Hanohar Haloonkar

Gifted with an observant mind, capacity for vivid portraiture, carefully cultivated raciness of language and readability, narrative skill and entertaining power stemming from the dramatic structure of incidents, Hanohar Haloonkar (born 1913) is one of the major practitioners of Indian novel in English. He is a deft story-teller but the interest of his tale is largely episodic, its sundry episodes being held together by the principal character. His distinction, however, lies in his sound historical sense and authoritative knowledge of the Indian scene, both past and present but he cannot rid himself of the shackles of his deep-seated prejudices and 'anglophilia'. His keenness to win acceptability often tends to focus his attention on the dramatic and the sensational. He appears to be really interested in telling his story in such a way as to grip the attention of the reader:

I do strive deliberately and hard, to tell a story well; and I revel in incidents, in improbabilities, in unexpected twists. I feel a special allegiance to the particular sub-caste among those whose caste-marks I have affected, the entertainers, the tellers of stories.

Using memory as a narrative medium, Haloonkar deals with "slices" of life rather than with life in its chaotic fulness or multitudinous variety. He does not dilate upon the flux and complexity of modern life, scrupulously keeping away from metaphysics which, if brought into the orbit of aesthetic experience, would necessitate new thrust and new techniques and he may

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not then remain essentially an entertainer or a story-teller, pure and simple. Malgonkar, therefore, considers the psychological novel of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce a temporary aberration in the novelistic tradition:

The pedlars of erotica and drug dreams may churn out best sellers, but these are not novels, and the interminable ramblings about the day in the life of some one or other are like counting the veins in every leaf of cabbage. All this was a phase, but you cannot play with a cabbage for long. The novel will be back, story, plot and all: the signs are already there.2

Malgonkar is quite a prolific writer and has produced an impressive core of novels in rapid succession Distant Drum (1960) Combat of Shadows (1962), The Princess (1963), A Band in the Ganges (1964) and The Devil's Wind (1972). Spy in Amber, though written originally as a screen-play, was recast into a novel by his daughter in 1971.

With frequent introduction of the scenes of sex and violence to meet the exigencies of the melodrama and to compel the reader's attention, coincidences seem to overshadow the pattern of his plots, reducing the characters to the frame-work of the conventional: "The chief weakness of Malgonkar's novels seems to arise out of his tendency to concentrate his attention more on the exotic and melodramatic than on the worthwhile aspects of Indian life".3 It is difficult to agree with the suggestion that Malgonkar treats insignificant aspects of Indian life but his frequent recourse to the introduction of the sensational in his tale determines the 'feel' or 'colour' of life that he portrays.

Manohar Malgonkar professedly takes great pains to be absolutely accurate about historical facts which are verifiable. He says, "Though some would criticise my style, they don't criticise my historical veracity." But the historical facts are screened through the prism of his consciousness and prejudices. Whereas Malgonkar neither romanticises nor idealises Freedom Movement, he is hardly objective or detached in transmuting the raw material into art, and it is not difficult to attribute motives to his writings. He almost invariably presents a ludicrous and contemptuous image of Gandhi and the Congress Party.

Malgonkar upholds certain values and ideals of gentlemanliness, honour, daring, uprightness etc, which distinguish his heroes from civil servants, the Napoleons of Red Tape, and the cunning politicians. O.R. Sharma perceptively argues that Malgonkar seems to be "dramatising those moral qualities in his major protagonists that the Satpura Code (Distant Drum) seeks to encompass" and the novelist is "more concerned with the operative thrust of the code rather than with its genesis." This code determines a set of priori norms of behaviour in which daring is the deed and cowardice the irredeemable sin. Unscrupulous politicians, debased bureaucrats and gutless officers have been, therefore, conceived as foils to the Code heroes.

M.E. Derrett suggests that Malgonkar as a novelist has obviously no standpoints. An assessment, however, of the behaviour

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of his characters, having a touch of the polemic but undergoing complex experiences, would substantiate the contention that Malgonkar has definite political views or convictions to offer. Inefficiency, corruption, hypocrisy, dishonesty and unscrupulousness are some of the weaknesses he has associated with typically Indian characters, exemplified by nationalists, politicians, Congressmen and the followers of Gandhi. Malgonkar has cultivated the knack to manipulate his character into a situation where it is easy for the novelist to utilize him to voice his political affiliations or grievances.

Gandhi does not find a direct mention in Distant Drum (1960) but there are incidents to suggest the dubious actions, motives and ideals of the followers of Gandhi. The novelist is apparently portraying the shady aspects of Indian politicians, who are none others than the followers of Gandhi but this is tantamount to drawing a coloured portrait of the Mahatma by implication.

Distant Drum is the narrative of a young Indian officer's initiation into the army code. Correct, polite, upright and honourable, Lt. Col. Kiran Garud upholds British Army traditions. His confrontation with a brusque and shabby congress leader is a carefully contrived situation, dovetailed into the main plot of the novel. This episode has been designed to discredit the follower of Gandhi by resorting to sheer caricature. The Congressman is presented as the butt of ridicule and this is a veiled disapproval of Gandhi and his followers as Gandhi and Congress are synonymous terms for the layman. The typical Khadi dress and Gandhi cap of the congressman are the obvious manifestations of the Gandhian creed. Malgonkar seems to disapprove the behaviour of
the Congressman in the changed national scene but the indictment of Gandhi is too glaring to be missed as Gandhi is being viewed in terms of his followers.

Kiran Garud is involved in a tricky situation when Lala Vishnu Saran Dev, "the chairman of the District Canora Committee" approaches him for the Shamiana (the new one, next the old one), to be 'shent to the ahity hall garden' in connection with a 're-sheption' planned for a minister. Kiran, trying not to betray his annoyance, studies calmly the belligerent visitor who has burst into his office, pushing past a protesting sentry and helps himself to a chair without invitation. His atrocious English and his whole description make him appear a ridiculous figure, no better than a clown:

He had a three-day growth of beard and his mouth was red with the juice of pann which he had been chewing, his tongue busy looking for hidden pieces in the cravices of his dark-brown teeth. His clothes were crumpled and looked unwashed. On his head, pushed far back so that it exposed a large portion of his head, he wore a cap which must have been white when new but now looked grey and oily. 7

When the young officer explains that he cannot lend the shamiana for a political gathering, Lala Vishnu Saran Dev pleads that "The gusht is a minifter off the government" but Kiran remains politely adamant: "But Lalaji, if the Shamiana was required by him or the district officials, no doubt, I would have received orders to give you the shamiana. But for a political show, I'm afraid, it is not at all possible" (p.60). The old man thinks that Kiran is trying to put him off simply, so he changes his tone. He reminds Kiran that the political party of which

he talks so lightly is then ruling the country and the days of treating Congress party as a seditious organisation are gone:

"Now the party and the government are the shame. I would say that in refusing this is small favour you are running a great risk" (p.60). When the defender of the Satpura Code is not prepared to argue the point further, the Lala explodes: "But thith —— thith is just like the British days!" He threatens that he would raise this question in the parliament as "It is natt your privut Shamiana. It is government prosperity" (p.61). Kiran shouts for his orderly and the Lala stamps angrily out of the office. Lt. Col. Garud's mind goes back to the days of British Raj. He cannot "imagine the old C.O.'s being shouted at by someone like Lala Vishnu Saran Dev. In their days, the sentry at the gate would never have let him through" (p.59).

This incident, trivial though it appears to be, serves as the reflector of the author's intention. By presenting an upstart politician in unsympathetic light, Malgonkar has manipulated a deliberate censure of the nationalist leader, although the situation hardly warrants it. Phonetic variations of a man hailing from U.P. have been exploited to discredit the congressite and his party. This device could well have been exploited by any other novelist to lend authenticity and local colour to the tale. If Lala Vishun Saran Dev is a member of Parliament, he should not be so simple as to be ignorant about the normal practice and army rules; and, secondly, he could have used the good offices of district officials or someone else for the procurement of the Shamiana. It is simply inconceivable that he should be so shabbily dressed, particularly when he happens to be a Congress member of Parliament. White Khaddar, spotless and immaculate, is
what ensures his place in the hierarchy of the organisation; he is always in his proper out-fit on ceremonial occasions. Chewing of paan is something normal in his province. Malgonkar has tried to make his tale spicy and readable at the cost of credibility and artistic integrity.

Nicholson's inference drawn from the incident discussed above seems to be rather far-fetched and superimposed that "the relations between the army and the ruling party are strained" and that "army officers have not paid much attention to the political change in the country". The issue involved is not the clash between the army and the ruling party but an encounter between two sets of values and it is not difficult to see where Malgonkar's sympathies lie.

Combat of Shadows (1962) which concentrates on the lives of English tea-planters in Assam in the backdrop of national events covering the specific time-span of 1938-40, has portrayed with intensity a world of isolation which hastens the moral disintegration of the hero of the piece. Far from assimilating values of upright conduct, personal integrity and gentlemanliness, reflected in daring coupled with decency, into the fabric of his life-pattern, Henry Winton, the manager of a tea garden in Assam, is haunted by the instinct of survival, fostered by his determination to succeed after his initial failure as a dealer in used cars in England.

9. The blurb of the novel carries the following comment: "The action of this story takes place in North-Western Assam, India. The Time : September 1938 to March 1940.

This determination is further, fortified by his Resident Director who explains: "We don't grow morals in the tea-district, Henry; we grow tea. And whatever is conducive to the growth of tea, we foster. To us here it is a simple matter of hard, business arithmetic" (p. 228).

Conformity with and strict adherence to the set code of social behaviour of an English Sahib in India results in Henry's segregation from those with whom he is destined to live. His lack of involvement with India determines his predicament: "We all have our failings, Mr. Winton. Your failing is that you cannot bear Indians; yet your tragedy is that you are doomed to work in this country" (pp. 107-8).

Unscrupulous and disdainful as Winton happens to be, he is not altogether an unredeemed monster. As a human being, he has his moments of insight but he is driven by the overriding truth that there is no room in India for the Sahib who fails: "Failure was unthinkable; it was the abyss, dark and bottomless. The slackening of the moral fibre, on the other hand, was something that his system was getting used to." (p. 86).

Placed in the sad predicament of fighting a losing battle for survival in the vitiating atmosphere of fear, distrust, and alienation, Winton's encounter with Indian characters, particularly the upstart politician in Jugal Kishore, is neither deep nor all-embracing. Jugal Kishore, the trade union leader turned Gandhite, is not a "fully realised character; he is almost allegorical in his typicality and abstraction and is cast in a purely functional role". 10

10. Amur, Manohar Malgonkar, p. 63.
Once a favourite of Winton's predecessor Wallach, Jugal Kishore is for Henry a trouble-shooter, "shifty, facile, cunning, ugly—— God! he was ugly, with the blunted, puffy roundness of feature, the opaque, half-closed eyes of the low-caste East Indian" (p.33). Truth is the first casualty in his political manoeuvring; and moral scruples are absolutely alien to his nature. His relations with his 'niece' Gauri remain enigmatically shady and undefined. Gauri, 'a damned attractive wench', who is once caught stealing tea-leaves but is pardoned by Henry under some quick impulse of compassion, aroused by this extra-ordinarily good-looking girl's "full figure which her skimpy garments did little to conceal" (p.8), is meant to be the manifestation of his debased nature. Jugal Kishore distorts this incident blatantly to hit back Winton when the Englishman warns him to refrain from taking part in labour activities. A false complaint is lodged with the police that Winton has tried to molest Gauri and Mr. Arkell, the police chief, comes to believe that the complaint is substantially true.

Jugal Kishore seems to have been created as a foil to Code heroes of Malgonkar. The depravity of this phenomenon called politician knows no depths. He possesses intelligence but his is the evil genius of an incarnation of corruption. That is why Malgonkar presents Jugal Kishore as "dangerous, cunning, vindictive; soft and yielding whenever it suited him but equally capable of violent recoil" (p.72). He organises labour, possesses convincing argumentative skill and is a sort of a 'Bolshey'. His offer to Henry to accept his "niece" as his mistress offends our sense of credibility. Meticulously dressed in a spackled green-silk and yellow flowers adorn her hair, she is escorted by Jugal Kishore to Henry at his residence to press for her appointment as a
teacher on the strength of her better qualifications. Giving a sly and meaningful laugh, Jugal Kishore suggests that his niece would be "quite willing if there was any other service expected from her" (p.75). When Henry rejects the offer with an air of finality, Jugal Kishore makes one more desperate effort: "Is she not as beautiful as the Miranda girl? Look! Look!" and he reached out and pulled Gauri's sari away from her head and shoulders. 'Look!' and he tugged viciously at the knot of her choli laying bare her full, firm breasts, startlingly white against the olive tan of her face and arms" (p.75).

Jugal Kishore exploits the plank of trade union activities so as to dabble in politics; his mass following among the coolies provides the much-needed handle for it. Most of the labourers in the tea garden pay him rupee one each on every pay-day for his 'services' to the Council of Labour which is supposed to represent their grievances before the management. When Jugal Kishore comes to inform Henry that he is resigning his job to contest a bye-election to the Assembly, he is not wearing his usual grey suit and brown pill-box cap, but: "a short grey jacket closed at the neck over a knee length white shirt. In place of trousers, he wore tight, many-folded churidar pyjamas; and instead of the brown pill-box cap, a snow-white Khaddar cap" (p.111).

Malgonkar's ambivalence in caricaturing the politician seems to be the outcome of the conflicting claims of his anti-Gandhi convictions on the personal level and the knowledge of the complete overshadowing of the political scene by Gandhi on the national level. The politician can, therefore, be no other than a follower of Gandhi. It is not without significance that Jugal Kishore is dressed as Gandhite; but what he says and does
would hardly conform to Gandhian ideology. He threatens Winton to hit back violently as he can get all the labourers to strike work. The reaction of the Englishman to this blackmail of the so-called Gandhite is typical of his class that cannot grasp the technique of non-violence: "I know your game. You want to provoke me into hitting you so that you can raise a hue and cry about it. You are too terrified to come out and hit back, and too cowardly; all you Indians. Your Ghandis and everyone" (p.112).

When Jugal Kishore shouts back that the days of people like Winton and 'lecherous dog Jeffry Dart' are over, the retort may not be untrue but the tone of retaliation does not reflect Gandhian spirit. Henry is, therefore, aghast to contemplate if people like Jugal Kishore are to be elected to assemblies. Jugal Kishore, he believes, is "crooked, without a spark of decency, corrupt, and ... quite immoral" (p.113). Jugal Kishore is, later, elected to the state legislature by an overwhelming majority, and now the whole of Assam becomes his field of activities. He goes away to live in the state capital, "and so had the woman he called his niece, Gauri" (p.156).

Malgonkar focusses his search-light on the opportunistic nationalism of the Indian politician. Jugal Kishore becomes the minister of plantations. This 'nerve-shattering' report, as the Englishman takes it, quickens the pace of Henry's liquidation, which is meant to convey the idea of nemesis or poetic justice. Henry, thereafter, thinks of joining the army as the only way out but he is detained by the government to kill 'rogue-elephant'. The Resident Director who has managed to get the minister on his side against a regular monthly renumeration of one thousand rupees, understands his character well but his generalisation is
rather sweeping that the only motivating force behind the nationalistic activities of Indian politicians is their craze for money: "No, Henry; You don't know your babu politician. Politics are his business, just as growing tea is yours and mine. We grow tea for no other reason than because it gives us the wherewithal to live according to our standards; he goes into politics for much the same reason" (p.227).

Malgonkar has, however, vividly portrayed the practical application of non-violent Satyagraha moulded in the crucible of trade union activities. Gandhi's impact is discernible in the peaceful conduct of the strike. A deputation of labour leaders comprising six men and one woman serves a formal notice of strike against the supersession of one of their colleagues. A charter of demands is also presented but the coolies remain meek, docile, polite and firm. They refuse to withdraw the strike-notice as they believe that their "demands should at least be discussed, some assurances given ...." (p.126), and when Henry refuses to give an assurance, the deputation "filed out of his office in silence, with bowed heads and sullen, brooding faces" (p.126). The long-drawn strike, at last, fizzles out as it turns out to be a fight among the unequals. The Englishman is more than fair in his analysis: "Absolutely. Jugal Kishore can appeal to their emotions; we can hit at their bellies. It is hardly a fair fight" (p.140).

Malgonkar exposes the machinations of the unscrupulous follower of Gandhi with a masterly stroke of irony. After Jugal Kishore is installed as the Minister of Plantations, the labour trouble in the Tea Gardens of Assam disappears miraculously,
although the Minister has done nothing to improve their lot. This is a mystery to Henry but his Resident Director startles Winton with the revelation:

Did you know that the Brindian Tea Company contributed five thousand rupees to his election expenses, and the other two companies, two thousand each? Do you know that the day he became Minister for Plantations he was given an assurance, on behalf of three companies, that he would be given a monthly remuneration of one thousand rupees if he stayed on our side? (p.228).

The novelist seems to be at pains to suggest that Gandhian revolution has not shaken the people to their depths. Everything connected with the British in India is a political issue for them. Cockburn, an experienced planter, speaks for the novelist. "In India, everything that concerns a Sahib is political, damn it. His very presence is the basis of all political agitation" (p.90). The message of the novelist is unmistakably clear that there is no genuine awakening among the masses for freedom and Gandhian ideology remains a distant dream. The followers of Gandhi always remain on tenter-hooks to exploit every failing of the Englishman for political ends. Patriotism, we are given to believe, is a cloak for racial prejudices and hatred. The Indian Press offers a convenient stick to beat the Britishers with. When the Indian shikari is trampled to death by the elephant, the sad event is twisted as a contrived political murder. Cockburn warns Henry when he fails to understand that a shooting accident can conceivably lead to anything political: "And there's the press. My God, you don't know the Indian press." Cockburn was saying. "If they get a sahib in their mangle, particularly when it concerns something we ourselves profess to do better than the Indians .... The political capital the Gandhis and Nehrus will make this sort of thing...?" (p.90).
Corabat of Shadow is, thus, a narrative of racial prejudices and hatred. As a political novel, it presents the dark aspects of both the Englishman and Indians as far as the issue of communal animosity is concerned. But the picture of political situation in India around the forties is tainted with personal predilections. The novelist is highly critical of the followers of Gandhi and Nehru. These nationalists are presented exclusively in their dark hue without any redeeming feature to serve as representatives of Indian politicians. Absolute malignity, like absolute piety, cannot encompass and motivate the whole class of people, however, compelling the reasons and tempting the situation. The dark side of the followers of Gandhi, as represented by Jugal Kishore, may not be altogether untrue in certain cases, but Malgonkar has not cared to lend credibility and authenticity to this portraiture.

Jugal Kishore, the trade Unionist of the Corabat of Shadows, re-appears as Parja Mandal leader Kanak Chand Dhor (later rechristened as K.C. Gaur), the upstart demagogue and careerist politician in The Princes (1964) which reconstructs the drama of the disintegration of princely States till their merger with the Union of India. By making the life of a Maharaja in a small and obscure princely state of Begwad as the king-pin of the narrative, Malgonkar has his own axes to grind but he does not let the tale lose its grip on the readers. He presents nationalists as 'goondas led by traders and lawyers' on one hand, while he upholds, on the other hand, values enshrined in the Satpura Code of the Distant Drum viz. "disdain for danger, a capacity for coolness under stress, and unfailing readiness to take responsibility and above all, a stubborn, almost stupid, refusal to bend under
Abhay Raj, the narrator-hero of the *The Princes* is another version of Kiran Garud of *Distant Drum*. His princely lineage binds him to the particular code of conduct of a prince, that is almost identical to the Satpura Code: "The way a man takes up his lose is the measure of his Manliness" (p.101). From the point of view of the Yuvraj of Bsegwad is reflected the interplay of the political, social and primordial forces that have shaped the destiny of princely rulers leading to the inevitability of the logic of history. The theme of the disintegration of princely states presupposes the historical role played by Congress, Gandhi and Praja Mandal but the novelist faces a dilemma. While he is convinced that an adequate representation of these forces forms the circumstantial requirement of the story so as to lend it an air of credibility, contemporaneity and interest, he finds it hard to come out of the groove of his pre-conceived notions and prejudices. This inherent contradiction results in his half-hearted acknowledgement of the reality of the phenomenon that goes by the names of nationalists, Congressmen, Gandhites or politicians. It is for this reason that Kanak Chand, though a little more carefully drawn character than Jugal Kishore of *Distant Drum*, still borders on the caricature and is less convincing as a character than Abhayraj, the Maharaja or even Diwan Harikishore. Amur sounds fair in his observation that Kanak Chand episodes are hardly presented with objectivity.

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12 Manohar Malgonkar, p.81.
Kanak Chand is not simply a 'malevolent revolutionary' who wants "to wash away the insult of poverty... the shame of untouchability" but he is constantly haunted by: "The shame of my mother not being allowed to draw water from the well because it would pollute the supply, of brahmins washing themselves if my father's shadow fell on them; of temples being barred to us, of tea-shops refusing to serve unless I took my own cup and plate..."(p.274).

Kanak Chand is, therefore, the product of the age-old sufferings of the downtrodden and his revenge, though born out of personal humiliations inflicted upon him, takes a positive turn through political orientations when he owns up his commitment to life: "I want nothing, nothing for myself. I stand for the people, the downtrodden people of this state, for their birthright..."(p.274). Abhay Raj concludes that "His mind had been so warped by the iniquities of the circumstances in which he had been brought up that it was useless to talk to him" (p.275). But he cannot understand Dhori's vehemence for agitation and betrays himself by making a vain bid to buy him off. Earlier, when Abhay drives to Kanak Chand's house, he finds the Praja Mandal leader sitting with two others. There are "glasses on the table between them, and a tin of cigarettes. Under the table was a bottle of brandy" (p.273). It is easy to share Amur's analysis that "in spite of their trying to be fair to Kanak Chand, Abhay and his creator find themselves out of sympathy for him. They are too firmly committed to their own scales of values to get firmly the

13 Kanak Chand, a high spirited lad, befriended Abhayraj who wrote an essay for the boy so as to enable him to win a scholarship. The Maharaja got wind of this ghost writing. With deep aversion for dishonesty, lying, cheating, disloyalty, Maharaja was further enraged by the detection of white cap in his pocket and whipped the poor boy with his riding crop.
insight into the kind of crisis which produces men like Kanak Chand. Hence, the distortion and the falsehood.  

Kanak Chand's loyalty to Gandhi and the Gandhi cap is symbolic of freedom consciousness that has percolated to the grass roots of Indian society, revitalizing it to the core. Maharaja, with his exasperating tendency to reduce the national political agitation to sordid personal levels, cannot understand that Gandhi's movement for self-rule is not wholly motivated by his bitterness against the British because he had been once thrown out of a railway carriage. Living in a world built on make-believe and half-truths and legends, there is a note of derision in his voice whenever the Maharaja refers to the nationalists: "... all misguided lawyers go and join the nationalists—the opposite camp" (p.14). He realises that the British need the support of the princes as "the topiwallas are getting scared of the white capwallas" (p.15).

Kanak Chand is the first direct contact of the narrator-prince with the "quivering" poverty of India. A single black roti of millet or bajra smeared with a mess of oil and chillies and a whole raw onion is all that the diligent son of a cobbler has as his mid-day meal at school. But Kanak Chand as a student is politically well-informed. Conversant with Gandhi's nation-wide agitation for self-rule, and anti-salt tax campaign, he devoutly refers to Gandhi as the Mahatma. He knows that "the white cap is the people's cap" (p.66). As Mahatma Gandhi's cap, it is the cap of freedom and in their own 'bustees' of the untouchables "You dare..."

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An intriguing aspect of Kanak Chand's personality is his callous refusal to show any gratitude, by a word or gesture, to the person who has paid for his education at High School and College. He cannot forget the incident of being thrown into the school pond or horse-whipped in public. On being reminded that he owes his career to the generosity of the Maharani, Kanak Chand retorts furiously: "That was merely to salve a guilty conscience. Am I to grovel before you all my life just for that?" (p.274). This malvolence hardly agrees with his professed allegiance to Gandhi. He calls the princes "killers, robbers, the worshippers of obscene god," "impotent cats pretending to snarl". The novelist probably wants to let the reader infer from the actions and utterances of Kanak Chand, the Praja Mandal Chief, that the so-called people's movement is "just the agitation of a few trouble-makers... disgruntled goondas like Kanak Chand. People crazed with undefined hatreds wanting to hit back at those they think have wronged them" (p.282). That is why the Maharaja thinks that his type does not listen to reason.

Kanak Chand is vested with hateful manners and it is not for nothing that the novelist paints Kanak Chand as "cocky, suspicious, touchy, slightly ill at ease and yet conscious that he was the star turn of the show"(p.285). Defiant, challenging and mad with rage, he is no match for astute Dewan Harikishore. Kanak Chand shouts at others but is reluctant to face the electorate and bullies everybody. His agile, gesticulating figure spearheading the Praja Mandal demonstration and later his hard-hitting venomous speech as Education Minister at the school function point only to
one conclusion that Gandhian stress on ahimsa and moral values can only be an expedient strategy or a convenient cloak for the followers of Gandhi to cover their evil intentions.

Malgonkar has, however, shown a fair sense of history with respect to freedom struggle in India from the late thirties to the end of the forties. Gandhi's leadership accelerated the pace of the freedom movement in the thirties. The Praja Mandalas emerged as the counterpart of the Congress in the Princely states and fought for the amelioration of the people. Gandhi was the beaconlight for all fighting for freedom but Malgonkar takes meticulous care to paint the followers of the national leader in a darker dye. This criticism of the politicking of unworthy politicians, disguised as followers of Gandhi, seems to be the main forte of Malgonkar as a novelist. A significant aspect of *The Princes* is the attempt to present Gandhi as the acknowledged leader of the masses and his relentless crusade against untouchability and social injustice, although Malgonkar does not gloss over the pettiness of Gandhi's followers.

Epical in scale and panoramic in scope, *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) reconstructs the harrowing experiences of Indians caught in the turmoil of the Second World War and in the culminating phase of the Struggle for Freedom. Fusing the personal and the historical perspectives in fictional terms, the novelist explores a large coverage and manipulates massing of stirring events from recent national history. Gandhian postulates of Non-violence and Swadeshi suggesting the boycott of foreign goods, the clandestine activities of the terrorists, the tedious march of evacuees from Burma consequent upon the British retreat from
Rangoon, the Japanese landing in the Andamans after the outbreak of the Second World War, the Bombay dock explosion and the holocaust of communal frenzy before and after the partition of India. The wide canvas of the novel also includes the feudal world of Konshet, the princely living of the ruling family of Beguad, the aristocracy of blood and cultural renaissance symbolised by the affluent Keruard family, the fast living of Westernised set in Bombay, the obscure world of aborigines and criminals on the Andaman Islands and the murky world of the prostitutes. The anxiety of the novelist to gain in coverage leads to "sketchiness" and "superficiality" and the novel boils down to "skillful reportage", giving thereby the effect of diffusion, not of intensity. A Bend in the Ganges, therefore, appears to be less an integrated human drama but an erratic national calendar.

Gian Talwar hailing from the rural depths of the Panjab, arrives at Duriabed for college education and comes under the spell of Gandhi. He participates in the burning of foreign clothes by throwing his own costly blazer into the bonfire. Gian resists the earnest efforts of the terrorists led by Shafi and Debi Dayal to win him over to their creed of violence. The

15 Robin White, New York Times Book Review, February 14, 1965. "In trying to cover everything Mr Malgonkar inclines to sketchiness, arousing interest in one thing only to pass on abruptly to another so that the effect is one of superficiality". Quoted in Amur, Manohar Malgonkar, p.118.
16 "But there is also Manohar Malgonkar, who in a novel like A Bend in the Ganges, tries to stand resolutely outside his subject in order to exploit its potentiality to the maximum but what he achieves is not very different from skillful reportage". Meenakshi Mukerjee, The Twice-Born Fiction, p.36.
shattering incident of his brother's murder reveals to Gian the futility of non-violence as a way of life and he kills the murderer of his brother. He is transported for life to the Andaman Islands but he is no longer a nationalist. He sides with the British and acts as a spy on Debi Dayal who is also there for his involvement in terrorist activities. When the Japanese arrive on the Islands, Gian is rescued and sent back to India, while Debi Dayal continues rotting there.

Gian approaches Debi's father, lies about his intimacy with Debi Dayal and thus manipulates to get himself rehabilitated as Gian Joshi in Kerwad Construction Company, Bombay. Debi's sister Sundari is drawn towards Gian but Debi comes on the scene and Gian faces humiliations. Debi drops his identity and withdraws into the north-western corners of Assam. After two years, he seeks out Shafi in the brothels of Lahore and takes revenge for Shafi's betrayal of Debi's role in the terrorist activities. Debi takes away Shafi's favourite girl from Anarkali and withdraws from the political life of the country into the domestic happiness with Mumtaz. The Partition of the country is preceded and followed by holocaust of communal frenzy. Debi, Mumtaz, Debi's father Tek Chand, his wife and Shafi are all claimed by violence while Gian and Sundari survive to discover new moorings of love and faith.

Articulating the conflict between fond beliefs and the stark exigencies of actual experience in life, Malgonkar has sought to render a critique of Gandhian Non-violence as a way of life, which is contrasted with terrorism or the cult of violence. Thus probing the ideology of Ahimsa with a view to proving it ineffective, Malgonkar attunes the novel to the fleeting mood of doubts captured in the Epigraph but the passage torn from its context confirms only
This non-violence, therefore, seems to be due mainly to our helplessness. It almost appears as if we are nursing in our bosom the desire to take revenge the first time we get the opportunity. Can true, voluntary non-violence come out of this seeming forced non-violence of the week? Is it not a futile experiment I am conducting? What if, when the fury bursts, not a man, woman, or child is safe and every man's hand is raised against his neighbour? M.K. Gandhi.

The narrative is designed to suggest that non-violence cannot be a strongly felt creed with any individual but only a temporary expedient. The word 'Bend' in the title is indicative of the relinquishing of the creeds of non-violence and violence, when the chief protagonists cast a lingering glance at their ideological convictions and seek fulfilment in new pastures of love. The novel seeks to affirm the value of love which brings fulfilment to Debi Dayal and Gian, who discover the haven of love in their separate yet strangely involved lives. But by presenting Gian as a spineless fellow betraying rank opportunism and plain cowardice, physically and morally, Malgonkar aims at denouncing non-violence as something unworthy of heroic life.

A Bend in the Ganges is, thus, an allegorical novel with specific political and philosophical overtones. Both Debi Dayal and Gian are meant to symbolise violence and Non-Violence but the treatment of these symbols undermines the credibility of the novel as an allegory. The twist in Gian's ideological convictions comes too quickly and his faith in Non-violence and Truth is hardly skin-deep which betrays itself, giving thereby the suspicion that the novelist is merely exploiting Gian as a device to project his political sympathies.

Malgonkar has identified Non-Violence with servility, cunning and self-seeking in Gian, whereas Violence is represented
by dedication, daring and decency in Debi Dayal. As such, the novel offers a biased study of Ahimsa and Truth, because the novelist is hardly objective and fair-minded in the choice of symbols and non-violence stands discredited even before the fictional re-creation of the tale warrants it. Both Gian and Debi Dayal happen to be raw youths and not politicians; their actions and reflections can be easily interpreted as the working of immature and inexperienced minds.

It seems that Gian, the ardent follower of Ahimsa and Swaraj, has been created only to represent a particular class of politicians, the 'expedient go-getters', whom Malgonkar denigrates almost in every novel—thoroughly unreliable, mean, corrupt, unscrupulous, servile and spineless. As a political character, Gian completes his part after he has spoken his message to the reader that he has decided to side with the Empire against Independence. After this transformation, Gian is degraded to the level of a love-lorn adolescent. It is rather intriguing why Malgonkar decides to dispense with Gian as a political character half way through the novel. There is force in Nicholson's observations that Malgonkar "purposely played Gian down after he had achieved the necessary change of character and expressed the novelist's political sympathies". Malgonkar, however, replaces Gian Talwar with another character, whose chief aim is to deride the officers of the Indian National Army.

As an omniscient author, Malgonkar provides an intimate

glimpse of the working of Gian's mind and this "inside knowledge" contributes to our better appreciation of Gian as an individual but a deliberate distance is maintained in the case of Debi Dayal whom the novelist wants to present as aloof, superior and heroic. The pettiness of Indian politician and for that matter of average Indian also, forms the re-curring motif in all the novels of Malgonkar. Gian Talwar's analytical description of himself, therefore, seems to be a statement of the novelist's own point of view: "Was it his youth that made him so shallow, he wondered, or was it a part of the Indian character itself? Did he in some way represent the average Indian, mixed up, shallow and weak"?  

Gian's non-violence crumbles the moment it meets a major test and his nationalism wavers: he is not like Debi Dayal, who holds on to his beliefs with unswerving rigidity. It is not sheer an inescapable coincidence that the Indian Brigadier of I.N.A., who replaces Gian as the butt of the novelist's ridicule, physically represents the same species that is "the embodiment of all that was servile in India". The novelist seems to endorse what the Japanese Commander Yamaki says that the British will be driven out of India by brave men of sterling character only: "The Gandhis and Nehrus will never make them quit. The British do not understand passive resistance. They have not given in an inch to your Gandhi for the last twenty years" (p.218).

A Bend in the Ganges is, therefore, a lop-sided appraisal of Gandhian Ahimsa and Truth as the characters are mostly conventions

and the story progresses on pure coincidences. With an obvious thrust on the melodramatic, characters are subordinated to events and almost breathless action of the tale. The novel, however, offers a wealth of information — factual and theoretical — about Gandhi, his ideals and programmes. Chapter one is the exclusive recreation of Swadeshi and Boycott of British goods started by Gandhi, "the man who had come to represent true greatness to every Indian; the apostle of truth and non-violence", (p.7). His followers are new kinds of soldiers with weapons of truth and non-violence but their non-violence is "the non-violence of the brave, arising not from cowardice but from courage, demanding greater sacrifices that ordinary fighting men are called upon to make" (p.8).

Impressing upon the crowd the message of 'Boycott British goods,' Gandhi's lieutenant reiterates that "the path of ahimsa is not for cowards" and in true non-violence there is "no room for timidity" (p.8). Gian Talwar, at once takes off his football blazer of imported English material in the heat of "irrational impulses" and flings the coat into the flames. Thereafter, Gian, as a follower of Gandhi, is always dressed in rough homespun Khaddar but he does not care to probe Gandhian ideology deeply. He is no match for the brilliance of the terrorists or their type who understand that: "College boys fall more easily for Gandhi's type of movement, it is much more face-saving. They shelter their cowardice behind the tenets of non-violence, and refuse to rouse themselves to any form of positive action" (p.19).

Later, Tukram, his cartman, is surprised at Gian's white Khaddar dress and asks: "Have you become a Congress Wallah?"
Govind undergoes change of heart when his faith in non-violence is tested in the tempestuous crisis starting with his brother's murder. He sadly realises that what he owes to Hari can never be paid back and his brother would not have died if Gian had not shown cowardice. He had hung back at a safe distance instead of going forward with his brother: "What was his justification, his lighthearted acceptance of the creed of non-violence? But that was merely a political expedient a weapon specially forged to serve the struggle against the British; how could it ever serve as a philosophy of life itself?" (p.61).

Basu, a revolutionary turned communalist, believes that Non-Violence is merely a pious thought, a dream of the philosophers. Taking communal riots as the inevitable turn of history, Basu shudders to think what Gandhi will feel when he sees the holocaust that will engulf this country. Debi Dayal who wonders whether all his exposure to, what Gandhi describes as man's inhumanity to man has converted the terrorist in him to the doctrine of non-violence, cultivates faith in Gandhi's sincerity but Basu does not like the idea of confusing sincerity with a delusion as there can be no future "for a country nurtured on non-violence in a world of mounting violence" (p.292), and "if non-violence is the bed-rock of our national policy, how is the fighting spirit to manifest itself only in our services?" (p.292).

Tek Chand, the affluent industrialist, has never cared to bother himself about the political issues of the day but he is
shaken into awareness to see that the attainment of the cherished goal of freedom through Gandhian non-violence is preceded and even followed by the naked display of the "most barbaric cruelties of primitive man" (p.332). The administration has practically collapsed. Mob rules the streets "burning, looting, killing, dishonouring women and mutilating children; even animals sacred to the other community became the legitimate targets of reprisals" (p.332). Malgonkar thus demonstrates the ineffectiveness of non-violence as a way of life through the sad reflections of Tak Chand:

Now he could see that as far as the people of India were concerned, Gandhi's message was merely a political expedient, that for the bulk of them, it had no deeper significance. At best, they had accepted it as an effective weapon against British power. It seemed that the moment the grip of British power was loosened, the population of the sub-continent had discarded non-violence overnight and were now spending themselves on the orgies of violence which seemed to fulfil some basic urge (p.333).

Malgonkar has, thus, sought to include into the periphery of his novel the ingredients of the Indian political scene—the two parallel movements of violence and Non-Violence, 'Quit India' phase, Communal virus and the partition of India. The sudden, jerky ending of the novel leads one to the conclusion that modern India is made by heroes like Debi Dayal but consists of a nation of men like Gian. This ironic inference is drawn inspite of our awareness of the fact that Malgonkar's comments as an omniscient and intruding author and action of the novel seem throughout to depreciate Gian and elevate Debi. Concerning the historic events detailed in the narrative, Allen Wendt aptly remarks, the book "has little new or original to say. The author frequently interrupts his narrative to offer generalisation that
are dubious at worst and platitudinous at best.¹⁹

The plot of A Bend in Canoes creaks its way on pure coincidence without revealing character or indicating insight. Gian and Debi Dayal are stock characters who attain their limited excellence as teenagers but they shrink from participation in any serious aspect of life afterwards. They are manipulated into chance confrontations and their attitudes change to meet the exigencies of melodrama. Debi Dayal burns an aeroplane and Gian murders the man who has killed his brother. That is all noticeable about the principal characters of the novel: everything else is simply leading to the anti-climax.

As a study of the ideology of Gandhian Non-violence, A Bend in the Ganges fails to be evocative, profound and moving. Malgonkar’s appraisal of Gandhian creed is biased, although the novel displays his fineness of story-telling. Gandhi and his followers come in for sharp criticism and detraction in Malgonkar’s novel. Gian Talwar of A Bend in the Ganges seems to be a modified version of Lala Vishnu Saran in Distant Drum, Jugal Kishore in Combat of Shadows and Kanak Chand in The Princess.

Gandhi is, thus, treated as an idea that serves for Malgonkar a butt of ridicule and deliberate censure. A ludicrous image of Gandhi is presented by reading Gandhi in terms of congressmen or politicians whom Malgonkar portrays as embodiments of inefficiency, corruption, hypocrisy, dishonesty and unscrupulousness. The depravity of this phenomenon called politician or

¹⁹ Allen Wandt, "The Book Club Syndrome" in Literature East and West 9 (Spring 1965), 148.
the followers of Gandhi is demonstrated through all his novels and the novelist often resorts to caricature. In fact, the pettiness of the followers of Gandhi forms the recurring theme or motif of Ralgonkar's novels. By concentrating on the upstart demagogue and careerist politician as the representation of Gandhi, Ralgonkar has tried to read the past in terms of the present and his vision is coloured by his personal prejudices and deep-seated convictions.

Ralgonkar seems to face a dilemma. He can't rid himself of his anti-Gandhi convictions but he cannot be altogether unmindful of the immense popularity and mass following of the Mahatma. This dual integrity—one to his convictions and the other to reality of the situation—leads to the ambivalence in the treatment of Gandhi. There is, however, a wealth of information, factual and theoretical about the ideals and programmes of Gandhi. A critique of Gandhian Non-violence as a way of life is offered in contrast with terrorism or the cult of violence. By identifying non-violence with cowardice, servility, cunning and self-seeking, Ralgonkar has conducted a biased appraisal of Ahimsa and Truth and his assessment of Gandhian ideology fails to be evocative, profound and moving. The generalisations implied or stated seem to be dubious at worst and platitudinous at best.