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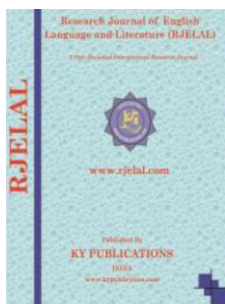
HISTORICITY IN MANOHAR MALGONKAR'S *LINE OF MARS*

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ABSTRACT

Manohar Malgonkar is the most accomplished historical novelist of Indo-Angliana. A man of many parts he has successfully blended his Army career with such diverse occupations as big game hunting, tea plantation, mining, and politics. But essentially he is a prose writer of great charm, excelling in novels, short stories, crime fiction and travelogue. In *Line of Mars*, he is on his mettle as a playwright. *Line of Mars* is a period play. As such, its dramatis personae are stereotypes of the period and not the individuals. The play is based on the atrocious Doctrine of Lapse of Lord Dalhousie. It deals with the story of King Manaji Mangal Raj who claims is descent from Mars himself but has no son to succeed him to the throne. Based on the Doctrine of Lapse, *Line of Mars* exegesis how the King maintains his family line without an heir. This paper encapsulates the life of King Manaji and his tradition to continue his sacred line, and how he saves his kingdom from being annexed. A sense of history is traced in this paper.

Key Words: *historical novelist, stereotypes, Doctrine of Lapse, sacred line.*

Preamble: *Line of Mars* consists of two acts. The first Act takes place in 1849 and the Second in 1857. In the beginning of the play, Sharma, a penniless Brahmin artist lives in the village with his beloved daughter, Sumati, a good looking girl of seventeen. Sumati expresses her father the desire of marrying a King, "someday the Raja just will have to see his future wife. My horoscope says that I shall marry a King. And he is the nearest King" (12). Sharma also indicates her that Mangal Raja has married four times and three of his wives are still alive. Sumati, having no seriousness about it, utters, "Kings can afford as many wives as they like" (13).

Sumati's Fear and Manaji's Fear: To everyone's surprise, Manaji Mangal Raja's mother, Anandi meets Sumati with her, Bhimsen. She tells Sharma, "I've come to seek bride for my son, the Maharaja Mangal" (19). Sumati gets married to the King. The

King explains the threat of Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General of India from 1848 to 1856, to Sumati, "His first name is James, but the name he's known is Annexation-Annexation Dalhousie. He's set his heart on finishing us all off-every single kingdom in India. And he proposes to do this through the Doctrine of Lapse" (30). Datta Monica in *Indian History: Modern*, reminds a valid point here "It was customary for a ruler without a natural heir to ask the British government whether he could adopt a son to succeed him. Dalhousie concluded that if such a permission was refused, the state would "lapse" and thereby become part of the British possessions" (160).

Manaji has no son to succeed him. But Sumati is so confident that she could get five sons. He is bit relaxed to her words and says "Five! Oh, one will quite enough! But you will have to be really

nippy getting him; or that little man Dalhousie will enforce his Doctrine, the moment I'm dead, everything I possess will be swallowed by the British" (32).

The Stratagem: Manaji employs Sumati as a stratagem to save his kingdom. It is explicitly clear by his aspiration and fear. He evokes his fear "You're our secret weapon against the Doctrine of Lapse, to save this raj from gobbled up by Dalhousie if there is *no heir-male, or my body, lawfully begotten* . . . " (33). By this time he reminds her notorious life of the kings that they keep concubines. He indicates his grandfather's serious mistake of dividing his Kingdom between his two sons—his illegitimate son and his original son—Manaji's father. He emulates by saying that the mingling of his grandfather with a concubine who belong to Koshi, a lower case, has polluted his line. And that is the only root cause for his present threat of Dalhousie.

Greatness of the Line: Manaji proudly announces his ancestry,

The purity of the line is sacred about all-the Line of Mars. The god Mars was our very first ancestor. That's why the family name Mangal; which means Mars, the Red God of War. We can find our brides only among the highest Brahmins. For thirty-nine generations, the line has remained pure, the envy of every Royal house in India; through wars, famines, defeats and disasters to say nothing of the usual proportion of drunks, perverts and opium addicts in the family, we have preserved it. And this is what they want me to defile (34-5).

Manaji's Position: Manaji tells his critical position to Sumati, "Perkins is coming with a message from Governor that, unless I can show him an heir, within one year, I have either to merge with the bastard branch, or they will annex my kingdom the moment I die. You understand the Problem" (38). Thus, he has one year of time. He has to get a son with a year. To get a son through Sumati, Manaji agrees to go on a pilgrimage to Kashim Mathura and to Tirupati.

Pilgrimage: A Mission! According to Manaji, "this pilgrimage is a mission of war . . . As you know, the British keep watch on our movements; we're like chained dogs—not permitted to stray" (55). To maintain the line of Mars pure and brave, Manaji tells Sumati the determination of his inner heart, "We're going to get together and drive out every white man from this land—drive out every Dalhousie and Perkins" (55).

A Twist: On her pilgrimage, Sumati arrives at a temple of Lord Shiva. There she meets a priest. He gives her the holy water to drink. He orders her to sleep on a slab and in her sleep she would see God and Love and sacrifice. He orders her not to tell anyone what happens in the temple, No, Not even to your father or mother, brother or sister, your husband, nor the son that will be born to unto you. You must not speak about it to yourself—not even think of—of the pleasure you will get, or the pain" (63). A twist occurs in her life. When she is lying on the slab, an unknown soldier rapes her in the temple.

Captain Rowland's Arrival: The second Act begins with the outbreak of Sepoy Mutiny. During a clash, the Indian regiments kill the wife and daughter of Captain Mark Rowland. He is taken to a private cell. Sumati does not see any white men earlier. She is not allowed to meet the captive also. But, she goes to Rowland's cell in the absence of the soldiers. Attracted by the charming beauty and strong physique of Rowland, she grabs his hand roughly and pulls it into her chest and kisses him hardly on his mouth. She gets into the bed and lies beside him.

Meanwhile, Sumati begets a son, Arjun, and he is seven years old now. Manaji tells him that Captain is the only British man alive due to Smati's pleading of keeping him alive. He evinces Arjun as, "He is lucky to be alive. If your mother had not pleaded for his life, he would have been hurled down into the gorge. That was what he was brought here for" (76). When he is out for war, Sumati sleeps with him many times. She wishes her husband to win the war and also longs for the company of Rowland.

Manaji returns from the war and exhibits the fear of failure in the. Sumati comforts her ejected husband, "My lord, everything is not lost. All that has happened is that you have failed to drive the white men out. Its not the end of the world. Prudence demands that you now accept British over lordship" (99). He asks Sumati "Why should I blend? Why should I go down on my knee to lice the white man's hands? WHY? WHY? And Sumati replies, "My Lord knows the answer himself. So that this line should go on; so that, his son should rule the MAnjal raj . . ." (100). Manaji thinks that he could easily end the line-the Line of Mars., with dignity. He remains in his place as a defeated ruler. Captain appears as the 31st Bengal Infantry. Rowland decides to forget the bitter past and says, "And we must all—Indian and British alike—strive to forget the bitterness of the recent past and try to find—try to forge a new instrument—mutual tolerance" (110).

Rowland tells Manaji that the mutiny is over and there should be no recriminations, no annexations, and no conquests. He also announces that the Doctrine of Lapse has also gone. He also tells that the British have wangled their way into the political service. He says, "One is being started now to—to establish and maintain cordial relations with the Prince of India" (112).

Towards the end of the play, Gopika, the first wife of Manaji takes him to overhear what Rowland speaks to Sumati, "Line of Mars! Bells! Line fathered by a drunken toddy trooper in search of bazaar babies. You will even know his name, the man who raped you while you lap doped and fathered you son" (122-3).

Quarrels and Accusations: In a clash between Anandi, Manaji's mother and Sumati, Anandai tells Sumati that it is she who has made her Maharani and arranged a pilgrimate to ensure her fecundity. But Sumati retaliates, "By having me mated with an unknown soldier! You know how to work these miracles, didn't you? You, the expert in fertility rituals—having practiced them all. You who, took off your sari and hang it on the city gate for all comers—you the expert in deceit and fraud!" (128).

Learning the secret from Rowland, Manaji kills Arjun to tear away the polluted part. Sumati, on her part, indicates that Manaji himself is born to an elephant trainer, Bhimsen of his father's court. On hearing Sumati's accusation, Manaji speaks with anger, "So long as the sun and the moon! Haaah-ha-ha! So long as the su and the moon shall go round the line of the Red God of War shall continue. Haaah-ha-ha! The line of Mars stopped with my father. And who am I to wear his turban. Who? Who am I? (134).

Manaji is heartbroken and jumps from the balcony and commits suicide. Agonized by Manaji's death, Sumati says that his sin is not the murder of her son or the disgrace of his birth, but the sin of false pride-his possession with the line of Mars. Later, Sumati is announced as the Maharani by Rowland.

Conclusion

Thus, the play *Line of Mars* has a sense of history and historicity is evident in almost all scenes of the play. A secret and clever stratagem is implemented, which is projected as quite common in Royal India during colonial days, King Manaji Mangal Raj himself being an illegitimate son of an elephant trainer. The tragic-comic stratagem to maintain the family tree through well-concealed adultery is a bizarre sage of decadent morality about the time of the First Indian War of Independence of 1857. In the play, the princely line that claims descent from Mars is as it happens imaginary, but it is said to be descended from other planetary bodies exist to this day, and their members are just fiercely proud, just as touchy, about their supposed ancestry as the fictional Mangal of this play. Malgonkar has revealed the private life of the kings of the colonial period through this work of art. A. S. Dasan in his "Questioning for Truth: History-Fiction Interface in the Recent Indian English Fiction" opines that "Art does not exist in a vacuum. It is a reflection on time and history wherein the larger movements of life are captured, envisaged and comprehended . . ." (25) Malgonkar has proved his acumen as a novelist and he has focused his intelligence on the hidden history through this play.

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