

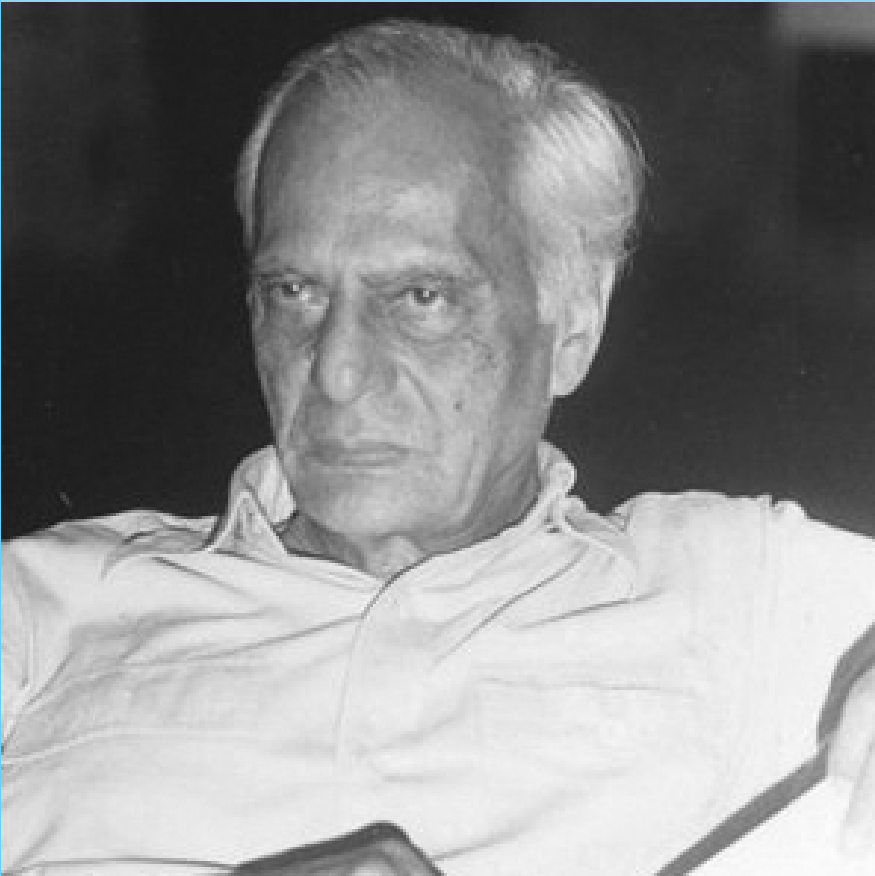


Makers of Indian Literature

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# *Manohar Malgonkar*

Usha Bande



**Manohar Malgonkar** (1913-2010) occupies an important place in the canons of Indian literature in English, particularly for his historical fiction with political undertones. History was his forte but he was a writer and artist first and as such artistic integrity coupled with depth of historical sense make the works interesting and authentic. Born on July 12, 1913 near Belgaum, Manohar Malgonkar was the grandson of the Prime Minister of a former princely state of Dewas. The Malgonkars were close to the rulers of Dewas and young Manohar got an opportunity to experience life in the royal households closely which is reflected in *The Princes* and *The Devil's Winds*. Often acclaimed as a master story-teller for his narrative skill, Malgonkar has the uncanny knack of transmuting his felt experience into an artistic piece. The corpus of his work is rich with eleven novels that have a blend of history, romance and military life, two light romances/thrillers, a detective novel, a play, innumerable essays/articles, two historical accounts, a travelogue and a large number of short stories collected in several anthologies. Indeed, his works are as varied and colourful as was his life—a stint in the army, a time spent as a big game hunter, a miner, a tea garden manager and an adventurer.

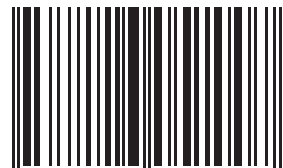
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Manohar Malgonkar

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodhana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

*From:* Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

*Courtesy:* National Museum, New Delhi

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

# Manohar Malgonkar

*By*

Usha Bande



SAHITYA AKADEMI

**Manohar Malgonkar:** A monograph on eminent English writer Manohar Malgonkar by Usha Bande (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2016).

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## Preface

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To write on Manohar Malgonkar was for long on my agenda but somehow I could not take it up for one reason or the other. Then came an opportunity with Sahitya Akademi's offer to write a monograph and I just grabbed it, happy that now I am bound by time limit and would finish the work in right earnest; but that too bounced and I got inordinately delayed because of circumstances beyond my control.

I was introduced to Manohar Malgonkar in the 1960s by my father, Manohar Bande, an army man, a voracious reader and an excellent story teller like Malgonkar. He was fond of Malgonkar's writings particularly short stories and *Distant Drum* with which he could identify. We would eagerly await Malgonkar's new book, scramble to get hold of it first, be the first to read it and then discuss it; it was a delightful time, indeed.

Malgonkar is not a complex writer. The story element running through his works can be likened to the flow of a swift stream. The language is simple; expressions are swift and the dialogues have English-English touch; the atmosphere of army establishments appeared familiar to us.

Nonetheless, Malgonkar posed difficulties—reading for pleasure is one thing, reading for critiquing is quite another. His simplicity became a hurdle. What new do I write when so many aspects have been thrashed by critics and scholars already? Besides, the critical works read all alike, there was so

much repetition, everybody saying same things in different words, except scholars like Jasbir Jain and a few others who had something new to offer. For long I was flabbergasted. The writing process just could not begin. There was no tip, no thread to hold on to and start. Then I came across James Y. Dayananda's book published for Twayne—lucid, thorough, original! And I knew where to start from, what to write, which strand to clutch. And within a short span I could complete this monograph.

Writing is never an isolated activity. So many people— friends, family, colleagues and librarians come forward to help— some openly, some unobtrusively and some invisibly and when you finish writing they are there standing at a distance and smiling; the elders say “shabash”, peers congratulate you and youngsters heave a sigh of relief for having stopped the “boring” “tick-tock” on the computer.

I take this opportunity to thank Prof. Malashri Lal for providing me rare and unavailable books; to Sahitya Akademi for assigning me this project and to Ms. Gitanjali Chatterjee, Deputy Secretary, Sahitya Akademi for her encouragement and patience. A special word of thank to Ms. Durgesh Chaurasia for typing out with speed and accuracy. One cannot thank one's family enough but they know how and what I feel. That says it all!

Usha Bande,  
Shimla.

# 1

## *Life and Works*

---

I don't think a language is any kind of national property. I didn't feel any sense of violation when I chose to write in English instead of Marathi or any Indian language.

— Manohar Malgonkar

Manohar Malgonkar (1913–2010) occupies an important place in the canons of Indian literature in English, particularly for his historical fiction with political undertones. But to focus on him only as a novelist or story-teller with historical leanings would be to limit his versatility and slot him as a spinner of tales. To be fair to him, let us admit that the corpus of his work is rich with eleven novels that have a blend of history, romance and military life, two light romances/thrillers, a detective novel, a play, innumerable essays/articles, two historical accounts, a travelogue and a large number of short stories collected in several anthologies. Indeed, his works are as varied and colourful as was his life — a stint in the army, a time spent as a big game hunter, a miner, a tea garden manager and an adventurer. Like Ernest Hemingway, he weaves the beauty and thrill of adventure into his fiction in a language that is meticulously British in expression and syntax, and authentic in historicity. Often acclaimed as a master story-teller for his narrative skill, Malgonkar has the uncanny knack of

transmuting his felt experience into an artistic piece. Since this experience is invariably of his interaction with the Englishmen, some Indian critics question his authenticity as an Indian writer.

Notwithstanding his colonial stance, obvious in his army writing and short stories, he is an inveterate Indian novelist who writes about India, Indian themes and Indian characters. Let us look at his efforts to understand Nana Saheb Peshwa and the 1857 Revolt from Indian perspective (*The Devil's Wind*); or his seething anger at Henry Winton's racial discrimination for which he punishes Winton with death (*Combat of Shadows*). Malgonkar is of the opinion that writing becomes authentic only if it comes from within the writer's milieu with which he/she identifies. "I keep writing of India ...because I feel no author should write outside his own living circumstances. If he does, it is phoney" (*The Ellsworth American*, 2 Nov. 1970). Another aspect of his writing for which critics often feel disconcerted and angry is his high-brow approach to life, class-consciousness and neglect of ordinary people and their real problems. Critics find this far removed from the reality of Indian life. That can be explained by throwing a glance at his family background.

Manohar Malgonkar, the grandson of the Prime Minister of a former princely state of Dewas was born on July 12, 1913 near Belgaum. The Malgonkar family was closely associated with the rulers of Dewas which gave young Manohar the advantage of knowing the royal household from close quarters; that speaks for the meticulous and flawless depiction of royal life in his novels like *The Princes* and *The Devil's Wind*. He graduated from Bombay University with English and Sanskrit and took to big game hunting. But somehow he realized early in his career that hunting and killing did not suit his temperament. He gave it up and became a conservationist of wild life. He joined the army and rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Maratha Light Infantry. As an officer in the Army Intelligence and later

in the General Staff he not only entered the protected precinct of the 'whites' but also gained enormous experience of handling men and situations. Association with British officers gave him the advantage to speak English as it was spoken by the British; besides, training in operational activities sharpened his acumen in handling subordinates, and life on war fronts taught him the importance of companionship and camaraderie. This was his training ground to understand human beings, their problems and conflicts — factors that he used successfully in his works. Malgonkar showed deep understanding of Indian as well as British characters and depicted them with equal ease. This is one of the reasons why he portrayed his British characters with sympathetic consideration which is often censured by critics as his colonial leanings.

Army life charmed Malgonkar, yet he felt bogged down by its routine and regimentation; after ten years of service from 1942 to 1952 he took early retirement. He was a dynamic man, energetic and lively and would not sit inactive. He started working as a journalist for a few years, wrote research papers on Maratha history and thereafter turned to fiction writing. Soon various other activities interested him — business, mining, tea gardening, writing movie scripts, further research in Maratha history and even politics to an extent.

Unfortunately, this vivacious Army Officer was a lonely and distraught man towards the end of his life. Life had dealt him several blows — death of his wife and later of his only daughter Sunita in 1998, ill-health, inability to read due to eye-problem. He remained confined to his estate in Jabalpet near Belgaum, a weak and nearly blind old man unable to move. He passed away on June 14, 2010. Wing Commander Barreto, his long time friend recalls that Malgonkar lived in a remote village near Belgaum in a cottage named 'Burbusa' on a large property inherited from his father, with most of his well-known books being written in the

rural setting. H. Hamilton, his publisher from Britain and many other long time friends visited him occasionally and many stayed with him in 'Burbusa' for some time. Malgonkar was a sensitive man who empathized with and helped the needy and those in trouble. He was a dog-lover, an aspect amply illustrated in a couple of his stories where the dog is an important character.

He published four of his six major novels in close succession from 1960 to 1964 which brought him into prominence as a novelist. These are: *Distant Drum* (1960), *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princes* (1963), *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964). In 1972, *The Devil's Wind* dealing with Nana Saheb Peshwa's life and the First War of Independence was published. *Cactus Country* came out after a gap of twenty years in 1992. Before plunging into writing novels he was writing short stories that were published in reputed journals and magazines and were later collected in four volumes: *A Toast in Warm Water*, *Rumble-Tumble*, *Bombay Beware* and *Four Graves and Other Stories*. Besides, he wrote thrillers, film scripts and a large number of journalistic articles.

### **Works:**

*Distant Drum*, his first novel is a military novel. It was published in 1960 when Manohar Malgonkar was 47, and the experiences of army life and the soldiers' *esprit de corps* were fresh in memory. Understandably, the novel throbs with a mood of musing over, of recall, though certainly not of nostalgia. It is motivated by the martial code that is in the blood of every soldier. Honesty, integrity, loyalty to duty and discipline form its core. Religious and communal tensions fade away when Kiran Garud, the protagonist, and Abdulla Jamal, his friend help each other and each saves the other's life on different occasions. In a broader context, the novel is also about the moral and ethical questions of mutual relationships of the English and the Indians in British Indian Army during colonial times and the Indian and Pakistani soldiers in the armies after Independence. Malgonkar holds the

view that in Independent India everything British need not be condemned in our enthusiasm to celebrate 'nationalism'; sifting the good from the bad and making our own decision will be good for our national health.

*Combat of Shadows* can be read, at one level, as a depiction of life on tea estate in Assam like Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* but on deeper levels it explores the tragic implications of racial discrimination and the arrogance of the British officers towards Indians. It is as much the tale of Henry Winton's loneliness and treachery as of Ruby Miranda's rootlessness and search for identity. Exploitation and rejection of Indians, Eurasians and the tribals form its sub-themes. Towards the end, *Combat of Shadows* becomes a tale of deceit and revenge in which nemesis doles out justice. It is a complex and layered novel; a finely carved portrayal of a society in the throes of change.

*The Princes*, his third novel, has been hailed as an epic saga of our contemporary history. It is about the princes who were on the verge of losing their roots; and it takes up the ticklish question of their identity. Malgonkar shows remarkable ability to present an insider's view of princely life. A bold and dramatic novel, *The Princes* offers the tale of two rulers of the State of Begwad — Maharaja Hiroji and his son Prince Abhayraj — the former has ruled with impunity and the latter is destined to be the king for forty-nine days. The novel covers the period from the 1938 to 1948–49. Abhayraj, the protagonist matures through life experiences, understands the importance of human relationships and changes his perspective accordingly. The novel has autobiographical elements though it is not an autobiography in the real sense of the genre. Thickly woven yet fast paced, it presents an authentic picture of princely India as well as of the turbulent years of our freedom movement. Within the fabric of the tale, Malgonkar weaves the story of the rise of upstarts like Kanakchand and his ilk on the Indian political firmament.

*A Bend in the Ganges* has the freedom movement, partition and the resultant violence as its theme. This is the fourth of his

1960s novels and is often hailed as an epic study of violence versus non-violence. Sensitive issues like spurt of violence, revolutionary zeal of some sections of the youth, communal divide and the efficacy of Gandhian principles of non-violence are at the basis of its structure. It is a cleverly crafted work that paints a vivid picture of the decade prior to the partition of the country, bringing out the realities that led to rift in the hearts of the common man, the partition of the country and the anarchy that followed. When the masses are in frenzy, violence spares none — whether it is Gian, the Gandhian or Debi Dayal, the revolutionary. In its wake it implicates everybody: Sundari, Gopal, Shafi, the Tekchands and all others; non-violence remains only “a pious thought, a dream of philosophers.” The final message is clear: unless there is “inner” calling, non-violence is meaningless.

In 1972 came *The Devil's Wind*, a historical novel about Nana Saheb Peshwa's role in India's first War of Independence. It is an effort to correct the picture of Nana Saheb who was condemned by the British as the villain of the ‘mutiny’. Written in autobiographical mode, it is the story of Nana Saheb placed within the happenings like the Doctrine of Annexation, the aggrieved Indian rulers, the oppressed Indian masses and their joint reaction to British hostilities. Nana provided them leadership and though atrocities were committed by both sides it is the loser (the Indian side) that comes out as villainous. The novel beautifully blends facts and fiction, art and history to create a character who is generous, noble, understanding and affectionate but weak, albeit, unwilling to shed blood. In his ‘Author's Note’ Malgonkar says, “This ambiguous man and his fate have always fascinated me. I discovered that the stories of Nana and the revolt have never been told from the Indian point of view. This, then, is Nana's story as I believe he might have written it himself. It is fiction; but it takes no liberties with verifiable facts or even possibilities.”

*Cactus Country* was published in 1992, two decades after *The Devil's Wind*. It is at once a historical novel, a novel focusing



on army life and a novel about the birth of Bangladesh. But what makes the work different is its point-of-view; the central consciousness is of Aslam Chisti, a Pakistani army officer. The action is set partly in West Pakistan and mainly in East Pakistan soon to be Bangladesh. The vast land-mass that is India, spread between the two Pakistans, East and West, and the significant role she played in the liberation of the new nation have been “watered down;” not to discredit India but only for the exigency of his story. Soon the reader realizes that the author’s preoccupation is not so much with the march of history, as with the fate of the individuals involved in it.

Malgonkar’s keen sense of history is reflected in his historical non-fiction like *Kanhoji Angrey* (1959), *Puars of Dewas Senior* (1962) and *Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur* (1971). Kanhoji Angrey was the valiant Maratha Admiral on the Konkan coast who controlled the invading Siddis, the British and the Portuguese. *The Sea Hawk*, is the fictionalized biography of Angrey, a man of “incredible stamina, bold, brave and independent”. *The Men who Killed Gandhi* is about the political and historical forces that created the vicious atmosphere that led to Gandhi’s assassination. It is non-fiction and has been written in reportage style. The author clearly indicts the circumstances and political intrigues that led to discontent, fear and the resultant violence. The book is supported by documents, manuscripts and photographs and is written in flawless prose that reads like a novel. *The Garland Keepers* depicts the Emergency years 1975–1977.

Coming to his light writings, *Spy in Amber*, an espionage thriller is set partly in the Ragyabas monastery in the Himalayas and partly in Delhi. It is about the priceless jewels of the Panchen Lama, the hunt for these jewels, Chinese agents’ bid to sabotage the monastery and find the treasure. The story is set in 1971 when hostility between India and China was surfacing. *Bandicoot Run* is again a detective piece, this time about a missing file which

creates tensions in the Army headquarters. It is the story of a missing file and is based on a real incident when a file was destroyed to help one of the two officers vying for the top post in the Indian Army.

*Open Season* is a light romance meant for a film and is the usual run-of-the-mill story. *Shalimar* is the novelization in English of a movie story by Krishna Shah and does not come under serious writing. Malgonkar's incursions into writing light romances, screen plays for films and detective thrillers have been rejected by readers as non-serious literature full of intrigues, suspense and sex and as such academicians do not consider them fit for deep study, whereas the general readers, particularly from the army, appreciate the author for his bold move to have diverted from serious novel writing onto an area that is not much valued academically. In his interview with James Y. Dayananda, Manohar Malgonkar admits unflinchingly, "I do all kinds of work, because being a professional writer, I can't pick and choose too much. I do a certain amount of ghost writing. I write for the Indian movies, scripts and story."<sup>1</sup> Malgonkar admits that writing a film story is simple compared to the novel; moreover, since the Indian film industry is vast, thriving and opulent, it pays sumptuously. Writing novels is not very rewarding in terms of monetary returns, so to keep going, most writers have to have something else out there — some teach in colleges, some, perhaps, work on television networks or that kind of thing.

## (II)

Malgonkar scholars rue the fact that his contribution to Indian English fiction has largely remained unacknowledged. Academics and critics find fault on four levels: (i) highly anglicized language

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<sup>1</sup> See James Y. Dayananda, *Manohar Malgonkar*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1974. Dayananda included extracts of his interviews in the chapter 'Biographical Introduction'.

lacking in experimentation; (ii) themes with colonial inclination; (iii) elitist approach neglecting the reality of Indian situation; and (iv) lack of rigorous Indianness. According to some he is, like Nirad Chaudhary, pro-British and not in touch with Indian realities like poverty, the problem of the masses, middle class aspirations and various other issues of the society Critics opine that compared to his contemporaries like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao he appears less serious about Indian realities. Anand's deep commitment to the cause of the poor and the oppressed; R.K. Narayan's ironical portrayal of everyday realities of life, Raja Rao's metaphysical concerns are missing in Malgonkar's writings. Also, these early writers experimented with the English language and made it their own whereas Malgonkar, they argue, uses English-English. Raja Rao's 'foreword' to *Kanthapura*, "we cannot write like the English. We should not," has become a dictum for critics to judge the validity of English expression by Indians. Manohar Malgonkar is certainly different but that does not mean he is mediocre. He may not be didactic or philosophical but then he takes Indian history out of the "cultural pile" and gives it shape which in itself is a great contribution to Indian literature.

Malgonkar goes down literary canons primarily as a historical novelist conscious about presenting an authentic picture of the society he knows best. This society is of the upper classes – princes, rulers, army officers, tea estate managers, big businessmen and politicians. Their way of life centers round big-game hunting, wining and dining, excursions into the jungle, sex and revelry. In this scheme of things the common man does not figure; if at all the workers and laborers are necessary for the thematic structure of his story, he gives them space without dwelling on their problems. For example, he gives due recognition to the exploitation of teagarden workers but not as Anand does in *Two Leaves and a Bud*. Anand is concerned for labor welfare; Malgonkar is concerned with moral decay of Britishers. However, these factors do not make Malgonkar a "non-Indian" in any

sense. He loves his Indian tradition albeit that tradition is of conservative India, India of the royalty.

Mulk Raj Anand often said that a writer cannot afford to sit in his ivory tower and write. If he wants to reach the people, he must come down and rub shoulders with the public. Malgonkar rubs shoulders with those he knows best and he writes about them. In his conversation with scholars he often reiterated that he writes about India because a writer cannot write of any other place than his own though he is not obsessed with 'Indianness'. His argument is simple: if one is writing from within the Indian ethos, the writing can be "nothing else but Indian." Some critics opine that even Kamala Markandaya had royal connections — her ancestors were Dewans of Mysore State but she wrote about the farmers (*Nectar in a Sieve*, *A Handful of Rice*), the fishermen (*The Pleasure City*), tribals (*The Coffer Dams*), and of village girls' aspirations (*Two Virgins*). Others, countering the claim argue that: first, Kamala Markandaya had firsthand knowledge about villages as she had worked in villages for some time and had seen village life closely (the experience went into the writing of *Nectar in a Sieve*), and second that her portrayals have chinks and are not wholly authentic because she looks at them from a distance — from the vantage point of her social class and also as an expatriate; consequently her view is of an outsider. Leaving aside such controversies that galore and going back to Malgonkar, one must admit that Malgonkar's canvas is limited to the socio-economic class to which he belonged.

Thematically, his novels can be grouped under four broad concerns: (i) historical and political scenario of pre-and-post-Independent India, (ii) human relationships, (iii) sense of loss and search for roots, and (iv) East-West encounter. Within this framework he weaves his plots and presents his point of view boldly — contradicting the British portrayal of Nana Saheb Peshwa and highlighting his human and humane qualities; interrogating Gandhi's concept of non-violence; questioning the

Emergency and its expediency; taking a rational view of those supposedly convicted in Gandhi's assassination and indicting those at the helm of affairs for their myopic vision; and exposing the devious dealings going on in the higher echelons of the army. He does not spare the British if they are wrong: in *Combat of Shadows* he punishes Henry Winton for his wanton behavior; he has no sympathies for the likes of Kanakchand and Jugal Kishore and has serious objection to the induction of dubious characters into the politics of the newly formed democratic India. He seems to have no inclination to portray the poor, the down-trodden and the commoner people; that is the sore point for critics who find his works far removed from the soil. However, to be fair to the author, this India of kings and princes, army officers and the elite also exists side by side the other India and as Gayatri Spivak observes in another connection, "one is not just one thing," one is many things at the same time. Malgonkar does not devalue 'Indianness'; only that he portrays the India he knows best. And certainly, one can be nationalist without being imperialist.

Manohar Malgonkar is firm on his stand when he admits unabashedly and arrogantly: "The social life of millions of Indian centres round the dustbins of great cities. Granted. But mine doesn't, and for me to write about it would be as insincere as a white man writing about a Nigro riot."<sup>2</sup> He believes that everything cannot be explained by talking about it, one has to feel for it to understand it. In *Distant Drum* he observes, "If you didn't feel it, somewhere deep inside you there was no way of making you understand it" (p. 239). As G. S. Amur observes, Malgonkar is not interested in the average and the democratic but is fascinated by the unusual and the exceptional in human relations (Amur, p.13).

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2 G. S. Amur, *Manohar Malgonkar*. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1973.

This is the first scholarly study to appear on Malgonkar's writings and answers many questions that were raised in academic criticism. This book has been consulted often and page numbers are given in parenthesis.

Another point concerns lack of objectivity in his portrayal of British and Indian characters. For him Englishmen are exemplary figures of honesty, integrity and sense of loyalty and so are the public school products like Kiran Garud and Abhayraj. On the contrary, he equates dishonesty and servility with Indian traits in general; and the archetypes of these traits are people like Jugal Kishore, Kanakchand and even Gian. Critics such as R.S.Singh opine that Malgonkar uses the word 'Indian' loosely and falls in his own trap as he admires some 'Indians' but condemns 'Indians' on the whole.

Manohar Malgonkar is clear about his priorities. Metaphysics does not interest him nor does psychology appeal to him. Psychological novels like those of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce and nearer home of Anita Desai and Arun Joshi are not his cup of tea. He is a story-teller who identifies with plot, action, characterization and dramatization than with the whimsicality of the mind. "I do strive deliberately and hard to tell a story well...", he says. The psychological novel with its "interminable ramblings about the day in the life of someone or other" does not appeal to him. Scoffing at it he equates it with "counting veins in every leaf of cabbage." Yet, his novels have strong individualized characters who can be studied from the angle of psychology. Characters like Hiroji, Abhayraj, Debi Dayal, Aslam Chisti and Henry Winton are not abstractions meant to serve a thesis but human beings with a motivational system, moving within the conceptual system of their time; they are human beings with goodness or meanness, contradiction or unpredictability. Many a critic avers that Malgonkar analyses his characters with the detachment of a historian and draws "faceless" and "conventional" characters; they fail to emerge as living human beings; have no conviction of their own, nor do they affirm their identity. My contention is, however, to the contrary. Malgonkar draws realistic characters who feel, think and act in accordance with their motivational system. They are individualized, lifelike and inwardly intelligible. Prince

Abhayraj, for example, puzzles the readers by his endorsement of the Maharaja's values, which G.S. Amur justifies as "nothing more than a recognition and a return." (p. 84). His actions make sense to us when we understand him as an individual and not as an abstraction of history. Likewise, the rhetorical treatment of Gian and Debidayal in *A Bend in the Ganges* poses problem till we probe their motivational systems and judge them as individuals acting under the tensions of historical time. It would be reductive to understand Gian, Debi or the Prince (Abhayraj) in terms of Gandhian ideology or any other conceptual system of the time. That would tantamount to denying them their human vitality. Aslam Chisti of *Cactus Country* is an able army officer and is meant to behave as per the norms of the value-system but he has his own intrinsic nature and character structure; add to this the external factors and internal demands. In fact, there is a strong psychological impulse in Malgonkar that tends towards the presentation of highly individualized figures who resist abstraction and generalization.

Malgonkar's appeal lies in his ability to make us think, perceive life in all its complexities and wonder over the vagaries of existence without being tediously philosophical. His works are meant to encourage and enliven us to look at life from different angles. Malgonkar belonged to elite society and he wrote about the elite society — refined yet snobbish, fun-loving and perky yet aloof; as such his novels are peopled with chic and classy men and women. In his social or socio-political novels he upholds conservative values but takes care to highlight negative aspects of both the aristocrats and the middle classes without any attempt to evade the unpleasant.

His personal experiences as an officer in the Army Intelligence, a miner, a manager of tea garden, and a hunter have been woven into the plot of almost all his novels. He clarifies this in an interview with James Y. Dayananda, "I feel that having

started writing more or less at very mature stage, I don't have to do much research about life because I fall back on experiences, you know about army life, about shooting and hunting and the jungle life and some aspects of politics and all that which I have gone through like our trouble with the English, for instance, I have experienced them myself so to that extent it has given me some sort of capital to draw on" (p. 23). His plots and themes are thus original and vigorous as was his outdoor life; his realism was based on real happenings around him and his intimate knowledge of them. Though his novels are not strictly autobiographical, they can be appreciated vis-à-vis his lived life. His observations of life are deep and sympathetic albeit of a particular section of Indian society. Those living within the boundaries of elite society and those living at its periphery and affected by it have been portrayed with empathy and herein lies his strength as a novelist.

His weak works of scant literary merit such as the thrillers and romances damaged his reputation considerably. Malgonkar admitted his failing:

When you have written a number of good books and people like them, you've got to be extremely choosy.... I have done some very stupid things too. You remember a film called *Shalimar*? They made it with a lot of hoo-ha, and Rex Harrison was there in it. They'd asked Khushwant Singh, who was editor of the *Illustrated Weekly*, who he thought could novelize the film script. Khushwant said I could do it. I hadn't even heard of the word novelize. I wasn't very keen. I didn't like the script and I knew it would take six weeks to two months for me to make it into a novel of 40,000 to 50,000 words. I said I'll do it for Rs. 50,000 and they said yes, of course, do it. So I did it. In spite of all the shape I could give it, it was such an absurd story. The film bombed and so did the book. People ask me how could you ruin your reputation taking on a thing like this and I tell them look, give me Rs. 25,000 a month and I'll do anything for you (laughs). But I haven't written anything as rubbish as that. (*Gentleman*, July 1986, p. 23)



Unfortunately, academic criticism remained apathetic towards his contribution to Indian English writings. There are a few book length studies, a dozen or so anthologies and articles in literary journals focusing on different aspects of his writing but serious probe is generally missing. One of the earliest works is G.S.Amur's study published in 1973. By that time Malgonkar had written five novels and all his short stories lay scattered in magazines and periodicals, not yet collected. Amur has done the spade work; he had provided us the basic material for criticism. James Y. Dayananda's work published under Twayne series gives a mine of information methodically. Other studies like Shankar Bhattacharya's *Manohar Malgonkar: A Study of his Mind and Art*; A Padmanabhan's *The Fictional Works of Manohar Malgonkar*; M. Rajagopalachari's *The Novels of Manohar Malgonkar* deserve mention as they deal with major aspects of the novelist's art, craft and themes but the rigorous appraisal so necessary to provide insight into the mind of the artist is still missing. To assess Malgonkar as a mediocre writer of historical fiction is to do him injustice. One has to delve below the surface: his subtle probe into the psychology of his characters; the philosophy of the Gita located within the given structure; his idea of new India and his integrating vision need in-depth study.

Shyam M. Asnani's article in *Critical Response to Indian English Fiction* makes an interesting reading. He appreciates the talent of the author who could present India not as a mystery or a muddle but as a country in her own right. To Asnani, Malgonkar's strength lies in dexterously integrating his vision of India with his vision of the world. Indira Bhatt's "A Study of Malgonkar's Maharani: A Feminist Viewpoint," in Jasbir Jain and Amina Amin edited *Margins of the Erasure* offers a feminist perspective of a professed 'man's writer'. Some other papers refer to Malgonkar's deep-rootedness in Indian ethos and traditions and a few consider the influence of Maratha history on his art as note-worthy.

The following chapters plan to explore Malgonkar's oeuvre to comprehend the sharpness of his vision, interpretation of characters bobbing up and down with historical forces, and his boldness in contradicting the accepted views to prove his point. The works have been grouped according to the author's vision. We wish to see how his short stories, historical works, his only play, travel writing and thrillers make for themselves a niche in the Indian literary scenario despite their seemingly light treatment. The narratives have well-planned strategies that make them readable and enjoyable. An evaluation of their texts and subtexts will open, it is hoped, new vistas for appreciation. It may be stated candidly that it has not been possible to procure all his works, particularly journalistic writings that are scattered all over. Luckily, I have in my collection some cuttings of the articles published way back in *The Tribune* which came handy.

## 2

### *The Martial Code: Distant Drum and Cactus Country*

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The code of martial and manly honor is essentially secular in nature. It permits men to live in an absurd universe, full of violence and suffering, without losing faith in the meaning of life.

— Bernard J. Paris

*Distant Drum*, Manohar Malgonkar's first work and *Cactus Country* the last of his six serious novels are both army novels. Themes like human relationships, love and desire, violence and aggression, and political conflicts are all woven within the framework of the main structure. It is typically a male world-view and the basic fabric is of army postings, life in cantonments or army barracks and the protagonists' evolution from 'Bum Warts' to commanding (or decision-making) positions. The officers/protagonists are required to conduct themselves honorably to uphold their Regiments' honor without losing their human bearing. The different strands of the novels are held together by the concepts of martial and manly honor which give strength to the structure. Since Malgonkar was well aware of the patterns of army life, the structure of the novel, situations, dialogues, and the internal struggles are authentically portrayed.

***Distant Drum:***

*Distant Drum* is, in a way, celebration of the martial code around which the theme of the novel revolves. It begins with a rather long 'Prologue', initiating a young new officer into the Regiment's code of conduct. A senior officer apprises the subaltern about the importance of the Regimental code to be followed meticulously by every officer, "In this Regiment, we are, first and foremost, gentlemen. No Satpura officer ever consciously does anything that would hurt the Regiment's *izzat*." Thus inducted, the protagonist lives up to the Code all through the action of the novel, fights for it, sacrifices for it and finally earns military honor for exemplary service.

Briefly, martial code is governed by the principles of values like integrity, honesty, sense of duty, obedience and discipline. '*Esprit de corps*' throbs all through the novel and gives meaning to the actions and decisions of the protagonist. The story becomes engaging and thrilling, not because of its quick paced events, or because of its patriotic fervor but because it shows the growth of the protagonist from a raw soldier to an experienced officer who never compromises the honor of the Regiment. Devoid of this strong binding force the novel would have been a boy-meet-girl sort of love story. There is love and desire in the life of the protagonist but both are subservient to the main theme. The story evinces the on-coming change in the attitude of the younger generation officers — if Kiran Garud can swear by the Code and pledge to uphold it, the new breed of officers like Kamal Kant and the politicians at the helm in Delhi show scant respect for ethical codes. Read from today's state of affairs, the work appears almost prophetic.

The novel tells the story of Kiran Garud, a young officer of the 4<sup>th</sup> Satpura Regiment, from his recruitment in the British Indian Army, to his rise as the Regiment's Commanding Officer in Independent India. The period covered is roughly 1938 to 1950.

This was the period when the country was passing through a turbulent time — World War II, Burma war, India's Independence and partition riots, the Kashmir issue, and the urgency to settle the migrants from Pakistan. The hero's development goes side by side the development of the plot. The author documents army life with accurate details and gives an insider's picture of how things work in the field, in cantonments, in the army clubs. Obviously, Malgonkar delves into his personal experiences as an army officer. He was in the Maratha Light Infantry and held different posts like Army Intelligence Officer, General Staff Officer and Commanding Officer. These experiences go into the making of Kiran Garud's life — field postings, life in camps, the relaxed pace of Raniwada, the light hearted atmosphere of clubs and Officers' Mess. His encounters with various men and women mould his views and strengthen his adherence to the Satpura Code. By the time the story ends, Kiran is ready for two important events of his life: command of his Regiment and his marriage. We see him weaving dreams with his would-be wife Bina; they visualize living in the big 'Flag-staff House' with eight bed rooms and a bandstand in the garden. "It is wonderful! In the afternoons, we can have tea on the lawn, just you and me, under the tamarind tree, and you can see hundreds of parrots and you can hear the bugles practicing their calls in the lines, and in the distance, far away, you can hear the drum..." (p. 270). The novel begins and closes with the sound of buglers practicing and the drum sounding in the distance. Bugles and drums are integral to army establishments. The beat of drum is symbolic of soldiers' march. Life does not stop for Kiran, obviously, he is ready for the march albeit in a different setting.

The novel is divided into three parts; each part has forward and backward movements. The forward movement depicts his present and is slow, almost static because it has only one function: to lead the reader to the past when a chance meeting or a stray remark takes Kiran Garud back to the past. This movement gives

the reader a fairly good idea of Kiran's growth from a raw young officer into a mature man who has all through been an ardent follower of the Regimental Code.

Part One 'The Regiment' opens with Lieutenant Colonel Kiran Garud reaching Shingargaon for Infantry Commanders' Conference. Here he meets his friend Arun Sanwal and his wife Leela. The author takes care to introduce Bina, who is an important female character in the novel who is visiting the Sanwals. Bina knew Kiran Garud from her Raniwada days when her father Mr. Sonal was posted there as Deputy Commissioner. These first few pages induct the reader into typical army family party — men engaged in office gossip, the all-male ethos of their drinking bouts and the intrusion of their chirpy wives who lend some color to the atmosphere. The conversation between various characters is typically English-English spoken with immaculate Public School accent, army slang and crisp and snappy expressions. The colonial residue may appear a little jarring in contemporary setting but these are the few remaining trappings of the days of the British that were an integral part of the Indian Army even in the 1960s and Malgonkar has been a part of it.

The officers' light conversation in the exclusive atmosphere of their Mess evokes the ethos of army cantonment. Small personal likes and dislikes of the officers surface in unguarded moments, acerbic remarks take the place of polite behavior and we see them as humans. This touch of reality generates interest in the story. The author dexterously paints the cantonment scene in graphic language. He describes the languid afternoon thus: "The massive tamarind and mango trees beyond the stretch of lawn were motionless like a painted backdrop in a stage setting, and the crisp, transparent-organandie sky beyond the trees was entirely cloudless" (p. 13). It is here, sprawling on the wooden MES chair that Kiran hears the sound of the distant drum which remains his companion during all his postings and he hears it at the end

of the novel too. The movement is thus circular and augurs well for Kiran-Bina union.

Manohar Malgonkar introduces the main characters in this Part to quicken the action of the plot. Kiran remembers Bina of Raniwada ten years back — a spindly, dark girl of fifteen trying to play tennis in the club and insisting on playing doubles with them. Kiran, an inveterate tennis player, often felt irritated by her intrusions. This girl, now a graceful young woman of twenty-five enters into his life unobtrusively. Bina's teasing but casual remark about his friendship with Margot Medley takes Kiran back to his past and we are introduced to Margot Medley and Major Medley — two persons in Kiran's life who unknowingly mould his views on love, lust and life and help in his growth.

In flashback Kiran remembers his unfortunate affair with Margot Medley that led to Major Medley's death. Margot Medley, the wife of a senior British officer, was an attractive English woman full of life and sensuality. With no inhibitions or self consciousness, she was friendly with young officers. Kiran Garud is attracted by her charms but he discreetly avoids being involved and keeps his gentlemanly distance. But once in Calcutta he is carried away by her inviting appeal and spends a night with her in her flat. Unfortunately, Robert Medley appears on the scene unannounced. Extremely elated at his long due promotion as a full Colonel, he plans to give surprise to his wife and reaches without intimation. It is Kiran who opens the door and Bob (Robert Medley) understands what anyone could have under the circumstances. He just turns about and leaves without a word, never to return. He goes back to his Unit and blows his head with his gun. Years later, Kiran learns from his friend Abdul Jamal the happenings in his Unit. It was painstakingly proved before the commission of enquiry that Bob was a psychological case with suicidal tendencies which saved Kiran from disgrace. Kiran could never free himself from guilt; the scar of being a murderer albeit

indirectly, was left on his conscience forever. “He had got away with it that time, got away with no more than a deep gash of guilt on his conscience and a mountain of debt he owed to Abdul” (p. 39).

Margot Medley affair is important for the advancement of the plot. It is not just one of the affairs inserted to make the story spicy; instead it helps Kiran Garud to segregate love from lust, desire from wish. After this he never wandered and remained steadfast to Bina till her father agreed to the match. The Medley episode reveals another facet of Kiran’s personality: his intrinsic ability to empathize. He often imagines himself in Bob Medley’s place; in the place of a man at the front weaving romantic dreams about his lovely wife in Calcutta, who comes home eagerly to give his wife a surprise, showing up at her door wearing his flashy new red tabs and his extra star (of a full colonel). Kiran imagines Bob’s anticipation, planning, eagerness to celebrate his promotion with Margot and the shock he gets. Kiran catches himself wishing that Bob Medley should have killed him (Kiran Garud) instead of committing suicide. He remains grateful to Abdul Jamal for saving him from disgrace and when time comes he saves Jamal’s life during the riots. Kiran’s ability to analyze his feelings, to mend his ways, and remain grateful are qualities of a healthy mind.

Part Two entitled ‘The Staff’ develops Kiran-Bina love story along with Kiran’s rise in his career. The end of Part I depicts Kiran Garud being intensely emotional about the army and his own army career. The training period for the young officers is particularly strenuous but despite its “crudeness” the results are splendid as the training establishments like the Academy in Dehradun produces excellent leaders of exceptional integrity and discipline. He remembers the maxim drilled into them in the Academy:

*“The safety, honour and welfare  
of your country come first,*



*Always and every time.  
The honour, welfare and comfort  
of the men you command  
come next.  
Your own ease, comfort and safety  
come last,  
Always and every time”* (p. 80).

With these ideals enthused in him afresh he takes over his new command. Challenges are there but he stands up to them with dignity and firmness. The first challenge comes from Bina's father who wants his daughter to marry Arvind Mathur, a rich prospective groom. Kiran loves Bina. She is attractive in a distinctive sense; she has “more distinction than beauty, character more than glamour”. But her father cannot tolerate a meagerly paid army officer to wed Bina, he stops Bina from meeting him and gets Kiran transferred out of Delhi. Kiran's response to her father, a senior IAS officer, speaks of his arrogant pride in his Regimental Code: “To me, the army, the profession itself, is a great thing, although in your sense of values it may rank with the lowest forms of life.... I cannot afford to risk my professional future; to a career officer like me, it is an unfortunate thing to clash with people of your influence.... My career is more important than anything else — more than your daughter” (p. 207). Does this smack of insincerity towards Bina? Critics think so. They interpret this statement as his opportunism and lack of love. However, seen against his code of military honor, one understands his caution in withdrawing till she manages to bring her father to see her point.

This section is divided in small chapters that describe the various activities of the soldiers — strategic planning, guarding top secrets with care, execution of plans. These chapters are also replete with military expressions and recapitulation of the ‘dressing down’ by senior officers; similarly, one of the chapters

contains Kiran's harrowing personal experiences at Burma front.

Part Three is comparatively small. It leads to denouement. Entitled 'Active Service', this part begins with Kiran's posting on Kashmir front, the difficulties of a soldier's life and the loneliness at inhospitable height. The first chapter 'The Enemy on Front' has graphic description of the Himalayan terrain, the observation points, and enemy activities across the border and the inclement weather of winter. It is 8<sup>th</sup> December 1949. The dreariness of life up there and the loneliness of soldiers are captured splendidly. Looking at the calendar Kiran broods, "the calendar was only meant to mark out the days in a different world, where the passage of time forced itself on your consciousness in a hundred different ways, and not this ghostly corner of a Himalayan no-man's land, silent and inhospitable." (p. 210). It is on the Kashmir front that Kiran meets Abdul Jamal, now in Pakistani army. Kiran remembers nostalgically the days before and during partition when life was different. Each had helped the other in many ways. Now with Abdul in the rival army, the instructions from his officers to be wary of Abdul Jamal and the onus to safeguard his country's honour, everything appears weird. Friendship, gratitude and human relationships appear meaningless. However, Kiran cannot disregard the call of duty. It is greater than the call of personal relations. "There was no room in the soldiers' code for divided loyalties. His debt to Abdul was only a private debt" (p. 231.)

Despite these hurdles he and Abdul meet "under the Bushy-topped tree in No-Man's land," become sentimental, suppress sentimentality, exchange trivialities, laugh and repatriate to their own posts across the border. The Author compares this meeting to a film scene and writes ironically, "The cheap, second-rate film had reached its climax; was over." (p. 240). From the army point of view Kiran has committed a serious offence. In the Martial code there is no place for sentimentality. However well meaning and innocuous his meeting with Abdul Jamal be, he violated the

code for which he gets a strong warning. Luckily, the matter is closed there.

Manohar Malgonkar is concerned here with the question of values, or in other words, with the martial code. Reverting back to the beginning of the novel, we remember the unintelligible explication of the Regimental Code given by Kiran's senior officer. Let us look at what the officer tells the subaltern: "We try to live up to what you might call the Code of the Regiment, though I don't particularly care to call it that myself. ... We try and live up to certain broad principles of behavior. We don't always succeed, of course, but we try. We try very, very, very hard!" This definition of the Regimental Code when cut off from the context appears to have no clear-cut meaning.

Manohar Malgonkar tells his readers, "This book is largely the story of the success or failure of the efforts of one of the officers of the Regiment to live up to its code" (p. 9-10). The story of Kiran Garud starts from this point and the novel puts before us full view of the entire gamut called the "martial code" which makes our army proud. The bewildered young officer does not understand what it means but by and by experience shows him what this Code could be and what it means to him. Only after going through the novel can we make sense of the long harangue of Commanding Officer.

Kiran Garud lives up to the Code and is proud of it. Nothing can move him from his path of duty and loyalty. Roney Booker's offer of a business deal, the threat of losing Bina under her father's compulsions, the daring attempt to get into the mosque to save precious lives, courageous actions on war front and honest dealing all through his career have been documented with precision. To Roney Booker his daring reply is: "We would be failing in our duty to these youngsters and to the future army if we were to quit. Well, it is something like those Principles that the Satpurus live by, or try to live up to. No one can explain them, no one can teach them, you have to find them out yourself, by whatever is

worthwhile from those who make an honest effort to live up to them and by testing yourself.” (p. 252).

Malgonkar has been criticized for being an Anglophile, extolling Britishers and being sarcastic towards Indians. That, however, is a matter of opinion and mine is not the same. To me, Malgonkar is fair in his portrayal of the British and is proud of his Indian heritage. Kiran Garud does not like those who are snobbish but has good relations with those whom he admires for their qualities. As a junior officer, he shows indomitable courage when he counters Colonel Manners. Colonel Manners does not have high opinion of Indians, their art, literature and religion. He often criticizes them in full hearing of the officers in the Mess. One day Colonel Manners speaks derogatively of Indian leaders, “... Gandhi is a quack and Nehru an utter charlatan, and the only thing to do with all sedition-mongers is to put them against the wall” (p. 24). There is a stunned silence in the room. Only Kiran Garud has the courage to dare the Colonel and walk out defiantly. An unheard of thing in the army! This act enhances his stature in the eyes of his brother officers and he becomes a hero overnight. Kiran can be frank and brash with politicians who try to boss over the army officers. He refuses to give the regiment’s shamiana for political function and shows the door to the pan-chewing, local politician Lala Vishnu Sharan. His threats cannot intimidate Kiran.

As for language, *Distant Drums* is narrated in typical Englishman’s English. Malgonkar had clarified many a time that he studied English in Indian schools but since during his army career he came in close contact with British officers, he picked up their idiom and spoke and wrote like them. It may also be mentioned that the Indian army, a legacy of the British army, was heavily anglicized even after Independence. Malgonkar was aware that Indian expressions in the mouth of anglicized army officers would have hampered the quality of *Distant Drum*. He

profusely uses army slang, swear words and loose expressions, such as ‘damn,’ ‘go to hell,’ ‘to hell with you,’ ‘Bung-ho,’ ‘old boy,’ ‘blast,’ ‘Bum-Wart’ and so on. His description of Ladies Club at Akbar Mess is graphic — the ladies getting into small gossip, officers shouting for the bearer with typical English accent, “Beearaah” and ordering drinks. One has to read between the lines to guess whether Malgonkar is sneering at the artificiality of the army officers and their wives or he is glorifying the public school conduct. Knowing Malgonkar’s style and his adherence to traditions, it appears that he was just being authentic.

### ***Cactus Country***

*Cactus Country* (1992) which came three decades after *Distant Drum* (1960) does not dwell so openly on the significance of the martial and manly honor but the movement of the story and the protagonist’s trepidations and anxiety to remain above board leaves no doubt about his adherence to military values. During these three years (1960–1992) Malgonkar wrote thrillers, romances, film scripts and travelogues; by the time *Cactus Country* was published, he was nearing his eighties. His style, views and philosophy had matured further. *Cactus Country* dramatizes Pakistan’s campaign in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). Aslam Chisti, a young Pakistani Army officer is the narrator. The entire history of the birth of a new nation seems to have acquired a different hue. History and fiction intermingle to motivate a young Pakistani officer to live up to the martial code. It reminds us that decades after the British left, their legacy continues in the Indian and Pakistani armies; the ideals inculcated in them by the British still motivate them. Chisti would rather be straight and honorable than indulge in wrong deeds.

Throughout the narrative, the author seems to be at pains to project the higher values of his hero. He is an honorable man, too good to resort to “rape, plunder and loot” with which Pakistani army was discredited. *Cactus Country* made our critics

unhappy with Malgonkar for having recounted a major Indian victory from the perspective of a Pakistani soldier and for side-tracking Indian army's role which was much more important and gracious than a Pakistani youth's half-hearted involvement. On close reading, however, it becomes obvious that in spite of its conscious identification with a Pakistani officer, the novel is as much a documentation of army as *Distant Drum* is. It is based on historical facts and has all the violence, bloodshed, arson and other sinister acts associated with those turbulent events but the voice of one man's conscience redeems the novel. Chisti may not be strong and decisive like Kiran Garud nonetheless he is a soldier — honest, good-hearted and conscientious. At this level the universal appeal of the story can be seen.

There are four codes operative in both the novels: (i) the code of military honor called the martial code; (ii) the code of loyalty, duty and service; (iii) the code of personal ambition; and (iv) the code of religious and cultural values. Kiran Garud's Satpura Code and the Aslam Chisti's 10<sup>th</sup> Chakwal Code are an amalgam of the martial code and the code of loyalty, duty, discipline and service. The code of personal ambition and code of religious values are individual and can be sacrificed during crisis. Since the martial and manly codes are psychological determinants, any breach of faith is followed by inner conflicts, self-berating and guilt. There are several occasions in *Distant Drum* when Kiran Garud makes mistakes but his sense of duty and discipline saves him from deviating from his path of honor. Aslam Chisti firmly sticks to his military honor but towards the end he succumbs to Brigadier Pirzada's suggestion, compromises his principles, avoids being a prisoner of war and escapes to India. He faces moral trepidation after that.

This novel about the liberation of Bangladesh — seen almost after two decades — is at once a historical novel and a novel focusing on army life. What makes the work different is the

point-of-view with which the story has been recounted. Though it is a third person narration, the central consciousness is of Aslam Chisti. The action is set partly in West Pakistan and mainly in East Pakistan which was soon to be Bangladesh. The novel has two factual statements in the beginning contained in its epigraph and in the 'Author's Note.' The epigraph records Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's statement, "The Hamoodur Rehman Report (on Pakistan's Bengal Campaign) — is a story of rape, plunder and loot... a macabre conspiracy!" In the 'Author's Note' Malgonkar writes that *Cactus Country* is a work of fiction but the "background is authentic and its account of Pakistan's Bengal campaign straight history. If anything, I have watered down the violence and left out the more gruesome excesses so as to keep within the norms of fiction."

The story opens in Lahore, with a graphic description of Aitchinson's College cricket ground, where a cricket match is being played for the selection of a test series in England. (Those septuagenarian Indians who studied in Lahore before the partition and have memories of the by-gone days will be thrilled to re-live their youth when the boundaries did not divide the two countries). A young player, Aslam Chisti, establishes himself as an excellent batsman and is tipped for the forthcoming cricket match in England. The first twenty pages build the tempo so fast that you would think it is going to be a novel on the life of some cricketer. But soon, the narrative takes a turn. "Crush India," reports published in the Pakistani Newspapers and references to Mr. Bhutto, the 10<sup>th</sup> Chakwal Rifles, General Tarik Chisti, make sure that it is going to be a historical novel about the birth of Bangladesh.

Aslam Chisti is the son of "the No. 2 man in the Junta... straining every nerve to become the No. 1." (p. 13). As General Tarik Chisti's son, Aslam has to consider some vital points that have political bearing — trouble is brewing in East Pakistan, General Tarik is on the brink of making it to the top post and

the time is perilously poised for his father. At such precarious times, if his son is sent to play cricket in London, the General's credibility would be doubted. Tongues would wag and the General would be blamed for showing favors to his son. The General clarifies, "...everything is balanced so precariously that the slightest scandal, and the whole thing will blow up in our faces. Asloo, that's why I just cannot afford to be exposed to the charge of showing special favours to you" (p. 41). Aslam is not much convinced by the argument. His selection has been fair, on the basis of his performance, not on the count of his being General Tarik's son. But, a "good" son as he is, he bows to the wishes of his father, accepts mutely the code of "an officer's obligations, to his country, to his service, to his regiment" (p. 42) and goes to Bengal to join his regiment, to fight for his country (or rather to help his father grab the No. 1 position as President, with Mr. Bhutto as the Prime Minister of Western and Mr. Mujib as the Prime Minister of Eastern Pakistan?)

Thus, it could be argued that the novel is about Pakistan and Bangladesh. Where is India? On one side, the high drama of power-politics is being enacted in West Pakistan, on the other, insurgent East Pakistan is oppressed and angry and is poised for liberation. Sandwiched between the two, India appears almost inert; an observer from the outside. The novel does not bring her to the fore. Whatever we, as readers learn about her role, is through remarks that are as bland and impersonal as newspaper reportage. At this point we ask: where is India? And then as we read on, we realize that India has never been absent from the novel and that Aslam Chisti has not been different from Malgonkar's earlier protagonists: Kiran Garud, Prince Abhayraj, Debidayal and others.

Though a Pakistani soldier, Aslam Chisti follows the same principles of the martial code which moves Kiran Garud. Only it is not called by that name. His moral and military values are



the same as were Kiran Garud's or Prince Abhayraj's. Aslam is as much a Pakistani as major Peerzada is a Bangladeshi or for that matter Anita Desai's Hugo Baumgartner is a German Jew. Whatever be the geographical boundaries of their countries, they are the products of history which influenced their consciousness but on which they have no control. Aslam is one of the many fictional characters who is torn by external and inner factors — the division of the country (of which he has no memory; let us remember that Aslam is just 24 in 1971), his parents' different religious affinities, and above all his own conscience motivating him to act honorably. We may not call him a pawn of history but he is a human being affected by the flow of history.

The author introduces his hero to the readers — Aslam Chisti, a first rate, brilliant cricketer, a lieutenant in the Pakistani army, posted to 10<sup>th</sup> Chakwal Rifles, and the son of a big-shot, General Tarik Chisti who is expecting the top position. In short, Aslam has all the ingredients that a legendary hero is supposed to have and therefore, he needs to display all the legendary hero's attributes — loyalty, sense of duty, discipline and such other virtues. Chisti is not a legendary or mythological hero; he is an ordinary human being placed in a realistic situation. He has human limitations and we get an authentic picture of a young officer in the throes of a war he does not understand or appreciates.

Bengal has its share of adventures in store for him. On reporting at the MLA H.Q. for his duty, Aslam comes in contact with Major Pirzada, a Bengali officer who is beholden to the Chisti family for a favor extended to him. Major Pirzada, his Begum Sahiba and their daughter Wahida react to the arrival of the young Chisti differently. While the Major is officer-like in his dealings, the Begum is motherly, but Wahida is suspicious. She is fresh from the trauma of a combing out operation in the Dacca University where Pakistani soldiers had indulged in rape, murder and allied atrocities. She is often angry and snappy with Aslam.

Initially, Captain Aslam is given Military Intelligence duties which he carries out efficiently but with resentment. His “Abbu” would not approve of his involvement with the “Spooks”, he thinks. So, he would rather be with his regiment. As expected, Aslam gets what he wants because no officer would like to incur the wrath of General Tarik, the most powerful man in the Junta. They oblige Aslam and he gets the desired orders to join the 10<sup>th</sup> Chakwals. After some adventures of minor nature *en route* with the Mukti Bahini guerilla, Aslam reaches camp Kathihari and is stranded there, till he and his people manage to get out only to be killed or be P.O.W’s. Aslam discovers slowly, over a period of one year, that he has lived through experiences of love, lust, war, wounds, intrigues and inner turmoil.

As a P.O.W. Aslam compromises with Major (now Brigadier) Pirzada, lives in comfort and develops emotional ties with Wahida. Finally, with the graciousness of Brig. Pirzada, Aslam tries to join his unit but by then the Pakistani army is in a deplorable state. Before the final surrender, however the author saves his hero from dishonor or harassment as P.O.W. Aslam conveniently escapes into India, finds his maternal uncle Ganga Singh in Jalandhar and feels safe, but entrapped, under the protection of the patronizing kin. The guilt for having deserted his men gnaws at him for long’ “The guilt would not go. To become a prisoner was bad enough but you could blame it on bad luck. What was unforgivable was that he had traded away his prisoner of war’s right to make an attempt at escaping, for creature comforts... Abbu would never condone” (p. 329). Unfortunately, at his uncle’s (mamaji) house, he feels further alienated. As Ganga Singh leads him inside the house, he suddenly feels as if it was not a sanctuary he was entering but a trap (p. 405).

The author’s constant focus on Aslam Chisti lets the reader remember that the novel was on Pakistan’s military action in Bengal. The documentation thus remains authentic. Military words

and terms occur frequently but they are intelligible to a non-army background reader. No scenes of actual battle are depicted except a couple of “operations” and skirmishes which leave the reader mildly shaken and the hero greatly upset. For example, after Sheikh Mujib’s capture during “Operation Searchlight,” Aslam feels a stab of pain on seeing his men rejoicing. For Aslam, it is despicable to capture “an unarmed man who had been sleeping in his house” (p. 138). He disowns any responsibility in the episode and feels that “this was not an experience... to recount to one’s children with pride and a thump of the chest saying: ‘I was there.’ Because this was not something a soldier could take pride in.” (p. 138).

Throughout the narrative, the author projects his hero as a soldier — honest, generous, good-natured, loyal, brave and honorable. But unfortunately Aslam fails to impress. He is an able officer and a kind hearted man, no doubt, but he is too feeble to make his mark. Like Kiran Garud he follows the code of conduct of the army with impunity. But, whereas Guard is mature, Aslam is a stripling youth, just 24, much under the awe of his father’s name and fame. He is not even capable of independent thinking. Always concerned with his Abbu’s reactions: “What will Abbu say?” “Abbu would not approve” and the like, Aslam moves under his father’s shadow. He fails to grow as a capable man of the world. His decision to go to India, does not help him to be independent; because though he wriggles out of his Abbu’s awe he falls in the hands of his mother’s people. “We will teach you to say prayers,” are the words with which the novel ends. Aslam shrinks from the realization that asylum also means “conversion.”

There are several other characters in the novel who are meant to further the plot. Most of them are military officers and have set characteristics. Major Pirzada is an opportunist who changes sides according to the demands of his “personal loyalties.” When he was in the British Indian army, he joined the I.N.A. of Netaji

Bose for the cause of India's freedom; given a second chance in the Pakistani army, he works for the Mukti, this time for the liberation of his second motherland. This amounts to stabbing his Punjabi brethren on the back. Despite his so-called treachery, Pirzada is neither despicable nor petty-minded. Somehow, the author is not angry with Pirzada. He gives him scope to help Chisti and thus exonerates him. That does not mean that he could escape poetic justice. The Nemesis takes revenge in the shape of his only daughter's death which gives him a massive shock.

Begam Pirzada is an endearing character. She is a tender Bengali woman given to music and art. The other two women characters — Wahida and Bimba — though made only to serve the cause of Aslam's initiation into manhood, are strong, alert and yet soft and loving. Despite her miserable condition, Bim is not a pathetic person and in spite of her fiery personality, Wahida is feminine. Both these women prove indispensable for uplifting his morale. Bim — short for Bimba — enables him to “slough off his youth and think of himself as a man” (p. 257). After his physical contact with her, Aslam feels fulfilled and happy. “If there had been a column in the log book for the morale of the commanding officer, he would have unhesitatingly put it down as ‘Very High.’” (p. 257) Bim was patient, passionate and tender; contact with her elevates him. Wahida helps him in his self-discovery. Her personality and unspoken love touches his inner core. In his dealings with Bim and Wahida, Aslam maintains dignity and both assess him as “bhalo manush.” That is what Manohar Malgonkar wishes his soldier officers to be — thorough gentlemen.

The author gives frequent indications of Chisti's nobleness. To Major Pirzada's suggestion to escape, Aslam says an emphatic ‘No’ and adds, “It would be like running away, sir... deserting. To go off to India while the army is facing defeat and surrender here. No” (p. 350). He too seems to be saying with Col. Kiran Garud of *Distant Drums*, “To me the army, the profession itself, is

a great thing....” The partition of the country as seen in retrospect is a process of history which Aslam can neither understand nor appreciate. It divided families but it could not obliterate individual affection. Kiran Guard and Abdul Jamal in *Distant Drums* meet because they were friends and belonged, not so long back, to the same army. Now, a quarter of a century has passed (the action of the story takes place in 1971), times have changed and so have attitudes. It is understandable that Aslam should have no attraction for Indian soil or for Indian brother-officers. Still, he is human enough to be moved to tears on hearing “Sonar Bangla.”

Malgonkar’s *The Princes* and *The Devil’s Wind*, two novels to be studied in the next chapter, are not novels of the martial code but they do underscore sense of honor, service and an elevated sense of patriotism. Each has history as its backdrop and each involves a ‘telling’ — an apparent witness of history. The history in *The Princes* is relatively contemporary; in *The Devil’s Wind*, it is more than a century old. It is interesting to discover how the author, with the power of imaginative re-visioning transforms history to free it from its constructed fixity.

# 3

## *Of Kings and Warriors: The Princes and The Devil's Wind*

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It is most important not to squeal, to show hurt. Be a man, my son. ...It is a great thing to be a man.

— Maharaja Hiroji to Abhayraj in *The Princes*

Knowing the dangers, he embraced a revolt. His sacrifice shall light our path like an eternal flame.

— Inscription on Nana Saheb's Memorial, Bithoor

One of the merits of Manohar Malgonkar's writings is his penchant for authenticity. He writes out of his personal experiences — the portrayal of life in palaces in *The Princes* is based on his first-hand knowledge of princely ways; for *The Devil's Wind* he turned to thorough research, read documents in archives and consulted more than 150 books in libraries and also gathered facts from oral sources. *The Princes* (1963) and *The Devil's Wind* (1972) are both historical novels in which he successfully fuses art and history and achieves cohesion of documentation and fictional technique with the result that the works become historical documents put consciously in the garb of literary art. His art, however, does not let history impinge on literature. The reader gets the pleasure of reading a good piece of literature without being over-burdened by dry historical facts. *The Princes* is considered one of his most

historical novels. It is set in the princely state of Begwad and the minute details of life in the palaces as presented here are reliable. In his interviews he often admitted that some of the characteristics of Abhayraj were like his own. As for Nana Saheb Peshwa in *The Devil's Wind*, he could not say the same as the Peshwa lived in an altogether different era.

### ***The Princes***

*The Princes* is Malgonkar's third and most popular novel. It was published in 1963 in New York and was selected by the Literary Guild of America as the novel of the month. Written in first person from the point of view of Prince Abhayraj, the novel narrates the story of the princely State of Begwad, its ruler Maharaja Hiroji and the heir apparent Abhayraj. In recording the life of the rulers it also records the recent history of India from 1938 to the merger of Princely States in the Indian Union in 1948. Hiroji, the Maharaja of the imaginary state of Begwad is divested of his powers when he signs the Instrument of Accession. But he cannot and does not sign the Document of Merger because that would have meant ringing the death bell of his own kingdom. It would mean obliterating the very identity of the Bedars and jeopardizing the state of Begwad. Between dishonor of dissolution of the kingdom and physical death he prefers the latter; walks unarmed deep into the jungle tracking the wounded tiger and gets killed. It is left to his son, Maharaja Abhayraj to sign the Document of Merger and be a part of a larger reality — India. He abdicates his title and becomes simply Abhayraj Bedar. As he sits in the 'tiger room' he remembers his father's words, "No matter what anyone tells you, there will always be a Begwad and there will always be a Bedar as its ruler, so long as the sun and the moon go round" (p. 19). The situation is ironical as at that very moment the Newsreader on All India Radio announces, "The Maharaja of Begwad, His Highness Abhayraj Bedar the third, has communicated to the Government his decision to abdicate his title and renounce his privileges as the

ex-ruling Prince...” (p. 245). The events that started in 1938 with Abhay’s initiation end in 1948 with his abdication. He ruled his State as Maharaja only for forty-nine days. The Merger goes down in history as the triumph of democracy; for the rulers, however, it means obliteration.

Historically, 1938 to 1947 was a period of great political activities, upheavals and uncertainties in the country. Early in the novel, Abhayraj, in narrating his story also tells the history of the country: “The map was red and yellow. The red was for British India; the yellow for the India of the princes.... For more than a hundred years, the red and the yellow had remained exactly as they were. Then the British left, and in no time at all, the red had overrun the yellow and coloured the entire map a uniform orange. The princely states were no more. We were the princes; no one mourned over our passing... I realize that it could not have been otherwise, and yet I cannot rid myself of a purely selfish sense of loss. (p. 13).

In around 1938 the freedom movement was at its peak in British India, but in princely India, governed by the hereditary Indian kings and rulers, the political situation was under control or so the rulers pretended. Praja Mandals and such other patriotic organizations had already made headway into the kingdoms and were operating unobtrusively but the rulers underplayed their role and never thought them capable of stirring public passion. The rulers were convinced of the deep rooted loyalty of their subjects which was “something deep and incorruptible.” Besides, they were sure of their own capacity to adopt repressive measures if the nationalists were ever to enter their precincts. To avoid trouble and deal with the political situation ingeniously, some rulers tried to dupe the democratic forces. They adopted seemingly democratic measures like forming new constitutions with elected members as advisors but the nationalists could see through their game and guess that the entire gamut was an eye-wash and nothing solid would come out of it.



There was suspicion on both sides: the nationalists were moved by democratic ideals and suspected the intentions of the kings and princes; the rulers were openly hostile to parties like the Indian National Congress and organizations like Praja Mandals and were wary of the nationalists. Let us remember Maharaja Hiroji's whipping of Kanakchand for wearing the white Gandhi cap, indicative of the spirit of nationalism. Though the nationalist movement was gaining ground and becoming strong in the princely states, the rulers were negating its influence on their territories and refused to accept them as a threatening political force. Maharaja Hiroji is an example of the purblind attitude of the ruling class. "There is no such thing as Praja Mandal in Begwad," the Maharaja said haughtily. "I don't hold this nonsense about people's movements." The Rajas and the Maharajas were soon to realize that such a dismissive attitude was misplaced and the power of the masses could not be denied for long. Later events like Lord Wavell's assurances to the Princes, the meeting of Chambers of Princes, the Naval Mutiny, the visit of the British Cabinet Commission and finally the Instrument of Accession and the transfer of power came with quick succession leaving the Princes bewildered. Their dream of creating a separate India of the Princes — strong, solid and rooted in tradition — vanished. Some rulers saw the signs of time and accepted the Instrument of Accession, a legal document created in 1947 to enable the princely states to join the new dominion; others joined later. By 1949 almost all the princely states had acceded to the Indian Union.

*The Princes* is woven around these historical facts. The story has two strands: first, the historical realities, and second, the protagonist's personal growth. The historical canvass of the novel is limited to Begwad, but what was happening in this tiny, imaginary state is the microcosm of what was also happening in the whole nation. The goings-on in these intervening years, 1938–1947, impact the fate of three significant individuals in the novel and

are vital for the forward movement of the plot — Maharaj Hiroji's brave encounter with death, Abhayraj's accession to the throne for forty-nine days and subsequent abdication, and the rise of Kanakchand as a minister in the newly formed democratic state. The second strand, growth of the protagonist from boyhood to adulthood and thence on to manhood is closely linked to the outside events and inner conflicts that mould his attitude. The progressive, forward-looking, rational youth of eighteen, who had the courage to counter his father — the formidable Maharaja Hiroji — changes to a conservative man by the end of the novel. He searches for security in the old order, clings to the remnants of conventional values and becomes a reactionary like his father. The whip-lashing of Kanakchand (now a Minister in the newly formed state) in the final scene is a re-playing of his father's role and corroborates what his wife Kamala too observed once, "Sometimes you act so much like your father that it makes me feel frightened" (p. 318).

Till 1969 the erstwhile princes were entitled to hold privy purses; use their State emblems on their cars and letterheads; and were addressed by their titles. Between 1949 (complete merger) and 1969 (abolition of privy purses) socio-cultural changes were slow. Manohar Malgonkar wrote *The Princes* in 1963; till then the people had a special place in their hearts for their rajas and maharajas. Reading the novel now, in the twenty-first century requires special efforts to understand and appreciate the past — the then existing norms and situations, vanities of the rulers, the splendor of their courts, their distrust of the national movement and nationalists, and their fear of the loss of conventional order. Let us mention here briefly that in *The Puars of Dewas Senior* (discussed in Chapter 6) Malgonkar has written about the ruler of Dewas who faces identical fears and uncertainties as the Maharaja of Begwad does. Maharaja Tukoji is a real personage of history, Maharaja Hiroji of Begwad is a fictitious figure. Tukoji is dominating, extravagant, pleasure-loving and

conceited, whose wife leaves him for her parental house never to return. Finally, insolvent and hunted by the British he seeks asylum in Pondicherry, the French territory and dies there. His son Vikramsinhrao becomes the ruler for a brief period, and after Independence he signs the Instrument of Merger.

The ethos of the tiny state of Begwad on the Deccan Plateau is so meticulously brought out that E. M. Forster could see its likeness with the happenings in Dewas. Forster was the private secretary of Maharaja Tukoji of Dewas for six months and he knew the ups and downs faced by Tukoji and his state. Forster appreciated Malgonkar's novel in a letter dated August 27, 1963:

I have just finished *The Princes* and should like to thank you for it. It interested me both on its own account and because I am involved — as far as an Englishman can be — in its subject-matter. I happen to have been in touch with a small Maratha state (Dewas Senior) during the years of its dissolution. The parallels are numerous and heart-rending. I am so glad you have got down a record. Otherwise all would soon be forgotten (qtd. by Amur, p. 78)

As the narrator of the story, Prince Abhayraj is both reliable and unreliable. Reliable, because it is the account of his life which revolves round his mother, father and the kingdom; and unreliable because he does not know or maybe does not want to acknowledge the democratic aspirations of the common man, poverty and oppression in India as well as in Begwad. As a school boy, he shows empathetic spirit when he gives his books to Kanakchand, the poor cobbler boy, but as a deposed king he cannot tolerate the likes of Kanakchand standing shoulder to shoulder with him. Abhayraj knows only one face of India — the royal India and not 'other India' represented by the leaders of Praja Mandal and such other organizations. The rulers in general, and maharaja Hiroji in particular, could not visualize the power of leaders of the masses who, in exposing the real face of feudal

polity prepared the ground for integration of princely states. In Begwad, Kanakchand represents the aspirations of the people and their desire to merge into the mainstream of democratic India's political, social, economic and cultural life. With time Abhayraj realizes that it is not possible to stop the flow of history, yet he resists change.

In the beginning of the novel it appears that Abhayraj may become a symbol of change but this hope is belied because he remains bound to the inherited values and traditions. Despite being progressive as a young man, he cannot accept Kanakchand's rise, nor can he compromise with merger. His gloomy mood in the tiger room, his anger directed at Kanakchand, and his final act of whipping him are indicative of his frustration. Though his reaction is natural and human, it is still an indication of a disturbed psyche not ready to accept change. Had the author allowed him to change completely, the portrayal would have lost much of its authenticity.

The story of India's freedom struggle, its fast movement forward and its culmination in Independence is dexterously woven with Abhayraj's story of growth and maturity. On the one hand the new sun of democracy dawns on India and at the same time the old order crumbles with the old Maharaja's death. As the new Maharaja takes over briefly, we hope he would uphold the new order; he would be the spring board of change but the fast forward movement of the novel reverts and takes a circular course. Abhayraj becomes a votary of traditional order.

Let us now see how Malgonkar describes Begwad and gives it a distinct personality. Its Maharaja is a force to reckon with. The British have bestowed on him the title of KCIS, Knight Commander of the Star of India. Maharaja Hiroji IV, ruling over 500 thousand people is entitled to seventeen-gun salute. Begwad is rich in natural resources and is famous for its jungles, tigers and hidden treasure. The Maharaja is aware of his wealth and

likes to gloat over the opulence of his kingdom.. The Maharaja is authoritative, conservative, taboo-ridden and he despises the nationalists. The novel opens with Abhayraj, eighteen years of age in 1938, confronting his father over the issue of national politics and nationalism, questioning his allegiance to the British and challenging his views. Ultimately his father loses his temper and shouts at him, 'Is nothing scared to you?... Get out of my sight — at once" (p.19). At this Abhayraj feels a boyish pleasure for having disturbed his foreboding coolness. After this incident, the father-son relations become strained and remain so till Abhay joins the army, travels, gathers experience and develops the faculty to understand his father, the man beneath the formidable veneer.

As a boy Abhay hates his father for his rigidity and callousness, particularly for his attitude towards the queen, Abhay's mother. The queen is neglected and relegated to the isolation of a separate palace with no contact with the Maharaja and his life. Abhay develops contempt for the Maharaja for this gross injustice. As per the traditions of the princely house, Abhay is made to leave his mother's abode as soon as he becomes a grown up boy. He joins the main palace life for his initiation and training as the heir apparent. To draw a small parallel here, in Gita Mehta's *Raj*, this tradition works in the reverse. Jaya, the princess of Barmer is allowed to participate in the male world of horse riding, fencing and such other boyish activities but as soon as she grows up, the women of the house claim her; she is sent to the women's side of the palace and taught feminine activities.

At the age of eleven, Abhay has his first encounter with his father's cold and insensitive approach. The incident took place on the day when Abhay's favorite ram, Cannonball, was killed in a ram fight. Sad and distraught, he started weeping. His father took him to a dark room, asked him to sit in a high-backed chair and holding a glass of whisky said to him, "It is a man's drink... Men who weep cannot call themselves men... We are like lions, we do

not weep for dead lambs.... We never break down in public. There are in everyone's life moments when it is much easier to weep; but it is always more manly not to. Sorrow, grief, is a private thing, like making love." (p. 32-33). The process of initiation started on this day. The Maharaja forced him to drink whisky and then took him to the banquet hall, carved out the eyes from the cooked dish of Cannonball (his favorite ram) and made him eat these in full view of all those present there. Abhay hated him for his insensitivity; he could have killed his father at that moment. This boy of eleven, distraught, terrified and helpless embarked on the journey of self-discovery at that moment.

Beside this, Abhay resents his father's heartless attitude towards Kanakchand, the poor cobbler boy he whips brutally for cheating. It is much later in life that he understands the Maharaja's rage when he, Abhay, himself is infuriated at Kanakchand's audacity and whips him. It does not matter if Kanakchand is a minister in independent India. The author beautifully shows aspects of continuity and change — the cheat Kanakchand grows into a corrupt politician; the prince, now abdicated grows into a traditionalist and recalls nostalgically his father's inordinate pride in his Bedar clan and his faith in Begwad's continuity. At that time Hiroji was the "Maharaja with almost absolute power over five hundred thousand people," now he is dead; Abhay is an ordinary citizen of India, he has abdicated the title, everything has slipped from his hands and he is looking for the familiar anchor. It is in the ominous tiger room that he is first estranged from his father and it is here that he becomes like his father — conservative, seeking succour in old order and unhappy at the quirk of history.

Abhay's initiation and training takes place in different arenas and by different persons. Teachers like Mr. Moreton and Mr. Walter Ludlow, Kanakchand, a poverty stricken friend, Army training, Minnie and Zarina and finally his understanding wife all influence his life in one way or the other. Riding, boxing, music

and fencing; playing cricket and hockey; participating in other sports and games became a part his normal training as a prince. He acknowledges the elevating influence of his teachers during his growing up days. About Mr. Moreton, Abhay says, "I now feel he may have been the greatest single influence of my early days" (p. 40). Mr. Walter Ludlow taught him rules of social virtues. He understood through his interactions with Kanakchand that his father's kingdom has the 'other' face — the face of poverty. But unfortunately, the concept of elimination of poverty never comes on the state's agenda till Praja Mandal makes it an issue after the Independence. His army service provides him with experiences of surviving under extreme hardships, on scanty food and just a bottle of water the whole day; strenuous training, man management and such other measures of army life add to his maturing process. At nineteen, Minnie initiates him into the mysteries of love. He meets Minnie, an Anglo-Indian girl, in Shimla, spends some good time with her, and enjoys the thrill of first dating. He is so enamored of her that he wants to marry her but she flirts with him for a while only to marry another man. Abhay gets a glimpse of corrupt practices when the Maharaja's trusted minister bribes Minnie to get back Abhay's letters and protect him from scandal. That love could be bargained with money power comes as a surprise and shock to unsuspecting Abhay.

Ultimately, Abhay compromises with family norms and marries as per his father's wish. Tradition demands that as an heir apparent he must have a wedded wife; it does not matter how many mistresses and concubines he may have but wedded wife was a necessity. "For people in our position," my father began, "marriage is a sacred thing. It is not a private, purely personal matter at all, but an affair of state. Even the Political Department has an interest. There is a duty, an obligation, to marry someone suitable. Someone whom the people will one day have to accept as their Maharani" (p. 168). Abhay is married to Kamala in a traditional manner and he has a happy life.

With mental and physical growth, Abhay's perspective on life also changes with time. Let us briefly scan the various incidents of his life to see the inner changes. One of these concerns his attitude towards his mother. As a boy Abhay feels sad and angry at the plight of the Maharani living her life in the land of the dead as it were, "My mother lived alone with her dignity, next to the shrine of the satis, in a part of the palace which my father rarely, if ever, visited. She lived in the strictest purdah, surrounded by a horde of women servants and a few ladies-in-waiting.... She was someone already removed from the world, not to be seen or heard, someone condemned to the shadows while still in the land of the living. A sati even though her husband was still alive" (p. 60). When he grows up to be a young man he feels sorry for his mother "cast on the dust heap." He advises her to "break away before it is too late;" to "go somewhere and live life of your own." But the same Abhayraj rejects his mother when finally she deserts and goes away with Abdulla Jan. He is shocked beyond reconciliation, calling her "a bitch" a shameless woman of the streets; a "cheap whore!" and severs all relations with her (p. 319). This is the conventional side of his personality, the same side which cannot tolerate Kanakchand's rise to power; which cannot reconcile to be an "ordinary" Indian citizen of democratic India; which looks back at the kingdom now gone and broods over the loss. This is the result of his upbringing — a "male" steeped in patriarchy; a superior being lording over his subjects; a king with immense power to subdue and rule. To link the incident with Malgonkar's male attitude, let us turn to *The Devil's Wind* where Nana Saheb Peshwa reacts sharply when Kashi, his wedded wife becomes Rana Jung Bahadur's mistress. "You bitch", Nana shouts at her and casts aspersions on her. One wonders, how could Nana forget at that moment his own failings? He had never cared for Kashi when they were in Bithoor; she was as good as a piece of furniture in the palace, a showpiece. She lived with it for twelve years of their wedded life and he had never as much touched her.



Malgonkar draws his characters with master strokes. Abhayraj evolves from a boy to a mature man, as such he is developed slowly vis-à-vis his interactions with other characters such as the Maharaja (his father), his teachers, Mr. Moreton and Mr. Ludlow, Minnie (his friend), Zarina (his concubine) and even Kanakchand (boyhood friend). This does not mean that he is a shadow of the others. He is allowed to develop independently after he joins the army and gets out of the protective atmosphere of the palace. Minnie, who is senior to him in age, makes him sexually aware and reveals to him his identity as a man; this is his period of emotional maturity. Later, Zarina helps him possess himself, and finally it is Kamala's steady and mature love that makes him the man he is — a man of the world, father of two children and a happily married man.

Abhayraj's relationship with his father is the most interesting part of the novel. Hiroji is a formidable figure whom the protagonist (Abhayraj) loves and hates, resists and accepts, opposes and follows. He clashes with the old Maharaja on the issue of nationalist politics, religion, his treatment of the Maharani (Abhay's mother), and the Kanakchand episode. To Hiroji, the nationalists are "Goondas led by traders and lawyers" (p. 13); to Abhay they signify the rising India; to Abhay his mother is the ultimate in purity, for Hiroji she is almost non-existent; the Maharaja's rashness in inducting his eleven year old son into rituals like eating the eye-balls of the cooked ram and gulping down whisky angers young Abhay. Despite this, Abhay glorifies his father, "He was the Maharaja with almost absolute power over five hundred thousand people; I was his heir" (p. 23). He admits, "The most dominant urge of my childhood was to prove my devotion to my father, he strode my horizons like a knight in shining armour, his smile or frown capable of covering the full range of emotions" (p. 24). Finally, Abhay unobtrusively slides into the mold of his father: a stickler for traditions, conservative in his approach, proud of his heritage and an adherent to the princely 'code'. This is his "recognition and return."

Malgonkar seems to be at his best when describing the jungle, tiger hunt, the gloomy tiger room and the eerie atmosphere of the Jamdar-Khana in the old fort of Palapat. He creates the desired atmosphere with powerful imagery. Describing tiger hunt, he gives his readers a glimpse of the topography of Begwad, famous for tigers: the matted jungle, the rugged Sattawan or fifty-seven mountains, and the dry water courses, “Even without being told, you know that you were inside the tiger country.” Such passages bear witness to Malgonkar’s personal knowledge of the terrain and of tiger hunts. Likewise, the tiger room also merits some consideration because here personal mood and the atmosphere match perfectly well to take the story ahead. The novel begins and ends in this room — dark, ominous and menacing with tiger skins watching you and swords and shields glaring at you. In this room, Abhay first angers his father and takes a wicked pleasure for having disturbed his composure; in this room he sits in the last scene and misses the overwhelming presence of his father.

Hiroji and Abhayraj are fictional figures, not historical personages; even Begwad is an imaginary kingdom. However, the historical-political situations are true: Indian’s freedom struggle, Gandhi’s call, the rise of Praja Mandals and the champions of the downtrodden like Kanakchand are all real. It goes to the credit of the writer’s art that he creates harmony between the turbulent period and the aspirations of individuals. The portrayal is life-like and the documented facts have not been tampered with. According to A.N. Dwivedi, *The Princes* symbolically presents the dissolution of the princely states of India; Kanakchand represents the oppressed class and the Bulwara dam project stands for the resistance of the princes to industrialization and technological advancement. Malgonkar, in a way upbraids the Rulers for forestalling progress. Probably, their aim was to let the people live as they have been living for centuries — in darkness of ignorance.

### ***The Devil's Wind***

In writing *The Devil's Wind* Manohar Malgonkar once again enters his favorite arena — Indian history. The focus this time is on Nana Saheb Peshwa, the hero/villain of 1857 uprising. Malgonkar's interest in Nana Saheb Peshwa goes back to his boyhood when he heard stories from his grandfather about the 1857 Revolt and Nana's escape. The story stayed with him and as his scholarly interest in Indian history increased he saw through the British tendency to distort our history and present a maligned picture of Indian heroes and leaders. For them, Shivaji was a "mountain rat", Kanhoji Angrey, a "pirate" and Nana Saheb Peshwa a "monster". This negative portrait needed to be presented from Indian perspective. Malgonkar did it in his books *Kanhoji Angrey* and *The Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur* and now it remained to be done in Nana Saheb's case.

In *The Devil's Wind* this is what he does — dig the history of Indian uprising, shape a perspective and show that Nana Saheb, "a monster to frighten children with," was in fact a soft-hearted man, scared of bloodshed and incapable of malevolence. Malgonkar gives Nana Saheb the privilege to tell his story, to juxtapose the public and the private and to let the reader see the complex historical context, the tensions and the conflicts. His aim is to put the record straight for posterity. Thus it becomes Nana Saheb's autobiography. The full title of the novel is: *The Devil's Wind: Nana Saheb's Story*. Malgonkar carried out deep research, studied the relevant documents and using his historical imagination side by side his artistic imagination he has given us a novel that falls essentially under the category of historical fiction.

Two points need to be clarified before we embark on analyzing the novel. First, the 1850s was a period of violent socio-political changes and restlessness; and second, the disgruntled people needed a leader to give voice to their discontent and anger. In Kanpur, this leader happened to be Nana Saheb Peshwa. When

the rebellion swept Northern India from May 1857 to July, 1858 a period of frenzied brutalities followed with inhuman massacre of men, women and even children by both Indian and British people. Since Nana Saheb Peshwa was a prince and the Sepoys looked to him for guidance and command, the responsibility for all that happened fell on him despite the fact that the Peshwa himself was, at that time, a confused and frightened man, uncertain whether to join one of the sides or to remain neutral. He never wanted violence of the type that erupted. History took its course and when it came to be written based on eye-witness accounts, personal memoirs, and letters and dispatches of the British officers, soldiers, teachers and others who were part of the turmoil, the accusing finger pointed towards Nana Saheb. Malgonkar writes in his 'Author's Note', "Every book is written in anger and in every one the principal villain is the same: Nana Saheb — infamous, dastardly, despicable, crafty demon, barbarous butcher, and arch assassin, Nana."

Malgonkar samples three western views as 'Prolegomena' to substantiate his statement. The British view of Indian 'mutiny' (for us it is our First War of Independence) given by A. Miles and A. Pattle in 1885 says, "Few names are more conspicuous in the annals of crime than that of Nana Saheb, who achieved an immortality of infamy by his perfidy and cruelty at Cawnpore." The French records make him a man-eating monster who "had a roasted English child brought in occasionally on a pike for him to examine with his pince-nez." The American view refers to, "Nana Saheb massacring entire British colony at Cawnpore." On the contrary, in India, he became a revered figure; "parents privately warned their children not to believe the history taught in schools" and in villages folk songs and ballads were composed extolling him as a patriot. The songs are still sung with great relish. After our Independence, India recognized his contribution and acclaimed Nana Saheb as a hero. At Bithoor his memorial bears the inscription: "KNOWING THE DANGERS/HE EMBRACED

A REVOLT/ HIS SACRIFICE SHALL LIGHT OUR PATH/  
LIKE AN ETERNAL FLAME.” These two diametrically opposed positions fascinated Malgonkar and in *The Devil's Wind*, he tried to present Indian point of view.

It becomes imperative for a novelist who wishes to base his story on historical facts to integrate factual history and fictional elements to achieve the desired effect. If history is superimposed on the requirements of the story-line, much of its fictional appeal is lost. If story overwhelms history, the veracity is lost. Malgonkar weaves the historical material with the life story of Nana Saheb so dexterously that the public and the private remain separate yet woven within the fabric. The public domain is of then existing discontent, revolt and violence, it needed to be shown objectively; the private sphere pertains to his “inner” life of feelings and sentiments hence was to be portrayed subjectively.

Malgonkar gives free hand to Nana Saheb to recount his story from his birth through growing up years followed by various influences, the Revolt and after. The factual history is distributed all through the story for background information and his personal life of love and hate, emotions and sentiments, fears and hopes is slowly built around these facts to construct his personality. For example, the helpless condition of royalty is highlighted in the opening paragraph of the novel. “Monarchs! my father would often say with contempt, “They were more like dummy calves... skins mounted on sticks so that the great cow that is the public should gaze upon them with adoration and go on lactating freely” (p. 15). His personal helplessness as an adopted son of Peshwa Bajirao II, is expressed through his thoughts, “If I had not been adopted, the burden I was destined to carry through life would certainly have been lighter, for my parents were humble and God-fearing...” (p. 16); as a boy of ordinary parents, he would have been free and happy in an ordinary way; as the adopted son of the Peshwa, he has to share the burden of

that of the Peshwa dynasty. As James Dayananda points out, the novel has two stories — a candid, factual narrative of the events of the Revolt of 1857 and second, a fictional narrative, a kind of emotional history of the people of India, their hopes and fears and “more specifically, the ‘inward life’ of Nana Saheb, an account of what went on inside Nana, a nineteenth-century prince who in one fashion or another expresses what the revolt was all about in essence” (Dayananda, p. 140).

The Novel is divided in three parts: ‘Bithoor’, ‘Kanpur’ and ‘Gone Away’. Within this framework, the author presents the course of events that ultimately led to Nana’s defeat and escape, the end of East India Company’s rule and the promulgation of the British Queen’s rule. The first two parts deal intensively with documented history, while in the last part (Part III) Nana Saheb Peshwa’s present is seen in the light of his past.

The history of the Revolt starts with the widespread discontent and distrust of the British — their behavior and policies. The British stratagem to exploit Indians was well-planned and calculated. Dalhousie’s The Doctrine of Lapse came as a great shock to the rulers; the farmers and taluqdars were unhappy with land reforms, the people saw socio-cultural reforms as interference in their traditional ways of living and were afraid of conversion to Christianity; the Sepoys were apprehensive of animal fat on cartridges. In brief, the discontent could be seen in all sections of the society: the nobility, who dreaded the Doctrine of Lapse; the taluqdars, who had lost their land to farmers as the result of land reforms and the masses who feared conversion. Things took a grim turn when Oudh (Avadh) was annexed and its treasure was looted with impunity. Begum Hazrat Mahal of Oudh, Begum Zeenat of Delhi, the Mad Mullah of Fayzabad and Laxmibai, the Rani of Jhansi were deeply incensed by the way the British officers treated them. The seed of conspiracy was sown; tension started mounting on all sides and the rebellious mood

was setting in slowly. The revolt did not spurt suddenly but it remained seething for long. Nana sums up the condition of the rulers thus: “The ruling princes were the Maharajas who had been allowed to remain as vassals of the Company. Now they were like jungle animals waiting for a game drive to begin, paralysed with fear. Before their very eyes, Carnatic, Nagpur, Satara, Jhansi had been liquidated because their rulers had failed to produce sons and Oudh, whose King had so many sons, because Dalhousie believed that God wanted him to do so” (p. 88).

Part I is set in Bithoor, the residence of Bajirao Peshwa II who was banished here from Poona by the British. As an adopted son of Bajirao II, Dhondu Pant, alias Nana Saheb Peshwa enjoyed a happy childhood with no responsibilities and all luxuries at his command. Nana’s fencing teacher was the famous Tantya Tope who played a significant role in the rebellion. His childhood companion was Mani, whom he would have married but for a snag in his horoscope. She was married into the royal family of Jhansi and has gone down history as the brave Rani of Jhansi. Nana tells us of two facts from his horoscope — first he, the son of Madhav Bhatt was destined to become a king; and second, there was a curse that any woman married to him would die if the marriage is consummated. True to the prediction, Dhondu, son of an ordinary Brahmin, was adopted by Bajirao Peshwa II and he became the Peshwa; Nana’s first wife died after the consummation of their marriage. He was later married to Kashi with whom he never had any physical relations. She remained just a religious and social necessity and ultimately, in Nepal she readily became Rana Jung Bahadur’s mistress.

In retrospect Nana often remembers his natural parents and feels that had he not been adopted, his life would have been less burdened than it is now as the Peshwa heir carrying the sins of the Peshwa household. He further adds, “My world has been debased and defiled by his (Bajirao II) misdeeds; the realization that I was

powerless to undo the harm he has done is like some unsightly birthmark I bear” (p.16). Nana hated Bajirao, his adoptive father. Even towards the end of the novels he writes, “I have never felt anything but deep contempt for my adoptive father” (p. 295). And yet, he was always respectful to him. With such small touches, Malgonkar shows with the skill of an artist, Nana Saheb’s human qualities. Part one builds up Nana’s life, his loves affairs, his concubines and his relations with his wife for whom he feels guilty all through his life. In one of the parting scenes, when the impoverished Peshwa gives the family heirloom that happens to be Mastani’s ear rings to Kashi, he feels overwhelmed. He feels sad for having neglected her. These and some such snippets show him as soft-hearted and well-meaning. In the Bithoor palace Nana was exposed to corroding external influences like: the corrupt East India Company officers; the ever seething anger against the British; Bajirao’s lecherous life; his disgraceful behavior. His personal life revolved round his concubines, sex and luxury.

Bajirao II was hated by his subjects for his cowardice, greed and perverseness; the East India Company (known among Indians as John Company) officers despised him and were waiting for him to die. After his death, they stopped his pension, snatched away whatever fragment of territory was with the family and divested him of his titles. Nana records, “I, the successor of the last Peshwa, started life as an ordinary citizen of India — an India that had become the East India Company’s private property and pieces of which could be bought and sold on London markets” (p. 23). One cannot miss the bitterness in the tone of the narrator and also the veracity of the situation.

The tension prevalent in the air has been dramatized through a conversation between Nana and Hamlah Wheeler. They are talking about the Indian soldiers and Nana remarks with irritation: “When you are dealing with mercenaries, you learn to think only in terms of rupees,” I said.... “Jack Sepoy may



not have received regular pay in our employ, but he was given jagirs, land grants.” Again Nana Saheb Peshwa instigates Wheeler, “The Company has consigned all Indians to a life of serfdom.... Just as no sepoy can rise above a sergeant, a civilian cannot rise above your newest ‘griffin’. Only forty years ago, their fathers were ministers and governors — they themselves can never rise above clerks” (pp. 114–15).

To the serious issue of annexation, Malgonkar’s art lends some humor too. Nana Saheb seems to be expressing his irritation and annoyance by name-calling: Dalhousie is ‘The God who rides a buffalo’ — that is Yama, the god of death. Todd is pronounced as ‘toad’; his long nose is termed ‘beak’, Nepal Prime Minister’s laugh is likened to ‘hissing’. Powerless as Nana was to deal with the British face to face, he devices his revenge by using such derogatory remarks; however, by resorting to humor Malgonkar redeems history from being boring.

The atmosphere for the rebellion was building up all these years. The date fixed for the uprising was June 23<sup>rd</sup>. Somehow General Wheeler seems to have got the whiff of the conspiracy. He tries to probe Nana at one point, “I was hoping you’d tell me something about June twenty-third.” Nana laughs off the question; it is the “anniversary of Plassey” he says but in his heart of hearts he rejoices to think that on this day “The Devil’s Wind would rise and unshackle Mother India.”

The Revolt, however, spurred ahead of the fixed date, in May 1857. Nana Saheb, now thirty-three, is a mature man, held in esteem by his men and respected by the British. He is in a dilemma whether to join the rebels or to stay neutral. The events of Meerut put him in a quandary:

What happened in Meerut frightened me and made me realize that, for me, the issues were not clear cut. I could not, in my own mind, separate the national struggle from personal involvement. I was on intimate terms with many British and

Eurasian families,... Could I now stand by and watch the men and women who had sung and danced and laughed in my house slaughtered by howling mobs? They had done no harm to me, or indeed to India. Why should they have to be sacrificed for all the wrongs piled up by the East India Company over a hundred years? (p. 127).

In part two, the scene shifts to Kanpur and deals at length with human courage and endurance in the face of calamity. The rebels are gaining an upper hand and every day there are reports of brutalities. There is fury and hatred in the atmosphere on both sides and the need of the hour is to get some sane voice to control the passions. Hillersdon gives the responsibility to Nana to restore normalcy in Kanpur. Soon Nana realizes that he had no choice but to join the Revolt. He hoped "to be the voice of reason" and go down history as "the man who had tempered a revolt, who had helped his own people to achieve freedom from foreign conquerors with only the minimum bloodshed." But unfortunately, Nana was destined to become the "monster" of the massacre; the villain of Bibighar atrocities and the Satichaura slaughter. "It hurts because it is not true," says Nana at the end of the novel when he sees a plaque figuring his name (p. 199).

After killing British officers, women and children the rebels marched to Delhi; captured the city and proclaimed Bahadur Shah as the Mughal Emperor. The English started fleeing wherever they could and there was mayhem everywhere. The mutineers received popular support in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. By June, Kanpur was captured by the rebels and soon the rebels were in control of the entire Ganges valley. Nana Peshwa in Kanpur, Rani Jhansi in Bundelkhand, Begum of Avadh, the Mad Mullah, Tatyia Tope were the leaders on Indian side. Malgonkar confines himself to Kanpur and depicts the happenings there because it was Nana's field of action. In Kanpur, seeing the plight of the British, Nana offered to give them safe passage. It was then that the mutineers went out of his control and the two inhuman massacres took

place — of Satichaura and Bibighar. Terrible atrocities broke out with carnage, butchery and bloodshed everywhere. Nana Saheb recounts again and again how miserable he felt, how guilty for his inability to control the rebels but it was too late.

Part Three traces Nana Saheb's life after his defeat in Kanpur till his escape and asylum in Nepal. This part bears direct reference to facts in the first two parts. The events turn fast — Kanpur defeat, the fall of Delhi, Nana's escape, British atrocities in Lucknow, the second fall of Kanpur, destruction of Bithoor by Hope Grant to obliterate all traces of the Peshwa. Finally, Nana escapes into Nepal but his travails do not end. It was next to impossible to get asylum in Nepal because Rana Jung Bahadur was aware of Nana's reputation and was scared of British backlash. After Nana's wife becomes the Rana's mistress and Nana surrenders his Naulakha necklace he is granted asylum with several conditions attached to it.

In Nana's story the historical personages are real: Nana Saheb, Kashi, Champa, Azim (his secretary) Tantya Tope, Sir Hugh Wheeler (the British Commanding General), Eliza, Wheeler's daughter, Hillersdon and a lot of them. Malgonkar portrays them in their specific roles, gives them interesting characteristics and makes them convincing human beings, not pawns of history.

Though Nana Saheb Peshwa is the real personage of history, his portrayal depends on the play of imagination. Nana is so hurt by the British that all through the novel he constantly broods over his role in the rebellion; he is at pains to prove his innocence; he needs answers to several vital questions: why were the Indians punished while for almost similar war crimes the British were exonerated? Do you call it the British sense of justice that Neill and Renaud (whom he calls Ahi and Mahi, the two demon brothers); Fredric Cooper and many others should be applauded as heroes for their atrocities? Neill and Renaud made Indians lick the blood-clotted floor of Bibighar; in Amritsar, Cooper locked the

rebels in a windowless room and suffocated them to death. The British soldiers and officers burnt villages and roasted innocent Indians. If Nana is the villain so is Queen Victoria; guilty because in a way she instigated the atrocities perpetuated by her subjects (p. 298). Why segregate Nana as the Bibighar monster?

Nana comments philosophically that actions and reactions offer composite picture. "If Daryaganj and other villages had not been burned down as guilty villages, Satichaura might never have happened; and if Fatepur had not been destroyed merely as a follow through to a victorious military action, Bibighar might never have happened" (p. 219). The brutalities of both Indian and Britishers are unpardonable. The British were equally unfaithful and disloyal as some of the Indians; why segregate Indians; why blame Nana? Malgonkar's Nana is not guilty of atrocities. If in every plaque in India Nana's name figures as the "murderer" on the same premise British names should also be there.

Nana Saheb was sincere in his efforts to save the situation in Kanpur but he became the victim of circumstances. After all, Nana was not heroic and Malgonkar does not allow his protagonist to project himself as a dare devil superman of the rebellion. Nana was an ordinary man who had to wear the mantle of the Peshwa and bear the burden of Peshwai. Not fiery by temperament he was an easy-going man who would rather keep neutral and enjoy the friendship of both parties. With this vacillation and uncertainty of his temperament he was incapable of taking any firm decision and that went against him. He was in a tight corner: since he had good relations with the British he was not trusted by Indians; being an Indian ruler, the British did not trust him. "My loyalties were hopelessly intermixed, and my hatred far from pure," he admits (p. 78)

Malgonkar's language is smooth but when he has to describe military action he switches over to powerful strokes. For example, his description of the outbreak of the revolt in Meerut is vigorous

and fast-paced: “They were like stampeding cattle and indeed some were like mad dogs. In throwing off their yoke, they threw away all restraints. There was no purpose in what they proceeded to do and no sense. They looted the Meerut bazaar and set fire to shops; they hunted down their officers as though they were wild animals, and some went berserk and broke into their officers’ bungalows and butchered their wives and children” (p. 126). In Delhi, they created the same raucous. Shouting “A kingdom awaits you, O Lord of the Universe” they hailed the old, tottering Emperor who “trembled like a leaf about to fall, realizing that this was an ultimatum as well as an invitation, and bowed to the inevitable.”

The success of the novel lies in Malgonkar’s handling of the theme. He does not take liberties with historical facts yet he is able to defend his narrator-hero and project him as a man of peace, an unfortunate victim of circumstances. Malgonkar gives Nana Saheb space to justify his actions, explain the historical situations and put before posterity a clean image. Malgonkar’s aim in writing this historical novel was not to exonerate Nana Saheb but at least to give him a chance to tell his story and to give him his due as a human being. He invents Nana’s thoughts and feelings, blends his personal experiences with the facts of history, looks at the “inner” man and creates a Nana Saheb Peshwa we would recognize. In 1874, sixteen years after the tumultuous events Nana sits in his room in Constantinople and looking at the scenic beauty outside his window he broods, “This pale world is not mine. The vivid colors of my land and the profound silence of the Ganges are somehow closer to me than my surroundings. And yet I do not yearn to go back. I have crossed the Ganges for the last time” (pp. 314–15). Nana’s story ends here but not our journey with him. The Peshwa stands before us as a richly alive man who may have fumbled through life but who never stooped down to be the “villainous monster”. Malgonkar’s Nana Saheb remains the leader, if not the hero, of our First War of Independence — a

man of learning, a noble friend, a refined gentleman and a man who believed in justice and fairness.

To sum up the two novels, let us recall that the royal India inside the imperial British India was as exciting, exotic and fascinating to the British as it was puzzling. If it dazzled them by its opulence, it irked them by the eccentricity and extravagance of the rulers who would squander lakhs on the marriage ceremonies of their pets or dolls while their people went hungry. This was also the India of tiger hunts, elephant rides, of marble palaces, playing fountains, rich banquets, exclusive gardens and fabulous paintings — all that could excite the imagination. The princes and their enigmatic lifestyles have always been a matter of common curiosity. A large body of literature — fiction and non-fiction has appeared on this class which includes the maharajas, Nawabs, kings, rulers and Nizams. Both Indian and British writers have tried to record their impressions of princely life in India.

Mulk Raj Anand's *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* stands out distinctly for its stark presentation of a distraught prince. Kamala Markandaya's depiction of Balaji Rao III and his reign and Prince Ravi's inclination towards the new India gives another view of this reality. Gita Mehta takes up the case from Jaya's point of view, the princess of Barmer in *Raj*. All these novels end with the dissolution of the kingdoms and the ruler's reactions to it. But in Manohar Malgonkar's case the synthesis of historical facts and fictional fancy stands supreme. *The Princes* is contemporary history; *The Devil's Wind* is long past history. Both establish that the charms of princely life have not diminished and the author's pen brings these to life by depicting not only the appeal of the princely India but also its eccentricities, troubles, tribulations and tensions.

In the next chapter, we propose to see another aspect of our colonial history — the interplay of violence and non-violence, human frailties and the price one has to pay for one's treachery.

# 4

## *Violence/Non-Violence: A Bend in the Ganges and Combat of Shadows*

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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.

— Combat of Shadows

They will end up making us a nation of sheep. That is what Gandhi and his followers want. That is exactly what the British want us to be — three hundred millions of sheep.

— A Bend in the Ganges

Manohar Malgonkar often reiterated in his interviews that he did not subscribe to any philosophical doctrine. He wrote whatever he saw and experienced and his philosophy, if any, emerged out of it. But Malgonkar seems to have faith in the Gita. In all his works, its message to face the vicissitudes of life is either obviously mentioned or subtly implied. The Maharaja in *The Princes*, Nana Saheb in *The Devil's Wind* and Kiran Garud in *Distant Drum* draw courage from the Gita and stand up to face the battle of life. But in *A Bend in the Ganges* the doctrine of the Gita which says 'take up your fight and do not cringe' becomes the bedrock of the story.

Of the two novels to be examined here, *A Bend in the Ganges* has partition for its background; and *Combat of Shadows* is set in a tea garden and has racial intolerance as the main theme. Malgonkar had worked as a manager of a tea garden after his retirement from the army and was well aware of the life pattern there. As for the freedom struggle and the partition of the country, he had lived through the times. This he confirms in his interview with James Dayananda. Apparently, Manohar Malgonkar (born in 1913) was growing up during the 1920s and 30s when the country was passing through the turbulent period of freedom struggle. Events like Gandhiji's call for non-violent resistance, the British atrocities on peaceful demonstrators, the Indian revolutionaries' rejection of the philosophy of non-violence, the ever widening communal divide and the coming and going of commissions and committees were creating colorful and fearful cameo in the socio-political field. Malgonkar could not have missed these details.

Conflict is an integral part of any work of fiction for the very reason that fiction is about power, personalities and social and political interactions and tries to understand its psychodynamics which in turn may lead to social/political change. Where there is human interaction, there is bound to be conflicting situations. Conflict refers to some form of resistance, friction, disagreement or discord within a group or with members of some other group. *A Bend in the Ganges* and *Combat of Shadows*, have conflicts in plentiful — racial, communal, political, ideological and social.

### ***Combat of Shadows* (1962)**

In the chronological sequence of Malgonkar's oeuvre, *Combat of Shadows* is his second novel. G.S.Amur, however, opines that he would like to place *Combat of Shadows* as his first and call it a novel "of unusual distinction" (Amur 62). *Distant Drum* has a positive depiction of Indo-British relations. The martial code was at play which governed the officers; and integrity, honesty and duty were at its core. This cannot be said of *Combat of*



*Shadows*. It is set in the civilian world of high ranking British officers of the tea garden and shows moral disintegration of the officers. In an interview in 1999 Malgonkar termed his novel “dated”, set in the 1930s it shows an aspect of the Raj which is no longer relevant today. It covers the period from 1938 to 1940 when colonial power was at its peak and racial discrimination and superior-inferior syndrome was a common feature of Indo-British relationship. To a casual reader *Combat of Shadows* may appear to be the story of racial discrimination but on deeper study, one comes across a number of themes of which identity and rootlessness is an important one. James Dayananda identifies five prominent themes in Malgonkar’s works in general: (i) Indo-British relationships at personal level, (ii) Initiation, (iii) History of India, (iv) Man woman relationships, and (v) Hunting. Of these, *Combat of Shadows* has Indo-British relationships and the themes of hunting followed by man woman relationship. It does not deal with initiation and history.

It is the tale of a young Anglo-Indian woman, Ruby Miranda, who dreams of becoming a ‘pukka’ memsahib by marrying an English man and wash away the stigma of being an Anglo-Indian — an unenviable ‘outsider’ position when one is not accepted by the British and one does not want to be accepted by Indians. She sees in Henry Winton a prospective husband to take her out of her identity prison. Pretty as she is, Ruby Miranda has not bargained for rejection. It comes to her as a shock when Henry considers her Anglo-Indian origin as inferior and prefers a white woman. For him Anglo-Indian Miranda is good enough to be flirted with, used and then discarded. Miranda reacts sharply but is helpless in the face of the historical situation of Henry’s superior status as a Britisher and her dangling status as an Anglo-Indian. Henry Winton’s moral degradation and the conflict generated by his vainglorious attitude of superiority form another nucleus of the story.

The epigraph to the novel is from the Gita, which is a pointer towards the title of the novel. It reads thus: "Desire and aversion are opposite shadows. Those who allow themselves to be overcome by their struggle can't rise to the knowledge of reality." The twin forces of desire and aversion are let loose in Silent Hill Tea Garden. Desire and aversion create fear and longing, acceptance and rejection, jealousy and revenge. These are those dark recesses in human heart that make human beings unwary of their behavior, create confusion and account for much of their trouble, not only at personal level as individuals but also at racial level. The denizens of this world of the Assam tea estates are the British officers, the Indian coolies and the politician Jugal Kishore who whips up passions by his petty manipulations. The shadows cast by desire and aversion fight (combat) with each other to possess the inhabitants' consciousness; and since they let these forces run wild and overlook the need for desires and aversions to be controlled for a healthy moral and ethical life, they face trouble. This is exactly where the inhabitants of the tea estate fail. Henry Winton and the officers of the tea garden have pawned their souls to the devil; they are leading a life of moral decay away from the prying eyes of the world in the remote areas of Assam. Henry Winton is destined to pay for it with his life, which Amur terms as "the hero's apocalyptic realization of the moment of truth." (p. 62).

The novel has a double theme: the relationship between the British masters, the Indian coolies and the Anglo-Indians at public and personal levels; and second, hunting (here it is the fear-evoking one-tusker elephant). These two themes run in the two parts of the novels — Part I, "Prelude to Home Leave" and Part II, "Return from Home Leave". The story culminates by coming full circle when two deaths occur in close proximity — Eddie Trevor a victim of Henry's fears and aversion, and of Henry, a victim of his own moral fall. Within this framework stands the world of human frailties, their fears and desires and their inability to perceive the reality.

The story opens in a tea garden in North-West Assam between 1938 and 1940. Henry Winton is a Junior Manager of Silent Hill Tea Garden situated in a remote area cut off from the world. Their head office is at Chinnar forty-two miles from Silent Hills where they have the Highland Club; English officers converge here to relax and go trout fishing, boating, dancing or clay-pigeon shooting — normal relaxation activities of the English officers. The first problem Henry faces soon after his arrival comes from Gauri, Jugal Kishore's niece whom he catches pilfering a bag of tea. He interrogates her sternly but draws a blank as she simply stares at him not able to understand a word of English. Finally in irritation and helplessness he warns her firmly, "If ever I catch you robbing my garden again, I will give you a thrashing, understand? I'll flog you with a horse-whip and then hand you over to the Police" (p. 9). This is just a small indication of the East-West encounter on which the author proposes to build his theme. Henry, the representative of the ruling race at the tea garden will soon show his English snobbishness and superiority complex in dealing with Indians and Anglo-Indians whom he considers as good as animals.

Henry, thirty years of age and still a bachelor, has been with the Company for five years. Back home in England life dealt him several blows and marred his self-confidence which probably he tries to recover in India by bossing over the hapless natives. A public school product, he aspired to be a football player for Oxford but his father's sudden death thwarted his ambition. Later, he became a dealer in second-hand cars but failed miserably. When Henry lands a job in India he comes with the baggage of his failures and temperamental incompatibility to handle difficult situations. All his efforts are directed towards making himself a success for which he could be ruthless and discard integrity, honesty and fellow feelings. The Henry we meet is a snobbish and selfish man, conceited, jealous and revengeful.

Henry has two glaring faults that in turn are linked to his other flaws — a wavering mind and weakness for women. Henry Winton's boss Captain Cockburn of Brindal Tea Company introduces him to the Chinnar Highland Club. Henry enjoys the relaxed pace of English life of the club and looks forward to frequent visits. Once, on the invitation of Sir Jeffrey Dart and Lady Dart to spend an evening with them, Winton and Cockburn proceed to Chinnar but due to a landslide they have stop at Tinapur where they attend a gala evening at the Railway Institute, Tinapur. Here Henry meets Eddie Trevor and his girl friend Ruby Miranda, which happens to be an important stopover for the story.

Henry likes Ruby Miranda at first sight; but a chance introduction to Jean Walters at the Chinnar Club the next evening displaces Miranda and Jean takes over his fancy by her bold overtures and English attractiveness. During that fateful evening there is a talk of the one-tusked elephant Tista. This rogue elephant had killed four villagers and was evoking fear in the villagers. The District Commissioner assigns Henry Winton the task to kill it. Manohar Malgonkar joins the three thematic threads at this point: Henry's relationships with Ruby (Anglo-Indian), Jean (English) and the Elephant (hunting).

However, Jean does not visualize marriage and rejects his marriage proposal. Henry turns to Ruby Miranda an attractive young woman he had met at the Tinapur. A young woman "nice to look at, ...with the sort of lush, overflowing loveliness; ... bold and flashy and dark; burnished black hair falling on smooth tan shoulders, a clinging satiny, ice-blue dress daringly low cut and showing off a lovely figure; and he was stabbed by a slight unreasoning pang of jealousy towards her partner" (p. 17-18). At that moment Cockburn had made his mischievous suggestion, "Why don't you take her on? ...Why, give her a job, man. That's the sort of woman who will stop you from going crazy in that

antiseptic bungalow of yours” (p. 19). Cockburn’s suggestion, coupled with his own weakness for women, excites Henry and soon after appointing her as the Headmistress at Silent Hill Primary School he gets involved with her. Incidentally, Ruby, though all too willing to submit to him has her doubts and wonders if this “heavily built Englishman” had any genuine interest in her.

Miranda’s interest in Henry Winton was not selfless either. She and her mother were eager to wash off their Anglo-Indian origin by her marriage to an English man. Mrs. Miranda considers their Anglo-Indian roots as bane of “rootlessness, of not belonging; not being wanted, even being despised in the teeming Brown world of India” (p. 98). Henry was not aware of this racial and ethnic conflict within the Eurasians and Ruby could never explain to him her need to marry him. She could never have explained to Henry Winton “the throbbing compulsive craving of Anglo-Indian to seek kinship with the West;” but she dreams of becoming a white man’s wife and Henry is the best bet she has.

Things however change for them both after Henry’s return from leave in Part II of the novel. Now he is a married man — married to Jean Walters. Ruby has lost all hopes; all her efforts to trap him into marrying her have proved futile. She hates Henry and prepares to marry her boy friend Eddie Trevor. When Henry again shows interest in her she realizes his perversions and in aversion she shouts at him, “No, you brute: you white swine: I hate you — I hate you... (p. 152).” Henry is taken aback by her verbal violence and in an unguarded moment he reveals his deep seated prejudice against the Anglo-Indians, “you half-caste slut... you don’t deserve anything better than your colony and your half-breed lovers — your Eddie Trevors and God knows who else” (p. 153).

Once the control is lost and his innermost prejudices revealed, it is easy for Henry to slide into the dark abyss of revenge, hatred and fear. Taking revenge on Trevor was high on his agenda. Now

Trevor is his sworn enemy because Eddie Trevor has snatched both his wife and beloved. In rejecting Henry, the two women seem to have judged his character correctly — a man with no integrity. Ruby throws him out of her life and Jean flings it on his face directly when she tells him that he had not been faithful to her; he had never given her his whole-hearted love. “You have always held back — and that a woman can never forget,” she says and leaves him to live with her aunt in Poona. The third woman in his life Gauri turns far more damaging than Ruby and Jean. She gives a fatal blow to his manhood and completes the circle. Henry evinces no sexual interest in the dark, unattractive girl; yet she becomes instrumental in breaking him. She appears only four times in the novel: in the first appearance we see Gauri as a pilferer whom Henry catches and upbraids. She appears as a helpless girl at this point; in the second encounter, Jugal Kishore presents her as Henry’s prospective mistress: here she appears beautiful and an object of desire; in the third meeting, she leads the strike and becomes a challenge to his authority; and in the fourth appearance Gauri shows him the naked truth — his wife Jean in the company of her lover, Eddie. After dealing him the final jolt she just laughs, “...all she did was to laugh and laugh... her laughter went sprawling higher and higher cutting like a knife into the dead silence of Wallach’s Folly” (p. 253).

How these incidents turn ominous and culminate in hunting and deaths forms the crux of the novel. Hunting is one of the major themes of the novel. The first casualty of the rogue elephant’s anger is Kistulal, the expert tracker. The description of the grassland and the flora and fauna — the day-long drive for red jungle cock, chukore, hare and three kinds of pheasant — and the officers’ day-long annual rough-shoot, is graphic (p. 25–26). Elephant shooting is the central motif of the story. The elusive elephant becomes a god for the villagers; for Henry it is a sinister force come to seek him out and destroy him, an enemy more hateful than Jugal Kishore. The elephant is a force of nature who

walks all the thirty miles tracking Henry and reaches near his bungalow after one year. Henry as a hunter is not supposed to be afraid of his hunt. "A true hunter is not afraid of the thing he wants to kill, nor does he hate it" but Henry is secretly afraid of the elephant and he hates him because he is afraid. Malgonkar has skillfully organized his hunting experiences in this part of the novel and has joined the different threads of the novel in a unifying whole.

Henry Winton's jealousy, vengeance, hatred, falsehood and cunning come into full play after these incidents. Unfortunately, after failing to kill the rogue elephant he develops an innate fear of hunting. He becomes a haunted man. The elephant, majestic and awe-inspiring becomes "the symbol of his unconquerable fear as well as an adversary determined to seek him out and destroy him" (Amur p. 69). His failure to test fire the cartridges before setting out for hunting is his failure as a hunter and is also indicative of ill-omen. Let us remember that Henry has a dread of failure. Henry and Cockburn camouflage Kistulal's death in a blatant lie, which is an indication of his further fall. For a British sahib, failure was unthinkable. The mantra was to succeed at any cost.

Kistulal's accidental death gives Henry a clue to kill Eddie using the same strategy that eliminated Kistulal. Opportunity comes to him when he is ordered to shoot the rogue elephant roaming in the Koyna valley. Incidentally, Henry sprains his ankle and is unable to walk. Eddie offers to do this task for him. Henry readily accepts his offer seeing an opportune moment to take revenge on Eddie. He gives Eddie a box of defective cartridges along with his powerful rifle and as was expected, the cartridges did not work and the infuriated beast trampled Eddie as he had trampled Kistulal. Eddie's death is duly publicized as an accident but those who knew Henry could not believe the story. Would they exonerate him? No!

Ruby, Sir Jeffrey and Pasupati plan to eliminate this man who was treacherous and unreliable. He is sent to the Game cottage on the pretext of checking the artificial moon and is killed in a fire that engulfs the cottage. Before his death they send him the empty cartridge-shell recovered from the site of elephant shooting and the ear-rings he had presented to Ruby. That was the moment of truth for Henry Winton, “bringing with it a fleeting spasm of realization, steadying his mind and restoring cold reason as though for a quick summing up, centering his thoughts on essentials.... The smell of paraffin was strong in his nostrils, and the flames were leaping all about him” (p.289). This was a terrible death — lonely, suffocating, and heart-rending.

Henry’s moral degeneration pervades the novel. Particularly corroding is the racial hatred for Indians and Eurasians. That is what Jugal Kishore flings at his face, “your failing is that you cannot bear Indians, yet your tragedy is that you are doomed to work in this country...” (p. 111–12). Henry’s capacity to hate is monstrous: he hates Eddie because he is an Anglo-Indian, he cannot marry Ruby on the same prejudice; he cannot accept dark-skinned Gauri, although he craves for her body, Kistulal’s death does not matter because he is an Indian coolie, the Indian workers in the tea garden are “like animals” (p. 143) and so on. The list of his sins is long. To Jugal Kishore he says, “God help India if people like you are to be elected to assemblies. You are crooked, without a spark of decency, corrupt... and quite immoral” (p. 109). Henry assesses his character accurately but fails to assess Jugal Kishore’s nuisance value and sneakiness to create troubles. Jugal Kishore breaks Henry’s morale by pitting Gauri against him, organizing the strike, forestalling his plan to join the war and thus he plans his doom.

The ending of the novel is gloomy and critics, by and large do not approve of it. Henry pays the price for his moral decay, greed and fear. Besides this, in the public realm, he pays the



price for his racial prejudices. Henry's mania for English women, his inclination towards all that is British and his rejection of all that is native brings about his downfall and destruction. The one-tusked elephant that evokes fear in him, Ruby who stirs up desire, and Eddie and others who induce aversion in him cast the shadow on his life and career. They create a composite design and become instrumental in bringing about his downfall. Desire and aversion, as discussed earlier in this chapter, are dangerous because they block self-knowledge and truth. Henry realizes this in his last moment.

Henry is guilty but how far is it fair to put the blame squarely on him? Are not almost all Britishers in the novel guilty of racial discrimination; only that they are able to camouflage their hate? Henry is a public school product and as Ashis Nandi recounts in *The Intimate Enemy*, the English public schools instilled superiority complex in the boys as future rulers of the Empire and trained them to look down upon subject countries/cultures as inferior. Sir Jeffrey Dart is another representative of the Ruling class, he advises Henry not to "cross the line" in his relationship with Ruby Miranda; Cockburn suggests to him to hide the truth about Kistulal's death. Their motto is that an English officer must uphold his superior status at all costs. Cockburn cautions him to be wary of telling the truth about Kistulal incident; truth "will kill your reputation as a big game hunter.... Sudden will never forgive you for having let down the side.... If you are determined to go of your career here, you cannot afford to be tied down to a suburban conscience..." (pp. 89-90). Intrinsicly, Henry could never stand failures, "There was no room in India for Sahibs who failed, that was the over-riding truth; they were despised even more by their class than by the Indians. Failure was unthinkable; it was the abyss, dark and bottomless" (p. 90).

As regards inter-racial encounters, all the officers are guilty of it. Even Sudden Dart is also not above board; he uses a coolie

woman to satisfy his lust, when she is pregnant he marries her off to his watchman. Several other English officers of tea estates use native poor women and silence them by paying a few hundred rupees. For the British officers the Indian coolies are commodities to satisfy their needs. This attitude shows the general atmosphere of moral and ethical decay. Malgonkar has shown the problems of Indian society of the 1930s–1940s in general. The Indian laborers and coolies, self-serving politicians, snobbish British officers and businessmen, their club-life, the power they wielded over scores of men and women working for them, and the Anglo-Indians with their identity problem people the world of this work making the novel a finely etched portrait of the society of flux.

Henry deserves our understanding, if not sympathy. Many a time he shows uncanny capacity to analyze his actions and regrets his weakness. When he is lenient towards Gauri, and lets her go unpunished, he feels uneasy with a sense of shame. He berates himself: “He had given in to an absurd, purely impulsive weakness of mind which was not in tune with the recognized behavior-pattern of his calling in the East. You could not run a tea estate if you acquired a reputation that you connive at thieving” (p. 5). Similarly, after unleashing extreme brutalities on the strikers, he shivers and feels nauseated. “His whole being ached to get away from it all, before he was irretrievably sucked in, before he learnt to accept physical violence to passive, unresisting men and women as a part of life... or before he broke down altogether” (p. 137). People like Jugal Kishore, unscrupulous and devilish see to it that he gets sucked in the darkness; that he is destroyed. We do not exonerate Henry Winton, nor do we try to justify his viciousness, we are just trying to see his human side which is intrinsically weak.

Henry Winton, who finds life a bliss in his sprawling bungalow amid the lush green beauty of Assam, ultimately finds life a burden, hunted and haunted by fear — fear of the

workers' strike, fear of losing his love to another inferior man (an Anglo-Indian, Eddie), fear of the elephant and fear of Jugal Kishore's antics. The plot of the novel revolves round the dark aspects of human life. The dramatic conflict has racial, social, political and artistic dimensions. Contradictory forces like "desire and aversion" are also marked by the contradictions inherent in the titles of some of the chapters, "Love and Passion," "Tea and Python," "Sportsmanship and Vendetta."

### ***A Bend in the Ganges***

*A Bend in the Ganges* can briefly be summed up as an "anatomy of Ahimsa". With the help of three vividly drawn characters — Gian, an ardent Gandhian, Debidayal, a revolutionary, and Sundari his sister — and against the background of our freedom struggle, Malgonkar asks a significant question: can non-violence be a valid ideology for all the situations in life? When applied in its exclusivity, non-violence proves to be a faulty philosophy because it results in violence of the worst sort. Non-violence as the highest human ideal needs courage and inner strength. Devoid of that it becomes spurious and superficial. Unless the practitioner of non-violence internalizes the harmonizing power of love, no abstract prescription of non-violence can work effectively. Both Devidayal and Gian are weakened by their adoption of violence and non-violence respectively because they are not immersed in it. Malgonkar dexterously brings forth man's inner capacity for violence but that does not go on to say that he upholds violence. Violence, unless tempered by maturity and love is capable of wreaking havoc. Debidayal's creed of violence swallows him up; Gian's credo of non-violence is a cover to hide his propensity for violence. Gian is vindicated in the end when he realizes the power of unselfish love. Neither violence nor non-violence in its entirety is desirable. As violence cannot be an alternative to non-violence, non-violence cannot be a panacea for violence. "The value that the novel does seek to affirm is the value of love which transcends

violence and non-violence — the real and the unreal — and brings about freedom and fulfillment to the individuals. This is the value that Gian, the unheroic hero, and Debidayal, the heroic hero, both discover in the act of living out their separate yet strangely involved lives” (Amur p. 104–104).

*A Bend in the Ganges*, hailed as an epic saga of partition is, at one glance, a novel about the inhuman tragedy that followed the partition of the country — killings, loot, arson, rapes and the consequent dislocation of millions of people on both sides. But that is not all. The novel is a study of an ideology, an exposition of basic human nature, and an examination of the controlling forces of history. The Ganges in the title is the Ganga, symbol of India, of her culture, including her history; the ‘bend’ is the turn historical forces have taken leading to partition and dislocation. The title is derived from the epigraph to the novel, a quotation from the Ramayana in which Rama and Sita are delighted to see the beauty of the Ganges where it bends to move on further. It is the present context of fragmented India, rived by violence and disorder that the title bears an ironic tinge.

The story begins with the dramatic scene of burning British-goods, introduction to the philosophy of non-violence, and Gian and Sundari’s induction into the ideology; and it ends with Gian and Sunadari fleeing the land of their birth. In the beginning there is a milling crowd come to ‘see’ Gandhi and listen to him (he does not speak as it is Monday, his day of silence); in the end there is a sense of loneliness of abandonment, of flight, and saddening realization that in the heartless atmosphere of exodus one cannot “wait for one’s old man” (p. 382). In between are the events of a decade of ups and downs, of violence and non-violence, of human treachery and selfishness. In his ‘Author’s Note’ Malgonkar records, “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.”

At one level, it is the story of two young men who jump into the freedom struggle—Debidayal, the son of an affluent family of Duriabad, and Gian Talwar from a poor family of a village. Graduates of the same college, they are both motivated to join the freedom struggle but they choose different paths. Debidayal is a revolutionary and Gian subscribes to the non-violent ideology after he comes under the influence of Gandhiji at a rally. Interestingly, Gian’s conversion to Gandhian ideals is too instant and impulsive to hold on for long. On the spur of the moment he flings his coat in the fire of foreign goods, shouts slogans “Gandhiji ki jai!” “Bharat mata ki jai” and becomes a Gandhian. This story of conversion is simple but Malgonkar, the artist par excellence, would not have any simplistic solution to the proposition he has in view. The big question this situation poses is: can one become a Gandhist and a follower of non-violence without integrating it in one’s very being? As Gandhiji’s associate proclaims, “The path of ahimsa is not for cowards; in true non-violence there is no room for timidity” (p. 9). Gian shows his true colors soon after—murder, revenge, treachery, betrayal denigrate the very ideal he stood for once. And we once again turn to Gandhi’s moments of doubt when he broods, “This non-violence, therefore, seems to be due mainly to our helplessness. It almost appears as if we are nursing in our bosoms the desire to take revenge the first time we get the opportunity. Can true, voluntary non-violence come out of this seemingly forced non-violence of the weak? 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 neighbor?”

Manohar Malgonkar paints a vivid picture of the decade preceding India’s freedom to show man’s innate weakness for

violence, the instinct for self-preservation and how during turbulent times man pawns his soul to gain selfish ends. The story in outline can help us understand the vital trends of the novel. The first scene opens in a public square where Gandhi is sitting on a dais, quietly spinning cotton on a spool and his associates explaining the purpose of boycott of foreign goods. The scene whets passions and Gian flings his expensive blazer made of imported material in the fire and so does a young woman whose personality attracts Gian. Thus Gian is converted to Gandhian ideals.

Gian is studying in Duriabad, a town North-West of Punjab in a college where he meets Debidayal, the son of Dewan Bahadur Tekchand Kerwad, of Kerwad Construction Company. Like Gian, Debidayal too is a motivated young man but he is a revolutionary and member of a party called 'The Freedom Fighters'. Shafi Usman is their leader and together, these young patriots engage in various terrorist activities like blowing bridges, removing fish-plates from railway tracts and such other acts. However, they land in trouble when they smuggle explosives from Tekchand's factory and blow up an Air Force plane. In the intervening period of planning and executing the plan, Shafi comes under the influence of Hafiz, a fanatic Muslim who brainwashes Shafi and dubs all Hindus as their sworn enemies. After the plane tragedy, Shafi betrays his Hindu friends and manages to escape; Debidayal is arrested, convicted and sent to the Andamans. Shafi's betrayal is shocking because so far he had been working hard for Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity. Youths like Shafi and Debidayal were the mainstay of communal harmony. Shafi's betrayal deals a great blow to Debidayal who is now serving a term in Andaman jail. It is also an indication of the emerging communal consciousness in the country.

On the other hand, here is Gian, disturbed by various family problems and feuds, unable to stick to his ideals of non-violence,

burning to take revenge on Vishnu Dutt for his brother Hari's murder. Gian was devoted to Hari whose death came to him as a blow. Since the axe with which Vishnu-dutt had murdered Hari could not be found, the court acquits him and in helpless rage Gian kills Vishnu-dutt. Gian is charged of murder and sent to Andamans. In the jail, Gian and Debidayal once again cross paths. Debidayal's revolutionary fire is not doused. Gian, on the other hand, becomes a turncoat, he acts as an "administrative spy," co-operates with Patrick Mulligan, the Jailor and reports against Debidayal, who is consequently flogged mercilessly. With his cunning and treachery, Gian manages to escape from the jail and reaches mainland India. Debidayal cooperates with the Japanese who had taken over the Andamans, works out a plan to go to India under assumed name and continue his terrorist activities. The Japanese escort him up to Kohima from where he joins the swarms of refugees and reaches Lahore. In Lahore, he meets Shafi Usman, marries Shafi's girl friend Mumtaz to take revenge leaving Shafi powerless and broken.

Gian continues his nefarious activities in Duriabad, contacts Tekchand Kerwad, manages to earn the family's goodwill by proclaiming himself Debidayal's friend from Andaman, gets a job with the Kerwad Construction Company and also develops ties with Sundari, Debi's sister. Things suddenly take a turn for the worst. Debidayal and Mumtaz plan to reach Duriabad but it is 1947 when riots are breaking out with fury, hitherto unknown. The holocaust implicates everyone. "Willy-nilly, everyone had come to be a participant in what was, in effect, a civil war" (p. 331-32). "Tens of millions of people had to flee, leaving everything behind; Muslims from India, Hindus and Sikhs from the land that was soon to become Pakistan: two great rivers of humanity flowing in opposite directions along the pitifully inadequate roads and railways, jamming, clashing, colliding head-on, leaving their dead and dying littering the landscape" (p. 32).

In this melee Debidayal is mobbed to death. In Duriabad, Gian and Shafi clash and Shafi kills Mrs. Tekchand and Gian kills

Shafi. The pandemonium is let loose and nobody knows who is doing what. Ultimately, Gian escapes to India but somehow his conscience pricks him. After going through the fire of remorse he changes his attitude, goes back to Duriabad (now in Pakistan), saves Sundari and takes her to the safety and security of India. The last chapter titled, “The Land They Were Leaving” has a touch of nostalgia about it. But most heart-rending is the callous way in which old Mr. Tekchand is left behind as Sundari and Gian are ordered to move ahead by the traffic controlling office, “We can’t hold up the convoy for somebody’s old man” (p. 382), is the last line of the novel.

Narrated in simple manner, the story probably is nothing more than a harrowing tale of violence unleashed by partition, much told, many times repeated. But, that would be devaluing a work that E.M. Forster selected as the best book of the year and that has been rated as a deep study of non-violence and human psychology. The story has three distinct strands: (i) Debidayal and Gian, as antithesis to each other; (ii) the communal strand represented by Shafi who vows to forge unity but under communal pressure betrays his Hindu brethren; and (iii) thirdly it is the story of growth — of human beings as well as of nationalism. Within this framework, we are given the picture of human psychology, national psyche, the irreversible historical process and the dangers of imposing ideology on untrained and weak minds.

It is interesting to see how Gian and Debidayal change their basic principles. Gian starts as an idealist and ends up what Sundari dubs him as, “the scum”; Debidayal begins as a fiery revolutionary but ends up being a man of peace who would prefer a quiet life of a householder; Sundari starts as an outstanding figure but comes out as a woman to whom nothing is sacred; and Shafi’s promising start as a young man of integrity and communal harmony belies the hopes. Shafi’s revolutionary ideals have no strength to hold him to his credo. Since he does not swear by non-violence we do



not expect him to follow that path but we do not expect him to kill irrationally, betray Hindu and Sikh friends under erroneous communal notions and kill his friend's mother, Mrs. Tekchand. When people are caught in the vortex of mass fury, one cannot expect rational behavior from them. As for Debidayal, he stands by his principles. He is anti-British and remains so till the end. He has self-esteem and he refuses to fall a prey to the suggestion of the man (Gian) in whom he has no faith. He tells Gian on his face, "...I would willingly rot in a cell here rather than associate with someone like you and become free. You are scum; you are far worse than Balbahadur because he at least is openly hostile — you spout truth and non-violence" (p. 198). After marriage Debidayal changes his perspective but that is a healthy sign as he becomes a votary of peaceful co-existence. However, he too is not above petty-minded acts of vengeance. Luring away Shafi's girl friend Mumtaz as an act of revenge is hard to condone.

The most enigmatic figure in the novel is Gian and Malgonkar is interested more in showing his rise and fall and rise than anyone else's. Shafi and Debidayal are killed before they have a chance to prove themselves. Sundari remains a decorative figure though impressive in the beginning of the novel. She loses her sheen midway in the novel with her unsuccessful marriage, her continuous worrying over Debidayal's fate and her attitude towards Malini. Gain's introduction as an inveterate Gandhian is short-lived and very soon we are left aghast by his violent mentality and revengeful deeds. He is not at peace till he kills Vishnu-dutt for his brother's murder. Debidayal's assessment of Gian's basic character is precise. In Andamans when Debidayal sees Gian, his thoughts go back to the time they were in India, "Was Gian the man, Debi wondered, the non-violent disciple of Gandhi who had been convicted for murder? He cursed and shook his head in disgust. Gian was certainly not the man. He was typical of the youth of India, vacillating, always seeking new anchors, new directions, devoid of any basic convictions. He had

been dedicated, so he had told them, to truth and non-violence. He had already jettisoned non-violence; how far would he go with truth?" (p. 155). Debidayal does not have to wait long. Gian shows his fangs, deceives Debi and has him flogged. In Andamans, Gian turns an informer and we get a creepy feeling to see him lose all his self-esteem. He has lost his soul to the devil; he is guilty of cheating, lies, deception, betrayals, groveling, fawning; and the most horrendous act of beheading Ramoshi's corpse for the gold coins hidden in the duct of his throat. He becomes a hate-worthy character by the time the novel reaches its climax.

In normal circumstances, it is difficult for an author to redeem such a character within the framework of the story, but not so with Malgonkar. He gives Gian several opportunities of self-questioning. In psychology, self-berating and self-questioning are important techniques to reach self-understanding. Gian's problem lies in his self-image and his inability to live up to it. To him, he is an idealist, a man dedicated to truth and non-violence. He is not ready to accept himself as an ordinary youth who breaks under the impact of life's realities — financial hardships, family feud, the role played by the Big House, Hari's murder. Once he takes the extreme step, murders Vishu-dutt and falls from grace, the march down below to the hell within is easy thence on. He reaches abysmally low in our estimate. During the communal riots Gian sees death and destruction face to face, the intensity of events forces him to look within, something he has rarely done so far. He realizes the value of unselfishness. Something inside him churns and he goes back to Duriabad to help Sundari and her parents. His encounter with Sundari is not smooth. Both are brash, angry and wary of each other. Sundari flings it on his face, "You have never done anything without a selfish motive... mercenary motives" (p. 351). The "assurance and the arrogant awareness of being in command" that Sundari sees on his face angers her as she looks at his determined and strong mien. His argument is invincible, "Look... this is something you won't believe, but it

happens to be the truth, I don't know what possessed you, that day of the explosion, to come and look for me. That is exactly the sort of thing I am doing now" (p. 351). Gian saves Sundari and helps her cross the border and reach safety. We, as readers do not know if Gian would be a changed man hereafter but since the author redeems him, there is every reason to believe in his transformation.

The novel is a strong commentary on the forces of history. Everybody is involved in one way or the other including Gopal, Malini, Tekchand and his wife. How the Hindu-Muslim divide widens and how some fanatics take advantage of the situation is well brought out with master strokes. Hafiz succeeds in brainwashing people like Shafi who easily discard their mantle of unity and consider Hindus as their sworn enemies. Hafiz's words emit poison as he tells Shafi Usman, "We who once ruled over this country as conquerors shall be living as inferior citizens, as the slaves of Hindus!.... In our hatred of the British we had altogether lost sight of a far greater menace: the Hindus!" It does not take long to spread such poisonous ideas among Shafi and his fellow Muslims, who betray all their Hindu companions.

Manohar Malgonkar is not a votary of violence nor does he uphold terrorism. Rather he denounces it. His misgivings about the success of non-violence is based on his practical belief that non-violence requires inner strength, it cannot be imposed from outside. Some characters in the novel, like Basu are the author's spokesperson who deride, condemn and ridicule the very concept of non-violence as propounded by Gandhi. The doubts these characters raise are practical and have no satisfactory answers. Basu questions the ambivalence of Gandhi and contends sarcastically that when the hour will come and violence will spurt, what will he do, but go on fast. "A fast to purify himself, perhaps unto death. But will he ever admit failure? That non-violence has failed? And what is the future of a country nurtured on non-violence in a

world of raving violence? How are we to survive? Defend our borders? Can a non-violent nation have a violent army? How will the fighting spirit manifest in our people?"

*A Bend in the Ganges* is a documentary narrative and the facts are authentic. The story is fictitious but based on facts such as — Jalianwala Bagh, World WarII, Japanese advent into Andaman, Communal riots and partition. However, there are certain images that jar on the senses as they do not belong to the land where the novel is set. Terms like Aji, Abaji, the location of Konshet are typical of Maharashtra and Karnataka where the author belongs whereas the action of the novel takes place in undivided Punjab.

Despite these small quarrels, *A Bend in the Ganges* is "an impressive novel," as James Dayananda points out. G.S. Amur appreciates its authenticity and its treatment of violence and non-violence in a double context — personal and social — and its presentation of love as a transcendent value. He feels that the novel attains universality reached by very few novelists. For K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, it is a bold experiment in artistically fusing the personal and historical perspective in fictional terms. The novel deals with the violent aspect of freedom struggle and not its non-violent aspect because the latter does not exist. Many critics are unhappy at the negative view he propounds of Gandhian philosophy but seen dispassionately, what Malgonkar asserts has strength in it. The issues Malgonkar deals with are: forces of history, human predicament, communalism and violence versus non-violence. Shafi, Debi, Gian and Sundari are seen vis-à-vis the philosophical and moral thoughts that were prevalent at that time. Malini is the new emerging woman, the likes of whom we see in many novels and stories of the 1940s and 1950s in almost all Indian languages.

Malgonkar does not provide symbols in his works but in *A Bend in the Ganges* both Ganges and Lord Shiva have symbolic

import. The Ganga is the symbol of India; whereas Lord Shiva stands for creation through destruction. The statue of Lord Shiva plays a significant role in the novel. He is the family deity in the Little House, he was discovered by Gian's grandfather in his land in Piploda. The idol becomes the cause of family feud between the Big House and the Little House. To Gian, Shiva seems to be saying, "a million shall die, a million!" In the end, Sundari kills Shafi with the same idol hitting him hard on the head.

*A Bend in the Ganges* shows a nation in transition and uses stark realism to expose the human catastrophe of a historical event of as great a dimension as the partition. It gives a glimpse of the philosophy of non-violence and its implications in a strife-torn world. Malgonkar's novel stands out distinctly in denouncing a concept that is widely accepted and much extolled. Non-violence, he shows, has scant meaning in the hands of the uninitiated like Gian and his ilk.

## 5 *Simple and Comic — Short Stories*

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If you can tell stories, create characters, devise incidents, and have sincerity and passion, it doesn't matter a damn how you write.

— Somerset Maugham

While discussing Manohar Malgonkar's short stories, G.S. Amur makes two important points: first, he hoped that these stories would be "salvaged from the musty back numbers of periodicals and published in a volume" (p. 39) and second, that though Malgonkar likes to call himself primarily an "entertainer", his attitude to life and art is of a serious nature and "both in range and the quality of craftsmanship" his stories belong to a higher order (p. 40). To consider the first of these observations, Malgonkar took note of it and wrote in his Preface to the 1974 edition of *A Toast in Warm Wine*, "Not having anticipated that they would be published in book form, I had destroyed many of my original manuscripts after they had been published, with the result that I must now rely on their printed versions." The originals were edited by the magazine editors sometimes heavily, sometimes badly, and often to cater to the popular taste, changing in the process the author's imaginative twists and turns. He gives an example of 'Mr. Cheng's Ducks' which lost the crux of its climax after the editor's pen pruned it to "a sort of tail-less freak." Whatever the author's reactions to such editorial 'improvements'

it cannot be denied that the stories are still highly entertaining even in their existing form though written “a good many years ago”. This places Malgonkar as a story-teller par excellence. Beside their entertainment aspect they provide social documentation of the 1950s and 1960s when the British influence in the army circles was stridently obvious, tiger-shooting was not a taboo and Goa was still Portuguese till 1961. Some critics do not find much substance in his stories and object to the excessive attention he pays to the comic mood which, they say, limits their artistic value.

Manohar Malgonkar started writing short stories before he took up writing novels. In his interview with James Dayananada he reminisces that he was thirty-seven years when he got his first story published. Writing has always been important to him, for one thing that it meant a good source of extra income. “I earn money by writing, and also it keeps me so relaxed, so occupied that I don’t want to do anything at all. It’s like dope, somehow. I’m in the grip of the profession now. It’s rather a wonderful feeling.” He also admits that stories get well paid. His stories were published and were also broadcast from the All India Radio.

After his early retirement from the army in 1952 he took to writing stories. In 1954 his stories started appearing in periodicals like *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Caravan*, *Shankar’s Weekly*, *Cocktail*, *Onlooker* and *Yojana*. Later, he elaborated some of the stories and incorporated them in his novels; for example, ‘Bachha Lieutenant’. The incidents narrated in this story also figure in *The Princes*. He wrote fifty short stories that are now compiled in four collections: *Bombay Beware*, *Rumble Tumble*, *A Toast in Warm Wine*, and *Four Graves and other stories*. By and large his stories can be divided in three groups: army life, business/mining, and hunting.

Manohar Malgonkar did not subscribe to the view that literature should have any conscious philosophical or psychological bearing. Whatever philosophical views a writer holds could well

be reflected in his writings without self-conscious in-puts. The specific features of Malgonkar's short stories are: they are short, crisp, witty, lively, to the point and fast-moving with comic touch. The situations are usually light and do not call for tragic ending. It is simply thus: some problem crops up, tension builds up, reaches a critical point, anti-climax begins and the tangle is resolved/or gets resolved by the end. You keep the story down with a smile and a big sigh. That is the success of his story telling — it has given the reader a relaxed space.

The early stories collected in *Bombay Beware* pertain to army life. In his 'Note' to the book he writes that after Andrew Graham included one of his stories in *Best Army Stories*, he (Malgonkar) got frequent letters from his readers, mostly armed forces personnels, requesting him to publish his army stories in one collection for the benefit of his readers who have something to do with the army. Drawing up on his experiences in camps and cantonments he wove charming tales. He perceived the varied moods of the British and Indian officers — relaxed in the Mess, disciplined in office, efficient on the field and friendly outside; he culled out situations that were hilarious or at best comic; he chose characters that were simple, funny, eccentric but all the same human with their small idiosyncrasies. He does not judge people, he does not correct them; he simply puts them before us to enjoy and see the variety in God's universe. One of them could just be around us, so lively and life-like are they — a Major General and his Brigadier wooing the same girl who is smart enough to keep them guessing; an ex-army Captain of Hudson Horse turned swindler; a bearer who steals a cat of his ex-master lending an unbelievable twist to the story; and many others who make the endings what they are — uproarious and mirthful. The author dexterously shows us that army life does not always mean war or skirmishes, killings or violence. It can also mean the joy of living, brotherhood, discipline and duty. These are peace-time stories of a war-time era.



The pattern of each of these stories conforms to the life pattern of the army. An army man knows how to relax despite tensions of a rigid routine. Here is a Brigadier and a Major General in 'A Little Sugar, A Little Tea'; the first story of *Bombay Beware*, each enjoying his fishing trip in his own way — the Major playing a truant and the Brigadier good-heartedly over-looking the harmless lapse. It takes a lighter view of the situation which could, if blown up, do much damage, but which a thoughtful officer diffuses by his understanding approach. Looked at from another angle, such an approach of the officer is healthy to keep the men happy and active.

Major Maxwell decides to go fishing to a spot 25 miles from their camp. As CO of No 326 TPT Company, he leaves his Adjutant, the narrator of the story, in-charge of the camp with instructions to cover up if some higher officer calls or enquires. Unexpectedly, a delayed signal comes informing of Brigadier Murray's arrival for inspection the next morning. The camp is in a flutter but the experienced Subedar-Major manages everything perfectly (or so we are given to imagine). The "kamjor" mules and horses are huddled behind the hills near the ranges and the "kamjor" men in the nallah. A perfect face of the unit has been presented to the inspecting officer. The Adjutant explains that Major Maxwell had to rush to Delhi as Mrs. Maxwell "was suddenly taken ill." The Brigadier does not comment. The Adjutant is aware that the "old boy" has hawk-like eyes and no lapse would go unnoticed. Brigadier Murray is an old hand and knows the trick of the trade well enough. Casually but cleverly, he extracts information about the "kamjor" men and "kamjor" animals from the Subedar-Major but does not react. Next day he expresses his wish to go *Mahseer* fishing, the spot happens to be the same where Major Maxwell has gone that puts the Adjutant and the Subedar-Major in sticky situation but luckily a snag in his vehicle wards off their encounter. While departing for Delhi the Brigadier casually reveals that he had met Mrs. Maxwell in Delhi

before coming and that she was fit as a fiddle. The officers are jolted from their complacency. The story ends on a comic note with the Brigadier humming “Thori chini, thora cha/Bombai bibi, bahut achha”, and the Adjutant gaping helplessly at him. The title of the story is taken from the first line of this song.

An altogether different facet of army life is provided in ‘Maggie’ a story in which a female character appears for the first time in her own right as an individual, not as an appendage to some officer. Major Mansingh of Corps of Planning, Madras, is the narrator. The story begins with the posting of Margaret Palmer as Staff Captain of Lt. Colonel Howard. Howard resents the appointment of a woman in their exclusive male bastion. “Can you imagine a woman nattering away in our set-up?” he says to Mansingh. But his attitude changes subsequently and he starts liking the girl. Then the Major-General, gets her transferred as his P.A. Now, each of the two is keen to marry her but Maggie keeps them guessing for some time and eludes them both as she announces her decision to marry her boy friend, a Major from the U.S. Air Corps. The most interesting part of the story comes at the end when both Lt. Col Howard and the Major-General sit in the mess and drink away their bitterness and heart break with light-hearted ease. “Did you know there is going to be a wedding in our little camp? Yes, a real, slap-up affair with all the fixings; wedding cake, an arch of swords and all that,” the General says beaming at the narrator. There is no rancor. This calm acceptance of rejection in love is as enlivening as Maggie’s impish game.

The story has a comic structure and the language has the touch of British army idiom. The dialogues are crisp and evoke the atmosphere of the Mess perfectly. The attitude towards women is typically male-oriented — a woman as Staff Captain or PA is “decorative;” a woman in Planning is a “popsy”; the HQ can “find all sorts of stooge jobs for them in the monkey house”; when Maggie shows interest in the Major-General the

narrator remarks “It is amazing how women are taken in by rank; nothing else seems to matter (p. 54)”; her presence makes “much of a difference” (p. 51). These remarks may be conceived as deprecating because they devalue women’s work and project them as objects of desire but then Malgonkar is, after all, a man’s writer and he wrote the story in 1954; till then feminism had not arrived in India!.

‘Bachcha Lieutenant’ is a moving story of action, heroism and loyalty to duty. Though titled after a young lieutenant, the nineteen year old Intelligence Officer Wilson, it primarily focuses on the sense of duty and courage of Jamadar Tukaram Shindey who lays down his life to save Wilson’s life. Both die trying to save each other and the author quips, “Neither Jamadar Tukaram Shindey nor the Bachcha Lieutenant ever knew just how much they had contributed to each other’s death” (p. 66).

The story is action-packed. The description of Arakan jungle, the movement of the soldiers, the thick darkness of night and its silence disturbed by the fearsome barking of the dog evoke atmosphere of awe and reverence. The craftsmanship is perfect and the story brings out the ultimate in dedication to duty which many of Malgonkar’s stories deal with. On the battlefield, when face to face with death, loyalties are formed; the code of military honor triumphs over differences and fellow feeling takes the front row. This story is reproduced in Chapter 16 of *The Princes*.

‘Green Devils’ and ‘Bombay Beware’ do not have much to do with the army except that the Captain of ‘Bombay Beware’ was from Hudson Horse who uses his army connection for cheating; and in ‘Green Devils’ the narrator-protagonist’s brother is in the army whose CO visits him for a few hours and leaves him paralyzed with fear and uncertainty. Both the stories are hilarious. In ‘Bombay Beware’ the Captain and his accomplice Shumboo Dass (called ‘the Boss’) lay traps to trick moneyed businessmen into investing in their fraudulent ventures. The “green devils” in

the story refers to the green beer bottles that create tensions. The story has a pleasant twist in the tail and one cannot but smile at the discomfiture of the protagonist as he admits, “The ADC should be arriving any minute. And Ganpat knows Hindi as well as I do, and I know that he knows that I know — the villain” (p. 91).

Of the sixteen stories in *Bombay Beware*, two deal with gold smuggling, one with smuggling monazite, thorium and other radio-active stuff. While ‘Snake and Ladder’ and ‘A Pass in the Mountain’ have the sinister world of smuggling and nefarious activities. ‘Two by Two’ has the harmless gaze of an over-inquisitive journalist. Evocative descriptions can be termed as the strength of these stories. ‘Two by Two’ begins thus, “Whenever someone mentions Goa, my mind goes back to the enormous old churches and the crumbling graves around Panjim; I think of Blue-chin and that superior *koi-hai* from Army Headquarters, Harwood. Neutral, sleepy Goa; the hot-bed of spies during wartime” (p. 67). The scenic grandeur of the Himalayan terrain stands out in ‘Snakes and Ladders’ and ‘A Pass in the Mountain’ but the darkness of the impending doom and the unholy lust for gold give an ominous ambience to the plot.

‘Top Cat’ is a charming tale about the theft of Hazy Sahib’s pet cat by Sammy Dias bearer but interestingly, though the story moves around Sammy Dias and his master Hazy Sahib, it is Sir Simon, the cat, who steals the show in the end. The description of the cat-fight is the most graphic part of the story. Sammy says, “a cat-fight such as I have never seen in my life. They were more like artistes than fighters, more like trained wrestlers than boxers. They went round and round, they crouched and jumped and made passes and hissed and spat and I would have sworn that they waited for openings and even made feints at each other. As plates slipped off the shelves and bottles fell down and crashed, we stood speechless and gazed... Then I saw Sir Simon lunge and

slip in a puddle of tomato sauce and recover his footing and make a dash for the pantry door, and like a flash, Jungee, our own cat, went streaking off after him” (p. 121). The climax comes when the ex-champion Sir Simon, defeated and routed, crouches under Sammy Dais’s bunk begging for some attention.

‘Pack Drill’ has typical army setting and the tactics and counter-tactics of the officers of Satpura Regiment under training. ‘Camouflage Tactics’ begins with Major Mansingh camouflaging his voice to tell the caller that he had not yet arrived so that he could read the newspaper for a while and smoke a cigarette. He succeeds several times but once his voice is detected and from the other end he gets good-intentioned instruction to camouflage his voice with more expertise. That says it all. The story has comic element but we get a glimpse of the working style in the army in a lighter vein. ‘Tea Break in Jakarta’ has sailors’ experience of getting tea in Jakarta and is full of fun generated by language problem and cultural difference.

The stories collected in *A Toast in Warm Wine* and *Rumble-Tumble* deal with assorted themes like business, hunting and smuggling; some are set in tea gardens and only a few concern army life. The title story ‘A Toast in Warm Wine’ is about a geologist and his professional integrity for which he gets an unexpected reward. The story maintains a note of secrecy till the end. The beginning is dramatic; the story unfolds in flashback as the geologist looks at the unexpected cheque he receives and broods on the events six months back, “I am not sure that I deserve this money. I had done nothing more than my duty, and I had been fully paid for that in advance. But I can understand why Ramlal sent me this cheque. It was not for something that I had done. It was rather for something that I had not done” (p. 9). The curiosity of the reader is whetted: what had he not done? How can one get paid for not doing something?

‘The Fixer’, ‘Married and Harried’, ‘Upper Division Love’ and ‘The Cheat’ make interesting reading and are entertaining yarns.

'The Fixer' is about a small-time politician Lala Govind Sarup, who is an expert at vote-catching tactics and knows how to oblige those who matter. The story has a socio-political setting and presents a graphic picture of modern day manipulative politicians who are epitomes of favoritism, opportunism and self-serving mentality. Lalaji's cunning eye sees excellent opportunity in the minister's visit to Raniwada. It should give him maximum benefit from all sides. Clever and shrewd Lalaji dexterously manages the situation and earns credit from all fronts — job for Arjun Dass, Harijan votes for the minister and a prize for agriculture for Tukaram, the farmer. Technically, the story is perfect and thematically it is enjoyable. The socio-cultural matrix reveals our duplicity in Lalaji's masquerading as Harijans' friend and well-wisher and his running back from Harijan locality as fast as he could. He would not have them touch him, not even his feet.

Two of the stories which could be termed pleasantly sweet and catering to teenage gusto are 'The Silence of Leopold' and 'The Cheat.' The former begins on a kind of detective note and ends with a discovery that falls heavy on the narrator-turned-detective; the latter recounts a ten year old boy's adventure with a fake fifty-paise coin.

The question of the story 'The Silence of Leopold' is "why did the dog not bark when someone was fiddling with things in the house?" And the answer leads to a discovery that puts the Resident Director in an embarrassing situation. The story is pure entertainment and has an appeal for teenagers as well as for adults. The playful detective is the young narrator, an aspirant for the post of Assistant Manager, who initiates a Sherlock Holmes and Slim Callaghan style investigation to find the thief of the 'big torch.' Befitting his dictum, "If you want to get on with someone, there is nothing like making friends with the children," the narrator gets fully involved in the game with Chinu and his sister and finds out why Leopold kept quiet, who stole the 'big

torch' and who ate the lemon tarts. As the six crinkled paper trays of lemon tart are found in the waste-paper basket in Chilmani's room and the boy shouts, "Daddy pinching lemon tarts in the middle of the night. And all that dieting, boiled spinach and skimmed milk..." (p. 33). The obvious outcome of his detective venture is painful. The young man loses his prospective job and to add to his woes, P.K. says icily, "you should join the police. In Criminal Investigation Department. You would do very well there" (p. 33).

Quick dialogues, the detective-style inquisitiveness and the setting are all eminently entertaining and lead to much mirth. We can laugh at 'Burra Sahib' P.K.Chilmani's cost as we imagine his discomfiture. The plot is meant to amuse and not tell the story.

'The Cheat' has the travails of ten year old Kisan who is constantly dubbed as a cheat because of the fake eight-anna coin he gets unknowingly. Nagged and threatened by his aunt Bhima and cousin Kalloo he somehow gets it changed for two 'pans' (beetle leaf) by cheating another boy of his age. Aunt Bhima and Kalloo enjoy the 'pans' but somewhere in his unconscious little Kisan feels sorry for the boy he has cheated. The story is skeletal but manages in an engaging manner to show the boy's march from innocence to experience.

'Cargo from Singapore' and 'Hush' have smuggling for their themes but the subject is handled in different modes — in 'Cargo from Singapore' it is tit for tat that leads to revenge tactics; in 'Hush' it is the 'hush money' (a term for bribing) that leads to a kind of harmony between smugglers and law-enforcing authorities and ensures satisfaction for all concerned — promotion to the police officer, a fat commission to the man on duty and a free hand to the smugglers. The cinematic technique used in this story makes it fast moving. It holds the interest of the readers. The setting is Goa and the author, living in Jagalpet just near the Goa border knew the country-side well and gives convincing glimpses of

the topography, the smuggling tactics, the shabby taverns and drinking bouts, snappy conversation with double meaning and quick business.

‘Pull-Push’ ‘The Rise of Kistu’, ‘Thorn with Thorn’ and ‘Two Red Roosters’ are some of Malgonkar’s impressive stories. In ‘Pull-Push’ Malgonkar presents the social scenario from three different positions — the defiant office peon who can get an officer transferred; a set of ministers manipulating to bribe the ‘Gayarams’ so as to remain in power; and a business tycoon who does not mind doling out dollars to end the workers’ strike. The vicious circle continues till Lubhaya, another office peon “manages” to get a bottle of Rum meant for the Jawans from military canteen to celebrate the officer’s unceremonious ouster. The story reeks of corruption, and all this happens in the Gandhi centenary year, in Gandhi’s name and under his photographs. The tone of the story is satirical and one of desperate humor. In fact, the title itself is indicative of the role pulls and pressures play in getting favors. The author uses cinematic technique of quick movement by changing scenes from one situation to another till they are joined in the end. This helps in bringing the theme in sharp focus. Without stepping out of its contents the story reaches its climax and ends with wry humor. Though the comic mood is maintained all through, one can smile as well as get helplessly angry at the entire set-up.

‘The Rise of Kistu’ is a moving story about identity, livelihood and the human will to survive against all odds. On the surface, the theme is about Kistu, a poacher and the ease with which he changes his way of life but underneath the thematic concern is the pain of loss of identity. An honest Forest Officer manages to convince Kistu to leave poaching and lead an honest life. Kistu changes but the officer, looking at the change in Kistu’s personality, feels uneasy for the the loss of innocence. He broods that Kistu, “dressed in soiled white trousers and an orange and blue Hawai



shirt and cracked patent leather shoes, with a heavily oiled hair and a pencil thin moustache, and making a living by imitating tiger roars for a circus, is a pathetic figure.” It is one of the best stories of Malgonkar where he deals with a significant question in simple idiom. One can compare Kistu’s predicament with that of the tribals whom we are trying to bring into the mainstream thereby snatching away their way of life.

‘Two Red Roosters’ takes up the theme of agricultural reforms and its outcome in a comic manner. Farmer Sonba’s land is chosen by Kheti Saheb to demonstrate the benefits of modernization but it is Sonba’s reaction that is typical of our villagers. He gives all credit to the “churail” for withdrawing her curse after the two red roosters were sacrificed to her. Sonba is sure that it is not mechanization that got him a bumper crop. Sonba’s argument is invincible: that the Kheti Saheb should choose his field of all the others is an indication of the supernatural will. G.S. Amur calls the story symbolic and opines that it compares well with R.K. Narayan’s ‘Two Goats and a Horse’.

Malgonkar tries to present a slice of history in ‘Old Gold’ by chronicling the saga of Parmar family from 1857 to 1975. But unfortunately, the story fails both on historical grounds and at artistic level. It is weak and lacks the historical appeal for which Malgonkar’s novels are known. ‘Upper Division Love’ focuses on our young generation’s attraction for the film world and has a funny ending which is highly unsatisfactory. Rather, it looks childish for a grown up man to behave the way the narrator does. The story could have been developed on the higher lines of relationships, human urges and complications generated by unequal love.

Among his hunting stories we can place ‘Shikar de Luxe’, ‘Bear on a Plate’ and ‘To Hold a Tiger’. Manohar Malgonkar’s familiarity with the intricacies of jungle life, rules of moving in the jungles and the topography of the Western Ghats are obvious in these

tales. But his hunting stories are not so much about killing as about human cunning and greed. He dexterously avoids killing animals in his hunting tales as he averts violence in his military action stories. The way Bagal Singh and Mukut Ram dupe Elmer Finkelstein, the American come to India for 'Big-Game' hunting and are paid in their own coin by the so-called "killer" bear is not only satisfying but also amusing. 'Shikar De Luxe' the last story in the collection (*A Toast in Warm Wine*) is developed through letters and telegrams and shows lust for diamonds for which animals are posed as bait. 'To Hold a Tiger' has a hilarious depiction of the inaccuracy of the guest-shikari. Interestingly, the story ends on a positive note and reconciliation, "You have saved him (the tiger) from all hunters. He will live in my jungles, but he is your tiger, Mr. Talbert!" says the Indian Shikari and the two men laugh at "nothing at all" and make peace. The overall pattern of big game hunting points to the fact that the author was more concerned with the comic aspects of human personality than his skill at killing. The description of the jungle and outdoor life, however, is flawless and refreshing.

'Monal Hunt' is a spy story almost on the lines of his novella *Spy in Amber*. Set in Jaunsar, it is one of his Army stories and has espionage and counter-espionage poised perfectly to keep the suspense till the end. The requirement of a spy story — suspense, danger and comradeship — is highlighted sufficiently and ingeniously. Malgonkar keeps his usual entertainment element restrained which makes the story a modern short story where the fictional art is kept intact.

Assessing Malgonkar's stories in general G.S. Amur opines that his stories are not "modern" either in form or in sensibility; they are romanticized and unreal (p. 31-32). Despite this, one cannot question Malgonkar's authenticity, craftsmanship and his ability to explore the area of personal experiences. He gives the readers an impressive variety of characters, situations and probabilities.

Though his characters are not memorable, they are credible and fit well into the situations they are placed in. Seetharam, the bearer, for example, in the story ‘This is to Recommend’ is not a figment of imagination and can be identified by any army officer as one of his men. Some of his stories fail on artistic level but by and large, the author’s narrative skill saves them from being boring. A criticism leveled against Malgonkar is that his British characters overwhelm his Indian characters and the scenes from army life smack of his colonial bent of mind. That is unfair to the author who often reiterates that he writes about India — Indian jungles, the Indian army and Indian men and women. The atmosphere, sensibility and responses and reactions of people are typically Indian. Let us take his description of camp-fire in ‘Pack Drill’: “Then we washed our hands and bathed our faces in cool, *khas*-scented water. The air was a heady mixture of sounds and scents: *shehnai* music, dust, *neem* berries and wood smoke, enriched by an aroma of cooking spices” (p. 127). Or let us look at characters like Bagal Singh swearing on “Hanuman’s tail” and “Shiva’s trident”; Kistu, innocent in a primitive way; Tukaram Shindey who lays down his life for his British Lieutenant; or Tukaram, the simple, unsuspecting Harijan vis-à-vis the crafty politician Lala Govind Sarup — they are Indian to the core. However, his ‘Yellow-Lemon and Fig’ lacks seriousness which was necessary for the theme of rehabilitation of a partition refugee. Authors like Khushwant Singh, Amrita Pritam and others have dealt with such themes much more dexterously.

Indian short story writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Manohar Malgonkar and others have written stories essentially Indian in content and presentation giving the short story form a distinct personality of its own as “Indian.” They give an insight into the dynamics of modern life and sustain the inner sensitiveness of man. All these stories make delightful and pleasurable reading and the ironic twist in the end sustains the element of surprise and humor. Whether we term these “modern” or not is another

point of discussion but like modern short story these writers prefer to base their narratives on personal experiences, an area they are familiar with, focusing on less spectacular aspects of life and more on the trivial. This insightful writing brings out harmony of form, theme and structure and reveals the ingenuity of human mind.

# 6

## Miscellany — Histories, Thrillers and Entertainers

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If our civilization is to survive we must break with the habit of deference to great men. Great men make great mistakes.

— Karl Popper's dictum

Kings are like horses with blinkers. Their function is limited to being seen — to be on display, but not to see. A ruler must remain blind — the best rulers are blind.

— *Line of Mars (Play)*

Although Manohar Malgonkar's serious literary writings seem to have ended with *The Devil's Wind* (1972), the appearance of *Cactus Country* in 1992 cheered up his scholar-readers for the writer in him was not yet dormant. In this gap of twenty years (1972–1992), he continued spinning yarns on the themes emerging from his experiences of life, requirements of film scripts, travels, and current political situations; but many of these later works could not be classified as literary works of high merit. *The Garland Keepers* (1986), *Spy in Amber* (an espionage story, 1971) *Bandicoot Run* (espionage, 1978) and *Line of Mars* (Play, 1978) have his usual flavor but the treatment of these themes is often light and categorized as insubstantial. Many of these later works were potboilers, suspense novels of intrigues in the high echelons of power, travel accounts, film and TV scripts and newspaper

articles. While his six novels have great literary merit, a whole lot of his later works do not find mention in literary critical canons. Moreover, many of them are unavailable even with the best of the online outlets. This chapter is, therefore, framed to provide brief accounts of his works for the benefit of the readers.

### ***Historical Non-Fiction:***

Manohar Malgonkar's historical writings have two distinct constituents: first historical prose accounts and second, historical fiction. In the former, we group those prose writings that are factual and research-based; in the latter, we have his novels and short stories in which history becomes a base for creative imagination. True to his belief that history should have basic faith in recording truth and not distorting facts or presenting half-truths, Malgonkar has always strived to take a dispassionate view of historical reality. In his novels and stories, history is presented in fictional terms with as much accuracy as is possible within the limit of artistic creation; in his three books of Maratha history — *Kanhoji Angrey* (1959), *Puars of Dewas Senior* (1963) and *Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur* (1971) — he records the life and times of the three Maratha historical figures. The fourth and last of his contributions to Maratha history is *Scaling the Heights* which came out in 2010 after his death. It chronicles the military exploits of Murarrao Ghorpade, one of the lesser known but albeit important Maratha leader in lower Deccan from 1730 to 1777. Looking at his vast historical writings James Y. Dayananda chooses to call Malgonkar 'The Historian of the Marathas', but also comments that his historical writings were commissioned books and show lack of original research.

### ***Kanhoji Angrey: An Account of his Life and his Battles with the English (1959)***

Kanhoji Angrey was a naval commander of the Marathas who guarded the Konkan Coast with great alacrity and military ability and was known as the 'Lord of Konkan'. The western coast of India

was vulnerable to attacks since Shivaji's time with the Mughals, the Siddhis of Janjira, the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the English trying to hold sway over the strategic waters. Kanhoji was born in a family known for its loyalty towards Shivaji. His father Tukoji was appointed guardian of a small state named 'Vir Rana Sank' while he was serving at Swarnadurga for Shivaji with a command of 200 posts. Kanhoji, born in 1669, was just eleven when Shivaji died in 1680. Kanhoji received his education in Harnai village with a Brahmin teacher. As a boy he often accompanied his father during his naval expeditions and gained knowledge of naval battles. Later, Kanhoji controlled the colonial naval powers' expansive exploits on the Western coast, often captured British and Portuguese merchant ships, and forestalled their drive for supremacy. In 1718 when he captured three British merchant ships the Governor of Bombay, Charles Boone, declared him a "pirate".

Malgonkar attempts to correct this picture in his work *Kanhoji Angrey, Maratha Admiral: An Account of his Life and Battles with the English*. He presents Kanhoji as a brave leader and an astute strategist. His moves were dreaded by the colonial powers — British, the Portuguese the French and the Dutch. To the Marathas he was indispensable, a savior who guarded the western coast. The Treaty of Colaba signed between Angrey and King Shahu of Kolhapur in 1714 gave him power over the Konkan strip that ensured security of the Kolhapur rulers.

Malgonkar sums up the advantages of the treaty thus: "As a result of the Treaty of Colaba, Kanhoji obtained control of ten sea-side forts and sixteen land forts, his annual income from the territory placed under his authority was thirty-six lakhs of rupees. He was confirmed as *Surkhail* and *Vazarat Na-aale* in hereditary perpetuity" (p. 177). Kanhoji was a great diplomat who knew how to accept the suzerainty of the Kolhapur rulers and yet be independent — he always hoisted his own flag (a deep red standard) wherever he went.

The rise of Kanhoji is closely associated with the rise of colonial powers in India and their struggle to gain supremacy over the western coast and also with the turn of events in Maratha history. The Konkan coast was always a bone of contention between the Indian rulers and their European counterparts. Seeing Kanhoji's naval ability, the Marathas signed a treaty in 1714; later the Siddis, who had an invincible fort at Janjira under the control of Siddi Yakoot Khan, signed a treaty with him in 1715; the Portuguese viceroy signed a treaty with him in 1722. These treaties and various naval exploits gave Kanhoji immense naval power and though he was branded as a pirate by the British, his supremacy in the naval warfare could not be devalued.

According to Malgonkar, Kanhoji was an extraordinary man — a daring leader, an astute diplomat and a lively man of the world who liked to enjoy music and revelry whenever he found time. He had three wives and a number of concubines, seven legitimate children and as many from his mistresses. Malgonkar calls him a man of “incredible stamina” and is all praise for his bold ventures and accurate planning. “A man of incredible stamina, bold, brave and independent; a man who exuded a hairy-chested maleness, who laughed uproariously and danced and sang with his men, and who never hesitated to fling the same men into assaults against unknown odds; a man with the sternness and mental discipline to punish a spy or a traitor by ordering him to be trampled under an elephant's foot, and yet with the softness of heart to undertake to look after the man's wife and children” (p. 170).

Malgonkar claims that the British who devalued this brave admiral as a “land-shark” and a “pirate”, were in reality under his awe, “The British called him a land-shark who devoured everything on land as well as on water; they called him a robber, pirate, villain, rebel and sent emissaries to wait upon him with instructions to speak to him ‘civilly’ and make a fabulous offer to



buy him off. The Portuguese called him even worse names and yet likened him to Barbarossa and sent him expensive presents” (p. 7). One of Kanhoji’s great contributions to the history of Indian navy was that he was the first Indian to build up a fleet of vessels, which he turned into a formidable naval force in Konkan. In the beginning his ships and men only acted as the coastal guards, capturing vessels that were plying without Maratha seal. But later, as the commander of the Indian navy he enforced his authority along the coast, built strong and big ships to contend with the European ships and established five ship yards. Malgonkar later reframed this historical account into a biography of Kanhoji Angrey as *The Sea Hawk* and released it in 1984.

### ***Puars of Dewas Senior (1963)***

The Kingdom of Dewas, near present day Indore, was founded by two Maratha brothers, Tukoji Puar and Jivaji Puar in 1731. E. M. Forster describes “the curious twin states of Dewas” in his novel *The Hill of Devi*. The kingdom was ruled over by the two brothers jointly but this system did not work for long and it was divided in two parts Dewas Senior and Dewas Junior. Manohar Malgonkar’s grandfather was the Dewan of the Dewas Senior state. E.M. Forster was private secretary to Tukoji Rao (the ruler from 1899 to 1933). His *The Hill of Devi*, is the fictional account of this kingdom. It may be mentioned here that after reading *The Princes*, E.M. Forster wrote to Malgonkar that he found the book of interest “in its own account and because I am involved” and that he was briefly in touch with a small Maratha state (Dewas senior) during the years of its dissolution.” (Amur, p. 78)

The history of Dewas goes back to 1731 but the history of their ancestors starts as far back as 1657 when Sabu Singh Puar had helped Shivaji in capturing Kalyan. His son Krishnaji became Shivaji’s military commander. The Puars were always with the Maratha kings as their trusted military commanders and generation after generation helped the rulers for which they were duly rewarded.

In 1714 the Marathas sent their forces to the North under Kaloji Puar's command. The Marathas had instituted the practice of allotting the conquered territory to their military commanders. After their successful mission in the North, the Puar were given the Dewas territory where they established their kingdom. Before that Dewas was a tiny village dominated by a hill called the hill of Devi. The Marathas continued their campaigns against the Mughals, the Nizam and the Portuguese; in all their exploits, the Puar continued to be with them. However, they were defeated in the two Maratha wars (of 1803–1805 and 1817–1819) against the East India Company who assumed power and recognized Tukoji Puar and Anandrao Puar as joint rulers of the Dewas state.

Tukoji Rao Puar III became the ruler in 1899 when he was just eleven years old. Sir Malcolm Darling was his tutor who wrote *Apprentice to Power* (the book was published in 1966); in 1921 E.M. Forster became his private secretary (only for six months). Tukoji Rao goes down the annals of history as a witty and complex man, "certainly a genius and possibly a saint." Somehow, Tukoji's married life was not successful. After the birth of their son she went to her parental house (she was the daughter of Maharaja of Kolhapur) and never returned. Nobody knew the reason for her decision but it is conjectured that it could be due to her skirmishes with her mother-in-law. Tukoji was efficient and shrewd and knew how to remain in the good books of the English. He was invested with the title of the Knight Commander of the Star of India and later for his war efforts the hereditary title of 'Maharaja' was bestowed on him. But Tukoji was extremely extravagant. He emptied the treasury and started borrowing recklessly for which the British Political Department started harassing him to present his accounts for scrutiny. Angered at it, and also to avoid problems, he took refuge in Pondicherry, a French territory in 1933, never returned and died there in 1937.

Tukoji's son Vikransinharao who was in Kolhapur with his mother's family, returned to Dewas in 1934 to assume

administrative charge and was coroneted in 1937 after the death of his father in Pondicherry. Vikramsiharao joined the army, saw action in the war (like Abhayraj in *The Princes*), was knighted in 1941 and granted Emergency King's Commission in August same year. During his absence his wife Pramilaraje acted as the Regent. On his return he again assumed the charge of administration of his state but on the death of Chhatrapati Shivaji of Kolhapur, he was summoned to the Kolhapur throne. He abdicated the throne of Dewas and left for Kolhapur; his son Krishnaji Rao III became the ruler on 19 April 1947. The state of Dewas merged with the Indian Union after the Independence and after ruling for a brief period Krishnaji Rao ceased to be the Maharaja.

### ***Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur (1971)***

Manohar Malgonkar's *Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur* traces the two hundred and fifty years of the history of the kingdom of Kolhapur that saw twelve Chhatrapatis from Shivaji Maharaj I (1627–1680), the founder of Maratha Empire to its twelfth and present occupant Chhatrapati Shahji Maharaj (1947–). These two and a half centuries witnessed family feuds, skirmishes, ascendancy disputes and intrigues common everywhere in ruling houses. After Shivaji Maharaj's death, the struggle for power started between his two sons — Sambhaji and Rajaram. Sambhaji was popular with the courtiers and was crowned king in 1681. He was brave and had earlier defeated the Portuguese and Chikka Deva Raya of Mysore. But Aurangzeb was on the prowl and to stop any alliance between the Rajput and the Marathas, he headed towards the south in 1681 with a formidable force; his aim was to conquer the Maratha Empire. Sambhaji was alert and did not lose any battle to Aurangzeb but in 1689 he was ambushed near Sangameshwar by a joint team led by Ganoji Shirke and Aurangzeb's commander Mukarrab Khan. Sambhaji was captured and taken a prisoner; he was tortured to change his religion and on his stout refusal he was executed in March 1689.

Things changed after Sambhaji's death. Rajaram, his step brother who ascended the throne was weak and could not counter the Mughal assaults. Rajaram fled from Raigad, took shelter at various places and died in 1700 at Singhagad. His widow, Tarabai took charge of the entire administration and led the Maratha forces through Malwa and defeated the Mughals. The Mughals lost their eminent position in the Indian subcontinent and subsequent Mughal rulers became titular heads. Before fleeing to Jinji, Rajaram had given the "Hukumat Panha" to one Ramchandra Pant Amatya. He looked after the state efficiently, countering all problems that arose, like influx of the Mughals, betrayals by the satraps (vatandars) and many social challenges like food scarcity. He also managed to keep the economic condition in order.

However, new challenges cropped up when, after Aurangzeb's death in 1707, Shahuji was released by Bahadur Shah I and Shahu, on reaching Kolhapur claimed the throne challenging Tara Bai and her son. Eventually, the Maratha kingdom was divided in two parts, Satara and Kolhapur. The division was confirmed after the treaty of Warna in 1731.

The regime of Shahuji is known for the rapid expansion of Maratha power, with the help of able generals. Raghuji Bhosle expanded the Empire in East reaching the present-day Bangladesh; Senapati Dabhade went to the West; and Peshwa Bajirao and his three chiefs — Pawar, Holkar and Scindia expanded the kingdom in the North. True that the expansions brought great power to the Marathas but it had its disadvantages also. The generals who had helped in expansions knew that they were indispensable; they assumed hereditary titles and immense power diminishing the royal authority of Kolhapur. The Maratha kingdom went through various ups and downs during its two hundred and fifty years of life till 1949 when it was merged with Bombay State and became a part of the totality of India.

As Malgonkar points out, both *The Puars of Dewas Senior* and *Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur* were commissioned works, and

were written as per the demand of the contract. Given to himself, he would not have written such books which critics term as lacking in depth, skepticism and research. They were written ‘for’ someone, probably as propaganda for the vanishing princes. Malgonkar seems to agree with critical assessment because he admits that he was restricted by the nature of the subject.

### ***Scaling the Height* (2010)**

The last of Malgonkar’s historical works *Scaling the Height* (2010) centers round the lesser known facts of the history of Deccan, records the exploits of the rise and fall of Ghorpade family and reveals four centuries of history of their reign. Malgonkar prepared the manuscript of this book but handed it over to Professor Sattar five weeks before his death (on 24<sup>th</sup> July, 2010). Professor of Archaeology and Art History, Prof Sattar was his long-standing friend to whom he had dedicated the book. The ‘Author’s Note’ says, “This book is an attempt to pick up the nearly lost trail of someone who died more than two hundred years ago: Murarrao of Gutti. Only when I was well on his track did I begin to perceive what a fascinating character I had stumbled on, a man whose obstinate refusal to conform was his overriding trait, his aim and armour as well as his source of vulnerability, something which gave his ‘neighbourly feud’ with Haider Ali, the inevitability of fate itself, and the denouement of that feud its touch of heroic grandeur” (xi). The story starts with the tale of two forts — one of Gingee and the other of Gutti — the first of the two was the seat of the Maratha kingdom and the second was the family seat of Hindurao Ghorpade who was the dreaded enemy of the East India Company and Haider Ali, both.

The hero of Malgonkar’s historical account is Murarrao Ghorpade who was born in Gutti in Deccan but whose field of action covered the large strip up to Satara. A man of indomitable courage and haughty temperament, Murarrao was both dreaded and hated by the Nawabs, the Nizams, the French, the English

and even the Peshwas of Pune. It was impossible to tame him. The book graphically brings out the various campaigns of Murarrao Ghorpade, his refusal to bow down before the enemy and his efforts to curb the colonial power and their expansions. It deals with a period when the European powers were trying to get stronghold in Deccan. The history of this period and of this lesser known territory is an important addition to the annals of Indian chronicles.

Murarrao was strong and fearless. Malgonkar gives several examples of his fearlessness. One of these concerns the reply he gave to Haidar Ali. It smacks of his undaunted courage and also arrogance. After capturing Bellary and subduing Karnool, when Haidar Ali sent him a message to surrender his guns captured at Moti-Talav and pay a lakh of rupees in tribute in token of accepting his vassalage, and also to send a contingent to serve under his (Haidar's) overall command, Murarrao's answer was less than polite: "I have seen you when you were a mere naik, with but five men under you. I, Murarrao Hindurao, happen to be the Senapati of the Maratha kingdom. You may have risen since then; but I can always take you on. As to the tribute you ask, I am in the habit of levying it, not paying it."

No wonder that Haidar Ali should crave for his head. Taking recourse to treachery, he captured Murarrao and sent him to the dreaded Kabbaladurga fort, which was "equivalent to a sentence of death' (p. 271). Murarrao was never seen after that. Some conjectured that he had escaped while others were sure he died in captivity. There is no memorial to this great fighter. Manohar Malgonkar reconciles to this and says, "And then it occurs to you that it is somehow dramatically neat that there should be no monument; that this man who so stubbornly refused to fit into the conventional moulds of his times should be remembered by something so banal as a brick-and-mortar edifice; not, anyhow, when the great rock of Gutti, soaring like a rearing horse against

the skyline and timeless in its indestructibility, stands itself as his very own monument” (p. 274).

It may be mentioned before we end that Malgonkar’s historical books are smooth reading, and as he often said in interviews, when he writes history, he takes care to make the works readable. Supplemented by pictures, documents and copies of correspondence, the books have authenticity about them. The language is crisp, to the point and the descriptions are photographic. Malgonkar’s pride in his heritage, in Indian history and in martial code is unmistakably present even in historical accounts.

The next three works discussed below pertain to contemporary history and come in the category of light reading though one cannot question the authenticity of factual material.

### ***The Garland Keepers* (1986)**

*The Garland Keepers* (1986) is based on some events of the Emergency of 1975–76. Like Nayantara Sahgal’s *Rich like Us* and Arun Joshi’s *The City and the River* it portrays an authentic and horrifying picture of the Emergency — a period that goes down history as a period of excesses and the throttling of the democratic political process. While the canvas of Nayantara Sahgal’s novel is broad and covers an analysis of the Indian socio-cultural evils like class/class-division, dangers of hero worship and personality cult and the problems generated by religious taboos, and Arun Joshi’s novel gives an allegorical picture, Malgonkar’s *The Garland Keepers* focuses mainly on abuse of power and violation of human rights. Manohar Malgonkar asserts in his ‘Author’s Note’ that his novel is based on a fictitious period and has fictitious personages, but despite his claim there are parallels to 1975–76 Emergency period. The author puts it thus, “At that, since all fits of national epilepsy must show some common outward symptoms, some of the events described in the book may have a passing resemblance to those that took place during the days of that earlier seizure — this would be no more than a coincidence.”

The title of the novel is derived from the epigraph which reads thus: "The principal deity in the temple may be garlanded only by the head priest or his deputy, a monarch only by those in the first circle of nobility. When garlands are removed, they are passed on to the most favored among the courtiers, whose privilege it is to keep them" (Epigraph to *The Garland Keepers*). Thus, there are the 'favored' ones — Swami Rajguru (the head priest), Kalas Kak (the son of the Great Leader), Kaul and Pashupat (members of the caucus). The sudden death of Om Prakash Agarwal, the Deputy Superintendent of Delhi Police in an accident and the investigations following it reveal a number of unsavory and shocking facts. The diary of Om Prakash goes missing which is supposed to have explosive material. Slowly, startling revelations about the maneuverings of those in power come to light. A bank fraud case, explosive official secrets, the evil designs of the Swami, his greed and lust come to light but the Swami is more than a match to the honest and upright officers and manages to wriggle out of the trap. Malgonkar has artistically juxtaposed the conflict between good and evil forces — the good symbolized by honest officers like Om Prakash Agarwal, Visram and Chopra; the evil forces are represented by the likes of the Machiavellian Swami, and his coteries. In trying to solve the mystery of murders, corruptions and shenanigans at the complex web of power, the author successfully depicts the contemporary state of affairs and shows how power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

The Swami exercises his tremendous influence over all administrative decisions because he is close to the Great Leader—the source of power—and also because he is in possession of a microfilm library of the secret dossier of some prominent people. On the whole, the novel opens many stinking facts about the Emergency which is often termed as a dark period when freedom of the citizens was jeopardized and freedom, justice and rule of law all were reduced to nothing. Here one



may compare it to Arun Joshi's *The City and the River* in which the Grand Master's strategies and administrative lapses lead to complete annihilation of the civilization. Arun Joshi's novel is allegorical and in the ultimate analysis becomes a treatise on the rise and fall of civilizations due to purblind approach, selfishness and power hunger. *The Garland Keepers* chastises the power politics of the Great Leader and his use of the Emergency powers to strengthen the rule of dynasty; it also takes to task self-seeking and unscrupulous politicians who help the Great Leader in his mission to perpetuate dynastic rule. The novel is action-packed, but it cannot be called a thriller because of the author's relentless search for individual liberty, social justice and quest for truth. Malgonkar warns us to be wary of those who, holding extra-constitutional authority, may pawn the country's future with impunity.

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

*The Men Who Killed Gandhi* (1978) is a non-fiction work revealing some important aspects of the historical-political situation behind the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. In fact, the book is less about the men who killed Gandhi and more about those forces that led to political maelstrom in the country. A work of this magnitude dealing with a sensitive issue needs thorough research and Malgonkar who does not write without researching his subject gives evidence of in-depth study and scrutiny of documents. His arguments are supported by documented evidence with original papers and photographs. The author does not limit himself to merely putting on record the events; but by evoking the historical and socio-political facts he has revealed the searing truth behind the betrayal and the resultant anger that led to the tragedy. Though written in reportage style, the book is not dull or drab; on the contrary, it has ease because of Malgonkar's masterly strokes. He is not irreverent towards Gandhi. He acknowledges his greatness but he is not blind to his failings. He maintains a tone of neutrality and yet tells the truth.

Malgonkar grew up during the turbulent period of India's freedom struggle. At the time of Independence he was in his early 30s, an experienced man of the world who had witnessed action and violence in World War II and had also seen Hindu-Muslim amity prior to the Partition and hostility after that. Thus, he had observed historical events from close quarters. He had regards for Gandhiji but he was also aware of his lapses. In his account of Gandhi murder he investigates to fix the points where Gandhi erred. It was Gandhi's failed policy of non-violence and appeasement of the Muslims that led to human suffering and the resultant anger and resentment. Particularly damaging was Gandhi's approach to stick on to non-violence during Bengal bloodshed which was directly linked to Mohammad Ali Jinnah's 'Direct Action' plan in Bengal

Malgonkar compares Gandhi, Nathuram Godse, Nehru and Patel to locate where we blundered. There were many sore points: Gandhi's unreasonable demand to release a large sum to Pakistan from our treasury; Nehru's inability to refuse; Gandhi's excessive and purblind insistence on non-violence; the riots, deaths, rapes and the chaos. Malgonkar has many questions: Was the then Government of India, with Nehru at the helm of affairs, weak to reject or even question Gandhi's demand for release of a large sum from our treasury to Pakistan? Was it a reasonable demand? Was there no remedy?

Godse and his companions held Gandhi responsible for this massive crime against humanity and finding no constitutional or Government help, they took the law in their hands and assassinated Gandhi. Though controversial, *The Men Who Killed Gandhi* is a major contribution to the history of partition from a different angle, supported by documents. Malgonkar does not indict Godse, nor does he exonerate him. He just puts facts before us — it is for us to accept or reject; if we accept, we learn from our mistakes, if we reject, posterity pays for our lapse.

***Spy in Amber* (1971)**

*Spy in Amber* (1971) is, as the title suggests, an espionage novel. The story concerns the hunt for Panchen Lama's treasure, the role of Chinese spies, sabotage of the Chinese plan by India's Military Intelligence officers and the efforts to solve the murder of Gomati and Bhatt. It is set during the time when tension between India and China was mounting. The drama unfolds partly in the Himalayas and partly in Delhi. Ragyabas Monastery in the mysterious reaches of the Himalayas has come into the eye of the storm because of the treasure hunt. It wears a mantle of silence and its magnificence is overshadowed by fear. Scared of a possible intrusion by the Chinese, the Head Lama of the monastery decides to transfer the priceless treasure of the Panchen Lama to India with request to keep it safe till the threat is over. The Chinese get an inkling of the plan and they send two expert spies — Chomo Jung and Pempen Kachim to foil the bid. Chomo is wicked and callous, and Pempen is an expert in ruthlessly using her charms to achieve her goal. Colonel Jeet Mansingh of Military Intelligence is sent to counter the Chinese agents. The location of the monastery is known only to two outsiders Gomati and Bhatt but they are both murdered. Now the question is who will reach the monastery and get the treasure? In the entire drama of murder, spying, creepy silences and shadowy dealings, the story advances and in the process it reveals human nature — its repulsive and squalid reality. Jeet Mansingh, his boss PK and Nirupa, the nurse are given important roles to play in solving the mystery. The story advances fast due to speedy action and constantly mounting tensions. The novel is gripping and interesting but all the same it remains on the periphery of serious literature and has not been accepted for critical study.

***Bandicoot Run* (1978)**

In *Bandicoot Run* (1978) Malgonkar again shifts attention to espionage. At its base is the story of missing files and the efforts

to solve the mystery of these files; in the process it reveals grimy secrets and the shenanigans in the corridors of power. The story is about two files that went missing from the Army headquarters. Two generals were vying for the topmost post in the Indian army. Both were due for promotion; at this crucial juncture the file of one of the generals gets lost. The story is told in a breath taking manner and the events move swiftly to keep the suspense. Malgonkar once revealed to a scholar who visited him after reading *Bandicoot Run* that the story was based on a real incident in which a file was deliberately removed and destroyed in the South Block to favor one particular officer.

*Bandicoot Run* is fictionalization of this real life incident that aroused strong suspicions and anger in the military hierarchy. It was serialized in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* in 1980–81. Malgonkar scholars regret academic apathy towards *Bandicoot Run* and wonder why it should not fall within the category of his serious writings. Although it is an espionage story, its strength lies in its subtle psychological insights into the working of human mind and man's propensity for wickedness for selfish gains. Malgonkar evokes the right atmosphere, like the room where Major Nadkar sits recalling his army days, reeks with smell of confidential files, DDT and rat's droppings. Malgonkar places national loyalty against betrayal and corruption and once again projects the Indian army as clean and the military code of honor as the highest. Even though it uses the thriller format, it has history behind it and only a bold writer can take up a sensitive contemporary issue of such magnitude at which those in the higher echelons of power can squirm.

### ***Open Season* (1978)**

*Open Season* (1978) falls under the category of light romance and does not qualify for serious reading and critical thought. To be fair to the author, it was never meant to be published as a novel but was written for making a film. In his 'Author's Note' Malgonkar

admits thus: “A friend who is one of India’s most exuberant movie producers, commissioned me to write a film story in which he could show the New York World Fair of 1964–65. In order to give him enough time to shoot the film before the fair closed, I wrote the story in two months flat. The bursting of the Panchet dam was big news at that time, and I thought the rugged Deccan hills would provide a dramatic contrast to the technological marvels exhibited in the fair” (1978).

The story opens with the hero Jaikumar waking up to the sound of rain on the roof, looking out at the wet morning and wondering how it would be to leave his home on such a day. “The morning reflected his own mood; behind him was the cozy warmth of the family house; outside was the bleak world. It was an awful day to be leaving home.” (p. 5). He goes to New York, has varied experiences, is immersed in life there, and falls in love with Kate. In fact this stock theme lacks depth — Indian boys developing relations with American girls and then coming back home and marrying a homely Indian girl. But in Malgonkar’s novel, the question of east-west conflict acquires interesting color. The problem of brain drain has been highlighted through Krishnaswamy’s changed perspective who would rather settle in the USA than go back home. We feel sorry for Krishnaswamy’s father Rachappa, who early in the novel hopes that young engineers like Jaikumar and his son, trained in the USA would be of great asset to our country when they come back.

Jaikumar is unable to shake off his Indian upbringing. He realizes that Kate may be a good friend but she cannot be his wife because of basic differences in their perspective on life, domesticity and career. Jaikumar comes back home. The title of the last chapter “Cows and Red Bangles” suggests his return. *Open Season* compares well with Arun Joshi’s *The Foreigner*. But Joshi’s novel is gloomy and his hero has existential dimensions. Malgonkar’s *Jai* is lively. The author presents a beautiful contrast

between the rugged Deccan terrain, the folk traditions, and the simple life pattern against the fast moving, technological First World. It is to the folds that one returns for peace and security.

### ***Shalimar* (1978)**

*Shalimar* (1978) is novelization of Krishna Shah's film of the same name. A crime-cum-spy story it is again a thriller that did damage to Malgonkar's reputation as a litterateur. The story runs around the investigation of the theft of a ruby in which expert criminals are involved with the CBI as the investigating agency. There is an impeccable hero, a beautiful heroine and finally their union al la Bollywood style. The theme as well the story is weak but Malgonkar's language has its usual flow.

After his 1972 novel *The Devil's Wind* and its success as a historical novel of great value, Manohar Malgonkar shifted to writing scripts for TV and films. These meant money and Malgonkar admits candidly that he needed an extra income. He writes about the genesis of this novel in his 'Author's Note' that he transcribed Krishna Shah's film script into a novel keeping faithfully to the original. It runs thus: "Krishna Shah wrote the screenplay of *Shalimar*, based on a story written jointly with Stanford Sharman. After that, he lived with it for several years, chopping and changing, pruning and adding, revising and polishing, before he made it into a film. My assignment was to write a novel based on his final screenplay." The film failed miserably at box office and the novel too bounced. Malgonkar's readers and fans were disappointed and his close friends were sore at it, "How could you afford to damage your reputation thus?" they asked, tells Manohar to James Dayananda. He got a handsome sum of Rs. 50,000/- for it and the author says he was comfortable writing such scripts for income-generation.

### ***Inside Goa* (1985)**

Manohar Malgonkar loved Goa, a fact that is all too obvious in his *Inside Goa* (1985) a narrative of Goan history, of the various

disturbances and historical forces that made this tiny territory and its people what it is — beautiful, buoyant, pliable and a pleasant mixture of Portuguese and Indian culture. The book traces the history of Hindu and Christian Goa and gives reason for the unique harmony in this small area of Konkan which till date has never experienced communal unrest.

The book jointly done by Manohar Malgonkar and Mario de Miranda is a valuable document of this land referred to as “Golden Goa”. Miranda’s cartoons and Malgonkar’s descriptive skill bring Goa scintillatingly alive. Malgonkar and Miranda establish an essential truth: that Goa is more than a geographical entity; it is a quintessential state of mind. The familiar phrase is “You can take the Goan out of Goa, but it is impossible to take Goa out of the Goan.” Glimpses of the history of Goa, the arrival of St. Xavier, the temples and churches, the enigmatic Abbe Faria, part Rasputin and part Machiavelli, and his role in Goan history and polity, the influence of Marathi literature on the life and literature of Goa, are all etched out with ease. We learn that Goa finds mention in the Puranas as Gomantak; in the 14<sup>th</sup> century records it is mention as Govapuri. This narrow strip on the Western coast of India is a hundred miles long and has an impressive history going back to the Bhoj Kings, Chalukyas, Shivaji and others. It recounts the contribution of Alfonso de Albuquerque in empire-building. The work is supported by authentic documents and whether it talks of the dreaded Inquisition or wonders at the Hindu continuity in a predominantly Christian backdrop, it has support of documented records.

The book reworks the life and history of Goa through contrasts: embattled and lavish Goa residing side by side with the Goa of eerie silence, miserable bumpy roads, the luscious forests lashed by tropical torrential rains and finally, the contemporary Goa of tourists.

### ***Line of Mars* (Play, 1978)**

*Line of Mars* (1978) is based on the theme of Indian history and provides a glimpse of the events leading to the 1857 uprising. Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse came as a curse for princely states of India. Apprehensive of losing their kingdoms the rulers were keen to drive away the British. The play has two Acts: first act is set in 1849, and the second in 1857 when our first war of Independence, often termed as Sepoy Mutiny by the British, broke out. If seen from the historical perspective, the play presents the events that led the disgruntled kings and rulers to take up arms. The 1857 revolt initially began in 1848 when Dalhousie, then Governor General embarked on the idea of expanding British supremacy in India. The Doctrine of Lapse was his brainchild, a special device for finishing the Indian kings and their kingdoms. The East India Company was managing the affairs in India and the idea of annexing the princely states fell within its desire for rapid expansion.

The play opens with an interesting conversation between an impoverished painter and his wayward daughter, Sumati, who is keen to marry a prince. It is in her horoscope, she says, that she would be a queen. Luckily, or unluckily, the Raja of the area is looking for a young woman who could give him an heir, his earlier four Ranis being unable to provide a male child. The birth of a son is important to save the kingdom from the clutches of Dalhousie and also to run their dynasty called 'Mangal' dynasty as it derives its origin from the Mars. The 'inspection' of the girl, the money doled out to the painter as the price of the girl and the carrying away of Sumati — albeit too willing to be carried away — are all recorded with a kind of eagerness befitting the mood of the Raja in a hurry to have an heir.

Manaji, the Raja weds Sumati who, in due course begets him a son. But the story of this conception has a bizarre angle which we see later in the play. Eight years after the birth of the child, the Raja joins his compatriots in the uprising, goes to the battle and



is killed. Sumati, once an innocent and almost foolish girl gains in stature, learns the intrigues and cunning of administration; and becomes the Regent Maharani of the Mangal dynasty. She is presented with 'Her Majesty's Warrant' to rule. The play ends here but leaves a host of questions about the English Resident Rowland and his relations with Sumati, the fate of the women of the house, the fate of the tiny kingdom and many more.

Though historically the story holds its ground, the treatment of the theme is flimsy and the language spoken by the painter-father, the Queen Mother Anandi, Bhimsen, the Queen-Mother's secretary and Manaji, the ruler is indecent and offensive. Frankly, no father can speak to his daughter as does the Painter; no son can speak to his mother as Manaji does. How could Malgonkar, who is a stickler for tradition and has conservative approach to propriety slip on this feature? Manaji's language is not only abusive it is highly insulting, obscene and smacks of insolence. The manner in which he talks of his mother's relations with Bhimsen is unheard of in polite circles.

The royal household seems to have done away with courtesy, graciousness and civility. Sumati's voluptuousness and sensuality are commensurate with her basic character (as shown in the opening scene) but the way she uses Rowland and buys his favors is brash and unpalatable. However, the description of Dalhousie eloquently expresses the Raja's anger, "Let me tell you about Dalhousie. His first name is James, but the name he's known by is Annexation Dalhousie — Annexation Dalhousie. A tiny, sinister figure with scrawny limbs and an enormous head, sick in body but a glutton for work — consuming paper by the cartload. And why does he work so hard? He's set his heart on finishing us all off — every single kingdom in the Doctrine of Lapse. (p. 30). Manaji appears an imprudent ruler who does not understand the British character — they are fools, he says, "drunk with power, arrogant, blind, doped with self-importance. They don't know what's coming to them" (p. 37). His boastful pride in his "line of Mars" is misplaced and ridiculous considering the ground reality

of the situation. Like Quixote he imagines the enemy swept away in one gigantic sweep. The location of Mangal kingdom is not clear. Sumati calls her father 'Appa' and her exclamations like 'aiyo' are typically southern whereas the name of the ruler Manaji sounds like one of the popular names among the Marathas. The 1857 Revolt erupted in the North. From these historical angles, the kingdom should be somewhere in the North which is not certain if we go by the incongruities mentioned above. But if we forget these shortcomings, the theme of the play is important to understand the causes behind the 1857 Revolt. "We are like — chained dogs — not permitted to stray. The Indian princes are not allowed to meet one another," is what Manaji tells us. (p. 55)

### ***Dead and Living Cities (1977)***

A charming little book I stumbled upon while searching for Manohar Malgonkar's works other than the famous ones, is *Dead and Living Cities* containing articles published over the years in *Orientalism*, *Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Freedom First* and *Debonair*. The articles are not about cities but about India, Indian culture and heritage and the little known places that preserve these cultural fragments amid the onslaught of modernity. A small piece entitle 'Look and be Afraid' is an account of a tiny village called Shirale. It is village of snakes and snake charmers, the author tells us. The article describes in details snake catching, Nagpanchami snake dance and pooja, and the lively but fear-evoking atmosphere for an outsider. The best part an environmentalist would like to gloat over is when after the Nag-Panchami day each snake is released in its hole from where it was caught. A super-human feat indeed!

The article on Ooty recounts its history briefly. Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of Madras visited Ooty in 1840. He was so enamored of the place that he extended his stay for ten months and started the practice of calling his councilors from Madras to Ooty. The tradition of shifting the secretariat to Ooty during summer set in after this. Later, Lord Dalhousie came

here to recoup and telegraph line was brought to this small hill station. In the postcolonial era, the few British residents remain an interesting and yet pathetic community of Ooty, those who have stayed on and re-live the past at the club, calling out 'Koi Hai' and enjoying the attention of the bearer who materializes from nowhere to attend on the Sahibs in Independent India

Write-ups on Rajasthan, Goa, and Madras open a treasure house of information about these places — something we do not come across in our travel writings. Madras, says Malgonkar "has proved to be a more durable relic of the Raj than any other city in India," and he goes on to give a beautiful portrait of the city, forts and churches that are the relics of the British past and Mahabalipuram, its temples and other features that speak of traditional India. The article was written in 1973; till then much of the ambience of the city was still intact. We do not know what changes we encounter now — in Chennai!

'Khedda' is about elephant trapping in Mysore area. In days of yore, this ancient practice of driving the elephants over miles of forest and bringing them to the place of capture at the precise hour decided upon months earlier was an art and a show of gallantry but now, it has degenerated to a show of numerical strength and the author, who witnessed it felt humbled by this pitiless practice of enslaving a creature of nature born to be free. 'Burning Bright' is about "tiger hunt" not the way it was done by Rajas and Maharajas, with dignity and poise but in a reprehensible manner by killing the magnificent animal with rat poison. The article evokes beautiful comparison with hunting as a game and hunting as a devious activity. Amid these serious and informative pieces 'Bird Talk' comes with scintillating humor. What do the birds talk? Probably, about war and troops and treason! In a way we can call this book an "unusual travelogue."

Malgonkar's writings are varied, prolific, copious and gripping. Let us sum up his achievements in the next chapter.

# 7

## *Achievements*

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Manohar Malgonkar's works are remarkable phenomenon in modern Indian English literature. Actuality of problems, realistic approach to them, skill to impart dynamism to action, beautiful style — all these put Malgonkar in the ranks of the most popular and readable authors.

— Elena J. Kalinnikova

To evaluate the achievement of a prolific writer is by itself a stupendous task but if he/she happens to be at once serious and comic; writing on robust themes and in the same stroke turning to film scripts and spy thrillers, the magnitude of the assessment job leaves one bewildered. Malgonkar maintains a high standard of professional success and yet does not mind staking his reputation by writing entertainers like *Shalimar* or *Open Season*; he has the guts to reject non-violence but is not a votary of violence; he is censured for his colonial inclination but is an Indian to the core. Indeed, how does one appraise such a multi-faceted writer?

Let us be fair to the author and concur that the achievement of a writer is not to be judged by critical censure or critical acclaim. Both are subjective and variable with time. Those who tore Hardy's *Tess of D'Urbervilles* to pieces as offensive to their Victorian sensibilities were soon overtaken by those who acknowledged its great literary worth.

The success of a writer depends on the quality of the experience he presents and the degree of control he exercises on his medium, opines G.S. Amur. On both these counts Manohar Malgonkar stands unquestioned. Like Ernest Hemingway, he was an outdoor man who loved robust activities like hunting, trekking, mining, games and sports, traveling and tea gardening. His years in the army provided him the required outdoor and indoor training and his posting in the Army Intelligence Service gave him an opportunity to understand how looking under the surface is the key to finding the treasure. All these experiences go into the making of his novels and stories. When writing historical accounts, he consulted documents, conducted research and read extensively. He never compromised authenticity and whatever he wrote was from lived and felt experiences, and was reliable.

As regards the medium of writing, the use of English did not bother him. In his view language is never anybody's national property. "I don't feel any sense of violation when I choose to write in English instead of in Marathi or any Indian language" (Dayananada p. 25). The Malgonkars did not speak English at home; as a child he learnt it at school and since he studied in Indian schools his teachers were Indians not British. He picked up British accent and slang in the army. In writing *Distant Drum* and his army short stories, British expressions came to him naturally. Some of the exchanges between officers, their typical exclamations and swear-words have been accurately reproduced by the author. In his first two novels he makes profuse use of English-English expressions but in his other works the use of "Tommy English" is minimum. He consciously uses the language according to the setting — a Peshwa speaking or thinking like a Britisher would be an anomaly, so Nana Saheb in *The Devil's Wind* does not speak in typical British style; on the other hand, Kiran Garud and his army friends sitting in the Mess would not look authentic were they to use anything but British expression. The idea is to convey the characteristic nuances and this is done through appropriate

expressions. Interestingly, in *Combat of Shadows* Ruby Miranda's Indian-accented English appears offensive to Henry Winton but she is smart enough to acquire British accent quickly to impress Winton who marvels at her improved spoken English. The use of English as his creative medium was never an issue with Malgonkar and he employed the idiom effortlessly.

Does that make him any less Indian than those who write in their mother tongues? Certainly 'Not'. He is an Indian writer, who writes about India and as C.D. Narasimhaiah points out, if a work has Indian sensibilities, it can be called Indian literature. Malgonkar has colonial sympathies at person to person level: there are good Englishmen and bad Englishmen, his protagonists appreciate the 'good' ones and become friendly with them; the bad ones are punished. Henry Winton gets his due for his treachery and betrayals but there are officers like Major Maxwell or Col Howard who charm us. But then, Indians too are good and bad. What about Gian and Shafi? How would one react to people like Jugal Kishore or Kanakchand? Their dishonesty and opportunism is far too obvious to be ignored. We can't just like them because they are Indians. Malgonkar's failure in portraying Indian realities is a ticklish proposition. What constitutes 'Indian realities'? Only workers, the poor, beggars or slum-dwellers do not constitute India's reality. The period he writes about has its own reality — freedom struggle, partition, violence, the Princes who lose their kingdoms and so on. Malgonkar was conscious of his class. His thoughts, approach to life, value-system and assumptions were governed by his class and caste. He was not a committed writer nor was he an idealist. He could write only what he saw, felt and experienced.

History is Malgonkar's forte. He is the first Indian writer in English to make profuse use of history for his creative writing. He fuses literary imagination with historical facts effortlessly and weaves his stories keeping the two elements — history and

literature — at proper distance with the result that the novels are neither boring like historical accounts nor questionable for having tampered with facts. His works have vitality and variety. Artistic integrity coupled with depth of historical sense make the works interesting and authentic. He observes the setting of each of his novels conscientiously and brings out the past to life. But, Malgonkar is not a historian to analyze facts of history, he is a literary artist and as such he combines narrative and analytical skills and through characters and situations demonstrates the historical reality that runs side by side the human reality.

Transition has its problems of uncertainties, uprooting, anger of dislocation and desperation. But these problems cannot dislocate permanent values. In *Distant Drum*, British Indian Army becomes Indian army/Pakistani army but the values inculcated in the men — values of integrity, duty, discipline and brotherhood sustain them in the face of crisis. Even upto Aslam Chisti's time — 1971 Bangladesh action — the martial code works on the same lines. Another aspect of change is evinced in *Combat of Shadows*. This change in attitude is obvious in the bold stand taken by the Indian coolies/workers who are mustering up courage to resist colonial high-handedness. Malgonkar's plots have originality; he gives them the desired structure and places the characters convincingly within the given set-up. With the help of witty dialogues, quick action and change of scenes, he advances the story, never letting a boring moment hamper the reader. He is an able historian with a fantastic imagination and a creative mind. Manohar Malgonkar's mantra for a successful novel is that the reader must be "hooked on" to the story. He generates conflicts — social, inter-personal, inter-racial and political — escalates them, places his characters in the commotion and then gives them strength to fight it out. In all of his six novels he fuses history with fiction; and in that he belongs to the "advanced guard".

One of the most knotty questions is his attitude towards his women characters. To be sure, Malgonkar is a man's writer. Outdoor activities, adventures, games and sports, hunting, fishing are his characters' favored activities. They are daring, adventurous and above all honorable men. Those that do not fall within these parameters are punished for their weakness — Henry Winton, for example; Nana Saheb cannot provide bold and reckless leadership to his men, he suffers a blot, albeit false, on his name and goes down in history as a wicked man. Malgonkar creates a variety of male characters — alive and alert, comic and simple, thoughtful and serious, good and bad.

The same does not hold good for his women characters. Malgonkar sees women through his traditionally tinted glass — the docile Indian wife, the pleasure-giving mistress, and a bold friend. Usually, the licentious woman has temporary appeal for men — Jean Walters in *Combat of Shadows* mesmerizes Henry by her bold advances but the marriage does not hold for long; similar is the case with Margot Medley whose boldness appeals to Kiran Garud temporarily but it is Bina who attracts him by her grace and elegance. Malgonkar has been criticized for portraying negative picture of the Maharani in *The Princes* and he is charged with giving away Indian woman's modesty to please his Western readers. Nothing can be farther from truth. To me, it appears that Malgonkar has sympathies with the Maharani (*The Princes*) and Kashi (*The Devil's Wind*). In giving them liberty to carve out a life for themselves, albeit late in life, he has foreseen the emerging new woman. The Maharani, Sundari (*A Bend in the Ganges*), Miranda (*Combat of Shadows*) Kashi (*The Devil's Wind*) emerge as empowered women who can take charge of their life, who want to exercise a choice for themselves and have the courage to confront their hopeless, lonely existence.

Malgonkar successfully transcended the linguistic and stylistic limitations faced by some Indians writers in English. He



makes clear distinction between an officer using English and a politician or worker using the language. The accent, tone and choice of words betray the latter. The same cannot be said of the early works of Kamala Markandaya or Anita Desai; their works are heavily influenced by the English Romantics, particularly evident in passages describing nature where the Shelleyan or Keastian aura prevails. Malgonkar's language is lucid, his diction and syntax are flawless, and his style is controlled and artistic. Khushwant Singh assesses him as easily readable, while R.K. Narayan called him his favorite Indian novelist in English.

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## Chronology

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12 July 1913. Born

1919–1931 Schooling

1931–1935 College years in Bombay. Graduation 1935

1947 Marriage

1948 Birth of daughter, Sunita

1935–1937 Professional hunter

1937 Joined central Government service

1942–1952 Army. Travel in Nepal, Indonesia, Malaya and Western Europe, England

1952 Miner

1957 Joined politics. Defeated in elections

1959 *Kanhoji Angrey*

1960 *Distant Drum*

1962 Fought elections as Swatantra Party candidate. Defeated

1962 *Combat of Shadows*

1964 *A Bend in the Ganges*. Visit to the USA

1970 Visit to the USA

1971 *Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur*

1972 *The Devil's Wind*. Visit to USA, Lecture tour

1980 *Inside Goa*

1992 *Cactus Country*

2010 *Scaling the Heights: Mired in Their Own Blood: Stories of Loyalty and Treachery from Medieval India*.

June 24, 2010. Death

