

Inversion Of Roles In The Dialectics Of Native And Settler: A Study Of A Bend In The Ganges In Light Of Fanon's Wretched Of The Earth

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Abstract

In the novel *A Bend in the Ganges* Manohar Malgonkar details the movements of Indian partition history on epic scale. In the backdrops of the partition upheavals the enactment of human ethos, emotions, predicaments and varied social shades of life thrive on. The prominent characters have been placed on socio-economic pedestals whereupon they tend to invert their given roles, if critically analyzed in light of Franz Fanon's theory of the roles of human as 'Natives and Settlers'. Debi Dayal, the heroic heir of large business empire, his sister Sundari, a princess like rich family girl, their father Tek Chand, the desi business tycoon during British era, and others fit into the role of Settlers. Typically, it is European or the West that is a Settler in strict accordance with the interpretations laid in Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. However, the treatment of life and social-economic status make others from the third world to qualify for the role of Settlers as they cannot be strictly termed as Natives simply on the basis of race and complexion. The characters peopling in *A Bend in the Ganges* appear first in equations of Settlers and Natives, socio-economic factors being determinants; they, however, are so put on the anvil of life that they tend to take shape in different role, inverting their roles as Settlers and the Natives.

Keywords: Native, Settler, partition, role, character, social

In primary criticism the novel *A Bend in the Ganges* is often categorized as the literary and quasi-historic document of the significance of Indian partition reality. Manohar Malgonkar, in wider critical terms, is credited to have detailed the vast scale of action in making of history and formation of newer nations on the map of the world. Upheavals, revolt, radical upsurge, mayhem, sabotages, mass exodus, colossal mass movements, terroristic activities, espionages, political paradigms, testimony of high doctrines, shaking the moorings of Gandhian philosophy etc--- actions on epic scale mark the very merit and significance of the novel. Quite often Malgonkar has been in questions for having put the questions on transcendental but useful Gandhian doctrine of Ahimsa, the non-violence. "This novel is not just one of the most popular novels written

on the Partition, but also one of the best-known texts in the whole canon of Indian English Fiction". (Roy, 2010: 47)

Besides, the critique of this novel often ranges to the reality of the contemporary Indian history of the partition reality and its aftermaths. Nevertheless, in this research, the endeavours have been made to unearth the relegated aspects of the novel; the action and nuances that go parallel against the backdrop of the colossal epic action of Indian struggle of Independence, partition holocausts and drastic consequences. The lives of the real flesh and blood characters figuring in the pages of the narrative transgress the boundaries of the regional reality. In deeper critical analysis the characters in the novel appropriately fit into the interpretations of entire human race, however, they tend to challenge the very stipulated interpretations. By shifting to focus from the epic scale action in the novel to the individuals and development in characterization there is no intention to gainsay what Meenakshi Mukherjee has opined. "A Bend in the Ganges is not so much a story of men and women as of places and episodes, not an integrated human drama but an erratic national calendar." (Mukherjee, 1974: 60)

However, apart from his ability to chronicle the epic action Malgonkar has also been acknowledged for his dexterous characterization and excellent delineation of human mind. "Malgonkar is a keen observer of manners and mood of his men and describes in detail the workings of the mind of his characters in his novels and that's why, his characters present an astonishing variety. They are alive in every limb, both cosmic and serious, simple and deep, foolish and thoughtful."

In this paper the characters, Debi Dayal, Tek Chand, Sundari, Radha, Gyan Talwar and others are to be analyzed and studied in the light of Franz Fanon's theory of human race as either as Natives or Settlers as in his seminal book *Wretched of the Earth* (1967). Jean Paul Sartre, the renowned harbinger in the movement of human equity, has been the key source with Fanon in the said book. Proportionately and in broader terms Fanon has laid a division of entire human race; the world society stands divided into two: The West and Europe and the rest. This rest can be seen primarily consisting of the third world people, those who were colonized in making of the modern world history. However, the oriental world and others either count as those who had hegemony as colonizers or those who were colonized. In a specific and broader criticism it is on socio-economic basis that some humans count as Native and some as Settlers.

Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants; five hundred million men, and one thousand five hundred million natives. The former had to work; the others had the use of it. Between the two there were hired kinglets, overlords and a bourgeoisie, sham from beginning to end, which served as go-betweens. In the colonies the truth stood naked, but the citizens of the mother country preferred it with clothes on; the native had to love them, something in the way mothers are loved. The European elite undertook to manufacture a native elite. (Sartre in 'Preface', Fanon, 1967: 07)

Notwithstanding the division of human race, many strata, families, people can be found not clinging to such defined roles strictly in terms of social and economic status. Though it is British era in India, the time of the misery of Indians who were Natives in every way, some natives were well-off and led opulent life. They enjoyed at par status with the British, though certain infamous incidents of discrimination and segregation had been prominent ones. Kerwad family is one such family in *A Bend in the Ganges*:

Standing at the window of their bedroom, Dewan-bahadur Tekchand looked nervously at his watch, and then down at the waiting car where the chauffeur, the tall and bearded and dressed in a fresh white uniform, was running a dust cloth over bonnet of the Buick. His wife sat at the dressing-table, wearing a good-bordered white sari and her pearls, putting the final touches to her make-up. ‘Sundari is wearing the other necklace,’ she said.” (*A Bend in the Ganges*. (*A Bend in the Ganges*, 1964: 82)

Khushwant Singh also substantiates this reality of desi opulence during the British regime:

Jai Bhagwan’s father, Krishan Lal Mattoo, wanted to bring up his only son as an English aristocrat. He often told his wife (semi-literate to him since she could only read and write Hindi) and children that in order to deal with the British, one had to speak English like them, mix with them socially as an equal, learn to eat their kind of food on expensive China, using silver forks and knives, and serve them premium Scotch and vintage French wines of better quality than they could afford. Then one should tell them to their faces that it was time for them to buzz off from India and let Indians manage their own affairs. Mattoo could afford to hold such views. He had made a tidy fortune as a practising lawyer in Delhi and other High Courts of India... (*Burial at Sea*, 2005: 08-09)

Against the backdrop of epical Indian freedom struggle and resultant partition saga Malgonkar’s flesh and blood people represent different socio-economic statuses in the novel. In Fanonian division and theory one born in the third world is Native who is native because he is not Settler. Settlers may be in America or in the third world of Asia and Africa, are those who had come to settle in the colonies. The prominent characteristic of Native, as defined by Fanon, is that he is economically deprived and socially dejected or ostracized. Fanon has taken into account the cases of Negroes in the *Wretched of the Earth* primarily, the Indians and others also, however, equate with them.

Nevertheless, Tek Chand in *A Bend in the Ganges* is the prominent business tycoon in British era Punjab who is pro-British in his views of life. He is typically anglicized rich Indian who, though snobbishly, follows the Western life-style for meaningful life. His wife Radha is beautiful and leads a pompous life like Western royal women. His son Debi Dayal, the unsung hero of the novel, is the sole heir of the large empire. “ ... Debi was the only son of Dewan-bahadur Tekchand Kerwad.” (*A Bend...*

06) His sister Sundari, born with silver spoon in mouth, stands contrasted as a pampered princess to her friends from middle class. Gian Talwar, critically acclaimed hero of the novel and the ambivalent of virtues and vices, is from rural poor family. He is, in all perspectives, fits into the role of typical Native, but he has been delineated in various dimensions. He has been depicted as Native against the natives who are Settlers viz. Debi and Sundari, the rich children of Teckchand. Native Gian, being from rural humble background, craves to be at their place and own Sundari (Settler) when he visits Tekchand's pompous museum of antique and expensive statues:

For a moment it was he (Gian) who was the statue, lifeless, ageless, unbreathing and the images that surrounded him were flowing with life, acting out a hymn of creation, the cycle of life and death, the drama of procreation and destruction. He stared, unblinking, abandoning himself to a higher consciousness as during a moment of prayer.

'Hi! What's wrong? Are you all right?'

The voice seemed to come from far away, from the depths of the earth, a part of the timelessness of the moment. But it had an urgency, an almost tearful trembling, which broke the spell. He shook himself. The girl was holding him by both the shoulders and her eyes were staring with alarm.

'Are you all right?' She was asking. 'What happened?'

He blinked at her, a statue that had come to life, a face that was a mixture of irritation and anxiety, so beautiful, so near. He wanted to put his arms around her, to pull her close to him, smother her with kisses.(08)

In such predicament and description Gian holds strong analogies to the typical Natives defined and described by Fanon. According to Fanon, it is the natives who are deprived and unable to settle like Settlers. In the colonies Natives are outside the establishment, deprived, despising and craving to be at Settlers' cozy homes:

The native town is hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light.... The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dream of possession—all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife, if possible. The colonized man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, "They want to take our place." It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place. (Fanon, 1967: 30)

In the vast scheme of the narrative these characters of Malgonkar are found tending to invert the status they have inherited. Debi dayal could have led a life of

comfort on the high ivory, away from the commoners, Gian and others. But he is not a pro-Western unlike his father. His hatred for the British owes to bitter and shocking incidents in personal life among other things:

As he entered the narrow, one-man opening in the back wall he had perceived a movement to his right, in the grove of casuarina tree, and then in the bright, summer moonlight, he saw the enormous dark figure of the soldier, leaning over the woman who stood rigid and silent against the wall. The woman was his mother. (A Bend... 54)

Having no attraction of the prosperity of his family he is determined to be masculine terrorist against the British who had tried to violate the modesty of his biological mother and his mother land as well. A sole heir of vast empire holds the status of Settler in whose home and life the Native (Gian) craves to get into, however he chooses different destiny; to be a freedom fighter for the millions of natives. Debi, thus, transgresses and inverts his role to play as Native who fights for his mother and mother land. His contempt for the white Westerns puts him in contrast to them as a Native.

Sundari, who has never experienced even a bit of compromised life, has to be in miserable circumstances owing to her non-happening nuptial life with Gopal Chandidhar. She never stays comfortable with him; the estranged wife has to experience what a rich heiress would never at her father Teckchand's house. Focused on the naked motif of revenge against Gopal she deliberately forms closeness with sly and hypocrite Gian, whom she would rather avoid in life. Having such experiences she also tends to be in role of native than being opulent Settlers. Even Tekchand has catastrophe in his life when, in the final pages of the novel, this rich tycoon is miserably left alone and helpless, vulnerable to communal riots. Instead of joining the convoy to Delhi he comes back to the dead body of Radha, his wife. The royal Settler ends up in misery as one of the wretched of the earth.

Whereas, Gian, going through vicissitudes in life, emerges as someone fortunate, forgiven, 'a lucky bastard' who gains far more than what he deserves. At the denouement, the ending of the novel, he escapes everything what has destroyed Kerwad family and others in Punjab. He, with the dint of smiling Mammon and cupid, gets riches and Sundari. A Native who wanted to own a Settler (rich) girl for love---as Fanon described, '...to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife, if possible'. The final sentence of the narrative reads, "The Ford leaped forward." (A Bend... 324) Gian finally owes Teckchand's (Settler) daughter and luxury car and it is the fateful life of Gian that leapt forward to higher pedestal--- from Native to a Settler.

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