

Two Partition Novels

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Two Partition Novels

SHAKTI BATRA

KHUSHWANT SINGH and Malgonkar deal with India's independence and the holocaust that followed in the wake of the partition of the country. They seek to portray how mass passions were aroused during those fateful days that preceded and followed the Sunrise of our freedom.¹ In addition to large scale arson and riots in various parts of the subcontinent, many a train during that terrible time was halted by armed bands of men, systematically killing the unfortunate passengers.

A Train to Pakistan and *A Bend in the Ganges* take up this theme and portray conflicting loyalties and various forces at work during what Malgonkar calls '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.'² This offers potentialities of turning out gripping and powerful accounts of rioting and bloodshed, and both Khushwant Singh and Malgonkar strive to present to us stories that, despite their various merits and drawbacks, manage to rise above 'the standard of sensational journalism.'³

The sleepy, little village of Mano Majra, on the Indo-Pakistan border is the locale of Khushwant Singh's story, and he describes it vividly.⁴ Life here is regulated by trains which rattle across the railway bridge spanning the river. The popula-

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tions is half Sikh, half Muslim; they have been living together, without any trace of communal strife, for generations. Then, one day a train load of corpses from Pakistan crosses the bridge near Mano Majra; refugees pour in, and incidentally, a Communist named Iqbal. The cry of reprisal silences the still, soft voice of humanity. The Muslim population is evacuated to a refugee camp. The enraged Sikhs decide to attack the refugee train bound for Pakistan, because they have heard of such attacks on their trains across the border.

A character like Hukum Chand, magistrate and deputy commissioner, who tries to lead a comfortable and quiet life in all this turmoil and is 'above the scene' is forced to face the horrors and bestiality of the situation. But he is powerless to do anything to prevent bloodshed.

In this all-round madness, the plain, earthly love of a Sikh peasant for his Muslim sweetheart asserts itself. Realising that the attack on the refugee train must mean death to Nooran, the tough Juggut Singh, 'budmash number ten'⁵ of the village, prevents the attack at the cost of his own life. He reaches the rope that has been fixed up across the bridge just above the height of the railway carriage. Other Sikhs, who have been awaiting the cutting of many people 'in two like a knife slicing cucumbers'⁶, spot him in the darkness and fire shots at him. But before he falls down dead, Jugga manages to cut the rope with his kirpan and thus redeem himself.

Malgonkar, on the other hand, chooses a wider canvas for his novel. 'Not only the violence in the story', as claimed by the author, 'happens to be true'⁷, but Malgonkar also strives to show how gradually, drop by drop, communal poison soured and embittered the lives of freedom fighters like Shafi Usman and converted them into communal fanatics. The young terrorists, who blew up railway tracks, bridges and an aeroplane, are at each other's throats at the end of the novel.

The story progresses on, what Verghese calls, 'pure coincidence'⁸. Debidayal, the scion of the Kerwad family, and Gian Talwar, a boy from a poor peasant family, are together at the college. Debidayal, an ardent terrorist, is arrested for blowing

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up a British aeroplane because Shafi Usman, in a fit of communal frenzy, betrays him. Gian, in spite of his faith in non-violence, pursues a family feud and murders Vishnudutt. Both find themselves together on the ship bound for the Cellular Jail, Port Blair in the Andamans. In prison Gian is the 'administrative spy', 'the favoured stool pigeon of the Sahib'. 'He becomes a collaborator and helps the authorities to nab Debidayal who tries to escape.

The second World War breaks out and the Japanese stand poised to 'liberate' their 'Indian brothers' from the 'British tyrant.' While pulling out of the Andamans, Mulligan does not forget the old faithfuls, Gian and the big Ramoshi, Ghasita. But before their plan can be put into operation, Mulligan is captured and Ghasita is killed by the Jaora Head-hunters. Gian escapes to India with Ghasita's ten sovereigns, which he extracts from his 'Khobri'. Debi, on the other hand, cooperates with the Japanese and is sent to India to work as a fifth columnist and to set up a new terrorist movement.

Communal passions are at their height when Debi and Gian find themselves back in their country, and the violence of India during partition sucks them in again. Gian manages to get a job with Debi's father and is stationed in Bombay. Here he falls for Debi's sister, Sundari, a hard and self-centred woman, who is the victim of a loveless marriage because she cannot fit into her husband's smart set. Debi, who wishes to settle his score with Shafi Usman, traces him to a brothel in Anarkali, Lahore. He buys Shafi's mistress, Mumtaz, and later marries her. He urges Sundari to prepare the ground for his welcome home and reveals to her how Gian had betrayed him in Jail. Sundari humiliates Gian and gets square with her husband in one masterly stroke and leaves for Lahore. Gian follows her.

Debidayal and Mumtaz try to reach Debi's parents on board a refugee train. The train is stopped and the passengers are checked by a mob of angry Muslims. Debi is killed by the mob and Mumtaz is carried away. Riots also take Shafi Usman to Lahore, where he finds that Debi's parents and sister Sundari are at his mercy. In the fight that ensues in Tekchand's house,

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Gian is successful in taking out Sundari and they join the refugee cavalcade to India.

In striving for realism and authenticity, Khushwant Singh and Malgonkar adopt English in such a way as to bring out the individuality of the characters, the social and cultural milieu they belong to, and their motivations; they, of course, do follow the example set earlier by Mulk Raj Anand, but they do not go the ludicrous lengths to which Anand goes in the name of realism : 'all the dialogue in my novels from my mother-tongue and (thinking) out the narrative mostly the same way.'¹² Passages like

O baby, you have eaten my life. You can't rest even while I am talking business to anyone. May you die. May your liver burn. May you fade away. You of the evil star... you...¹²

are rare in both Khushwant Singh and Malgonkar, although Khushwant Singh can't resist the temptation of bringing in the Punjabi idiom including the curses and the swear-words, into the dialogue or the characters he is dealing with. Jugga's mother tells him:

"Go, go wherever you want to go. If you want to jump in a well, jump. If you want to hang like your father, go and hang. It is my lot to weep. My kismet... it is all written there."¹³

And then Jugga's swear-words suit him, 'budmash number ten' that he is. Malgonkar is discreetly silent when it comes to abuses and swear-words. For him a dash serves the purpose; he leaves it to the reader to fit in an appropriate swear-word in the given context. But sometimes, he does give himself in when, in the vein of Anand, he does not bother to translate his swear-words and puts them in as they are.¹⁴

Neither Khushwant Singh nor Malgonkar tries to vulgarise English words like 'engine' into 'injan', 'fashion' into 'fashun' 'gentleman' into 'gentleman' in order to evolve an 'Indian English' or to attain an 'Indian atmosphere' in their novels.

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Haseena's escort says 'government'¹⁵, and not 'gormint' as Anand possibly would have made her say. Only Jugga refers to English conversation as 'git-mit' as does Bakha. To quote Verghese, "Anand's practice of indiscriminate use of Hindi words and of the vulgarisation of English words does not create the illusion of reality he aims at for the simple reason that the villagers and coolies cannot speak English. . . . An Indian novelist in English should employ his skill in contriving a dialogue that is at once natural and lively, supple and functional. He may even catch the speech rhythms and the turns of phrases used by all kinds of people in the village and translate some of the abuse, curses, imprecations and proverbs to advantage."¹⁶

Khushwant Singh and Malgonkar employ their individual 'skills' in order to achieve the above effect. In the first place Khushwant Singh's characters are the village-folk. They belong mainly to two communities—Sikhs and Muslims, the only Hindus being Lala Ram Lal, the moneylender who is murdered by the beginning of the novel, and Hukum Chand, magistrate and deputy commissioner. Dealing with a limited number of characters, Khushwant Singh takes care to integrate them with their background which has been etched painstakingly and with precision which Khushwant Singh himself knows very well. One can easily visualize Jugga, 'budmash number ten' making love to a half-willing Nooran; marching triumphantly to the police station without bearing any malice or ill-will toward the policemen; cracking obscene jokes with Bhola, the tonga-driver, or finally, going to Meet Singh so that the later can read a few sacred verses to him before he sacrifices himself. Khushwant Singh also brings before us the sordid affair between Hukum Chand and Haseena. Even minor characters like the Sub-Inspector, Meet Singh, Imam Baksh, Jugga's mother and Malli have been vividly portrayed. They employ their peculiar idiom, and thus sound unaffected because Khushwant Singh knows his background well.

Not so with Malgonkar. His characters, though they are drawn from all walks of life, are 'conventional'¹⁷ in a special sense of the term. He does not seem to know them first-hand,

They just appear to be herded together in the narrative. That is why, in the first-place, he does not follow the convention regarding the spellings of the names of the characters and places that he mentions in his novel. In his part of the country, it may be a common convention to spell names like Tekchand, Tukaram and Dhansingh the way Malgonkar spells them, but in Punjab (where these characters belong) they would be spelt only as Tek Chand, Tuka Ram and Dhan Singh. Nor would any names be hyphenated, as Malgonkar does it often when he talks of Birchi-bagh, or Dabbi-bazar. A Punjabi would normally recognise them as places in his province only when they are spelt as 'Birchi Bagh or Dabbi Bazar' This only shows how Malgonkar is not aware of the conventions of the people and the background he is dealing with. Khushwant Singh also spells Chundunnugger (in modern spelling in India, it would be 'Chandan Nagar'), because he chooses to stick to the British spellings of the place. At another place, he joins the word 'Chakravartayarajagopalachari', only to create a humorous effect. Describing the vagaries of the season, Khushwant Singh comments: "Before you can say 'Chakravartayarajagopalachari', the gale is gone."

Malgonkar's characters are Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Englishmen, Japanese and the Gurkhas. They hardly leave any impression because they are not individuals. They are made to change their point of view and attitudes to suit the exigencies of the melodrama just as the scenes of sex and violence are introduced to compel the readers' attention, rather than to develop his convictions. One such example is Gian, the disciple of Mahatma Gandhi and 'the noblest creed of non-violence', who kills Vishnudutt and is transported for life. This character remains sketchy and confused till the end. His actions lack motivation. Others like Mumtaz, Mulligan, Bak, Shafi Usman, Usman, Hafeez Khan, Gopal Chandidar, Malini, Tekchand and Balbahadur merely conform to certain types. The only character that rings true is that of Sundari, a hard and self-centred woman who holds nothing sacred and is half in love with her own brother. One admires the way she coolly turns the tables on Gian as well as her husband.

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Khushwant Singh concentrates on the incidents around 'the tiny' Mano Majra, whereas Malgonkar's Konshet is situated in the Himalayan foothills in the typical pattern of the favourably-disposed writers towards the British.¹⁹ And Malgonkar's mention of other places in India and Burma betrays his lack of involvement with his characters and locales. His overall view is that of a 'Brown Sahib' and he deals with identical locales in all his novels. Begwad (*The Princes*) resembles Konshet in more ways than one. Tea-plantations in Assam figure in *A Bend In The Ganges* as well as a combat of shadows Malgonkar's own experiences of life in the army are recounted in the exploits of the Satpura Rifles in *The Princes* and *The Distant Drums* and, in both novels, Rangoon is a city which figures prominently, it is mentioned in *A Bend In The Ganges* also.

In this novel, we clearly discern Malgonkar's condescending attitude towards places like Konshet, Sonarwadi and Anarkali, the favourite haunts of the common man. His picture of the Indian cities is confined to upper middle class life in Bombay (Gopal Chandidar and his companions), Simla (Anglo-Indian life as portrayed in *The Prince*) add a touch of Eastern mysticism, Malgonkar takes us to Tekchand's museum where he describes, in great detail, 'the gods and goddesses and the demons of the Hindu pantheon',²⁰ following the run-of-the-mill British writers on India and Indian themes.²¹ Malgonkar's narrative covers a wide variety of characters, situations and locales. He takes us from Lahore to Konshet and Sonarwadi, then to the jails in Calcutta and Bombay before undertaking the journey to 'the Silver Jail' beyond the 'Black Waters'. The Andamans have been graphically described in the novel.

After the Japanese occupation of the Andamans, we find Debidayal being trained for work as a Japanese agent at Rangoon before he takes up a clerical job at a tea-plantation in Assam. Then he reaches Lahore in Basu's company, where he traces Shafi Usman to a brothel in Anarkali. He buys Shafi's mistress to spite him and leaves for Kernal. When the partition riots break out, Debi and Mumtaz undertake their fateful journey across the border to meet Debi's parents.

On the other hand, Gian, after a short sojourn in Madras, manages to get a job and is stationed in Bombay where he meets Sundari they find themselves at Lahore when the riots break out. It is from here that Gian and Sundari cross over to India in a convoy.

Certain lexical items regarding the articles of dress, eatables and foodstuffs are deliberately, used by both the novelists because exact equivalents of these items are not available in English. Example *A Train To Pakistan* (paan, kirpan, nar admi, hurrup-punkah, etc., *A Bend In The Ganges* (pakoras, jellebies, begoon-bhaja, roti, kebab, achar, takli, janwa, kada, achkan, etc.)

Khushwant Singh and Malgonkar (as well as Mulk Raj Anand) have used the word 'clarified butter' for what is known as 'ghee' in the Indian lexicon. It is baffling why they don't use the word 'ghee' when other Indian lexical items like 'janwa', 'kada' and 'kirpan' are freely employed in their novels.

Khushwant Singh and Malgonkar also resort to the formation of certain hybrid words and compounds because of the same reason that exact equivalents of the items mentioned, or referred to, are culturally alien to non-Indian readers. Examples: *A Train To Pakistan* string charpoy, black-sequined sari, punkah-breeze, banian government, etc. *A Bend In The Ganges* tandoori chicken, cooking sari, chiraita juice, kanji house, police-chapli, halwai shop, etc.

It is strange to find a Hindu girl, Sundari, addressing Tekchand as 'Abaji' which is usually how the Muslim children address their father. Sundari belongs to an upper middle class family. Wouldn't it have been more appropriate if she addressed her father as 'Baba', or 'Papa' or even the plain 'Pitaji'? Mumtaz sounds another discordant note when she addresses the keeper of the brothel as 'Akka'. This is simply not done in Punjab. It is a form of address for the elder sister and is prevalent in the South. Against this, Nooran sounds natural when she calls Jugga's mother 'beybey'.

The villagers in Mano Majra belong to a closely-knit family. They know one another so well and intimately that Juggut Singh remains 'Juzgat Singh, son of Alam Singh', only in police re-

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cords. He is plain 'Jugga' or 'Juggia' to his fellow-villagers. Bhola is 'Bholeya' to them; and so are Meet Singh and Lambardar called 'Meet Singha' (or the plain 'bhai') and 'Lambardara' 'Khair Din' becomes 'Khair Dina' to the village community and nobody seems to mind.

Gian also lives in a village, but he remains merely 'chote-Baba', which anyway sounds anglicised, to Tukaram, and he hardly seems to have anything to do with other villagers. Hari is murdered. When Gian avenges his death, he is arrested. But nobody sympathises with poor Aji. She dies a lonely woman. Such a thing would be unprecedented in an Indian village.

In place of ubiquitous 'Mister' which is used as a respect-marker in the Western society, Indians are very particular about showing respect to elders and superiors and, in turn, they do expect and demand adequate attention and respect from others. Both Khushwant Singh and Malgonkar employ all the devices in the stock of the Indian lexicon to bring alive this facet of life. Meet Singh is addressed as 'Meet Singhji'; Gandhi is referred to as 'Gandhiji' lambardar becomes 'Lambardar Sahib'; Mulligan is 'Mulligan-sahib'. Other terms of respect such as 'Huzur', 'Cherisher of the poor' 'King of pearls' and 'Janaabe-ali' are fairly well-sprinkled over the novels. Malgonkar makes further subtle distinction between 'tu' and 'aap' (in place of 'you') which is relevant in the Indian context. The use of 'thou' in place of 'tu' would not achieve the same effect.

Exclamations of surprise, wonder and joy, such as 'Toba, Toba', 'Shabash', 'Hai, Hai', 'Harey Ram', 'Arre', 'Hai Allah', 'Yaah', and 'thu' add to the overall realism and authenticity of the characters.

Khushwant Singh and Malgonkar make their characters greet each other in their natural way. Greetings like 'Sat Sri Akal', 'Namaskar' 'Sallaam' and 'Jai Ramji-ki' are exchanged frequently and they make the characters using them sound natural. Malgonkar has used the word 'salaam' as a noun as well as a verb when he makes Balbahadur say to Debidayal: 'Remember to salaam when you go in. "Later, Balbahadur orders him, "Salaam Karo," Malgonkar himself reinforces the

verbal form when he reports, 'Debidayal did not salaam.'²²

Then we may consider the various expressions which come under the head: 'Phatic Communion.'²³ It is here that Malgonkar fails us. His characters are stiff and formal primarily because their creator lacks a sense of involvement with them and the situation in which he chooses to put them. The only instances of phatic communion that I could pick up from *A Bend In The Ganges* cannot be precisely defined as Indian, as they have hardly any Indian colour about them; 'As I was saying....', 'Just to think of that....'²⁴ I am honoured to meet some one like you, sir.'²⁵

Characters in *A Train To Pakistan* show their ties with the speech community they belong to more vocally. For them, even the policeman is 'brother, pooliceman'. The sub-inspector's meetings with Hukum Chand are full of 'huzurs' and 'your honours'. Expressions like 'God is merciful. We only pray for your kindness' crop up in every third sentence or so. And Hukum Chand gets sick of the old hag accompanying Hasseena, who goes on in her singsong manner, 'May your fame and honour increase... May your government go on for ever. May your pen inscribe figures of thousands, and hundreds of thousands.....'²⁶

Indian villagers are deeply religious. We find frequent 'Wah Gurus' and 'Ya Allahs' in *A Train To Pakistan*, whereas Malgonkar's characters, except for Hari, the village pundit and Sundari's mother (when she is about to die), appear to be too sophisticated for such invocations and prayers. They also appear to be pretty Victorian in their morals. While curses and abuses like 'May Allah's curse fall on you', and 'pig's penis', 'that incestuous lover of his sister' are freely bandied about by characters in *A Train To Pakistan*, even a coarse gurkha like Balbahadur²⁷ and a communal fanatic like Shafi Usman choose to do away wity abuses and curses. This sense of prudery and 'decency' generally pervades *A Bend In The Ganges*. Following the example of Mulk Raj Anand, Khushwant Singh on the other hand, brings out all the colourful Punjabi abuses alive in his delineation of the robust Jugga.

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Contemporary slogans also find a place in an atmosphere charged with communal frenzy, and appearing at appropriate places, they do lend a period flavour to the narratives. Malgonkar, again, seems to trip here. When the Japanese come, their slogan is 'Japan Hindi bhai-bhai', which seems to anticipate the latter-day slogan like 'Hindi-Chine bhai bhai'.

The practice of providing internal glossing and paraphrase of Indian lexical items, as well as expression, for the benefit of the non-Indian reader, is followed by Malgonkar when he makes Sundari warble a filmsong of the period on the day Gopal comes to see her.²⁸ Malgonkar also takes care to paraphrase Ramoshi's bawdy song that he sings with an accompanying chorus on board the ship bound for the Andamans: "Bolo jawanon kya-kya milat hai, Kali Panike Bazzar ? Arre Kale Panike Bazzar, arre kale kale Panike Bazzar. Mofat-ki undi, aur mofat-ki brandy, Aur mofat-ki rundi hazzar."²⁹ Roger paraphrased it thus: "Tell me, lads, what is in store for us in the bazaar at the Black-Water-Black Water is their name for the jail. . . . Free eggs, free brandy and thousand mistresses—also free. The only place Malgonkar achieves the desired effect without internal glossing and paraphrase is when the village priest, like the proverbial devil quoting scriptures, voices the noble sentiment, 'Kshama virasya bhushnam.'³⁰ But there the context is self-explanatory.

Khushwant Singh makes liberal use of the transliterated verses from the Granth Sahib, snatches from popular film songs, and even doggerels like:

'Pigoon—*Kabootar, Codan-fly*
Look—*dekho, usman-sky*'³¹

and

A B C where have your been ?
Edward's dead, I went to mourn.'³²

And Imam Baksh conveys the feelings of his Muslim brethern adequately enough when he recites :

'*Not forever does the bulbul sing*
In balmy shades of bowers,

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*Not forever lasts the spring
Not ever blossom flowers.
Not forever reigneth joy,
Sets the sun on days of bliss,
Friendships not forever last,
They know not life, who know not this.'* ³³

Indian languages abound in fixed collocations, idioms and proverbs the exact import of which is difficult to be conveyed to non-Indians; they can, at best, be translated literally for their benefit. When compared to *A Train To Pakistan*, *A Bend In The Ganges* suffers in this respect also, because its author is not familiar with the language, literary conventions and customs of the people he portrays, or may be he deliberately eschews all such linguistic peculiarities in order, not to exact his non-Indian readership on this count. He spared them the trouble of finding out all back-references, connotations and extended meanings of such collocations, idioms and proverbs. One of the strong points of Khushwant Singh is that he successfully puts across such items in English without feeling any need of glossing or paraphrasing these expressions, which make his 'Mano Majrans' sound the village folk they are. The real test of authenticity of the novel lies in the fact that there are as many as thirty such fixed collocations, idioms and proverbs that are used in a corpus of 158 pages by Khushwant Singh against a meagre eight such items employed in a corpus of 376 pages by Manohar Malgonkar.

Both Khushwant Singh and Malgonkar pick out the following identical collocations for their characters:

A Train To Pakistan

A Bend In The Ganges

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. p. 5 You have the bangles for Jugga?
p.9 Wear these bangles and put henna on your palms.</p> <p>2. p. 108 They have been eating our salt for generations and see what they've done—they have behaved like snakes.</p> | <p>p. 42 Have we started wearing bangles or are we emasculated that he can turn us away from what is ours.</p> <p>p. 282 Do you think I have started wearing bangles?</p> <p>p. 54 I have eaten your salt but I have not been true to it.</p> |
|---|---|

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Offering bangles to a man and asking him to put henna on his palms can be the biggest affront to his manliness, and the expression has been used in this sense by both the novelists. Who can have the courage to offer bangles to Jugga, 'budmash number ten' of the village and get away with it? Similarly, Hari is provoked when he finds Vishnudutt's men in the field that has been awarded to him by a court decree. Even though he is down and out, Basu flares up at Debi's suggestion to remain in Calcutta and look after his family while Debi goes to avenge their betrayal by Shafi Usman. A triumphant Hari, after winning the court case, says of his adversaries "They are certainly not twirling their moustaches."³⁴

Boasting of his manliness to Nooran, Jugga assures her. "I am not a budmash for nothing, Nooro. . . No one in Mano Majra can raise his eyebrows at you and get away from Jugga."³⁵ The raising of eyebrows, of the 'little finger', or 'touching a little hair' of someone's head calls for an immediate reprisal. Hassena is confident of Hukum Chand: "As long as he is there no one can harm a single hair of my head."³⁶ "We would like to see somebody raise his little finger against our tenants while we live," thunders an impetuous young man at the village meeting in the gurdwara.³⁷

If anyone 'raises his eyebrows' at Nooran, or even makes a malicious comment about her, Jugga's solution is rough and ready: "I will tear your tongue out," He tells Bhola, the tonga driver. And he is reported to swear that 'he would tear Mali from limb to limb.' Mali knows him too well; that is why he wouldn't have gone in (Jugga's cell) any more than a lamb would go into a lion's cage. Jugga is not talking 'big' when he tells the sub-Inspector of police, "He will run like a jackal when he hears my name."³⁹

The young Sikh officer challenges the manliness and spirit of revenge of the village folk when he asserts: "It (the village) should be drowned in a palmful of water. . . . It consists of eunuchs. "He asks them, "what sort of Sikhs are you? . . . Potent or impotent?"⁴⁰ This stirs the 'beloveds of the Guru' to action and they decide to fix a rope above the level of the railway

carriages on the bridge spanning the Sutlej river, so that the train can 'cut many people in two like a knife slicing cucumbers.'

Similarly, the concept of being true to one's salt is strong with an Indian. He would not like to betray his benefactor, and when Tukaram does it under pressure from the police, he is genuinely sorry for it. And the reported orgy of loot, arson, rape and murder in another part of the country, makes a youth identify and equate his own Mano Majran Muslims with their brethren at large.

Aji brings out the religious concept of the Lord providing for everyone of His beings when, in the face of threats from Vishnudutt's men, she says, 'He who give the beak to the bird, will also provide it with food'.⁴¹ She compares herself to 'a leaf about to fall any day' because of her old age. Malgonkar picks up this collocation when he says: 'The Empire was about to fall like a ripe mango into the hands of the waiting Japanese' during the Second World War.

Malgonkar's bag of collocations obviously exhausts at that. . . But Khushwant Singh infuses the vigour and idiom of Punjabi speech rhythm in: (i) the famous concept of what is commonly called 'bagula Bhagat'⁴² (ii) sixteen annas in a rupee being the touchstone to measure the truth and validity of all statements made,⁴³; (iii) the common Indian habit of hyperbole;⁴⁴ (iv) frequent references to the British as 'a race of four twenties; (v) the idea of self-respect and the fear of getting 'one's turban taken off in public'⁴⁵ etc. Khushwant Singh, moreover, literally translates the dialogue between the peasants, between the Sub-Inspector of police and Hukum Chand between Jugga and the policemen convincingly enough to create an illusion of reality. One, indeed, has to hunt for such expressions in Malgonkar's novel, because almost all his characters have been anglicised; they are sophisticated and urbane as compared to the simple rustics that we come across in Khushwant Singh's novel. Hari, Tukaram, and Aji (a stiff, formal and much-too sophisticated woman for her age, background and surroundings), as portrayed by Malgonkar, do, at times, betray their 'Indianness' despite the camouflage patronisingly offered by their creator. Malgon-

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kar gives the impression of having observed his characters and situations with 'detachment' and he presents his characters to us after they have been considerably toned down in their behaviour and mannerisms. As they emerge, such characters are 'faceless' and 'conventional' ; they lack individual traits and speech-habits so that they cannot be assigned to any particular speech fellowship or speech community, their peculiar characteristic, and 'Indianness', in the context of their social and cultural environment, their communal and regional instincts seem to have been taken away by 'the John Masters of Indian fiction' so that they are more presentable to, and less taxing for, their admirers abroad.

Khushwant Singh takes the political aspect of the partition for granted, as all that his villagers are concerned with is that 'it is Mahatma Gandhi's government in Delhi' and that 'people sing his praise in the four corners of the earth.' Iqbal does feel 'an outsider' in this set up as all his exhortations to them are of no avail; they fail to see his reason. His opinions on politics and the political situation of the country are confined to his monologues and his disgust for the villagers.

Malgonkar, on the other hand, presents the political side of the partition from the point of view of Gian, the ardent disciple of Gandhi and his creed of non-violence; Debidayal, the terrorist, and Hafiz Khan and Shafi Usman, the communalists. Malgonkar's account takes the form of a cool, impersonal debate among the characters; it looks like a scientific analysis of the situation rather than something which emerges out of the characters themselves and their convictions. This 'detachment' also marks his narration of the partition riots, when they are compared to similar descriptions by Khushwant Singh.

In order to reinforce his picture of the Indian life, Khushwant Singh employs certain stylistic devices that show the peculiarities of Indian speech; these characteristics are a carry-over from the influence of the mother-tongue into English. Malgonkar is very sparing in his employment of such devices.

While forming interrogatives in Indian languages, we do not front-shift our auxiliaries, nor do we employ a dummy 'do'—

type to tense-carrying verb. As a result, the nature of most sentence-patterns (whether they are declarative, imperative, or interrogative) is determined by their intonation and context. Khushwant Singh makes use of this question-formation in Indian languages. Different characters in *A Train To Pakistan* bring to life their simplicity and rusticity by question-formations like:

“You have the bangles for Jugga?” —Mali. p. 5

“You think it (the police station) is your father-in-law’s house?” —a police constable. p. 62

“You like tea in your own cup?”—Meet Singh. p. 48

“You want to be whipped or have red chillies put in your rectum before you talk,”—the Sub-Inspector of police. p. 66.

Malgonkar’s characters, on the other hand, appear to be urbane and sophisticated. Even an illiterate bullock-cart driver Tukaram, is capable of forming perfect interrogatives; “Can’t see I am waiting?” Or do you too need dark glasses to see?.. Why are you holding back Raja?” (p. 19).

Indians usually attach a tag-question to the statements they make as if they seek an assurance from the listener that whatever they say is absolutely right. While Khushwant Singh brings alive this facet of the Indian character, Malgonkar’s characters give the impression of being self-assured, as if nobody can doubt the veracity of their statements, and what they say is the right thing. While being marched to the police station, Jugga asks Iqbal :“It is Mahatma Gandhi government in Delhi, isn’t it?” (p. 54) Imam Baksh asks the Sikh army officer, “Everything is all right, isn’t it Sardar Sahib ?” (p. 72) A Sikh peasant keeping watch over the bridge says to his companion: “It was clear, wasn’t it Karnaila?” (p. 122) And knowing full well that the Muslim population has been evacuated, Iqbal asks Meet Singh “All the Muslims have left, haven’t they?” (p. 145) Complete absence of such tag-questions mark the speech-habits of a variety of characters in *A Bend In The Ganges*.

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Indians are fond of long-winded sentences which are marked by numerous connectives. A classic instance in this case is that Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. In a single chapter 46 running to less than ten pages the connective 'and' has been used as many as 321 times by the author. Khushwant Singh and Malgonkar give evidence of this through dialogue and descriptions.

Khushwant Singh, thus, takes pains and is more successful in the use of the culture and context-bound Indian lexical items and expression in his novels. And although he also employs them in a fair measure, the overall impression created by Malgonkar is nowhere near the one created by Khushwant Singh who deals with his own people—the people, their language, customs and contentions that he knows intimately. As a result, his is 'an easy style' which is marked by 'the charm and interest of its picture of the Punjab land and the Sikh people.'⁴⁷ On the surface, Khushwant Singh may give 'the impression of being an artless or sometimes a clumsy writer, but one cannot deny the fact that it is through a sense of involvement on his part that his major characters come to life and their mistake have the power to make the reader's conscience itch.'⁴⁸ "Khushwant Singh", says Santha Ram Rau,⁴⁹ is direct to the point of brutality, un sentimentally observant, and in his bold characterisations he is ready to explore the least appealing aspects of human nature and relationships. His humour—expertly integrated with an essentially sad and cynical story—is wild, broad, unsparing. *A Train To Pakistan* does offer us 'insights into the life and customs of the Sikhs in India,'⁵⁰ chiefly because it has a limited range and a restricted canvas, and it does not transcend the obvious limits of socio-cum-political narrative fiction of contemporary interest, though it has an element of intensity and fullness of passion.

Malgonkar's characters and background, on the other hand, are vaguely Indian. They have been given Indian names and they inhabit certain places in India. But they do not seem to be conversant with the language, customs and conventions of their community, or religion; they do not know their background because their author himself has had no first-hand contact with

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the situation. He views his characters and incidents with an 'aloofness' that detracts from his vision of life in India during those years of turmoil. Otherwise his novel, with a wider canvas and covering a larger number of characters and issues, would have proved a stirring masterpiece—on the lines of *War and Peace* and *Doctor Zhivago* and attained the epic grandeur that the *Daily Telegraph* reviewer ascribes to it on the blurb on the dust-jacket. Odious as it may sound, the nearest comparison to *A Bend In The Ganges* may be found with *Bhawani Junction* because Malgonkar's treatment of his theme remains superficial.' His narrative is remarkable of incidents than the quality of their observation and presentation. Malgonkar's standpoints are not obvious. Derrett takes him to task for his 'pedestrian language', even though an average reader is impressed by 'the polished nature of the whole' when he compares *A Bend In The Ganges* to *A Train To Pakistan*. In the latter novel, for instance, the inter-connection of the railway line with all its terrible implications and the inbred atmosphere of the small village, Mano Majra, is vividly described at the beginning so that the air never leaves us. Derrett especially takes note of 'the expansive technique', the accumulative detail of the village routine, the sounds and sights, and 'the visual and evocative quality of the whole. Hard though I tried, I could not find a similar instance in Malgonkar's novel. His descriptions are generalised and uninspiring.

"Malgonkar gives an Anglo-Indian impression," says Derrett in a footnote to page 134 of his book. It is so because of the lack of warmth and feeling in his account of what Malgonkar himself calls, one of the bloodiest upheavals of history . . . a kind of havoc rarely seen even in war. Instead he writes with the love of the British deeply ingrained in him; he feels a kind nostalgia for the Raj.

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REFERENCES

All references to the two novels in the paper are from the following editions :

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| <i>A Train To Pakistan</i> | <i>A Bend In The Ganges</i> |
| A Pearl Book (Paperback) | Published by: Hamish Hamilton |
| Distributed by: India book House,
Bombay-1. Originally published by
Chatto and Windus Ltd., London
W.C., 1956. (Published in the
United States under the title:
'Mano Majra'); Pages : 158 | London (1964); Pages 376 |
1. *A Bend In The Ganges*, p. 348.
 2. Author's note to *A Bend In The Ganges*.
 3. C. Paul Verghese, *Problems of the Indian Creative Writer in English*. p. 19.
 4. *A Train to Pakistan*, pp-5, 10-13-15, 28-29, 67.
 5. *ibid.* p. 53 Jugga earns this honour because his name figures in 'Register number ten' at the police station which gave the record of the activities of the bad characters of the locality, explains Khushwant Singh.
 6. *ibid.* p 157.
 7. *A Bend In The Ganges*, Author's note.
 8. C. Paul Verghese: *Problems Of The Indian Creative Writer In English*.
 9. *A Bend In The Ganges* pp 182.
 10. *ibid.*, p. 199.
 11. Mulk Raj Anand : *The King Emperor's English, Or The Role Of The English Language In Free India*, p. 23.
 12. Mulk Raj Anand *Coolie*, p. 16 (Kutub Popular Edition)
 13. *A Train To Pakistan*, p. 10
 14. In *A Bend In The Ganges* Malgonkar uses the swear-word 'haram zada' with much the same relish as Anand uses it in *Coolie* (p. 192, Kutub Popular Edition). In *The Princes* also, Malgonkar uses the swear-words 'bewakoofs, Ullus' (p. 27, Orient Paperback Edition)
 15. *A Train To Pakistan*, p. 26
 16. C. Paul Verghese, *Problems Of The Indian Creative Writer In English* p. 102
 17. *ibid.* p. 120.
 18. *A Train To Pakistan* p. 80
 19. Greenberger, Allen J. *The British Image in India* (1969 Oxford University press)—"The settings are still almost entirely in North India, and, even more particularly, the frontier regions of the Punjab or the Himalayan foothills. This is especially true of those authors who are most favourably disposed to the Raj" (p. 111). At more than dozen places or so, Malgonkar refers to the indispensability of the British Raj and applauds the British for their sense of justice and fair-

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- play. "We were lucky there was a British judge—No question of bribing him. We in India can get justice only at British hands.... They are Clean-clean as grains of washed rice..." p. 22) And Later, "He (Gian) admired Mulligan's thoroughness and, even more, his restraint. He was convinced that Mulligan would never pronounce judgement on a man without incontrovertible evidence, and that in his hands, the ends of justice would never be in jeopardy. (p. 173) Instances of this type can be multiplied from the novel.
20. *A Bend In The Ganges*, pp. 9, 228, 333, 2370. *U*
 21. Kincaid, *Their Ways Divide*, p. 271. Quoted by Greenberger: *The British Image in India*, p. 124.
 22. *A Bend In The Ganges*, p. 174.
 23. According to Bronislaw Malinowski, in every language there are socially-determined speech functions which, apart from being used for self-expression and communication of thoughts, create ties between the speaker and the hearer. The actual sense of the words here matters little. Such expressions are repetitive and socially-determined. They mark a person as 'outside' or 'inside' the culture of a speech fellowship, or a speech community.
 24. *A Bend In The Ganges*, p. 255.
 25. *ibid.*, p. 257.
 26. *A Train To Pakistan*, p. 78.
 27. "You son of thank-you.... Just because you speak English, I'll give you the Kaptaan-sahib's cigarette to smoke, you. And remember I will put my foot on your hand whenever I want to, understand? A hundred times, if I want on your hand or on your——. I can even—you if I want, see? Or your sister and——your mother." p. 128. *A Bend In The Ganges*.
 28. "Na-jane kidhar aaj meri nao chali-re", "I know not today where my canoe is headed for."
 29. *Ibid*, p. 124.
 30. *ibid*, p. 46.
 31. *A Train To Pakistan*, p. 24, 25.
 32. *ibid*. p. 112
 33. *ibid.*, p. 2.
 34. *ibid.*, p. 14.
 35. *ibid.*, p. 91.
 36. *ibid.*, p. 108.
 37. *ibid.*, p. 61.
 38. *ibid.*, p. 141.
 39. *ibid.*, p. 128.
 40. *ibid.*, p. 136.
 41. *A Bend In The Ganges*, p. 46.
 42. *A Train To Pakistan*, p. 18. "They are as good saints as the crane, They

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- shut their eyes piously and stand on one leg like a yogi doing penance; as soon as a fish comes near-hurrup.
43. *ibid.*, p. 44. "Whatever you say is true to the sixteenth anna of the rupee."
 44. *ibid.*, p. 141 "I have told you a thousand times..."
 45. *ibid.*, p. 72 "One's self-respect is in one's own hands. Why should I have myself insulted by having my turban taken off?"
 46. Raja Rao : *Kanthapura* (Orient Paperback Edition);. 192-210
 47. Rosen Archer, *Saturday Review* 42, 21, December 12, 1959; quoted by V. A. Shahane in his article, 'Theme And Symbol In Khushwant Singh's *I Shall Not Hear The Nighthale*', *Osmania Journal of English Studies*, Vol. VIII No. 1, 1969.
 48. Phoebe Adams, *Atlantic Monthly?* Jan. 1960, quoted by Shahane.
 49. *The New York Times Book Review* December 13, 1959, p. 26, 179, quoted by Shahane.
 50. Bryant, *The Literary Journal*, 84: 3870, December 15, 1959 quoted by Shahane.
 51. Derrett: *The Modern Indian Novel In English: A Comparative Approach*, 1956; University Libre de Bruxelles Institute de Sociologie, p. 105.