

BAND OF BROTHERS' NATIONALISTIC FERVOR AND AGGRESSION IN THE MANOHAR MALGONKAR'S NOVEL BEND IN THE GANGES

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Abstract

Indian writing in English flourished with nationalistic fervour in the 19th century. The writers of time awaked with their mite of pen and started to write in English about national literature. Nation and nationalistic theme awakened the milieu about socio-political condition of the time. The contemporary era flourished all branch of literature.

Keywords: Nation, Nationalistic fervour, Gandhi, Ideology, aggression

INTRODUCTION

A Bend in the Ganges, Manohar Malgonkar's fourth novel reveals Gandhian ideology of non-violence and passive resistance. It does not match with great trio Raja Rao, Mulraj Anand and R.K.Narayan's novel based on Gandhian ideology. Malgonkar has put his votary practicing non-violence on acid test. He has described that activist of non-violence needs to cultivate in personality boundless patience, forgiveness, purity of soul and faith in God. As R.K. Prabhu and Rao notes that in the book Mind of the Mahatma:

Non-violence is an active force of the highest order. It is soul force or the power of Godhead within us. Imperfect man cannot grasp the whole of that Essence-he would not be able to bear its full blaze, but even an infinitesimal fraction of it, when it becomes active within us, can work wonders (115).

There are two different ideologies described in the novel in support of Gandhism and in against Gandhism. Gian Talwar represents the pro-Gandhian attitude and characters like Debi-dayal, Shafi Usman alias Singh, Basu and Hafiz Khan represent an anti Gandhian belief. Shafi Usman is a Muslim youth and Debi is a businessman. In the beginning of the novel Gian Talwar is described truly Gandhian- a follower of non-violence. He believes that:

The path of ahimsa is not for cowards; in true non-violence, there is no room for timidity. Just as we are this day throwing away in this fire our garments made of imported materials, so should we be making an offering of everything within us which conflicts with our dedication to true non-violence-ahimsa (Malgonkar9).

Gian believes that non-violence is weapon of brave and demands more sacrifices. Like Gandhiji he believes that exercise of non-violence requires supreme virtue of bravery. Young vigilant lieutenant of Gandhiji mentions it as:

But we are a new kind of soldier. Our weapons are the truth and violence. Our war shall be fought only by peaceful means. Gandhiji has shown us the path. But make no mistake; our non-violence is the non-violence of brave, arising not from cowardice but from courage demanding greater sacrifices than ordinary fighting men are called upon to make. We are aware that there are in our country those who do not believe in our methods, those who aim to achieve freedom by resorting to violence. Such men have no place in our army, however patriotic they may be (Malgonkar08).

In the beginning of the novel Gian is greatly amused by a ceremony of purification. He is impressed by the slogans: Victory to the Mahatma Gandhi! Boycott British Goods! Mahatma Gandhi ki jai! He also joined in railing and starts to repeating those slogans. He says 'the path of ahimsa is not for cowards' (Malgonkar14). Gandhiji is God for Gian, who could only save him from clutches of Britisher's rogueness. Gian and Debi-dayal are classmates and they attend a picnic. At Kerwad House Gian is attracted towards Debi's sister, Sundari who shows Gian her father's museum, a rare collection of statues of gods and goddesses. These sculptures were full of dancing, fighting, killing, cursing and meditating in many other poses. For a moment he becomes 'The statue, lifeless, ageless, unbreathing' (6). It has a deep effect on Gian. In course of discussion Singh asks Gian why he puts on khaddar. Then he proclaims that this is the symbol of the Indian National Movement based on truth and non-violence.

When he announces to have become the follower of Gandhi, he was criticised. Actually Gian is then in the group of the terrorists group headed by Singh, Shafi Usman in disguise. The terrorist group does not believe in the principle of Gandhi's nonviolence, so he pronounces: 'Gandhi is the enemy of India's national aspiration'(7). Gian reacts to it and says that Gandhi through his non-violent movement can lead us to victory. He defines it as: 'any patriot, any man with any feelings for the liberation of the country is a follower of Mahatma Gandhiji' (8).

Singh asks him to cite any country that has stunned off foreign rule without resorting to war; Gian is agitated but declares suddenly Gandhi as a god. Singh quotes the examples of America, Turkey and even Shivaji and affirms: Freedom has to be won; it has to be won by sacrifice; by giving blood, not by giving up the good things of life and wearing white caps and going to jail. Look at America-the United States! They went to war, Turkey! Even our own Shivaji. Non-violence is the philosophy of sheep, a creed for cowards. It is the greatest danger to the country (Malgonkar 9).

Singh cites creates confusion in the mind of Gain. Thus he not understood difference between principal of non-violence and violence. Gian observed that he was standing on opposite side and Singh, Debi on the other. Singh and Debi Dayal think that Mahatma Gandhi will bring about a great adversity whereas Gian retorts:

Ahimsa is the noblest of creeds: There can be nothing more sacred. No man has the right to raise his hand against another, whatever the provocation. I shall never do it. It takes greater courage; non-violence is not for the weak (Malgonkar 10).

Debi, Shafi, Basu and Hafiz are political revolutionaries, who hate Gandhian ideology of non-violence and passive resistance. They do not like freedom fighters and call them enemies of the nation. They had disrespect for non-violent protest of Gandhiji and his followers. Debi dayal rejects the passive resistance of Gandhi, Nehru and their supporters. He blames them for the miserable condition of India and laughs at the call of Quit India movement. He comments:

Quit India! It had almost made him laugh. The British had left Malaya and Burma, but certainly not in response to such slogans. Those who had called on them to quit were now languishing in prison. The British would never quit a country just because a lot of men dressed in dhotis and white caps implored them to do so. The appeal could be regarded as either pathetic or ludicrous....(Malgonkar 277-78)

Shafi feels that practicing of non-violence is an insult to the land of Shivaji and Akbar as well as violence would be the only answer to drive away the British out of the territory of India. Basu also dislikes followers of Gandhiji and criticizes them scornfully: "Unless we are prepared to meet violence with violence, we shall be slave race again –within weeks of the British leaving us" (Malgonkar299).

In the novel the Hindu and the Muslim forms Ram-Rahim club to compel the Britishers to leave India. The club members are patriots and dedicated for nation service which set a very good example of religious tolerance. They renounce the vegetarianism and the taboo of religion. Their oath of initiation was signed in blood drawn from the little finger of the left hand. In the assembly they used to par take curry made of parts and pork. They all flouted the sacred rules of their religions. After taking the dish of pork and beef no Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh could continue to link with his religion. The religious dogmas could no longer prevent them from uniting them for their sole purpose. They were all willing to die for sake nation. Shafi Usman was their leader who was never affected by the wave of religious fanaticism. Debi Dayal also become member of the club eating beef and forgets about his religion as Brahmin. Here transformation of religion shows positivity for nation liberation and servitude. Putting aside ideology of Violence and Non-violence everyone has same ideology to free the motherland from the clutches of Britishers.

Gandhiji had view about religion tolerance represented in the book India of my dream:

I do not expect India of my dream to develop one religion, i.e., to be wholly Hindu, or wholly Christian, or wholly Musalman, but I want it to be wholly tolerant, with its religious working side by side with one another ().

Shafi Usman also transform to Sikh religion. He prefers to be called Mr. Singh, a Punjabi gentleman. He has grown beard and wears turban. He used to speak with mild voice in Punjabi accent. He was accepted as a leader and joined the coterie of the first batch of terrorists of Jitin Das and Hafiz Khan. Jitin Das had died in Andaman Jail. Hafiz Khan was instructed to direct the entire movement from Bombay. Shafi Usman shared the risks and hardships in collaboration with Gandhi who was the chief of the National Congress. Shafi has totally transformed himself as a freedom fighter. Novelist describes him:

The others watched him, spell-bound; the leader who was a Muslim and now looked like a Sikh. His transformation gave added significance to their movement. A man's religion meant nothing. Here was a man who had been born a muslim but had now become a Sikh; he even wore a Kada, the steel bangle of the Sikh-religion (Malgonkar 24).

At the end of the seventh chapter Bullocks and Bangles, an ardent follower of Gandhiji and his philosophy of non-violent, Gain Talwar becomes violent and kills his cousin, Vishnudutt who murdered his brother Hari. The novelist writes in author's note that violence is inevitable in life of every human being:

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. (06)

Here Malgonkar's background of as an army officer may be brought him at this stage of disagreement about non-violence. He has pointed out that non-violence brought with it bloodiest history. His observation during an army officer's tenure moulded him into belief that violence could only be subdued through violence. He believes that non-violence is the weapon of timid.

In the epigraph of the novel, Malgonkar has taken notes of Gandhi referred to his experiment with non-violence:

The 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 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 this neighbor? (Epigraph)

Gandhiji was aware with the result of the violence so he forbade Hindus and Muslims to involve in violence. Neither of the communities paid attention to his preaching of non-violence and it results into civil war, loot, rapes, genocide, massacre and arson, unparalleled in the annals of Indian history. Malgonkar also referred to tale of woe which took place at the time of partition of India and Pakistan. Majority citizens were killed and mutilated. The women were brutally raped and murdered in the holocaust. At this juncture Gandhi was wrong who warned the people to stop violence and follow non-violence? By describing genocide Malgonkar referred to Gandhian point of view that Violence breeds Violence. If we analyze the novel with this point of view it does not refute to Gandhiji's ideals of Non-violence.

The novelist has also referred to self consuming nature of violence. Violent personality like Debidayal and Shafi Usman were born violent who were killed. Debidayal is killed in the Hindu-Muslim riot. Shafi Usman killed by Sundri under impelling which leads to unavoidable circumstances in the novel. In case of Non-violent personality Gian Talwar, self consuming violence does not apply because he nurtured by non-violent characteristics earlier.

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