



# Women Identity: The Study of Characterization of Women in the select works of Manohar Malgonkar

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Received: 03 Jan 2024; Received in revised form: 08 Feb 2024; Accepted: 18 Feb 2024; Available online: 27 Feb 2024

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**Abstract**— *The portrayal of women in Indian English novels is a complicated and changing component of literature that has changed with time. It is critical to remember that Indian English literature is immensely diverse and that women are not portrayed uniformly throughout. The portrayal of women in Indian English literature does share certain common themes. The portrayal of women frequently reflects India's immense cultural diversity. The depiction of female characters varies depending on the cultures, groups and customs present. Traditional roles for women in the novels of Manohar Malgonkar include wives; mothers and daughters frequently take on the role of carers and are required to respect traditional family and social norms. Women characters were neglected and men played an important role in his novels. The present study will concentrate on comprehensive portrayal of man-woman relationship in his selected novels. It also depicts the characterization of women in his selected novels.*

**Keywords**— *Cultural diversity, Indian English Novel, Portrayal of women characters, Women identity.*



## I. INTRODUCTION

Women have a significant and indisputable role in society. Women have consistently played crucial roles in many aspects of human existence making significant contributions to the advancement and welfare of society spanning different historical periods and cultural contexts.

Women often serve as the foundation of families and communities offering affection, support, cultivation that promote robust social connections. They have a crucial role in nurturing youngsters, moulding future generations and imparting cultural values. Women are assuming more leadership responsibilities in both familial and communal contexts spearheading constructive transformations and championing the cause of social equity. They actively participate in community development, educational projects and healthcare advocacy.

Dr Muniraju & Urvashi Attri rightly notes that “Education plays an important role in building self-confidence among women it also enables to change she/her status in the society. Education enables and builds confidence to take decisions in a better way” (Dr Muniraju, para.1). Women provide distinct viewpoints that stimulate innovation and creativity across diverse domains. Their profound understanding and methodologies may result in revolutionary solutions and progress in the fields of science, technology, art and culture. Throughout history women have acted as exemplars and sources of motivation for others shattering obstacles and clearing the path for future generations to fulfill their aspirations. Their narratives of fortitude and bravery inspire other people to achieve their utmost capabilities.

Women are leading the charge in advocating for gender equality and human rights. They fervently champion equitable access to education, healthcare, political

representation and economic opportunity for all individuals. Women are essential in fostering peace and fostering mutual understanding across many cultures and groups. They possess a high level of proficiency in promoting open communication and achieving peaceful resolutions to issues. The significance of women in society is immeasurable. Women constitute not just half of the population but also serve as the catalyst for many social, economic and cultural progresses.

The portrayal of women in literature has been a multifaceted and constantly changing terrain across time mirroring the societal, cultural and political circumstances in which it originated. Women were often shown as formidable entities, divine beings and combatants. Notable examples include Athena from Greek mythology, Isis from Egyptian mythology and Brigit from Celtic mythology. Women were often portrayed as archetypal figures such as the vulnerable lady in need of rescue, the malicious stepmother or the knowledgeable elderly woman. These positions mirrored conventional gender roles and societal norms. Women were revered and idolized also elevated to an unattainable status and kept at a distance. This idealized perspective has little correlation with the actualities of women's experiences.

The Rig Vedic hymns indicate that women actively participated along with men in all aspects of life including both laborious agricultural work and joyful celebrations. They also accompanied men in battles against raiding tribes and cattle-lifters. Men were not the only ones capable of singing the praises of gods and goddesses; there were also female Rishis who had the ability to write hymns. Ghosha, Lopamudra, Mamata, Apala, Sachi-Indrani, and Viswarvara were among the female Rishis. RC, Majumdar, et al., rightly notes that "Families being patrilineal, people prayed for abundance of sons. The birth of daughters was not desired, but once born they were treated with kindness and consideration. Their education was not neglected, and some of them lived to compose hymns and rise to the rank of seers like Visvavara, Ghosha and Apala" (RC, Majumdar, et al., 30).

Female characters saw a shift towards increased complexity and subtlety with a deeper exploration of their inner lives and desires. Jane Austen's works showcased autonomous and clever female protagonists who defied traditional norms. Women were often portrayed as victims of male aggression and subjugation, emphasizing the perils faced by women in a patriarchal culture. *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley is a prominent illustration. Women authors have emerged as significant figures, questioning conventional depictions and advocating for more representation and empowerment of women in literature. Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison are prominent players

in this movement. Modern literature is progressively acknowledging the variety of experiences that women have and it delves into topics such as ethnicity, class and other aspects of identity.

Throughout a significant portion of history, women have often been portrayed in literature from the perspective of males, often being objectified. Contemporary authors are now questioning this viewpoint by focusing on the viewpoints and wants of female characters themselves. The inclusion of a diverse array of women's perspectives and experiences in literature is crucial for fostering a more nuanced and realistic comprehension of the female experience. The choice of words used to depict women in literature may have a significant influence on readers' perceptions of them. Writers are becoming more conscious about usage of inclusive and courteous terminology. The portrayal of women in literature serves as a mirror of our society and the narratives one chooses to share about one's own experiences. Through a thorough analysis and active involvement with these representations, one may strive towards establishing a future that is fair and encompasses everyone.

The portrayal of female characters in Indian literature written in English has had a captivating and intricate transformation throughout the years, mirroring the shifting social, political and cultural environment of India. Earlier works often reflected Victorian ideals, depicting women exclusively in the roles of obedient spouses, daughters, and mothers. Illustrative instances include figures such as Sita in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and Mrinal in Tagore's *Gora*. As the independence struggle gathered impetus, female characters started to epitomize ideas of defiance and selflessness. Bama Mehta and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, who were part of the progressive literary movement focused on the challenges faced by women in the context of societal issues like child marriage, sati, and purdah. Their characteristics defied conventional standards and championed education and equality. Authors such as Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal delved into the introspective experiences and intricacies of middle-class women beyond conventional depictions. Their characters confront and struggle with matters pertaining to identity, relationships and personal satisfaction. Authors such as Bama and Mahasweta Devi have shed focus on the experiences of marginalized groups that were previously overlooked. Their characters actively challenge and address the issues of caste and class prejudice advocating for their own autonomy and seeking fairness and equity.

Contemporary Indian literature showcases a wide range of female characters that are adept at navigating a globalized society. They address matters such as professional ambitions and managing evolving familial relationships.

Illustrative instances include the characters crafted by Kiran Desai in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* and the formidable ladies shown by Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*.

The emergence of feminist movements in India has had a profound influence on the representation of women in literature. Sandhya Tiwari observes that "Indian English women poets embrace feminist ideas and theories from the west into Indian poetry in English" (Sandhya Tiwari, p.xiv). *The* growing presence of female authors has resulted in a broader and more intricate portrayal of women's lives. Regional languages and literatures provide distinct viewpoints on the lives and difficulties faced by women. Even male authors also depicted the women conditions in their works.

Malgonkar's stories include several women who are well-educated, captivating and inclined towards romance. Malgonkar, as a male author, has made limited efforts to fully explore the complexity of his female characters. The portrayal of Indian, European and Eurasian women by him lacks a comprehensive exploration of their lives.

Malgonkar's characters elicit readers' sympathies due to their inherent imperfections but they possess qualities of warmth, modernity, gentleness and simplicity. These folks are grappling with the forces of nature and the complexities of life both of which are outside of their sphere of influence. Malgonkar exposes the characters completely to his readers. He consistently strives to reveal the inner workings of the mind through investigation of tensions and conflicts. Padmanabhan says that "As a novelist with a keen observation of life, he analyzes the reasons for happy and unhappy marital lives" (Padmanabhan 48).

Malgonkar does not possess the role of a chronicler or a sociologist; rather, he is a fervent advocate for humanity. He refuses to accept the world in a state of bondage. M. Rajagopalachari contends that "The few characters of the lower strata like Kanakchand, Gauri, Kistulal, Aji, Mumtaz do not give us the feel of a realized life. It is, perhaps, the reason why his writings are considered "withdrawn" from the reality of his country's poverty" (M. Rajagopalachari 15)

Malgonkar effectively portrays this societal transformation through the character of Maharani in the novel *The Princes*. In the story, Maharani represents the modern Indian lady. Malgonkar exhibits a formidable character embodying authentic femininity that goes beyond simple rebellion against societal norms but rather encompasses a steadfast rejection of injustice in the pursuit of one's obligations and selflessness.

Maharani character, deserted by her husband Hiroji and isolated to a dark corner of the palace provides an artistic element to the story. It depicts the challenges faced by princesses and wives in Indian culture irrespective of their background. Maharani is a true rebel who relinquishes her queenly status to be with an ordinary man she loves.

Abhay, the son of Maharani fails to appreciate the spirit of her action. He insults her very cruelly on her decision of relinquishing her queenly status to be with an ordinary man, but the mother is determined to break away the chains of marriage and live life fully. However, even when he disrespects her for her efforts, she continues to love him, despite the distress caused by his lack of thanks. Prior to her departure to Pakistan, she confides her whole estate to him. Therefore, she is shown as one of the terrible casualties of the intense personality in *The Princes*. Malgonkar depicts in the text that "'I will live as a wife should live, on what her husband giver her,' she said proudly, almost defiantly, and then she added: 'I am going as I came, taking nothing from here; a woman, not a Maharani'" (Malgonkar "The Princes" 359).

Regarding the other two female characters Minnie and Kamala in the novel *The Princes*, it is sufficient to note that they are eclipsed by the immense personality of Maharani. They embody distinct facets of femininity. Minnie, a young Eurasian lady, has qualities of freedom, sensuality, and materialism. Conversely, Abhay's wife Kamala embodies the traditional concept of a perfect Indian lady. She might be seen as a representation of the Sita archetype of the Indian lady in the literature.

Malgonkar depicts Minnie, a Eurasian girl, as a significant influence in forming Abhay character. She comes from a humble background being the daughter of a railway employee who was sent to Simla to work as a clerk. She lives in a working women hostel, which is an ideal place for young girls to live together and improve their chances of success in a world driven by wealth and enjoyment.

The Princes, Abhay falls in love with Minnie. However, she is not allowed to be his wife by Maharaja Hiroji. At this point, even the princes attitude is also just in tune with his father. The total failure on Abhay's part to comprehend the feelings of Minnie drives her to desert him. Ultimately, the prince marries Kamala, the eldest daughter of the Raja of Akheti, as arranged by his father.

Kamala, Abhay's wife is concerned about his well-being and is unwilling to leave him alone during the difficult situation of giving up the crown. She fears that he may act impulsively similar to his father, Hiroji. She raises his awareness of his role as a parent and spouse. Abhay becomes aware of it, as well as the fact that he loves her.

They both live as equals at home. It portrays women liberation movement from traditionalism to modernity.

Malgonkar adeptly presents a nuanced depiction of Nana's personal life in the novel *The Devil's Wind*. It reveals the complex theme of national experience of the Revolt of 1857. Malgonkar states in the Author's note:

This ambiguous man and his fate have always fascinated me. I discovered that the stories of Nana and the revolt have never been told from the Indian point of view. This then is Nana's story, as I believe he might have written it himself. It is fiction, but it takes no liberties with verifiable facts or even probabilities. (Malgonkar "The Devil's Wind" p.xxii)

It is a historical character and the novel is written in the autobiographical style. Nana Saheb in *The Devil's Wind* is believed to have a curse on his marital life. Though the curse on Nana Saheb is widely known, there are people to give their daughter in marriage to him when a huge sum of money is offered. This is because of the poverty of the parents. Female children are a burden to the parents who are eager to get rid of them.

Nana is a compassionated man who fears the killing of women by having marital relations with them. So he keeps away from marrying a third time. But in the medieval period marriage is a social duty towards the family and community. There is no chance of individual choice. Thus, it is a convenient ceremony which is proved by Nana's third marriage to Kashi, a ten year old girl. After the marriage she is shut up in a part of the palace. Malgonkar has treated man-woman relationship as a master and he has unraveled the mystery in it through Kashi-Nana relationship. Nana married her out of necessity merely used her for sacramental purposes but in the end she turns out to be the valuable asset who protected his life in Nepal.

Malgonkar's another novel *A Bend in the Ganges* can be categorized as a document pertaining to the freedom movement and partition. It explores the aftermath of India freedom specifically addressing the occurrences of violence, kidnapping, mutilation, and homelessness that affected twelve million individuals. The story revolves on three main characters - Gian, a devoted disciple of Gandhiji, Debi-dayal, a fervent terrorist and Sundari.

Debi-dayal's father Tekchand Kerwad, a rich business magnate of Duriabad is pro-British in his sympathies. The marital life of Radha and Tekchand Kerwad in *A Bend in the Ganges* lead a completely satisfied life.

The marital life of Sundari, daughter of Radha and Tekchand Kerwad with Gopal is in juxtaposition to her

parents' marital life. Gopal, Sundari's husband feels disappointed as Sundari does not show a full blooded attitude. Gopal attains the emotional stability of the Indian male who could be kind and generous to his wife without loving her. Gopal's flippant attitude to marriage and his flirting with his girl friend Malini worsen their relations. Sundari is uncompromising in her quest for fulfillment of her revenge on her husband.

Malgonkar works are characterized by the prominent prevalence of liberal ideas, indicating his lack of adherence to orthodox beliefs. The author's works aim to evoke the most profound reaction from readers by encompassing the whole range of life tangible aspects. He effectively portrays this societal transformation through the character of Maharani. The character Maharani depicted in the story embodies the archetype of the modern Indian lady. Seema Miglani rightly says that "Malgonkar's characters exhibit an excellent combination of the typical and individual traits. Being typical, they remain true to their times and being individual, they emerge as convincing characters" (Seema Miglani 178).

## II. CONCLUSION

The female protagonists in Malgonkar's works are shown as intentionally and decisively breaking away from conventional lifestyles throughout their whole journey. The writer's emotions are obviously aligned with the women who endure the intense anguish of unfulfilled desires and personal challenges sacrificing all other aspects of life. He makes his characters realistic and complex. They cannot be drawn into neat categorization of good and bad.

Malgonkar's heroines despite their flaws are genuine human beings. In addition, these personalities exhibit the same traits of being very autonomous and self-possessed while being loyal to themselves. They go against traditions and norms for a reason. They are undeterred by traditions and customs in their quest to discover their actual identities.

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