



St. Joseph's Journal of Humanities and Science

ISSN: 2347 - 5331

<http://sjctnc.edu.in/6107-2/>



WOMEN AND TRADITION IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF MANOHAR MALGONKAR

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the theme of women and tradition. Manohar Malgonkar's works portray this theme in an excellent way. His novels mark a reaction against social realism. The aim of this research paper is to highlight the tradition in women. Tradition can be related to culture and these cultural changes are the part of the society. It has been asserted that tradition refers to all activities of custom or ritual. Therefore tradition is merely followed to serve the society and tradition can have different aspects like custom, belief and superstitions. These social practices are born and later they face eternity within the civilization. New norms of the society and culture may replace the old one but the practices are continued.

Manohar Malgonkar shows the impact of tradition and depicts the clash between culture and women. He brings different characters that are unable to identify themselves. Therefore tradition and cultural anarchy are distinguished well. It showcases the life of women who are caught between their culture and identity and shows their power over men.

It also deals with princely tradition and modern democratic values which have lots of rules and regulations. The women characters portrayed show a sorry lack of self-identity and reality.

The Post-Independence novelist attitude to women has undergone considerable change, especially in the case of writers. Indian authors are faintly rebellious to conventions and Manohar Malgonkar is one among them. He is a prominent Indo English writer and his popularity is not mainly in his style and content of his novels but he uses a technique which was not followed

by anyone. He is known as 'down to earth teller of tales'. His technique of storytelling and the way he probes insight into life has made him the most skillful writer among Indo English literature.

Though his literary output is limited, his achievements in fiction are empirical modes of creation. He transmitted his experience in a meaningful way into a soulful art of writing. The main aim of the research paper is to highlight the role of tradition in the life of women. Tradition refers to all activities of custom or ritual. Therefore tradition is mainly followed to serve the society in different aspects. The different aspects are belief, superstitions which are the social practice with the civilization of new norms of society and culture. It may replace the old one but the practices are continued. Tradition is a belief or behavior passed on within a group or society with symbolic meaning or with a special significance with its origin in the past.

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Tradition are often continued as ancient, unalterable and deeply important.

Malgonkar's moral rules are elastic and rigid. He proves that these rules are variable irrespective of nation and tradition, and morality is specified essentially by culture. Malgonkar exploits this varying nature through the characters of women who are poor, helpless and uneducated. They all face different problems under different circumstances. Their attitude to morality also varies with their character. Malgonkar's first novel is *Distant Drum* (1961), an autobiographical novel. The two women Margot and Bina love to marry Kiran Garud. Margot is the wife of Major Bob Medley, who is second command of Kiran's regiment. Bob is much older than his young lovely and vivacious wife. She never makes things clear for Bob and behind his back continues to cast her spell on young army men specially bachelors like Kiran Garud. Bob comes to know the whole truth about his wife, very late but he cannot stop loving Margot, nor can he live with the fact that his world is polluted. Three weeks later he blows out his brains.

Much later Kiran falls in love with Bina Sonal, captivated by her simplicity. But Bina is to be married to Arvand Mathur. Mr. Sonal refuses to have him, an army man, for his son-in-law and also gets Kiran transferred to Kashmir. Only much later is he again posted in Raniwada and he proposes to Bina, who accepts him, despite her father.

Bina is a contrast to Margot in nature and lacks her cool and calm way of taking things. She enters Kiran's life with a modest and dignified aloofness which Kiran finds irresistible. She understands Kiran, loves him for what he is and admires his self-confidence and self-respect.

There's a greater variety of characters in Malgonkar's next novel *Combat of Shadows* with Britishers, Anglo-Indians and Indians. The hero is a Britisher—Henry Winton. He has an affair with Ruby Miranda, an Anglo-Indian woman. Ruby is neither an Indian nor a Britisher totally and her status as an Anglo-Indian is poor and extremely embarrassing. Ruby's sole aim is to marry a Britisher and become a mem-Sahib and she is determined to see her dream come true when she meets Henry. Ruby has much to offer in that respect with a rare mixture of the submissiveness and surrenders her womanhood. As G. S. Amur rightly says,

“The story of Winton's relationship with Ruby is one of betrayal—betrayal of passion through fear”. Henry even overcome his partiality for his own race and establishes a very good companionship with Ruby. But the question of marriage never crosses his mind.

Ruby realizes the truth when Henry returns from England married to Jean. Insulted mercilessly by Henry she swears to kill him; on Henry's part, he finds it difficult to forget Ruby and grudgingly compares her always to Jean. Though Jean suspects dissatisfaction in Henry it is not till she learns about Ruby that she realizes the whole truth.

Jean in her attempt for a revenge, rebels against the tradition of the Whites in India and their aversion to Indians and Anglo-Indians, falls in love and gives herself to Eddie, the Anglo-Indian friend of Ruby. Jean decides to divorce Henry and marry Eddie. But Eddie is caught in the cruel trap laid by Henry and dies. Broken-hearted Jean leaves her husband. Shocked and enraged Ruby succeeds in destroying Henry, with the help of Sudden Dart and Pasupati.

The failure of Ruby or even Jean, is mainly due to the thoughtlessness of Henry. He never understands Ruby, or Jean, or even himself. Given a chance Ruby would have proved to be a better wife, but Henry takes the wrong turn at the wrong moment.

Ruby never can take back what she's lost for no fault of hers, her relationship with Henry, nor can she make amends with what she had deliberately sacrificed, that is Eddie's love. The next novel is *The Princes* written about Princely India, like Ackerley's *Hindoo Holiday*, E. M. Forster's *Hill of Devi*, Anand's *Private Life of an Indian Prince*. But Malgonkar's *The Princes* is a real treat with the grandeur of an epic and the freshness of an autobiography. It depicts the end of the royal rule in Begwad State, symbolically signifying the end of Princes as rulers in India. Prince Abhay knows his mother only as tradition-bound who is neglected by her husband. His relationship with her is more cordial than loving.

In Abhay's words the Maharani is a “young woman cast on the dust heap in the full bloom of youth, growing to the verge of middle age with all her womanly desires still unslaked, rebelling, refusing to spend the rest of her life shut away in a dark palace, a volatile bundle of yearnings tearing herself away from the shell of

conventions. Abhay is shocked beyond reconciliation, when the queen runs away to lead her own life, that too in the light of courage kindled by none else than himself with the light heartedness Abhay advises his mother to 'break away before it is too late' and to lead a life of her own. But tradition means more to him than his mother's happiness.

So the neglected queen feels that her son, Abhay is the only anchor in life. She believes that she can make Abhay a bridge to fill the gulf between her king and herself, but she realises that it is only an illusion, and Abhay is no longer a little boy. So, she has nothing to care for and she does not regret her elopement with the palace officer, Abdulla Jan. In his companionship she finds her contentment as a wife and a woman. When her son unhesitatingly calls her a whore, she retorts "I was one, all these years when I lived with a man in sin. But remember I had been abandoned by my husband... but not a whore any more now that I'm married!... I am the wife, the lady of the house, a share in the joys and sorrows of my husband. Here I was nothing". With his shrewd craftsmanship Malgonkar makes it possible for the orthodox Maharani to denounce her royal status, dance in the night clubs and even change her religion and still not regret it—for after all a queen is a human being too.

A careful analysis of all these characters reveals a beautiful sentiment. Woman can seek justice and strive for happiness and she need not be tradition-bound when her own mental welfare is at stake. She has a right for happiness as a human being.

In fact Malgonkar never criticises any of his characters, not even Margot. Because in a changing world the moral code need not be different for man and woman and Malgonkar exploits this fact fully in his novels. May be his heroines are far too progressive and revolutionary but their attitude is pure and uninhibited.

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