, leave Malgudi for England or America, eat beef and marry foreigners and sometimes return to vex the quiet hearth.

Modern Indian English novel is, thus, preoccupied with the inner life and individual problems of men and women passing through revolutionary changes. The novel in the previous era was mainly concerned with the external aspects of society and little with the exteriorization of the inner landscape of the human psyche. It has
become more subtle, philosophical and psychological. This change in the content of the novel has necessitated the use of new technical devices. Anand defty uses the device of the stream of consciousness in his first novel Untouchable. Myth too has been used as a technique to illustrate the novelist’s vision or point of view. Almost all the novelists of this period have interpreted myth in their own manner so that it may contribute to the expression of their point of view.

It does not imply that modern novel is only inward in character. The momentous events which have changed the course of life in India, cross-currents of new ideas, scientific and technological revolution all have left indelible influence on the development of the novel. The inwardness of the individual and conflict between tradition and modernity which we have discussed in the foregoing paragraphs are the natural outcome of the epoch making changes in national life. The year 1947 was the year of great joy and equally great sorrow in Indian history. Independence became an established fact and it stirred new hopes of progress and prosperity for all sections of society. But along with freedom and vibrant hopes came the ghastly tragedy of the partition of the country. Bloodshed, unheard of in the history of the world chilled the joy of newly won freedom. The transfer of population was a blot on the conscience of civilized humanity. These glory events deeply stirred the consciousness of the nation and many a writer tried to interpret those momentous and soul-stirring events. Indian English novelists explored the dramatic and fictional potential in the theme of partition. Novels on the partition theme may be classified into two groups — the novels written by Sikh writers and those written by non-Sikhs (Hindus and Muslims). Some of the famous Sikh novels are Raj Gill’s The Rape, H.S.Gill’s Ashes and Petals, Kartar Singh Duggal’s Twice Born, Twice Dead and Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan. Saros Cowasjee sees “a persistent pattern running through the novels by Sikhs. First, the principal characters in the novels are all Sikhs, and each novelist shows a romance between a Sikh boy and Muslim girl. Secondly, most of the Sikh writers strive for historical accuracy and load their fiction with documentary evidence gleaned from newspapers, government reports and G.D.Khosla’s Stern Reckoning : A Survey of Events Leading up to and Following the Partition of India. Thirdly, the Sikh writers admit to Sikh atrocities against the Muslims, but argue that it was in retaliation for what the Muslims did to them” The three major works which fall in Non-Sikh group are Attia Hosain’s Sunlight on A Broken Column, Manohar Malgaonkar’s A Bend in the Ganges and Chaman Nahal’s Azadi.
Modern Indian English fiction is conspicuous for realism. The novelists with observant eyes and understanding hearts have pried deeper and deeper into the varied and multitudinous social life of India. Both the urban and rural areas have been fully explored. The image of India as represented by Anglo-Indian novelists—Meadows Taylor, Rudyard Kipling, John Masters and E.M. Forster—is far from realistic. They have “presented India is in area of darkness steeped in ignorance, superstition, occultism, yoga a country of bejeweled Maharajas, Sadhus, thugs, serpents, tigers, elephants—a country of grinding poverty and fabulous wealth, slums marring the glory and grandeur of princely states, of malaria and other fatal diseases of Taj Mahal and other historical monuments. The Anglo-Indians have missed the soul of India, the deeper currents of Indian politics and the passionate yearnings of her people. The Indian English novelists—Anand, Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Chaman Nahal, Manohar Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth P. Jhabvala and Anita Desai have touched various facets of Indian social life realistically and have exposed the horrid evils which have been eating into the vital of social and national life with a view to reforming the existing order. Some novelists like Anand have an implied purpose and even propaganda of their convictions and committed ideologies but what distinguishes the entire corpus of modern novel is the prominent note of humanism. An important offshoot of realism is the novelists concern with the theme of human suffering which has been the most commonplace theme of all literature. In Indian English fiction suffering has been brodly dealtwith. Kamala Markandaya depicts human misery in A Handful of Rice in terms of India-recurrent droughts, its barren landscape and its overpopulated cities. Mulk Raj Anand describes human suffering in ‘Untouchable’ and ‘Coolie’ in terms of social injustice and class inequality. Khushwant Sing in ‘Train to Pakistan’ highlights tension arising from communal disturbances. Commenting on the theme of suffering in Indian English novel Ron Shepherd writes :“Writers like Rao and Narayan find a place for human suffering within a larger philosophical context; suffering is shown to be not just a negative experience, but rather an experience which can lead to personal and social improvement. Anand and Khushwant Singh, on the other hand, tend to regard suffering as a negative condition which is the consequence of failure; suffering is not allied to ones Dharma, but is allied to meaninglessness and despair.”(4)

Modern Indian English novel is realistic in a comprehensive term The novelist explores and examines the relationship of man with his fellow men, Vis-a-Vis the
social forces at work around him in all their bewildering complexity. Thus, it realistically covers the entire gamut of human experience. The novelist minutely analyses the significant and far-reaching changes in individual passing through a period of overall transition. His observant and penetrating eye watches the evolution of new values and new morality. The politicians and social reformers do not feel the subtle changes in man’s individuality and his natural urge for assimilating new values and new morality. The creative artist alone is interested in these basic changes. Hence in these novels the basic changes in the individuality of man and the evolution of new values and new morality is integral to the theme, action and characterisation. All the novelists of this period from Anand to Salman Rushdie have sincerely and realistically recorded these revolutionary changes in human outlook and, thus, they have envisioned a new social order.

The post-independence novel has shown signs of maturity from the viewpoint of technique, style and language. American and European models began to exercise their influence on novel, K. R. S. Iyengar remarks: “Before 1947, the English models were the major outside influence on the Indian novel. After independence, however, novelists in India have shown themselves susceptible to the influence of American and European (especially Russian models, and also models from oriental countries.”(5)

The advance in fictional technique is a landmark in the history of Indian English novel. The novel has emerged as “a living and evolving genre, and is trying in the hands of its practitioners, a fusion of form, substance and expression is recognizably Indian, yet also bearing the marks of universality.”(6)

The relationship between an author and the public, though a peculiar and complicated one, is a vital factor which determines the evolution of technique. The public is composed of “all kinds of men and women of different classes, varying interests, passions and degrees of intelligence. The public is swayed (for all its apparent indifference, even supineness) by tremendous conflicts of class, by national and racial prejudices, by the inheritance of history working out its inevitable course in the life of humanity. From the public the author takes his characters as well as finds his readers there. Here he discovers both his raw material and his critics. In the greatest novels there is a kind of living unity between creator characters and readers. Where that unity is wanting, where the author is aloof from the public, ignores it or is spiritually ignorant of it, there is very likely to result an anaemia, a lack of some important element in the chemistry of imagination, which impoverishes the author’s
thought or cripples his power.” The Indian English novelist has not ignored this vital factor and has created an artistic and imaginative rapport with the public. The character of the public determines the technique. Schorer defines technique as “any selection, elimination or distortion, any form of rhythm imposed upon the world of action by means of which our apprehension of the world of action is enriched or renewed” (7). It implies that technique is governed by the novelist’s choice of point of view. Edgar Allan Poe, the celebrated American critic, poet and short story writer, recognizes the importance of point of view in fictional literature. What he writes about the short story is also applicable to the novel: A skilful artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived with deliberate care, a single or unique effect to be wrought out, he thus invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentenced not to the upbringing of this effect, then he has failed in the first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in mind of him who contemplates it with the kindred art, a sense of lie fullest satisfaction. The idea of the Tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed, and this is an end unattainable by the novel.

The point of view or the preconceived effect is essential to any novel. It determines the technique. Character, plot, narration and style are significant only as means to an end. The great masters of Indian English novel — Anand, Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamla Markandaya, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Salman Rushdie have artistically presented their point of view through technique which varies from writer to writer and even from novel to novel. We shall discuss the infinite variety of technique in novel while assessing the contribution of major novelist.

Universality of appeal has been accepted by all critics as a touch stone of greatness in literature. All the novels that have become classics possess this quality. But that does not in any way imply that contemporary events in life should have no place in literature. The case is just the reverse.

The well known critic Walter Allien has aptly put, “In the literature of an age its conflict, tendencies, obsessions are uncovered and made manifest to a degree which is continually astonishing; good writers are, so to speak, mediumistic to the deeper stirring; of life of their time while they are still unknown to, or at any rate
unsuspected by the public, politicians and current received opinion. The classic novels make the past familiar to us, that is one reason one can read them. But since we are living in the present, immersed in it, it is exceedingly likely that one can not recognize its real nature, any more than one can see himself except in a mirror. Contemporary novel are the mirror of the age, but a very special kind of mirror, a mirrors that reflects not merely the external features of the age but also its inner face, its nervous system, coursing of its blood and the unconscious promptings and conflicts which sway it.

Thus the great movements social, political or moral are sure to be mirrored in the literature of the nation. For example ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ was inspired by the French Revolution. ‘All Quiet in the Western Front’ by Eric Maria Remarque was inspired by the first World War. So was Hemingway’s ‘A Farewell to Arms’. The Second World War also has brought forth a harvest of novels, like ‘The Caine-Mutiny’ (Herman Wouk), ‘The Cruel Sea’, ‘A Time to Love and a Time to Die’ (Eric-Maria Remarque), ‘Young Lions’ (Irwin Shaw), some of which are technically weak, but have powerful appeal because of their stark realistic contents.

It would be futile to believe that this movement, this of struggle, which had caught the imagination of the entire nation should fail to inspire Indo-Anglian writers.

The Indo-Anglian Writers were and are people who have been educated on Western lines. Some of them had the benefit of education in England as well. Among the significant works inspired by this struggle are the novels like, ‘Inqilab’ by Khwaja Ahamad Abbas, ‘Waiting for the Mahatama’ by R. K. Narayan, ‘Kanthapura’ by Raja Rao, ‘Mother land’ by C. N.Zutshi and novels of social justice like ‘Untouchable’ by Mulk Raj Anand ‘Into the Sun’ by Frieda H. Das, ‘We Never Die’ by D. F. Karaka etc.

Nationalism, patriotism and a desire to change the very society heralded the beginning of a new era in Indian history. It was an era of national struggle fought at social and political levels under the inspiration of many Indian leaders, especially Mahatma Gandhi. The violent struggle of 1857 (reacted in Malgonkar’s The Devil’s Wind) was replaced by the non-violent-struggle—Satyagraha---under the leadership of Gandhiji.

‘Almost all the Indo-Anglian novels have one or more of the following nuclear ideas, predominant in them .The Evil of Partition the Cult of ‘Quit India’ and
the Gandhian Myth It is a significant fact that the Image of Gandhi is present in all the three types of novels, though the details and emphasis may vary.‘’(8)

“Political events and issues of over a hundred year period are reflected in various ways, both direct and indirect in literature.’’(9)

Krishna Kripalani in his book Modern Indian Literature has beautifully summed up the impact of Gandhiji on Indo-Anglian fiction. “Gandhi’s impact on Indian writers was direct and widespread. Apart from its political repercussions, it was both moral and intellectual and at once inhibitive and liberating. Gandhi stripped urban life and ‘elegance’ of their pretensions and emphasized that religion without compassion and culture without conscience were worthless. He transfigured the image of India and turned national idealism from its futile adulation of the past to face the reality of India as she was poor, starving and helpless, but with an untapped potential of unlimited possibilities.”(10)

Gandhiji thus turned Indian writers from romanticism to realism; the high flown literary style was gone. “His own employment of a simple and direct style, compact and incisive, shorn of all superfluities, both in English and his mother tongue Gujarati, wag very healthy corrective to the natural tendency to flamboyance in Indian writing.”(11)

So much is the impact of Mahatma Gandhi that a number of novelists are influenced by him. “No discussion of Indo-Anglian fiction dealing with the Independence movement would be complete without an assessment of the function of Mahatma Gandhi in these novels. The most potent force behind the whole movement, the Mahatma is a recurring presence in these novels, and he is used in different ways to suit the design of each writer. He has been treated variously as an idea, a myth, a symbol, a tangible reality, and a benevolent human being. In a few novels he appears in person, in most others he is an invisible presence.”

This trend of patriotism in Indo-Anglian fiction has produced some of the finest novels in India.

The category branded as Indian literature virtually encompasses the whole of India and its single aspect, both symbolically as well as realistically. And this certainly is not an over statement or hyperbole, as writers beginning the prehistoric age have tried to mirror their society, their times at large, a work to which they have also been successful. Indeed, the thought in Indian literature broadly hold within itself a magnificent yet clandestine vision, if view in an open angle. To state more
precisely, it is generally seen that writers are of the habit to leave their piece of work with an open ending, i.e. leaving his/her readers to judge the conclusion according to their own wish and understanding. And this where lies that much hidden ‘success’ of writer, who is forever bound under societal norms when he/she is writing for the present generation. Before beginning with a novel, poetry, short story or play, a writer always has to bear in mind the previous happening in his community and consequences that might occur after the work is published. Hence, the writer never as such can move out from his society and publish an out-of-this-world creation; if such phenomenon ever comes into being, the writer, and most likely is to be branded a ‘social outcaste’ or made ‘incommunicado’. Thus, themes in Indian literature always have to be created keeping in mind the ongoing Indian society or the people associated with it.

Now when elaborated further on this very subject, i.e., Indian literature and its predominating themes, it can be found that a writer, be it of any capability cannot move out from the long-established themes of humanity, like romance, society, tragedy, comedy, adventure, war, or the ancient ones like mythological or epical. Since the ancient Indus Valley Civilization, it has been documented in historical annals that man had favoured to express themselves by speech or letter in the basic overriding conscious emotions stated just above. As such, the ancient Hindu society in India had always favoured and liked to base their writing on mythology and umpteen other legends and folklore, which perhaps was taken to a likeness by ladies and gentlemen both from the mass and the class. As such, mythological themes in Indian literature was the first to capture and enchant Indian readers, dealing with kings, queens, palaces, demons, gorgons, vision of heaven or hell, the Almighty, battles and ultimate winning, also including themes like ‘never never land’ and every sort of non-living thing being animated into a living being. Indeed, these mythological stories had so very appealed and captivated Indian minds, that none of the succeeding generations has ever been able to come out of this everlasting ‘hypnotic’ effect.

Another vital modified version of mythological theme in Indian literature was the rather sophisticated development of epics in Sanskrit literature that was ushered in the Vedic Age. Epic themes in Indian literature began its journey with the two legendary magnum creations Ramayana and Mahabharata, influences and citations of which are still employed by contemporary Indian writers. Thinking in terms of such colossal dimensions called for expert Hindu Sanskrit scholars like sages Valmiki and
Vyasa, who were the venerated writers of Ramayana and Mahabharata respectively. In societies that were yet to see modern light of day, these luminaries were capable to take India and Indians towards that modernistic section that present critics refer to as much ahead of times. Indeed, maximum of later Sanskrit classical literature was based on these two epics, taking themes in Indian literature towards a genre by itself.

Romantic themes in Indian literature was soon to follow the ancient Hindu society, jumping from staunch Hinduism and its priests and borrowing to some extent from west, precisely from its European counterpart. Romance as is known in strict terms in present Indian scenario was far from what was seen in those times. Romance necessarily entailed virtually every aspect of life dealing with war, battles, crusades, chivalry, gallantry, relationships with heroic adventure and its knights wooing the princess etc and not only a love affair between a male and a female. Writers were successful to represent every kind of backdrop and link it with romanticism, which just as usual, is espoused by modern Indian regional or English writings. Indeed, contemporary Indian literature has derived out a sophisticated version of romantic theme in Indian literature, dealing again with convoluted versions of social backgrounds and yet falling in place with a perfect balance. In all these variety of literary genres, it can be witnessed that authorship is mysteriously and productively in line with societal norms, permanently portraying one or the other type of societal variation that has changed with age. Themes in Indian literature during Vedic Age, themes in Indian literature during Classical Age, themes in Indian literature during Medieval Age differs grossly with themes in Indian literature for the contemporary age. As such, social themes in Indian literature, be it in any kind of literal category, wholly falls in place with the structure organization that humanity dwells in.

The Indian novel, we may say, has emerged not simply as a pure literary exercise, but as an artistic response to the socio-political situation existing in the count. For, the factors that shaped and moulded the growth of the Indian novel, since the mid-nineteenth on century, arose as much from the political and social problems of a colonized country as from indigenous narrative traditions of ancient culture. This is exquisitely exemplified in the Bengali novels of Ramesh Chandra Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, and Rabindranath Tagore in which “the socio-political situation existing in the country is faithfully mirrored right from the early phase of reformist exuberance to the growth of revolutionary consciousness among the common masses of India.” If R.C. Dutt brought realism and reform to the Indian novel (*Sansar*), if
B.C. Chatterji invested the Indian novel with a feeling of patriotism and revolution (*Anandmath*), Tagore had breathed into the Indian novel social relevance and psychological depth (*Gora* and *The Wreck*).

The struggle for Independence in India was not merely a political one but an all pervasive experience that became a part of the life of almost all the sensitive and enlightened Indians. Parallel to this struggle for political freedom was a social struggle a fight against superstition, casteism, poverty, illiteracy, and many other social evils that were eating into the vitals of Indian society. The socio-political movement that had caught the imagination of the entire nation also inspired the Indian novelists in English who rightly realized that novel too had a vital role to play in it.

Small wonder, therefore, if the Indian novelists in English, right from the end of the 1920s, started turning away from the romantic phase focusing their attention on contemporary problems. Motivated by the political and social questions arising from the chanted historical situation they began to conceive of the relationship of man and his surroundings in a new and realistic manner. Though they did not completely break away from the central concern of man’s quest for self-realization, they modified it no longer emphasizing only its spiritual nature.

As Dieter Riemenschneider rightly puts it, “the question arising from the new direction in the Indo-English novel is, then, to ask how the writers responded to this challenge and what they achieved in their efforts to portray, creatively and in a realistic manner, the effects these changes had on India.”(13)

On top of that, the formation of the All India Progressive Writers Association in the 1930s made the creative writers portray the Indian peasantry and the toiling masses in the hope that social transformation could be feasible only through mobilizing the opinion of the underprivileged classes the economically exploited, the politically subjugated, and the socially oppressed Indian populace. Naturally, the Indian English novelist realized that his salvation lay not in reproducing the imitative voices of his colonial masters. But in “seeking the strength and fertility of his own cultural sensibility and socio-cultural experience.” This realization on the part of the Indian English novelists resulted in the creation of a socially purposeful literature remarkable for its intellectual maturity, technical sophistication and artistic vision — all fused into an organic whole.

The Second World War, communalism and the partition of the country were the other historical forces that gave an Impetus and a momentum to the Indian novel
with a social purpose. There was enough material in the society torn by political manoeuvrings, social disparities, communal frenzy and corruption in bureaucracy for the thematic treatment by the Indian novelist to stir the imagination of the people to a new awakening. This made the Indian English novelist realize that “so long as the imagination of people is not stirred, the seeds of reform will keep lying on the road to be trodden upon by the unwary traveller.”

Thus, inspired by the exigencies of socio-political history of the country, the Indian novelists took upon themselves the responsibility of giving artistic articulation to the problems that beset the common people and their joys and sorrows, the crusade against the tyranny of poverty, illiteracy, suffering, superstition, caste and sex. Resulting, in a number of novels the protagonist is a farmer, a labourer, a factory worker, a patient or a virtuous woman pitted against a zamindar, a landlord, a factory owner, or a ruthless, callous hard—hearted man. We may say that, on the whole, Indian English novelists have succeeded in their efforts to portray creatively in a realistic manner the rural as well as the urban India. They not only present the various problems social, political, economic and cultural of the contemporary society but also offer solutions in terms of fictional art. They also reflect the challenges posed by the influx of Western ideas and concepts of the individual, the family, society and the relationship of Indian culture to other cultures.

The status and predicament of women in Indian society has been yet another motivating force for the Indian novelist with a social purpose. Despite the fact that woman can contribute to social regeneration as much as to the cause of family welfare, she became a victim of social prejudices and male chauvinism. However, Gandhi’s clarion call to the Indian women to participate actively in the freedom movement made them conscious of the much needed liberation and equality of opportunity in personal, social and political life. Recognizing the potential” women to join their counterparts in their struggle against ignorance, superstition and backwardness, Indian English novelists in general, and women novelists in particular, began to treat women as legitimate subjects for their purposeful social novels. Their endeavour was to the relevant, to their culture by presenting characters and situations rooted in Indian ethos. This is made clear by what Nayantara Sahgal proclaims “To be relevant to his culture, a writer’s imagination has to be able to create the men and women and situations of the Indian environment and the Indian reality. If a writer
can do this, make people feel with him, stimulate thinking, and inspire action because of what he writes, then he is fulfilling his function.”(14)

The Post-Independence Indian English women novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande present women in their heroic struggle to break through the pattern of sexuality and sensuality and to discover themselves as human beings capable of playing a positive role in the development of society.

In its constant growth and development, the Indian novel written with a social purpose can be distinguished through two subgroups. First, there are novels depicting the political, economic and social oppression of individuals with their authors taking a humanitarian stance. Including in this group K.S. Venkataramani’s Kandan the Patriot (1937), Mulk Raj Anand’s works in general and his Untouchable (1935), Coolie (1936), Two Leaves and a Bud (1937), in particular, Raja Rao’s Kanthapura (1938), Bhabani Bhattacharya’s So Many Hungers (1947) and Music for Mohini (1952), Kamala Markandaya’s Nectar in a Sieve (1954) and A Handful of Rice (1967), Nayantara Sahgal’s Storm in Chandigarh (1969) and A Situation in Delhi (1977), Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children (1981), Amitav Ghosh’s Circle of Reason (1986), Upamanyu Chatterjee’s English August (1988), Shashi Tharoor’s The Great Indian Novel (1990), and Chaman Nahal’s The Salt of Life (1991) to cite but a few instances. In the majority of these novels the rebellious protagonist is integrated into society. Novelists like Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya, however, insist on man’s capacity and self-determination to work out his destiny for himself, thereby overcoming his conflict with society. The second group centres on an individual’s search for identity as in Anand’s Trilogy — ‘The Village’ (1939), Across the Black Water (1941). and The Sword and the Sickle (1942). B. Rajan’s ‘The Dark Dancer’ (1959) and Too Long in the West (1961), Bhattacharya’s He Who Rides a Tiger (1954), Markandaya’s Some Inner Fury, Khushwant Singh’s I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale. A. Hossain’s Sunlight on a Broken Column, Ranga Rao’s Fowl Filcher (1987), and Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence (1989). In these novels an individual character is shown as either unable or unwilling to accept the social role that the traditional society imposes upon him or her. The dramatic conflict usually arises out of the contradictions between Western notions of the autonomy of the individual and Hindu or Muslim concepts of supra-individual society.
The Indian English novel with a social purpose can be said to have stuck deep roots in the Indian soil, by imaginatively treating the contemporary problems and artistically exploring and interpreting India in all its variegated aspects. All the same, some critics contend that the Indian novel with a social purpose neglects the fate of the individual in a particular human situation in that it does not deal with a personal and private predicament. But, what we have to keep in mind is that, dealing as they do with a social milieu, these novels are more concerned with presenting the entire picture of society than with the individual’s personal history. Moreover, we have to realize that in the works of a genuine artist there is no conflict between the individual and the social. The dialectics of their interrelation, as propounded by Hegel, is so strong that “the more the individuality of the artist stands out, the more actively he expresses the mood of his contemporaries—in short, the more partisan his approach. For those who are not disturbed by paradoxes, one might say that the more individual the artist, the less he belongs to himself, for the more individual he is, the more people need him.”

Critics may also argue that since the Indian English novel with a social purpose is mainly concerned with the contemporary problems and topical events in life, it may cease to have a universal appeal. But it must be remembered that the Indian novelist with a social purpose, like any good creative writer, writes with a social consciousness born of the phenomenon enacted around him. He is essentially a creative artist and realist who moves around the society and experiences the crises and tensions of the struggling classes, thereby arousing his deep creative impulse. We have to realize with Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine that a literary work is “a transcript of contemporary manners” and, from such “monuments of literature” we might recover “a knowledge of the manner in which men thought and felt.”(15) It is also to be noted that, “contemporary novels are the mirror of an age, but a very special kind of mirror, a mirror that reflects not merely the external features of the age, but also its inner face, its nervous system, coursing of its blood the unconscious promptings and conflicts which sway it.”(16)

A serious charge generally levelled against the novels written with a social purpose is that of tendentiousness and didacticism. Some of the committed novelists like Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya have been even accused to indulging in social and political propaganda. No doubt, the novelists who write consciously with a sense of commitment have their messages, to implicitly convey in the depiction of
socio-political conditions, while relating the inner consciousness of mind and feelings of heart to the outer landscape of the social milieu. All creative artists reveal some truth, and more so the novelists who are in direct involvement with socio-political situations. This is exquisitely driven home to us when Joan Rockwell, in her seminal work, _Fact in Fiction: The Use of Literature in the Systematic Study of Society_, points out,“Fiction is not only a representation of social reality, but also a necessary functional part of social control, and also, paradoxically, an important element in social change. It plays a large part in the conduct of politics and, in general, gives symbols and modes of life in those less easily defined, but basic areas such as norm values, and personal and interpersonal behaviour.”(17)

It is, therefore, not right to argue that the main task of an artist is with his craft rather than with social reform in as much as it smacks of didacticism. What we have to bear in mind here is that the creative artist unlike the philosopher, the sociologist or the journalist does it not in “cold statements of dogma,” but only in terms of life rendered artistically through various fictional devices and techniques. Therefore, as Asnani observes,“the novelist has no reason to fear the intrusion of didactic values lest it should contaminate the pure spirit of his creative endeavour.”(18) What the novelist has to fear is not the didactic or ethical values themselves, but the wrong modes of their projection. This is laid bare when Bhabani Bhattacharya, a novelist of affirmation of life, asserts:“Art must teach, but unobtrusively by its vivid interpretation of life. Art must preach but only by virtue of its being a vehicle of truth. If that is propaganda there is no need to eschew the word.”(19)

So, novel, as an art form, can certainly seek to convey a message unobtrusively in so far it is ‘a vivid interpretation of life’ and ‘a vehicle of truth.’Recent novelists like Romen Basu and Chaman Nahal go a step further and maintain that unless fiction concerns itself with social reality and possesses specific humanism, it cannot be considered a significant work of art. Romen Basu observes :

“Fiction is a human document. For me, unless it has some hearing on real life it cannot be taken as a work of creation.”

Chaman Nahal is of the firm view that a novel must possess ‘synchronic relevance,’ and it must concern itself with “a specific community,” a specific class, a specific society.” He says,“The main point is that an artist should be able to associate himself with an identifiable community, or what Raymond Williams has called ‘a knowable community.’”(20)
Above all, if the novelist is convinced that he is primarily an artist, and achieves a harmonious fusion of his social concerns and artistic norms by raising the themes above the didactic content, he will have propagandist. Resenting the charge of overt didacticism and propaganda leveled against him, Mulk Raj Anand, a spokesman of the downtrodden and a lyricist of their joys and sorrows, feels sorry for his adverse critics who are not alive to the artistic presentation of his socially purposeful novels.

He says “My adverse critics have seldom seen the symbolism, the attitudes and the rugged poetry beneath the prose. Therefore, if the attempt to discover the meaning of life in my human environment is propaganda, then I am a propagandist, otherwise, it is expressionism, which I define as an enactment of the body-soul drama of human beings through the imagination.”(21)

“All this it is clear that in the best of the works of committed novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya, the social purpose and the artistic excellence are fused together.” Thus, it is not the social message, but the artistic presentation that carries the novel, and makes the social purpose vivid and poignant.

Raja Rao is a dedicated writer and he was a high sense of the dignity of his vocation as a writer. Raja Rao has brought novelty and distinction to Indian English Novel. Raja Rao has an enormous reputation as a novelist. Winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award for the Serpent and the Rope, Raja Rao is among eleven recipients named in 1988 for the $25,000., Neustadt International Prize for literature.

To compare the small with the great (in terms of quality, that is, not of quantity) if Kanthapura is Raja Rao’s Ramayana, then The Serpent and the Rope is his Mahabharaata. If Kanthapura has a recognizable epic quality, The Serpent and the Rope is more than in its scope. The story-teller in Kanthapura is a Brahmin widow, largely a creature of memory and tradition, and herself a character in the action, though a strictly minor one her intellectual range is limited, though she can agreeably respond to new ideas and situations.

“The story-teller in the Serpent and the Rope is Rama (Ramaswamy) who is also the central character in the story he is trying to tell; he is at once sensitive and subtle, sensual and spiritual; he is a South Indian Brahmin, a Smartha, the eldest son of a Professor of Mathematics at Hyderabad; and he can proudly trace his lineage back to Madhwacharya (Vidyaranya) and for back indeed to sage Yajnavalkya of the Upanishadic age.”(22)
The Serpent and the Rope has two structures: physical and psychological. We have discussed above the physical action. The Psychological action takes place in “The theatre of Rama’s mind, heart and spirit.” The central theme of the novel is the knowledge of the self which one attains by breaking away the bondage of the phenomenal world, the serpent. It is difficult to break the worldly ties and find out the ultimate truth, the rope. It is with the help of the enlightened Guru that one realizes the ultimate reality. The protagonist-narrator, who is a versatile scholar and thinker, is interested not so much in the events of his life as events, but in terms of the meaning hidden in them. The novel turns out to be his spiritual autobiography. Madeline, Savithri, uncle Seetha Ramu, Uncle Charles, Little Mother, Lezo, Georges, and Robin-Bessaignae are but the Serpent, Maya’s illusion.

Ramaswamy when he renounces his ego attains harmony with his self with the help of Guru. Describing his meeting with the Guru Rama eloquently and poetically writes:

“I had reached Benares-Benares. I had risen from the Ganges and saw the luminous world, my home. I saw the silvery boat, and the bootman had a face I knew. I knew his face as one knows ones face in deep steep. He called and said, “It is no long, so long, my son. I have waited you. Come, we go. I went and, man I tell you my brother, my friend, I will not return. I have gone whence there is no returning. To return you must not be. For if you are, where can you return? Do you, my brother, my friend, need a candle to show the light of the sun. Such a sun I have seen it is more splendid than a million suns. It sits on a riverbank, it sits as the formless form of truth; it walks without walking, speaks without talking, moves without gesticulating, to such a truth was I taken and I became Holy feet, and called myself a disciple.”

In this novel, the story element is almost threadbare, or to put it the other way, Raja Rao has packed pages and pages of his reflections in this story to such an extent that the whole becomes flyingly dull. Rama or Ramaswamy was the son of a Brahmin family from the south, somewhere in Mysore state. At an early age, he went to study in France. He started doing his research in the special subject of Albigensian heresy ‘I had taken History, and my special subject was the Albigensian heresy. I was trying to link up the Bogomolites and the Druzes, and thus search back for the Indian background- Jain or Buddhist-of the Cathars. “The ‘pure’ were dear to me. Madeleine, too, got involved in them, but for a different reason. Touch, as I have said, was always distasteful to her, so she liked the untouching Cathars, she loved their celibacy.” (23)
There he came across a French girl, Madeleine, who fell in love with him and they were married. Their first child, Krishna died in childhood. Raja Rao’s The Serpent and the Rope is to quote David Mc Cutchion, an example of the novel as Sastra. It is full of aphorisms, philosophical statements and metaphysical flights of Fancy. One might ask, “Is this a novel or a book of wisdom and philosophy?” Raja Rao talks mysticism in aphoristic language.

The Serpent and the Rope published in 1960, established Raja Rao’s reputation as a philosophically complex novelist. There is little doubt that Raja Rao reveals his intense predilection for Indian philosophy in his fiction. At the same time, he believes in the sanctity of spiritual life. He holds that “one can realize one’s metaphysical entity by a keen perception of primordial Indian reality.” He has confined to one of his interviewers in India that it “has been my endeavour all my life to be face to face with the ultimate.” In this process, his conviction in the efficacy of spiritual life impels him to draw heavily on Indian philosophical tradition.

The novel ‘The Serpent and the Rope’ has been written with a philosophical bias. It exposes the oriental characteristic of India with a view to interpreting it for the edification of the west. For this reason this novel has several locales the cities of India, Aix-en-province, Paris, London etc. As such it has a very wide canvas on which the characters move in their specific locales giving us an idea of the environment with all its colouring. The hero Rama makes his voyages from India to France and back and back again to the west and after that he settles down with the foreigner George and Catherine in Paris. He marries Madeleine, a French girl who ultimately becomes a Buddhist as if with a vengeance, thereby causing mental agony to the hero.

The novelist is much more interested in thought and philosophy rather than the objects. Art in this novel co-exists with the abstractions. Only art saves the novel from becoming bald. The pattern formations are artistic. Here we find the selection of the details. The colour he chooses is darkish if not murky. It is because of the fact that he has show the sorrows of humanity. While dealing with India and the west, Raja Rao lays emphasis on the holiness of Benares, brahminism, feudalism, cow, marriage, Sanskrit, Himalayas, Ganges, vegetarianism, joint family etc. on the other hand he deals with the conditions of the west-their social mores, food habits, their ideas about India and also about Buddhism etc. The novel ‘The Serpent and the Rope’ is a great problem-raiser and the solution is not forth-coming from any quarter. The novelist is interested in the effects and not the causes. Life is a bit erratic and people suffer in it.
Why? Why piety does not pay in the practical life of a person? Why should an idealist like Rama have the silent suffering and the tragedy of separation from his wife? Though sex is despised by the tabooed mind yet it lurks along with the home sapiens like some venom of the beautiful snake. Why? There are the problems in the novel to which the answer is not coming from any quarter.

The image of India in the novel is both of her high philosophy as well as the phoney-practices which is the bane of the country. Raja Rao has praised the ancient wisdom of the country as well as lashed the charlatanism that has crept in the fold of brahminism. It is not the modern India with her developing economy and the industrial complexes growing in clusters there in. It is the age-old India with her feudalism, tradition, rituals, fads, lethargy, oddities, landscapes, tradition, sacred snows and rivers that has been depicted in the novel. There is an ardent quest for truth in the novel, the moral truths, the metaphysical truths and the truths of the average human life. Mostly the truths are elusive in the novel. Apart from this there is the high tone of philosophies and histories. The philosophy pretends to absorb the human spirits often escapes from its grip. The image of India in the novel is that of her philosophy-ancient of a tradition. It has been treated with appreciation and criticism both. Raja Rao is of the critical charlatanism that has crept into the novel concept of brahminism. He cannot put up with the fraud attending it no the ghats of Benares. India is a religious country, but unfortunately the spirit of religion has been boistered up by those who get frustrated in life like little mother. The brahminical conduct in its essential spirit is missing.

The hero is a Brahmin, but he is not orthodox and as such has adaptability suiting to an occasion. The life of ritual and even idolatory (the sacred bull and the elephant of symbolical significance) are dismissed by him for he knocks some real saw-dust out of them. But realism is none of the concerns of the Indians. Life happens to be in a sort of rut out of which it cannot drag itself. The India of Raja Rao in the novel is not one with the developing industrial complexes. It is the post-independence India but one which had been of her body and soul hitherto. Yet he seems to believe in the Hindu universality and the sense of purity inspired by it. A south Indian Brahmin, because that is the specific case in the novel, may be pious and learned yet he would not hesitate marrying for the third time. There is sex without much responsibility. The tragedy of little mother is universal in the country. But the society is shifting in its mores—we now hear of the widow remarriage, and the child-marriages
are simply non-existent today except in the villages. The idolatory and the severe form of anthropomorphism are on the wane. They are now confined only to the places of pilgrimage. For instance in Hardwar we may find it, but not in Saharanpur.

The modern India is switching over to the rapid industrialization. The gods of the modern Indian are the tools and the benemoth objects striking terror into the village oriented people. The Pandas on the ghats, the carcass bearing-bramhins and others have become money-minded forgetting the religious responsibility.

Raja Rao highlighted some significant aspects of the life of India, particularly Hindus, apart from her philosophy. For instance he has given us an idea of the joint family and the responsibility and love of the elders for the dependents in it. The bathing prostitutes of Benares, the rising spirit of the Indians against the Britishers, the servility of the mind of the Indians, the respect and dis-respect we show to the cow, the gods and goddesses, the typical Feudal gentry with all its absurdities and superstitions, dirty pan-spitting habits of the Indians, the tyranny that the high class shows towards the low-born etc.

Yet Raja Rao feels that inside all this is real India, the redeeming features of the country. “The crust is so superficial it lies about everywhere but you can remove it, even with a babul-thorn.” Provincial prejudices like those of the South Indians against the Northerners have been shown by the novelist.

Madeline did not love India actually but because of her husband. Sometimes the imagination of the novelist reels back to the ancient past recalling the great personages of yoge like Gargi and Yagnyavalkya Sanskrit has been lauded by him. He feels the vastness of the country. Krishna has been rightly comprehended by him, and Rama much less. Efficacy of prayer given but seems to have been eroded as well. Madeleine has a fear of bacteria. She says : “How shall I ever stand unhygienic. Here is a climate of mysticism not as much of intuition as it is superstition. Madeleine holds that India is ‘infectious, and infectious’.

Indians are said to be sentimental by nature. Then we forget injury easily. “We forget evil easily.” Apart from sorrow there is ‘beauty between man and man’. The Indians can be proud of discovering zero, other than the Mayas of Mexico. The foreigners like Apollonius of Tyana returned from this country full of vedantic wisdom.

Madeline considers India to be a land of freedom and Rama, her husband, a paradise. The foreigners are often puzzled at our vegetarian habits. Tante Zoubei calls
them. The Indians are particular about their ‘dharma’ but in our time they are not so, the ill-gotten money is the crop they raise of their ‘dharma’. India then and now are two different countries. How very sad, but Raja Rao is silent on the point, Nirad Chaudhary is not Indians according to the latter writer are worshippers of money, clumsy, unaesthetic, furious, vulgar and what not.

The degenerate India of today deserves criticism. Raja Rao has touched the ancient core of the country and its traditional influence on it. The heroism of the Rajpur and the valour of the Marathas are the repositories of the country’s courage. The manifeceted life of Krishna, the hero of all, permeates the imagination of the peoples of India and now of the foreigners.

We have heard of the Krishna consciousness already: “yet Bhisma’s courage was Krishna’s gift. Krishna fought himself against himself”, through himself and in himself. “There is Karna and an-Uttara in every battle.”

It is however, strange as pointed out by Raja Rao, that ‘no battle in India was ever fought for humanity’s sake.

“Krishna fought against the Muslims by fighting for them. He died a Hindu martyr for an Indian cause. He died for truth.”

The poverty of India is sadly proverbial. The ineffective ‘garibi hatao’ and the slum-clearing are often heard of. It is touching to note Rama’s words: “my communism is made of Mother India’s tears.” But there is, in fact, not one mother India but many mothers in India as there are provinces. What a contrast between reality and our sentiment.”

The hospitality of the Indians is proverbial but it is now eroding due to the economic stress the people are chafing under. Gone are the days when they said: “They who will come will eat rice and dhal-water if we can give them nothing better.”

India is a ‘continuity’ changing, transforming all the time and the timeless gods and goddess clinging about the people’. India in a way observes the novelist: “is outside history”. Who minds the middle class dirty bath-rooms and broken crockery. But things now are changing fast with the coming in of the sanitary-fitting concepts etc.

The attitude towards drinks in this country is strange. Not only the drunks but the moderate drinkers are hated. They take drinks but mostly they would like to keep it a secret. Uncle Seetharamu cannot offer a drink to Rama “in front of everyone”. But the new generation today is a bit forward in this respect and not so hypocrite either.
Since most of the people are going out of the country and the people from the foreign countries are flying in every hour at the air-ports we are becoming less sensitive on the point of beef and pork, difference. We are emerging into a sort of synthetic culture; our individuality is getting dissolved in the general impersonality. Social evolution in India is on-the “sweet, musical, poetical, large-hearted sunshine, moonshine”. Bengali’s are coming closer to all, so is the south Indian.

The hero in the novel takes up the Albigensian heresy as a subject for research so that ‘India should be made real to the European. He interprets the philosophy of our country to the westerners.’ Madeleine becomes a slow convert to the ideas nay the rituals though in the last phase of her career she breaks away to embrace Buddhism and that with a vengeance. When the westerners had no restrictions in the movement, the Indians had.

For instance the Grandfather of the hero was against the ‘eldest son-in-law’ going across the ideas. In the hero the ‘difference is self-created’ though while landing at Naples he does not feel any difference between the East and the West. India happens to be in a sort of superstitions grip where even one felt that the ‘Compassionate one’ would wash the medicant’s bowl personally by the side of the holy Sarju. In India ‘the past and the present are for every knit into one whole experience.

When the feudalism was practically dead in the west it existed in our country-- the decayed and false modernity of our small Rajas and Maharajas went with some apprehension --- you have to see only to believe the ancient rituals and forms against which the modern mind revolts. This aristocracy, the ruling one, is now dead. The establishment of Raja Raghubir Singh in the novel is one instance of the same.

The difference is not only between the East and the West but also between the South Indians and the Northerners. This keenly felt by the hero and his Little Mother. India in fact has been compartmentalized into different sections-the castes, subcastes, races, provincial feelings etc. All have their individual prejudices and bias.

For the foreigners like Madeleine ‘India is infectious, mysterious.’ At places there is rage for the things India, but I hear an English lady, being not happy while witnessing the actual life here in the country, saying that she has no illusions left about her. But the opinions vary from. Foreigner to foreigner. There is explanation even for the odd beliefs by the Hindus : “Ultimately the far and the awesome is divine, it destroys the barriers of body and mind, no, rather of mind, and body, and
reveals the background of our unborn, immaculate being. That is why Shiva lives in the Himalaya”. But does every Hindu understands even this much of philosophy. It needs real learning to be a Hindu.

Madeleine in the novel has the old idea about India. The caste system still exists but its sub-divisions are fast disappearing. The Raja-Feudalism is almost non-existent, the abolition of the privy purses spelling its doom. The Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva remain only in the sphere of the Hindu scholars and the villagers. Those engaged in the industrial complexes and other offices and institutions do not have time to ruminate over their gods. The Indians, as supposed by some of the westerners like Madeleine, are not even as half dark as a Negro is.

The concubines, with the disappearance of the Rajas and the taluqdars have disappeared as a logical corrolary. The system of the sutties, the women burning themselves on the pyre came to an end long ago. The India today is in the grip of the new ferments, in the sense that it is drawing much of the western motifs; it is all due to the rapid transport, the jumbo jets now looming in the air. For the hero of the novel India is ‘freedom’ and for his wife she is ‘paradise’.

Raja Rao calls France a country of ‘peace and courtesy’. It is cultured to the core. The individual freedom is there, which is not the case with India where taboos and the traditional roots of rank feudalism are still seen.

India has no history, for truth cannot have history. Raja Rao has pointed out a bitter fact about the Indians.” “---no battle in India was ever fought for humanity’s sake or if fought it was soon forgotten. Krishna fought against Bhisma giving Bhishma courage. Mahatma Gandhi fought against the Muslim by fighting for them.”

The new India is going to emerge in the effulgence of technical glory. “The new civilization has to be a technocratic one. It will have to banish the personal, the romantic, the poetic from life—.“It will be less superstitious, but more with the social problems. But it will be honest in action at that.”

At present India is in a mess; she is yawning and ready to change side. It is epochal change. India, unlike the west broadly speaking, is a land of contradictions. Her holiness is just a ruse, the actions of the people are mostly plain mean. “I hated this moral India”, says the hero. “True, Indian morality was based on an ultimate physic.” “Non-violence, said Gandhiji, is active, heroic. We must always conquer some land, some country. Ignorance, pusillanimity, ostrich-virtue is the land we shall liberate. That is true Swaraj. The means is Satyagraha come.”
C.D.Narasimhaiah, “has stated his reservations about that he calls the considerable chunks of metaphysical disquisitions scattered throughout the work, which fortunately are such that one can cut them without injuring the organic structure of the novel.”(27)

This naturally raises the question as to what constitutes the structure of ‘The Serpent and the Rope’. Raja Rao’s novel is at once the history of an intellectual’s quest for self-knowledge which takes the form of memory and autobiography and an affirmation in philosophic terms of universal truths to which the hero is guided by tradition, thinking and experience. The novel derives its structure from a dialectic between two levels of presentation, one operating horizontally and dealing with events in time and space and the other operating vertically through a celebration of truths transcending these dimensions.

As ‘The Serpent and the Rope’ is deeply rooted in Indian philosophy, it depicts man’s quest for self-realization. The theme of the novel, as Raja Rao observes, is “the futility and barrenness of man in human existence when man (or woman) has no deep quest, and no thirst for the ultimate. Man’s life here in Samsara is an august mission to find the Absolute.”(28)

This theme is highlighted in the very first sentence of the novel as the narrator-protagonist, K.R.Ramaswamy, expresses his desire to know the Truth. Born a Brahmin, he should seek Brahman. Conscious of his Brahmanic heritage and inspired by his conviction that a Brahmin is devoted to truth, Ramaswamy expresses his irrepressible quest for God.

The story begins when Rama was called back to India when his father, a very learned man, died. He had to take his step-mother and his infant step-mother to Benares. While describing the journey to Benares, Raja Rao, in a series of flashback, describes Rama’s marriage with Madeline, death of their child Krishna, the worldly nature of Oncle Charles, Madeleine’s uncle.

On their way back from Benares, they come to Allahabad where they were quests of professor Venkatraman. Venkatraman introduced Rama to his former student Pratap Singh. Pratap belonged to a jagirdar family and was betrothed to Savithri, the daughter of Raja Raghubir Singh of Surajpur.

Savitri did not like Pratap and she accepted her betrothal only nominally. She had communist ideas and because Pratap has served the British so faithfully, she
disliked Pratap. Pratap sought Rama’s help to persuade Savithri, and that is how Rama and Savithri met in India.

At the university of Cambridge Savithri comes to reveal the detailed topography of her psyche, self and the general points of living. She is shy but of no one; she is ‘shy of herself’. She is gathered unto herself and things about her may be just illusion. She ‘listens to her own heart’ and according to the novelist it is here one could meet her, but for this one needs the ‘humility of a saint’. The complete merger in her heart for a man is difficult task. Perhaps, Rama succeeds in achieving this, but she still eludes him. She marries Pratap Sing and it does not matter whom she has married.

Rama writes: “saint I had to become if I would know Savithri, not a saint of ochre and bonecowl, but one which had known the extinction of the ego.”

She is, perhaps, awakened to ‘the truth of life’. The novelist had drawn this character delving deep into the inner layers of her ego, and we are appalled to find this nothing but nothing. There is no ‘Blare Bridge’ to ‘link’ them together. In Rama there is desire, but Savithri is free from this; she has greater saintliness in her.

Rama’s relation with Savithri happens to be just spiritual. The novelist perceive the play of awareness in the interpersonal relationship with her, which he does not perceive in his contact with Madeline. “she became the awareness behind my awareness, the leap of my understanding. I lost the world and she became it.”

Her behaviour is egoless all along, and there lies the strength of her saintliness. The act itself loses the actness, as one may say. The act zeroes itself, and in the zero resides nothingness, the supreme absence which may be called divinity in all fairness. She is the Ganges receiving unto herself all and remaining pure despite all impurities. “So we have love to each other, as thought it did not belong to us but a principle, an other an impersonal reality.” Their mutual contact generates in the hero a new awareness of self. “I could not possess Savithri –I became I.” He could also understand the rhythm and meaning of history through her.”

It is like a merger into some impersonal cosmic truth. It is beyond ego where passions dissolve like the shows of the Himalayas and become the water, the holy water of the Ganges; Savithri is Ganges. Perhaps no intercourse has been so sublimited in the range of literature as the intercourse between the hero and the egoless Savithri. She is unlike other women who have the sinful ideas of the act. No wonder then that mostly women are possessed by ghosts and not men. Ghosts prefer-
in India at least girls of sixteen or widows.” Savithri remains unpossessed, fearless, egoless and impersonal.

When Rama received a letter from Pratap that Savithri, who was in London, was in love with some Muslim boy, Rama went to London and passed a number of days with Savithri and her circle. The result was that Savithri was attracted towards Rama and she surrendered herself to him. This interlude, natural as it seems, covers a number of pages in the book, and is full of intellectual discussions and reflections of which Raja Rao is so found. When he goes to the library Rama has a number of thoughts about the library. Libraries always speak to me; they reveal me to myself with their high seriousness, their space, and the multiple knowledge that people have of themselves which goes to make a book. For all books are autobiographies, the History (in twenty-two volumes) of the Anglican Church.

The mechanics of a motor-car or of veterinary science all have a beginning in the man who wrote the book, have absorbed his nights and may be the nerves of his wife or daughter. They all represent a bit of oneself, and for those who can read rightly, the whole of oneself. The style of a man—whether he writes on the Aztecs or on pelargonium the way he weaves word against word, intricate the existence of sentences with the values of sound, makes a comma here, puts a dash there all are signs of nature of his inner movement, the speed of his life, his breath (Prana), the nature of his thought, the odour and age of his soul. Short sentences and long sentences, parentheses and points of interrogation, are not only curves in the architecture of thought but have an intimate, a private relation with your navel, your genitals, the vibrance of your eyesight.

Similarly the night at Cambridge is also beautifully described, ‘Night has a great, a tender innocence’. No one harms another in the night but with the convictions and irritations of the day. Those who speak of the dark night think of the dark day which precedes it. The night of Cambridge had an absolute silence, as though paths and roads had stopped suddenly and time has passed by them, and into Herfordshire.

The trees, though, made time, for winter had covered the earth with a grey, remembered existence. Man has a fire within, substance, a light and he illumines his night not with the stuff electric with as touch that is to touch, as lip that is no lip, but a smell, a curve of breath and silence, as if truth is a presence, an instant, an eye. Words are made of such stuff as breath is made on. “What happens in ‘The Serpent and the Rope’ decision ‘to stop life and look into it.’ It is perhaps this quality of the novel that
Raja Rao had in mind when he pointed out to Rilke’s ‘The notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge’ as a source of creative influence.’\(^{29}\) It is in their method and not so much in their weltanschauung that the two novels resemble each other, and this method is one of transforming the visible into the invisible.

“India is a large presence in ‘The Serpent and the Rope’ and Rama’s experience of India includes family relationships and rituals the atmosphere of places like Hyderabad, Bangalore, Bombay and Allahabad and the absorption of the life-renewing presence of its permanent symbols like the Himalaya, Kashi and Ganga, but the value for him is not so much as a historical fact or a geographical entity but as something outside history which brings him face to face with truth.”\(^{30}\) Consider, for example, the following passage where Rama describes his vision of the Himalaya “The Himalaya was like Lord Shiva himself, distant, inscrutable, and yet very intimate there where you do not exist. He was like space made articulate, not before you but behind you, behind what is behind that which is behind one : it led you back through abrupt silences to the recesses of your own familiar but unrecognized self.”\(^{31}\)

India for Rama is a symbol of knowledge which transcends time and through her he tastes ‘the sweetness and the desire of immortality’\(^{32}\)

He comes to India spiritually empty: “something had just missed me in life, some deep absence grew in me, like a coconut on a young tree, that no love or learning could fill.”\(^{33}\)

It is India, therefore, which helps Rama to fight his spiritual barrenness by creating in him a deep sense of quest.

“India, ‘says Rama, ‘is everybody’s; India is in everybody.’\(^{34}\)

Yet, it is India that separates Rama and Madeleine;

“What is it separated us. Rama?”

“India”

“India? But I am a Buddhist”

“That is why Buddhism left India, India is impityable.”

“But one can become a Buddhist”

“Yes, and a Christian and Muslim as well.”

“Then?”

“One can never be converted to Hinduism.”

“You mean one can only be born a Brahmin?”

“That is-an India”, I added, as an explanation of India.”

29
“Your India, then, Rama. Is in time and space?”
“No. It is contiguous with time and space, but is; anywhere, everywhere.”
“I don’t understand.”
“It stands, as it were, vertical to time and space and is present at all points.”
“That is India. Jnanam is India.”

The relevance of the earlier passages about India to this conversation can hardly be exaggerated.

For Rama. India means freedom through knowledge, while for Madeleine, it is neither a cause or a paradise. Rama is right when he says that in spite of her love of bridges Madeleine never crossed them.

“In Rama’s view Madeleine commits what his creator has called the heresy of the ‘modern’ woman in trying to reach the ultimate directly but Savithri is women par excellence.”

Rama’s relationship with her reflects a complete identity of metaphysical positions:

“------ when seeing goes into the make of form and form goes into the make of seeing, as the great sage says, ‘what, pray, do you see?’”
“You see nothing or, if you will, yourself”, Answered Savithri and I wondered at her Instant recognition of her experience.
“Therefore, what is truth?” I asked -----
“Is-ness is the truth” she answered.
“And is-ness is what?”
“who asks that question?”
“Myself”
“who?”
“I”
“of whom?”
“No one”
“Then ‘I am’ is”
“Savithri says Savithri is Savithri.”
“And you say Savithri is what?” she begged.
“I”
And the moon and the silence seemed to acknowledge that only the “I” shone.” (37)

India, however, is not the only cause of the parting of ways between Rama and Madeleine. Much earlier than the dialogue reproduced above, Madeleine had asked Rama. “I have failed your goods? And Rama had answered, ‘you’ve failed me.” (38)

Madeleine had been attracted to Rama by his impersonal outlook on life, his Brahminhood and her own enthusiasm for the cause of Indian Freedom and had married him, but the marriage had proved to be a battle. There were surely moments of tenderness and truth in their relationship but their world-views were too divergent from each other to permit a fruitful sharing of life. Each had tried to adopt the other’s world view. Rama had gone through a Christian phase of becoming and, as he puts it, had tried to wed Madeleine’s gods, but this had brought him nothing but anguish.

Madeleine had shared for sometime Rama’s Hindu superstitions and vendanta, though she had ultimately found her identity in Buddhism. What separates Rama and Madeleine in the final analysis, therefore, is not an emotional or intellectual incompatibility or lack of physical attraction but a basic metaphysical difference in their conceptions of self and reality. Raja Rao’s formulation of this difference is both rigorous and clear: “The world is either unreal or real the serpent or the rope. There is no in-between-the-two and all that’s in-between is poetry is sainthood. You might go on saying all the time. ‘No, no, it’s the rope; and stand in the serpent. And looking at the rope from the serpent is to see paradises, saints, avatars, gods, heroes, universes. For wheresoever you go, you see only with the serpents’ eyes. Whether you call it duality, a modified duality you invent a belvedere to heaven; you look at the rope from the posture of the serpent, you feel you are the serpent you are the rope is. But in true fact, with whatever eyes you see there is no serpent, there never was a serpent. You see the serpent and in fear you feel you are it, the Serpent the saint. One-the Guru brings, you the lantern; the road is seen, the long white road, going with the statutory stars. It’s only the rope. He shows it to you. And you touch your eyes and know there never was a serpent the poet who saw the rope as serpent became the serpent and so a saint. Now, the saint is shown that his sainthood was identification, not realization. The actual, the real has no name. The rope is no rope to itself.”

“Then what is it?”

“The rope, not as opposed to the serpent,”

but the rope just is—and therefore,
there is no world.”

“But there can be a Beatrice?” she implored.

“Yes.” I said, after a long while, “Yes,
Where I am not when I can love
the self in Maitreyi, I can be Yajnayavalkya.”(39)

Using here the familiar analogy of the serpent and the rope, Rama states the
well known advaita position with regard to the ultimate truth which denies the world
while affirming the underlying reality of Brahmin, and emphases the role of the Guru
in removing ignorance (ajnana) of the nature of reality.

These passages are, obviously, central to the novel whose main philosophic
concern is the nature of reality but, occurring as they do at the most crucial phase of
the relationship between Rama and Madeleine, they are integral also to the novel as
history. Structure in this context involves the horizontal as well as the vertical and
thus acquires its distinctive character.

“Rama’s denial of the world and his contempt for the Christian and Buddhist
compassion, because it implies for him an acceptance of the world as real, poses a
serious threat to Madeleine’s new-found identity as a Buddhist. She realizes that she
can neither be an Ananda or a beatrice to Rama and her relationship with him comes
to a logical end.”(40)

Thus, the Serpent and the Rope depicts the predicament of modern man, who
lured by the worldly pleasures, finds it hard to observe severe austerities and spiritual
discipline of Vedanta.

The Serpent and the Rope can even be called a metaphysical novel. Raja Rao’s
fondness for linking up the most unlikely things and his intellectual diatribes, relevant
as well as irrelevant, howsoever brilliant, they may be, strain the patience of the
reader and leave feeling of fatigue if not boredom, in the mind of the reader. Even the
sympathetic critic like K.R.Srinivasa Iyengasr says : “of course, Raja Rao (or his
hero, Rama) is apt to talk too much-ride his hobby horses to death; and, exasperated,
we feel like saying with Madeleine:

“Sometimes, Rama, I want to run away from you, run far away from you, just
to listen to stupid innocent laughter or go to a circus and see the clown make
everyone laugh this high seriousness reminds me of poor werther.Yet, grumble
though we may, we do not actually run away from the book; we feel we must go on
and on, marking the writhings and rhythmic movements of the serpent, watching the
head chasting it tail to know whether it is the serpent or the rope, and nothing the alternations in elation and discomfiture.\(^{(41)}\)

The novel is also considered autobiographical. However, Ramaswamy’s observation that he is writing the sad and “uneven chronicle” of his life with the objectivity and the discipline of “the historical science” makes the narrative objective. The novel is not a dry and sapless history because the description of the variegated life of England, France and India and the portrayal of several characters, Little Mother, Saroja, Savithri, Uncle Seetharamu, Madeleine, Georges, Lezo and uncle Charles make it rich in texture and variety. There is growth and development of consciousness in characters. Little Mother who was left “such a hapless and broken down woman—almost a girl” now has acquired natural dignity. Saroja thoughts now evokes in the protagonist such thoughts as “what a deep and reverential mystery women is!”\(^{(42)}\)

Savitri who, in the beginning appears a frivolous girl fixing engagements on phone later turns into “Akshara Lakshmi” and ‘divinity of the syllable.’ Thus Raja Rao’s superb characterization is a conscious attempt of a great artist who is producing a modern novel in ‘The Serpent and the Rope’. “In ‘The Serpent and the Rope’ the novelist explains the phenomenal nature of this world (Jagat) through the symbols of the ‘serpent’ and the ‘rope’ — the analogy originally employed by Sankara in his non-dualistic philosophy.”\(^{(43)}\) ‘The Serpent and the Rope’ is a novel, or more appropriately an ‘Epic Legend’ which invites many approaches. The apparent theme is, however the disintegration of an unusual marriage and Madeleine, his French wife. This conflict of cultures on the domestic plane is inevitably linked with that of the East-West encounter and leads us to the major problem of Illusion and reality.

It takes us straightway into a frank and philosophic discussion between the hero, Ramaswamy and his wife, Madeleine as to what actually drew them apart and caused their marriage to fail. Rama categorically states that it was ‘India’ that separated the two, by which he means, the difference in their cultural and spiritual ethos. He further explains the nature of the world as viewed by a Vedantin.

Raja Rao, here, expounds the non-dualistic theory of Sankaracharya, the celebrated Hindu Philosopher of the eighth century A.D. The world according to Sankara, may be likened to an imagined snake which proves, on closer examination, to be nothing but a coil of rope.
“The Serpent stands for Illusion as the rope symbolizes reality or the ultimate truth. When the truth or the ultimate truth when the truth is known, we are no longer deluded by appearance; the snake vanishes into the reality of the rope. The purpose of life is to end the illusion of individuality and to realize the oneness of the self with the absolute.” (44)

It is significant that at the end of the novel Rama, who realizes the futility of life goes in search of his Guru while Madeleine for whom Buddhism becomes an all-absorbing spiritual quest withdraws herself gradually from Rama and the world.

Manohar Malgonkar, a Marathi by nationality was born on July 12, 1913 in the village of Jagalbet in the Princely State of Indore. After getting education at the University of Bombay, he worked as a guide for sufficiently long period. Later from 1942 to 1952, he served in the Indian army and retired as lieutenant colonel, and thereafter devoted himself to literary activities. After working in the field of journalism for some time and after writing several research papers on the history of the Maratha people, finally he chose fiction-writing.

From 1960 to 1964, Manohar Malgonkar wrote on the basis of his reminiscences and published four novels, Distant Drum (1960), Combat of shadows (1962), The Princes (1963) and A Bend in the Ganges (1964).

The first and the last novel are about the most complicated of the political themes-partition of the country-, and the other two raise social problems. These books have brought literary fame to Manohar Malgonkar, and have made him an outstanding writer. “No doubt, this long-hoped for consummation of national aspirations”, wrote Krishna Kriplani about the achievement of Independence by India, “was hailed with great enthusiasm and joy by the people, but this jubilation was soon submerged in the great agony of partition with its insensate orgy of slaughter and the uprooting of millions of people from their homeland.” (45)

These blood-stained events immediately attracted the attention of Indian writers. The subject of India’s partition was also reflected in Indian English novel; first of all, it is connected with the names of Khushwant Singh and Manohar Malgonkar.

“Malgonkar’s hobbies – love for literature, especially poetry, hunting, classical music etc. have given ample material for his novels. It is no exaggeration to put him as one of the first four Indo-Anglian novelists and for sheer power of telling
an arresting story, one is tempted to put him above every other novelist—a major
ovelist from whom we can expect still higher achievements."(46)

Malgonkar’s novel, ‘A Bend in the Ganges’ is perhaps the masterpiece of the
author. The title of the book is reflected in the epigraph—a quotation from the epic, The
Ramayana, whose Principal characters, Sita and Rama their departure to exile are
delighted by the beauty of native spots near the bend in the Ganga. Like the characters
in the epic, the characters of the novel, Sundari and the Gian, leave the motherland.
But there is in the title still another deeper thought. The Ganga is symbol of India. Her
bend is the turn in the history of Indian and the present context, it is her partition into
two sovereign states.

This is a novel of the struggle of Indian independence and its bloody
aftermath. In his prefatory note, the author says, “only the violence in this story
happens to be true; it came in the wake of freedom, to become a part of India’s
history. What was achieved through non-violence, brought with it one of the bloodiest
upheavals of history; twelve million people had to flee, leaving their homes; nearly
half a million were killed; over a hundred thousand women, young and old, were
abducted raped, mutilated”.(47)

The leading personages of the novel, Debi-Dayal Tekchand, a son of a
prosperous merchant, and Gian Talwar a village lad from patriarchal family, are
graduates of the same college. They hold different views : Debi-Dayal is a violent
nationalist, a champion of terrorism, but Gian is a Gandhist, who has chose non-
violece as the fundamental principle of life.

However, when the elder brother of Gian falls victim to lawlessness and dies,
he avenges him and disregarding Gandhian morals kills the criminal. The lines of
Gian and Debi-Dayal cross once again: they meet in convict colony in the Andaman
Islands. But ever there they seem to be in the opposite camps.

Gian is an informer and works for the English, while Debi-Dayal Zealously
serves the Japanese, who have captured the Andaman Islands and Burma. Soon Gian
and Debi-Dayal successful in escaping, and they find themselves again in India. Now
they are compelled to live under assumed names. Life has cruelly treated both of
them, dispelling all their romantic illusions. From now onwards, their acts are guided
only by their instinct of self-preservation, they are no longer capable of patriotic
deeds, of participating in the struggle for national liberation.
The novel starts with the terrorist movement, and ends with the communal riots of the post-partition period. The hero is Debi Dayal, the son of a well known magnate of Lahore. He Shafi Usman, and others, were all members of a terrorist group which was fighting the British in its own way. This novel actually describes how gradually drop by drop, communal poison, soured and embittered the lives of freedom workers and converted them into communal fanatics.

This group of young revolutionary students, the freedom fighters, blow up railway tracks, bridges etc. and Shafi under the influence of Communal Frenzy, betrays Debi Dayal. Debi is transported to the Andamans beyond the black waters. There is another character Gian Talwar, a village boy, a proud, sensitive, basically good hearted peasant, comes from an orthodox Brahmin family of village Konshet, a family which was once prosperous but is now financially a wreck. He is the class fellow of Debi Dayal, the son and heir of Dewanbahadur Tekchand Kerwad, a prosperous business magnate of Durriabad.

Gian, deeply devoted to his family, admires the British rulers, in spite of his support for Gandhiji. Debi Dayal and Shafi Usman are also freedom fighters but they belong to a terrorist group. “They think that Gandhian ideology of non-violence will emasculate the nation.” (48) Debi Dayal and other members of the Hanuman club deem Shafi Usman their leader. They are dedicated to the overthrow of British rule in India and to Hindu Muslim Unity.

Shafi, the most wanted leader of the group, disguises himself as a Sikh. Debi has a personal cause to hate English men. His initiation into this group begins with his hatred for the British prompted by an attempted rape of his mother by a white soldier, Shafi too has a personal cause to hate the British. His father was killed during the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and his mother and he had to crawl on their bodies while returning from his father’s Funeral.

Gian’s faith in non-violence comes to an end when under “influence, backmail, flattery, bribes” Vishnu Dutta, the murderer of his brother Hari, goes schotch free. Unable to seek justice, he kills Vishnu Dutt. He is sentenced to life imprisonment in the cellular jail in the Andamans. Shafi Usman, alias Singh, proves to be a traitor, when he is informed of the impending raid on the club he warns only the Muslim youths leaving all the Hindus to their own fate to run away. Bosu, Debi and other Hindu youths are arrested and tried. Debi is sentenced to Andamans. Shafi’s creed of Hindu-Muslim unity crumbles.
We are shown the heartless and hard life that the prisoners had to lead in the Andaman cellular jail the description of which is as vivid as it is graphic and realistic. In cellular jail Gian becomes a Feri (a trustee prisoner) and an ally of the tough good-natured commandant Mulligan. The injustice he has received from Indians motivates him to act of treachery. He is not only instrumental in preventing Debi Dayal from escaping but is blamed for the flogging which Mulligan orders to be inflicted on him.

There a misunderstanding arises between Debi and Gian. Then come the Second World War and the British had to pull out from the Andamans. Gian was to go with Mr. Mulligan along with another prisoner Ramoshi, Ghasita. But before the boat came to pick them up, Ramoshi was killed by the native head hunters. Gian opened his throat, took out the ten sovereigns from a ‘Khobri’ (artificial cavity) in his throat and escaped by the boat to India.

Debi Dayal co-operates with the Jananese soldiers, and is financed and sent to India to work as a fifth columnist. Thus all our characters come back to India in the last phases of the Second World War. Gian gets a job in the firm of Debi’s father and is stationed in Bombay where he meets Sundari, Debi’s sister, who, a victim of loveless marriage, drifts apart from her husband. She knew that her husband moved in smart set and was not faithful to her and so she falls in love with Gian and the result is that the husband and wife drift apart from each other and Sundari goes to Lahore to her father’s house, just before the break out of mass communal frenzy. Actually when the communal disturbances start Sundari, her father and her mother are stranded helpless in the blood thirsty city of Lahore.

The last bitter phase of the novel deals with the partition and the massive exchange of Hindu and Muslim populations. Debi Dayal had learnt that it was Shafi who had betrayed him.

He traces Shafi at a brothel of Anarkali when Debi learns that Shafi was in love with Mumtaz, a prostitute in that brothel, he buys that girl for ten thousand rupees and thus an open war is declared between Shafi and Debi. In order to take revenge on Shafi, Debi marries Mumtaz.

1947 riots take Shafi to Lahore where he finds that Debi’s father, Dewan Bahadur Tekchand and Sundari were at his mercy. He wanted to abduct Sundari and so one night he takes a few friends in a jeep to loot the house of the Dewan Bahadur. But Gian had come there for the sake of Sundari. In the fight that ensures Shafi is killed by Sundari who hammers out his lead with a bronze Shiva idol. Then they join
the refugee cavalcade to India and the Dewan Bahadur lost and dejected and perhaps out of his mind wanders away from the halting place. The car carrying Sundari and Gian marches on in the convoy to India.

Debi was worried about his father and mother and so disguised as a Muslim couple, he and Mumtaz board a refugee train to Pakistan. The train is stopped in Pakistan and all the passengers are checked by the mob of angry Muslims. Debi is killed by the mob and Mumtaz is carried away.

Denunciating criticism of Malgonkar’s realistic novel is directed in different channels. Cruelty and treachery have been exposed by the writer through the characters, representative of the English administration Office in-charge of prison, patric Malligan, and the Japanese authorities in the Andmans. But the basis of the novel is still the same problem of the Hindu-Muslim antagonism.

Malgonkar sets before himself a difficult task: to trace the psychological ripening of religious fanaticism. Patriotic outbursts smashed down the barriers of religion which has divided the people of India. People regard themselves at brethren by blood, and the servants of the motherland. However, gradually the reactionary forces, who fanaticism has been stirred up by the English colonizers become more and more active. The separatists sow the seeds of discord, trying to turn the “breather by religion” to their own “faith of hatred” Shafi, a Muslim, the head of the patriotic organization, “Fighters for freedom”, consisting of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, becomes an objective of such an ideological working up on the part of the Muslim Extremist, Hafiz:

“(Hafiz) – we who once ruled this country as conquerors shall be living here as inferior citizens, as the slaves of Hindus! Jinnah is a great man. He has pointed out the way. In our hatred of the British we had altogether lost sight of a far greater menace: the Hindus!”

(Shafi) – The Hindus can never constitute a danger to the Muslims – not here in the Punjab, Never! Only fanatics can believe such nonsense. Jinnah has exposed them:

“The Hindus have shown that Hindustan is for the Hindus”. Now we Moslems have to look after ourselves. Organize ourselves before it is too late. Carve out our own country. That will be wholly Muslim; Pure, uncontaminated. We don’t want freedom if it means our living here, as slaves of the Hindus. If we succeed in driving out the British, it is the Hindus who will inherit power.”(49)
The poisonous seeds put up sprouts, and the agitation of Hafiz does not go in vain. When the English people are seriously engaged in the enquiry of the terrorists acts and Shafi comes to know about the danger, and it is only later on that he realizes that these few are only the Muslims, and the road to a convict colony is in store for the Sikhs and the Hindus, particularly for Debi Dayal.

On the other hand, when Debi-Dayal visits in Calcutta his old friend Bose, a Hindu, he sees that the face of his wife Deepali is disfigured by burn-the Muslims have thrown on her a phial with sulphuric acid. No wonder, then, if in the speeches of Bose he hears slogans of the Chauvinistic Hindu Party ‘Hindu Mahasabha’ : “We have to become aligned, in sheer self-defence, Hindus against Moslems.”

The novel concentrates on the anti-colonial struggle between the British and the Indians popularly known as Quit India Movement propelled by Gandhian dynamism. The main purpose of this movement was to oust the British from the Indian sub-continent. There was simply no controversy about it at all. But the crux of the problem lay in the modus operandi to be employed for the said purpose. There was a controversy among the Indians whether they should follow the path of non-violence and terrorism.

Manohar Malgonkar who was a colonel in the army naturally affirms the validity of military action as opposed to non-violent Gandhian persuasion. G.S.Amur is right when he says that “It concedes the reality of violence but shows it to be self-consuming and destructive.”

It is this martial vision that finds expression in the major character of the novel, Debi-Dayal. He does not approve of the peaceful agitation of Gandhian concept as he deems it to be useless and unfruitful. He wants to express his anti-colonial philosophy through indulgence in violent activities. That is the reason why he encourages the burning of British garments. He joins other leaders of non-Gandhian principles like Shafi Usman and tries to consolidate their views and activities in order to overthrow the British and India to achieve political independence.

Naturally they identify themselves with the national cause so much that there is hardly any difference between their personal life and national or public life. As they are inspired by the war-psychology, they do not think of adhering to puritanical or saintly ideals, but on the contrary, think of achieving their ends through any means. They, therefore, establish a Hanuman physical culture club in order to galvanize their activities in a systematic fashion.
But it is Debi-Dayal who is a terrorist of the first order. He identifies himself with the Indian national struggle so ardently and hates the British so fiercely that he was practically no private life of his own. In spite of being the son of millionaire, he does not long for a cosy and comfortable life. He has the courage of his conviction which enables him to disagree with his father Tekchand’s pro-British policy. He, therefore leaves the parents to plunge into the national struggle for independence.

He believes in terroristic activities like cutting the telephone wires, derailing the trains etc. The culmination of his terroristic activities can be seen in his life-imprisonment in the cellular jail at Port Blair in the Andaman Island. An ardent Patriot as he is, he does not want to submit himself to the prison rules weekly. He, for example, refuses to salute Patrick Mulligan, the Jail Superintendent of the Cellular Jail, writes anti-British slogans like Hitler Ki Jai and Angrez Murdabad on culverts and bridges. He openly sympathizes with the German side in the war and incurs the wrath of the British officers. He is so self-respected that he refuses to have anything to do with his own parents at home.

But Gian Talwar provides a good constrict to Debi-Dayal and Shafi Usman as he stands for Gandhian values at least initially in the novel. He is a traditionalist, a puritan and even a coward in his student days. When he was in the college, he had become a butt of ridicule among his friends for wearing the sacred thread, a symbol of puritanical religion. In the early days of his youth he had seen the family feud between the Big House and the Little House and was so cowardly that he stood back when his own brother Hari was murdered by Vishnu Dutt with an axe. But such a coward grows into a self-confident and defiant youngman later when he realizes the futility of non-violence and succeeds in murdering Vishnu Dutt with the same axe with which the latter had murdered Hari. Consequently, he has to undergo life imprisonment in the cellular jail at Port Blair.

When the colonizer feels the threat from the colonized, he tries to suppress the latter through fair means or foul. Needless to say that if the colonizer happens to be a Britisher, he, in keeping with his racial policy, enjoys the ‘Divide and Rule’ policy to achieve his ends. That is exactly what Mr.Patrick Mulligan does when he finds out that Debi-Dayal indulges in anti-British activities. Although, basically a sober and God-fearing man, Mr.Patrick Mulligan does not hesitate to enjoy his native policy of ruling by dividing. He, therefore, takes Gian Talwar into confidence and promises to
make him a Feri if he spies over Debi-dayal’s activities and reports them confidentially.

Gian Talwar who is tempted by the offer, yields to it. Consequently, he reports to Patrick Mulligan that is Debi-dayal who has written the anti-British slogans on the walls and culverts; and who has hidden some money in a jack fruit tree outside the jail. Debi-dayal, in addition to these activities, has irrigated the officers by killing a Gurkha guard namely Balbahadur by kicking his scrotum. Thus, Debi-dayal has broken the prison rules deliberately. Although, he and Gian Talwar are from the same college, they have been successfully divided by the British officer. Patrick Mulligan decides to punish Debi-dayal by arranging a ceremonial flogging. He is flogged so severely before the huge audience of prisoners that he becomes unconscious. Although, Debi-dayal is betrayed by his own college-mate and humiliated by the authorities, he is not disheartened by any of them. Being totally at the mercy of his officers, he bides his time for a while.

By now the war between the Japanese and the British comes to an end by the victory of the former over the latter. This international phenomenon affects the conditions in India and Andaman Islands. The success of the anti-colonial Japan, naturally reverses the situation in the colonized countries. When the Japanese soldiers come to occupy Andaman, the British officers like Patrick Mulligan and their opportunistic followers like Gian Talwar escape from there. Now, the anti-imperialistic groups begin to enjoy a new freedom and sympathy from the Japanese soldiers.

Debi-dayal feels a new hope in his life when the Japanese commanding officer, Colonel Yamakl asks him to join the Indian National Army led by Subhash Chandra Bose. Debi-dayal is only too happy to agree with him. Thus, being liberated by the Japanese soldiers from the British control, Debi-dayal assumes a new name i.e. Kalu-ram and escapes to India as a refugee. He is appointed as a stockman at the silent Hill Tea Garden in north-western Assam. Even after returning to India Gian Talwar follows rather an opportunistic way of life. For him, his personal safety and security are more important than the nationalistic ideals now.

Before leaving Andaman Island, he did not hesitate to steal the gold sovereigns from the kobri of the dead body of Ghasita Kamoshi. After landing in Madras he sells them to a shroff. He then goes to Bombay where he meets Dewan Bahadur Tekchand, sells the statue of Shiva to him. He ingratiates himself into
Tekchand’s favour by lying to him and his family about Debi-dayal and gets a job of shipments supervisor in the Kerwad construction company in Bombay with a salary of Rs.400 per month. He acts as a good contrast to Debi-dayal. He cheats Mr.Tekchand by telling him that he tried to help Debi-dayal in Port Blair although he actually betrayed him there. He acted the role of a Judas in Andaman Island.

Now, he cheats Sundari with his sweet and hypocritical lies. He develops amorous feelings for her and declares his lover for her and even wants to marry her if she can divorce her husband, Mr.Gopal Chandidar. When she pretends to love him, he does not mind having sex with her on the beach. Even after being insulted by Sundari, he comes back to their house for shelter when Tekchand is helpless and attacked by Shafi Usman and his gang of course, he has the humanity to fight for Tekchand and accompany them in the convoy to Delhi. But on the whole, he does not show the ardent idealism of Debi-dayal.

At the moments of emergency he is ready to compromise with the situation. He is an extract figure who can be used by the British officers for betraying his own friends and colleagues. In this sense he becomes a minor Satan in the paradise of Indian patriotism. If the personal rivalry acts as the cause of rift between Debi-dayal and Gian Talwar and weakness the anti-colonial struggle the communal rivalry between Muslims and Hindus acts as a greater cause of rift in the same. It is part of common knowledge that the British Government, when forced by inevitable circumstances to give freedom to India, wanted to divide the Hindus and the Muslims from each other.

Inspired by the British encouragement, the Muslims of India wanted to be free from the Hindu control after the departure of the British from the subcontinent. The Muslim separatism is, of course, clearly represented by Shafi Usman, who was once upon a time a member of the Hanuman Physical, Culture Club and a co-fighter with Debi-dayal against the alien Government, comes under the influence of Hafiz Khan and begins to drift away from the Hindus. Hafiz Khan brainwashes him as follows:

“I am not a leaguer only because the league does not believe in our methods. But there is no denying that Jinnah is a great man. He has pointed out the way. We must turn our back on the Hindus, otherwise we shall become their slaves!”

From then on Shafi Usman begins to develop a separatistic philosophy and looks at the Hindu leaders like Debi-dayal and others with suspicion and hatred. For some time when the situation is not favourable to him, he spends his days in an ‘out of
Bounds’ house in an in cognito condition. In that brothel managed by Akkaji, Shafi Usman has taken a fancy to a pretty Muslim girl namely Mumtaz and spends his nights with her. The sinister symptoms of the Hindu-Muslim discord become more and more evident. The separatist Muslims dream of an empire of Islam and the orthodox Hindus of a dominion of the Hindus. Debi-dayal has an apprehension of the coming bloodshed, and his fears are confirmed. Malgonkar describes how passengers of a train, proceeding from India to Pakistan, see in the distance a forest lawn, which seems to be covered with red stuff. When they reach close to it, they understand that before them it is not at all the production of the dye-house but a scene of mass killing, changed by the morning sun into a wild mirage. “The large patches of red, which had resembled saris left out to dry, shrank and shrivelled and faded before their eyes, leaving only pools of dried blood. The vultures, the dogs and the jackals emerged, strutting disdainfully.”

The Muslim separatism has obviously exasperated Debi-dayal beyond measure. His friend Basu inculcates in him the need for unity among Hindus and alignment with the philosophy of the Hindu Mahasabha.

Debi-dayal is convinced about the inevitability of fighting with the new enemy arisen from within India itself. He wants to take revenge upon Shafi Usman by snatching away his pet girl Mumtaz from him. He therefore, manages to buy her for Rs.10,000 most unexpectedly and much to Shafi Usman’s chagrin.

Shafi is so much angered by Debi-dayal’s action, that he throws acid at Mumtaz’s, but it falls upon Debi-dayal’s hand. Later on, when Tekchand is about to leave with his family for Delhi, Shafi Usman takes his gang with him to attack them. In the ensuing fight, he shoots Mrs. Tekchand and escapes from there. Thus, Shafi Usman finds a satisfaction in fighting for the Muslim cause.

But Debi-dayal finds himself in the dilemma. He buys the Muslim girl Mumtaz more out of revenge for Usman than out of real sexual attraction for her. But when he learns from her that she has nowhere to go, his basic sense of morality prevents him from leaving her in the lurch. Caught in the coils of samsar, he decided to marry her.

As India achieves independence, the separate state of Pakistan is also created simultaneously. Consequently, the refugees are exchanged between India and Pakistan. Debi-dayal has attached himself to a Muslim girl in spite of his hatred for Muslims on political grounds. He leaves for Pakistan in the guise of a Muslim (with a pseudo name Karim) with Mumtaz, but at last unfortunately his Hinduness being
discovered, he is mercilessly killed by the mad mob of Muslims in the newly created Pakistan.

‘A Bend in the Ganges’ contains a gripping and powerful story. The statute of Lord Shiva, the god of destruction, provides. “unity and symbolic pattern to the novel.” The Shiva statue, which Gian sells to Debi’s father in exchange for a job is used by Gian and Sundari against the Muslim attackers.

“A supporting source of unity is parallelism of narrative structure: the telescope that reveals her husband’s infidelity to Sundari is employed six year later by Sundari to humiliate him; Sundari saves Gian’s life in the Bombay docks and Gian saves her in turn from rape and murder, Mulligan, who befriends Gian and orders Debi to be flogged, emerges again as saviour Debi to be flogged, emerges again as saviour of Gian and Debi’s sister at the end of the book. The sense of a destiny behind the lives of the protagonist’s is strong and perhaps contrived, but contributes to an atmosphere of tragic inevitability.”

Tragedy also envelops the protagonists. At the end of the novel, Debi-dayal falls in love with a Muslim woman Mumtaz, marries her and takes her to visit his parents. Although Debi-dayal poses as a Muslim, Pakistani patrolmen, after subjecting him to humiliating examination, kill him. Rape and death becomes the lot of Mumtaz. The interweaving of live in the novel forms a complicated design.

Shafi, who is also in love with Mumtaz, after finding out that she has married Debi-dayal, decides to avenge his lucky rival and leaves for his home in order to rape Sundari, Debi-dayal’s sister. But Sundari is saved by Gian who loves her. As a result of a tussle in Debi-dayal’s house, Shafi is killed. Gian and Sundari drive away in a car, after having cast a parting look in the motherland – the country of carrion. And once again at the last page of the novel “the Teddy bear shape, crowned by the round red face, the pale grey eyes unblinking of Patrick Mulligan” Comes up in the column of refugees. The ‘phenomenon’ is symbolic because English colonialism stands behind the terrible bloodshed, which has shaken India. ‘A Bend in the Ganges’, thus offers us a picture of the anti-colonial struggle in the Indian context. In it Manohar Malgonkar succeeds in tracing the various aspects of the encounter between colonial and anti-colonial forces. Whereas Dewan Bahadur Teckchand is a rich man who owns the shipment company and who represents the pro-British Indian capitalists, his son Debi-dayal is an ardent patriot trying to win freedom for India through his terroristic activities. He stands for uncompromising idealism. He
sacrifices his life for the sake of protecting Mumtaz (the ‘lion’s cub’) that he has saved from a brothel. He, in spite of his limitations, attains the stature of an epic hero.

Like Teckhand, his son-in-law Gopal Chandidhar also represents the pro-British class of India. But Sundari, Tekchand’s daughter, seems to be detached from the political turbulence in the country, as she is an aristocratic lady buys with her club life like moving with prince Amjid, playing cards, swimming and taking revenge upon her husband by sleeping with her lover.

Gian Talwar represents those who betray the natives to the British Government for their own selfish ends Shafi Usman, obviously represents the Muslim population who craved for the creation of a separate country for themselves. All the major characters in the novel stand for four types of Indian population caught in the anti-colonial struggle that proceeded the Indian Independence on 15th August, 1947.

In ‘A Bend in the Ganges’ Malgonkar underlines the role of the Second World War in effecting radical changes in the affairs of men and nations, the attainment of independence and the partition of the country. The novel begins with the terrorist movement and ends with the communal riots in the post-partition period. The entire story revolves around three youngmen-Gian Talwar, Debi-dayal and Shafi Usman.

It is also an action-packed novel built round the most momentous events in the recent history of India. The action of the novel, “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-Gian’s brother Hari and Vishnu Dutt, Hari is killed by Vishnu Dutta and Vishnu Dutta, in turn, is killed by Gian as a sort of personal Vendetta. This personal bloodshed in a Himachal Pradesh village opens our novel and the national blood-shed, the killing, massacre of thousands of men, women and children, the Hindus as well as the Muslims, forms the dramatic finale of our novel. That alone is not the only outstanding feature of this novel.

The background of the plot is equally authentic and possesses a sort of documentary validity. He has selected the most unusual background-the terrorist movement, the Andaman jails, the native head-hunters, the great explosion in Bombay Harbour and the communal upheaval in the Punjab. The novel thus becomes a story of blood and tears.

The unusual situation, unusual events, acted against the most dramatic years of India’s history make this novel a great and powerful novel produced in the post-
independence period over and above dramatic and thrilling situations, the novel touches epic dimensions in as much as it describes the vast struggle for independence spread 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.

Our characters are connected with national movements for independence, the blood feuds spread over generations and end in murder or jail. The prison at the Andamans with its piled up memories, the explosion of the ammunition steamer of Bombay during the Second World War and lastly the communal frenzy of the Punjab—all these are as novel as they are romantic and dramatic. So far as the background is concerned the author has used excellent taste to select the background that is novel that is unique and dramatic. This touch of imagination and novelty in the form of unusual background are an added attraction of the novel. The character of Ramoshi Ghasita with a pouch in the throat that can hide guines permanently is something which the reader is not prepared to swallow very easily. And Sundari, True, she is girl of determined character, true, also that when challenged she is prepared to drown a puppy in hot water. True also that like any other self-respecting woman, she is very angry when the telescope in her window shows her husband making love to a cheap woman-Malini on the Juhu Beach. But to wait for six long years nursing a grievance and then to reproduce an exactly similar situation, to make love to Gian. While her husband watches scene from the self-same telescope and thus even the score.

It is, if not impossible, definitely improbable. We can defend this unusual behavior of Sundari only by assuming that the author was preparing that ground for the determined way in which Sundari killed Shafi Usman. The novelist has scrupulously avoided controversial topics but wherever he had to go into discussion (like the discussion about non-violence as a political weapon in the beginning of the novel and the discussion regarding patriotism and communalism in the end of the novel), the novelist had tried to give balanced views in the proper perspective. It does not mean that the novel is great because it has no defects, it is a great novel inspite of its defects; for example the very first sight of plot, highlights a few improbable situations.

When Shafi Usman and Debi meet after a number of years in a brothel of Anarkali to settle old scores, one naturally expects a quick fight but no such thing
happens. Debi’s method of revenge is as improbable as it is unrealistic. He buys Mumtaz for ten thousand rupees. One might ask: In what way would this purchase of Shafi’s favourite prostitute hurt Shafi? How did Debi know that Shafi was keen on this particular prostitute? If Debi wanted revenge, would it not have been better to kill or to hurt or maim Shafi? But the author selects a very unusual type of revenge in this twist in the plot of this novel. Again even granting that a prostitute can be very faithful – this dumb devotion of a faithful dogs not sound very convincing.

Could not Gian get a job just by telling the truth or could not he get the job by avoiding any reference to Debi? Similarly the way Gian gets a job under Diwan Bahadur Tekchand by telling a lie regarding his friendship with Debi shows a lack of inventiveness on the part of the author.

Last but not the least the behaviour of the Japanese soldiers in the novel. They treat all other Indians very harshly excepting those whom they had selected to work as saboteurs. This looks more like political propaganda than a real picture.

But inspite of all these minor defects the novel is a major novel based on Indian struggle for independence.

‘A Bend in the Ganges’ by Manohar Malgonkar is one of the most powerful novels dealing with the background of Indian independence and the communal riots in the Punjab. Manohar Malgonkar has tried to present before us a powerful story against the background of the troublesome times of India. 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 also a novel full of powerful character-drawing some of the characters are superbly sketched. The villainous Shafi Usman is as faithfully drawn as is the terrorist Debi Dayal or the Gandhi-ite Gian Talwar.

Even among the women characters Sundari with attic beauty and proud temperament outshines Mumtaz the devoted prostitute or Radha her own mother. In Sundari we see grace and beauty and a sort of iron-will which prompts her to drawn a puppy or to kill Shafi Usman with the blows of the Shiva-Idol. Even allowing for a little exaggeration in the portrayal of the character of Sundari, on the whole, we feel the fragrance of Sundari in the lives of the main characters of the novel, Debi and Gian. It is a powerful novel about the lost generation of Indians.
A.V.Krishna Rao remarks: “The powerful characterization, subtle nuances in style, the evocative descriptions and recreations of the milieu and the moment and, above all, the fine achievement of form in the face of “resistant, recalcitrant and inchoate matter” mark this out as a classic of modern Indo-Anglian fiction, representing the lost generation— the generation of Debi-Dayal’s, Juggat Singh’s, Syams, Jotins as well as Nalinis.”[56]

This is a powerful story full of gripping and suspenseful events. About this story, Richard Church remarks: “The general impression is similar to that which moves war and peace; the portrayal of the larger tides of human life when something occurs to rouse them to insane fury ———— A novel could not convincingly contain more violence than this late of the sub-continent during the post quarter of a century. It is not likely that we shall be given a more revealing, a more sanely balanced, or a more terrifying account of those years. The paradox of life is there, and out of it the author has made a work of art.” “Everything is done vividly and the author has blended the political and social background with consummate skill and moving emotional situations. The characterization is superb and although epic in dimensions, the plot never fails to enchant the reader. The new horizons like the back-drop of the Andaman jail and the suspenseful days of the partition riots set off the powerful events which lead to their tragic climax.”[57]

In a review of A Bend in the Ganges R.T.Robertson comments on the ending of the novel and says: “Although the action and the author’s comments seem through-out to depreciate Gian and elevate Debi Dayal, the conclusion appears to point to a gigantic irony—or to the suggestion that modern India was made by heroes like Debi Dayal and consists of a nation of Gians.”

When we come to the description of the Andamans, we know the extent of Malgonkar’s first hand knowledge of the Andamans which he visited during the Second World War. Yet one cannot escape the impression that V.D.Savarkar’s book Black Waters (Kala Pani) also seems to have influenced Malgonkar. A few defects do strike the eye of a discerning reader. For example, New York Times Book Review declares (February, 14, 1965) “In trying to cover everything, Mr.Malgaonkar inclines to sketchiness, amusing interest in one thing only to pass on abruptly to another so that the effect is one of superficiality.”[58]
Yes, the novel has abrupt twists and turns; the scene shifts swiftly from Lahore, Bombay, Delhi and the Andamans. But we cannot call it superficial or sketchy because each incident is intrinsically connected with the next one.

On the contrary the impression he creates is one of concentration and not of diffusiveness. Prof. Amur says, “E.M. Forester selected A Bend in the Ganges as the best book of the year and it is, perhaps the best the has published so far.”(15)

The novel, ‘A Bend in the Ganges’, is a novel which attacks both the British colonizers and the extremist Hindus and Muslims. On artistic plane, Malgaonkar’s novel is commendable, and can be compared with The Son of India by K.A. Abbas, though it is true that Malgonkar’s novel does not have a positive character. The name of Malgonkar is famous in India and abroad. “He (Malgaonkar E.K.) is an Indian and is fully aware of the responsibilities of the Indian writer who shoulders the task of interpreting his country to the whole world”, Ram Sewak Singh writes, “He is bold and does not fight shy of revealing those aspects of Indian life about which most of the Indians prefer to be silent, or if vocal, try to romanticize the history of Freedom Movement.”(60)

Malgonkar has shown how India had to sacrifice a huge lot for earning its freedom from the British Government and how it had to suffer the plains of partition into two countries. The problem of communal hatred between Hindus and Muslims and of exchanging the refugees between the two countries has been portrayed by the author in a very authentic fashion. The birth of two nations as a consequence of the departure of the colonial power as portrayed in the novel is indeed of great historical importance. “The individual characters like Debi, Usman and Gian Talwar become important in so far as they play their individual roles in the epic drama of anti-colonial struggle. The novel shows how India achieved what she had to make a great sacrifice for the achievement of a grand success over the enemies. It can be said to be an epic story of Indian freedom struggle containing the tragic loss of Pakistan from it.”(61)

‘A Bend in the Ganges’ is “an epic presentation of the whole struggle off the Indian Independence and its aftermath.”(62) and ‘the anatomy off partition’ has been attempted only in the last bitter phase of the novel, especially in the chapters entitled ‘The Anatomy of Partition’, ‘The Sunrise of our freedom’ and ‘The Land They were leaving’. These chapters constitute the climax of the novel towards which all the earlier events of the novel are skillfully manipulated. The divergent strands off the plot are woven together through this climatic focus on the partition.
Gian Talwar, Debi-dayal, Sundari, Shafi Usman, Mumtaz, Teckchand and his wife all of them are caught up in the communal holocaust when Independence brings the partition, and there is a massive exchange of Muslim and Hindu populations. The glory and defeat of the hour of freedom and the shame of partition emerge as the themes of ‘A Bend in the Ganges’ in its final chapters. That is why it can be described as a partition novel although it is more than a mere partition novel. The chief strength of his novel, particularly in regard to the partition theme, stems from the detailed historical introduction that it provides to the partition tragedy. The partition which came as a ‘Fellow traveler of freedom’ was not the outcome of an overnight political decision. It was rather the culmination of a steady process that slowly gathered momentum and exploded with a bang. In this novel Manohar Malgonkar shows how gradually, drop by drop, communal poison embittered the lives of such dedicated freedom fighters as Shafi Usman and Basu and converted them into communal fanatics. The young terrorists who blew up railway tracks, bridges and aeroplanes are ironically at each other’s throat at the end of the novel. Manohar Malgonkar has explored the issues connected with the partition rather, ironically. “The Sunrise of our Freedom’ for which Debi-dayal and Shafi Usman worked together, tragically becomes an occasion of their own destruction. The partition and the method with which it was carried out have caused sheer disgust in the novelist. He shows, “trust with destiny” as also the death-trap fashioned by the Malignant time-spirit”.

Debi-dayal is faced with a number of questions raised by the partition holocaust. But he does not live to find answers for them because while travelling in a train he is discovered by Muslim rioters and, despite the passionate protestations of Mumtaz, is dragged out and felled. She hurls herself upon him but she is wrenched apart and carried away naked and struggling, screaming at the top of her voice. The sun is just then rising over the Punjab but the sun of Debi’s Fate is going to set: “That was the last thing he ever saw: the rising sun in the land of the five rivers on the day of their freedom. The next second his eyes were blinded by a great flash of plain that seemed to shoot up from the centre of him, as though a bomb had exploded between his loins.” (Page 369)

The tragic murder of Debi-dayal and the way Mumtaz is separated from his is a clear indication of the enormity of the evil of the partition. Thus, while the partition is the subject of only the final chapters of ‘A Bend in the Ganges’, Manohar
Malgonkar extensively explores the historical facts of the partition through an indirect commentary on the slow but steady growth of communalism, the history of the partition, the background and the mass exodus of ten million people accompanies by communal violence as “a fellow-traveller of freedom.”

Manohar Malgaonkar views the partition as the outcome of the suppression of violence in Indian people by Mahatma Gandhi’s creed of non-violence. He has portrayed it from a political angle. Shakti Batra says that unlike Khushwant Singh, Malgonkar. “Presents the political side of the partition from the point of view of Gian, the ardent disciple of Gandhi and his creed of non-violence; Debi-dayal, the terrorist and Hafiz Khan and Shafi Usman, the communalist. Malgaonkar’s account takes the form of a cool; impersonal debate among the characters; it looks like a scientific analysis of the situation rather than something which emerges out of the characters themselves and their convictions. This ‘detachment’ also marks his narration of the partition riots, when they are compared to similar descriptions by Khushwant Singh.”

There is enough evidence in the novel to support Mr. Batra’s observation in a broad sense. One can find illustrative passages in the conversation between Debi-dayal and Basu at Calcutta:

“What a pass we have come to, fighting amongst ourselves, just when we should be concentrating on the British; Debi-dayal lamented, ‘It is almost as though just when they are on the point of leaving the country; the British have succeeded in what they set out to do set the Hindus and Muslims at each other’s throats. What a lovely sight!’” (P.289)

Basu calls his wife and shows her face to Debi-dayal, which was burnt with sulphuric acid filled in an electric bulb, the standard weapon of Hindu-Muslim feud in those days. Basu’s wife is symbolic of what has opened to the face of India. In view of Muslim fanaticism Basu has joined Hindu Mahasabha. With his astute insight he foresees the violence that is soon to come. “The moment the British quit, there will be Civil War in the country, a great slaughter. Every city, every village, every bustee, where the two communities live side by side, will be the scene of war. Both sides are preparing for it, the Hindus and the Muslims. The Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha are both militant.”

Much later while travelling in the refugee train with Mumtaz, Debi-dayal is stunned by the horrors of partition. Many questions crop up in his mind:
“The date was the 12th of August 1947; their freedom was only three days away. On the 15th of August, the sun that had not shone for them for more than a hundred and fifty years, would rise again. How many more men and women would have been killed by that time, Debi-dayal wondered, how many women abducted?

Yet, what was the alternative? Would terrorism have won freedom at cheaper price and somehow still kept the Hindus and Muslims together? Perhaps not. But at least it would have been an honest sacrifice, honest and manly—not something that had sneaked upon them in the garb of non-violence.” (68)

“How had they come to this? After living as brothers over so many generations, how had they suddenly been infected by such virulent hatred for each other? Who had won, Gandhi or the British? For the British at least and for seen such a development Or hard they both lost through not having allowed for structural flaws in the human material they were dealing with? Had Gandhi ever envisaged a freedom that would be accompanied by so much suffering and release so much hatred? Had he realized it might impose transfers of population unparalleled throughout history?.” (69)

Tekchand’s view-point also confirms Mr.Batra’s charge against the novel. But it is quite natural that Malgonkar should not be as passionately involved in the portrayal of partition as Khuswant Singh and Chaman Nahal are, because he views the events in a historical perspective. ‘A Bend in the Ganges’, however, shares the assertive and affirmative vision projected in both ‘Train to Pakistan’ and ‘Azadi’. Each of the three novels has a love-story in order to intensify the human tragedy of partition. The love between Debi-dayal and Mumtaz represents one of the positive and humanistic forces in these partition novels. As far Debi and Mumtaz, the following is a tell-tale description.

“And the last thing he ever heard was his name being shouted by this wife with all her might. ‘Debi! Debi! My darling! I shall never live with out you! I am coming with you too--- I am coming----
He surrendered himself to the pain, not knowing what she was trying to tell him, but taking a childish, pathetic consolation in the fact that she wanted to be with him wherever he was now going; go with him as she had always wanted to, to wherever he went.” (70)

“The ending of A Bend in the Ganges”, observes Professor Amur, “recalls the conclusion of Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan, where the affirmation is even more deliberate and emphatic.”(71)
The piercing cry of Mumtaz, as Mohan Jha points out, is “indeed the cry of outraged humanity.”\(^{(72)}\)

*A Bend in the Ganges* presents an epic portrayal of the historical reality of which the partition is a part. It derives this feature not only from the epic movement and structure of the novel but also from the epic material covered in it. As professor Amur has observed: “Richard Church has drawn our attention to the epic movement of the novel but it is also important to note the epic dimensions of the world that the novel offers. This is A Bend from Malgonkar’s other novels which comparatively limited areas. The range of the novel includes the feudal world of Konshet, the aristocracy of Blood and wealth symbolized by the fast set of Bombay and the Kerwad family at Duriabad, the world of criminal and aborigines located in the Andaman Islands, and the underworld of terrorists and prostitutes to mention only the clearly definable elements.”\(^{(73)}\)

As a partition novel ‘*A Bend in the Ganges*’ is, thus, marked by both strength and weaknesses. As a partition novel, ‘*A Bend in the Ganges*’ is not backed by the direct involvement of the author in the human tragedy as is true of Khushwant Singh or Chaman Nahal. Furthermore, the detached realism of the novel is not totally objective as demonstrated earlier, but the novel does succeed in the delineation of the complex factors which led to the partition. To sum up, ‘*A Bend in the Ganges*’ is a ‘romantic’ novel in a very special sense. Malgonkar’s Flair for out-of-the ordinary largely contributes to this impression. But this romanticism, if it is romanticism at all, is paradoxically realistic. His survey and documentation of the nationalist movement, the war, the partition and other socio-historical aspects of India is marked by authenticity, extra-ordinary objectivity and detached realism, although it is also equally true to say that he has betrayed his partisan attitude and bias at certain places as in the documentation of partition atrocities. On the strength of this novel, one can safely agree with H.M. William’s observation: “it is in thinking of India’s wars and convulsions and her swift and terrible eruptions of disorder and bloodshed that we are able to see how relevant is Malgaonkar’s romanticism (how paradoxically realistic) to the modern situation in that country.”\(^{(74)}\)

Manohar Malgonkar’s depiction of the social and cultural milieu is realistic. ‘*A Bend in the Ganges*’ gives a lie to David Mc Cutchinson’s generalization about Indian Writing in English; “The fascination of Indian Writing in English lies more in the phenomenon itself than in its documentation of Indian life, which may be hopelessly misleading.”\(^{(75)}\)
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