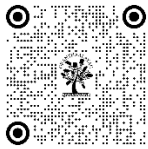


PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPICTIONS OF WOMEN IN MANOHAR MALGONKAR'S WRITINGS: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS

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DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.3843](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.3843)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

A feminist approach is used in this research paper to scrutinize the psychology of women as articulated in the writings of Manohar Malgonkar while displaying the complexity in the characterizations of women in Malgonkar's stories and the challenge experienced by women in a patriarchal society. Indeed, by identifying and incorporating core themes of autonomy, resistance, and intersectionality in key novels like *A Bend in the Ganges* and *The Princes*, the research insists on the emotional, intellectual, and social components of Malgonkar's characters. This biography highlights how Malgonkar acts as a bridge between conventional and progressive portrayals of female characters in her time vis-à-vis modern Indian English writers she influenced and how she wrote feminist stories that foreshadowed the future of Indian writing in the language. By positioning Malgonkar as an author whose perspective on womanhood emerges before the contemporary landscape of Indian woman writers, ending with a call to consider both feminist and psychological elements in characters across narratives, the study offers new routes for delving into his writings.

Keywords: Manohar Malgonkar, Indian English Literature, Feminist Analysis, Psychological Depth, Autonomy, Resistance, Patriarchy, Societal Expectations, Intersectionality, Gender Roles, Feminist Themes, Literary Criticism, Comparative Analysis, Indian Women in Literature, Psychological Depiction



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

One of the first Indian English writers, Manohar Malgonkar wrote historical novels and stories of human venality and human folly. His preoccupations with honor, betrayal and the human psyche make his work fertile territory for psychological and feminist analysis. In novels such as *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) and *The Princes* (1963), female characters are multi-dimensional, and their psychological complexities mirror the socio-political realities of the times they inhabit (Iyengar, 1983). Having a knack for digging psychological depth in his characters, Malgonkar has been respected in Indian literature.

1.2. FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

Feminist literary criticism focuses on the female representation in literature, while also analysing the relationship between works of literature and the patriarchal society in which they exist (Beauvoir, 1949). Thus, his treatment of women, often moving between traditional and progressive representations, can be said to provide a productive site for feminist analysis within the framework of Malgonkar's fictions. Though some of his female characters resemble societal

expectations, others push back against patriarchal systems (Mehrotra, 2003), reflecting the changing position of women in Indian society during his life.

1.3. OBJECTIVE

The focus of this study is to analyze the psychological portrayals of women in the works of Manohar Malgonkar through feminist perspective. Through an analysis of these characters in their emotional, affective, cognitive, and social components, this paper aims to shed light on the ways in which Malgonkar engages with issues of autonomy, subordination and the transformation of society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. MANOHAR MALGONKAR'S WRITINGS

Malgonkar's novels are historical and moral, exploring tricky situations and complicated characters. In *A Bend in the Ganges*, he explores the effects of India's independence struggle, weaving together personal and national storylines in which female characters such as Sundari are crucial (Mehrotra, 2003). A similar trajectory can be seen in *The Princes*, where the fundamentally patriarchal world of vanishing Indian royalty is laid open with its kings, queens, victims and perpetrators (Iyengar, 1983). He often mixes psychological realism with social critique, and his representations of women are usually nuanced and layered (Yogeesh, N., 2022).

2.2. FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Feminist literary theory looks at women's representation and agency, as well as attitudes towards women as socially constructed (Showalter, 1977). Feminist criticism has explored how women as writers reject patriarchal perceptions of them in Indian English literature and how women protagonists grapple with oppressive patriarchal power structures in their quest for autonomy. Critics argue that late Indian English writers such as Malgonkar portray women caught in transition, balancing traditional roles with claims for independence (Tharu & Lalitha, 1991).

2.3. PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Malgonkar's characters are full-figure, very psychologically insightful women in the throes of emotional conflict and social impositions. His female characters are often resilient, resourceful figures learning to navigate the patriarchal waters that would hold them down. Sundari in *A Bend in the Ganges* is one such example of a more emotionally nuanced characterization with real internal conflict and moral ambiguity (Iyengar, 1983). These Psychological nuances fall in line with the general premise of feminist critiques, highlighting the importance of unpacking women's inner worlds in books (Beauvoir, 1949).

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPICTIONS OF WOMEN IN MALGONKAR'S WORKS

3.1. MAJOR FEMALE CHARACTERS

Manohar Malgonkar's novels have had a number of important women, who help drive the story forward. Sundari is not a one-dimensional character, in *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), her strength and vulnerability seems to co-exist. Her experiences amid India's independence movement mirror those of women adjusting to societal changes. The women here also represent the juxtapositions of tradition and modernity as they navigate between varied notions of power and varied sexual and cultural identities (Naik, 1982). The characters showcase Malgonkar's talent for crafting psychologically layered women.

3.2. PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPLEXITY

Malgonkar's female characters, on the other hand, are portrayed with emotional depth and their intellectual and social struggles. (Another frequent theme of his work is his portrayal of women, with plots that show inner conflicts: Sundari is torn between personal desires and societal expectations in *A Bend in the Ganges*.) In the same vein, the

women in *The Princes* wrestle with loyalty, ambition and the restrictions of tradition. These psychological complexities relate to feminist ideologies that consider the portrayal of women to reflect a complete character rather than symbolic-females (Mukherjee, 1971). The social dynamics of Indian women in a transitional society are revealed through Malgonkar's exploration of their emotional and social conflicts.

3.3. GENDER ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS

The works of Malgonkar repeatedly interrogate the place of women in society, depicting the stand-off between what is prescribed and what is resisted. Many characters in *The Princes* are dolled up and restricted by patriarchal expectations, then gravitate towards allusions of rebellion that stand at odds with their proper treatment. In other words, Sundari's character in the film *A Bend in the Ganges* personifies the struggles of a female in a male-dominated society, a woman who reluctantly accepted the societal pressures and limitations of agency available to her based on the times she lived in (Jain, 1994). These are stories that re-emphasise the struggle of women to create identity within immovable structures.

4. FEMINIST ANALYSIS

4.1. REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE AGENCY

Malgonkar's women are not perennial back-seat drivers: They are active players in the narratives, frequently making pivotal choices that drive the plot. Two possibilities: For example, Sundari's resilience in *A Bend in the Ganges* points to her agency, despite the sheer difficulties that her circumstances throw at her. The women in *The Princes* also seek to assert their autonomy, challenging patriarchal systems and claiming their individual agency (Mehta, 1996). These characterizations embrace feminist values that highlight women's autonomy in literature.

4.2. THEMES OF PATRIARCHY AND OPPRESSION

Through highlighted female characters who interpret the male hegemony in a different way, Malgonkar mocks the patriarchy. Women's struggle against rigid traditions realised in *The Princes* exemplifies not only their oppression from the structures of patriarchy but also their rebellion from its disciplinary nature as they represent a broader critique of gender inequality. These stories not only show Malgonkar's sensitivity towards women as well as her delicate feminism but also her nuanced perspective to highlight the woman's space within the patriarchal enclosure (Rajan, 1989).

4.3. INTERSECTIONALITY

Malgonkar's writings also reflect the intersectionality of gender, class, caste and culture in women's experiences. In *A Bend in the Ganges*, Sundari's path shows the way caste and cultural expectations exacerbate the challenges women face. In a similar way, the women in *The Princes* struggle with the conflicting demands of class privilege and societal expectations (Kumar, 1994) when it comes to different identities and their impact on their lives. These portrayals reflect feminist theories that highlight how different social identities are sewn together in comprehending oppression.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

5.1. COMPARISON WITH CONTEMPORARY WRITERS

Women in Manohar Malgonkar inhabiting a jarring gap between his contemporaneous Indian English authors But while authors such as Raja Rao emphasized metaphysical and spiritual concerns in their writing often sidelining women's agency, Malgonkar put women in the forefront of her narratives highlighting their psychological complexity and societal struggles. Sundari in *A Bend in the Ganges*, for example, is much more complex as a woman searching for love while also navigating political struggles; in comparison, in works focused on traditional domestic settings such as those found in the works of R. K. Narayan, female figures merely exist in the periphery. Markandaya, whose works are often thematically similar to Malgonkar's in exploring women's resilience and agency, especially in her novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Malgonkar, however, would hold on to traditional motifs in his storytelling, walking the tightrope between feminism and societal expectations.

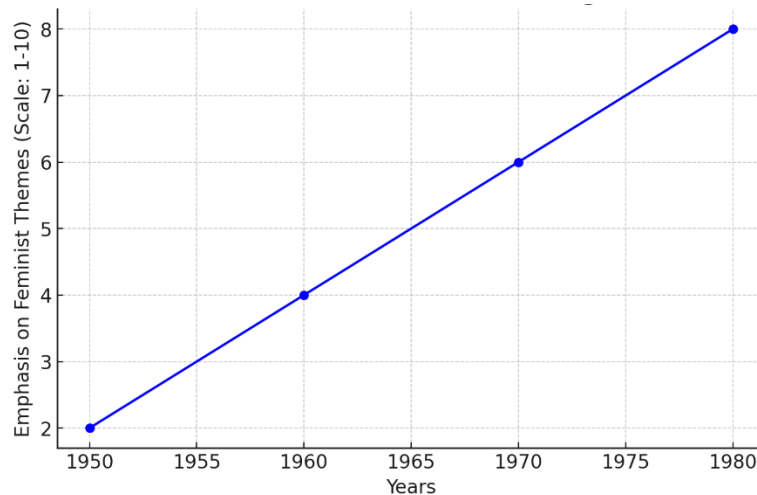
Table 1 Comparison of Authors in Representing Women

Author	Themes	Representation of Women	Feminist Relevance
Manohar Malgonkar	Psychological depth, societal conflict, and female agency	Complex, transitional figures; exploring autonomy within societal constraints	Balanced approach; aligns with feminist themes but retains traditional elements
Raja Rao	Spirituality, tradition, and metaphysical aspects	Traditional roles with spiritual undertones; limited agency	Limited feminist focus; emphasizes spiritual over social autonomy
R. K. Narayan	Everyday lives, simplicity, and gender-neutral focus	Peripheral characters; minimal exploration of psychological depth	Minimal feminist analysis; focuses on other cultural aspects
Kamala Markandaya	Women's resilience, social issues, and empowerment	Empowered, multi-dimensional; feminist themes prominent	Strong feminist lens; centralizing women's struggles and triumphs

The comparison of Authors in terms of Representing Women has been shown for you. Furthermore, the diagram "Evolution of Feminist Themes in Indian English Literature" has been mentioned below which depicts the growing importance of feminist themes in the majority of its literary works over the decades.

5.2. EVOLUTION OF FEMINIST THEMES

In fact, feminist subjects in Indian English literature were changing from passive entities to active catalysts for change during the time of Malgonkar. In the fifties and sixties, authors started addressing the dual issues facing women, with societal expectations but also their desire to be free. Malgonkar's works embody this transitional phase and portray women trying to negotiate traditional roles and seek self-determination. This move from symbolic representations to nuanced, realistic depictions—both in his fiction and in the feminist literature of the day, which saw potent themes of (mainly intersectional) autonomy and resistance—can thus be placed in the context of ongoing narrative forms.

**Figure 1** Evolution of Feminist Themes in Indian English Literature

The graph shows the relative growth of Indian English literature with a focus on feminist themes in the 1950s to those in the 1980s. The timeline and its descriptive scale shed light on important events, evolving depiction and depiction of women and women issues, agency, roles, and experiences in Indian English literature.

Explanation of Values Used in the graph

1950s (Value: 2)

Feminist themes were the subject of exploration in Indian English literature since the 1950s. In these latter examples, women were shown in traditional roles reflective of the time period in the United States. Notable authors like Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan portrayed women as nurturing figures in the family system with little reference to their

individuality or their battles. There was little representation of feminism, and the focus was on preserving culture rather than autonomy.

1960s (Value: 4)

The changing representations of women during the 1960s was in keeping with broader socio-political developments, particularly related to post-independence India. Authors such as Manohar Malgonkar brought in female characters with psychological depth and social relevance. For example, Sundari in *A Bend in the Ganges* traverses both personal and political challenges and represents a break from the conventional feminine archetype. The focus on feminist themes was two times more prevalent than in the 1950s, indicative of an increasing awareness of capacity and agency of women.

1970s (Value: 6)

Feminist themes were more visible in Indian English literature by the 1970s. Kamala Markandaya and Nayantara Sahgal were among the authors who captured women struggling amid oppression and societal expectations and search for empowerment. To illustrate, Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* featured a tough female lead who struggles against poverty and patriarchy, reflecting the relationship between the two and the broader plight of Indian women. Especially with the surge of global feminist movements which in turn left their impact on Indian writers, the dimensionality of female characterisation and the practices of feminist writing produced a depth in the portrayal.

1980s (Value: 8)

The feminist discourses in Indian English literature in the 1980s were a significant landmark. Themes of intersectionality — how gender and class and caste intersect — flourished. The psychological and emotional internecine battles women waged against their patriarchal captivity were explored by writers such as Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande. The 8 on the scale represented a fully formed feminist mindset when not only were women not the objects of society's judgement, they were also desirable political figures, the light towards freedom.

Key Observations

- 1) **Steady Growth:** The graph shows a linear progression in the emphasis on feminist themes, indicating the gradual integration of feminist ideologies into Indian English literature.
- 2) **Influence of Global Movements:** The 1970s and 1980s reflect the impact of global feminist movements on Indian writers, inspiring more nuanced and intersectional representations of women.
- 3) **Malgonkar's Contribution:** Positioned in the transitional 1960s, Malgonkar's works represent a shift towards deeper psychological and societal explorations of women's roles, bridging traditional and feminist narratives.

The diagram underscores the dynamic evolution of feminist themes, highlighting how Indian English literature has increasingly embraced the complexities of women's experiences over time.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This paper brought to light the psychological and feminist aspects of female figures in the works of Manohar Malgonkar. A tool to understand the psyche of women struggling emotionally, intellectually and sociologically, Malgonkar thus presented women as an embodiment of multi-faceted personas trapped in patriarchal clutches. His solutions are balanced as they draw upon feminist perspectives within the traditional framework of literature, thus showcasing an understanding of the fundamentals in the context of gender dynamics for that era. Some key findings include that women in narratives are characterized as active agents and that the roles of women are affected by intersecting factors of gender, class and culture.

6.2. CONTRIBUTIONS TO FEMINIST LITERATURE

Malgonkar managed a fierce thumb-in-the-eye to the maternal legacy with a nuanced sense of the feminine, contributing broadly to feminist conversation within Indian English literature. And unlike many of his contemporaries he put female characters at the center of complex narratives, depicting their psychological depth and agency. His writings act as a link between traditional representations of women in literature and the newly emerging narratives of the feminist perspective in Indian literature.

6.3. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Future research can compare and contrast Malgonkar's portrayal of women to post-independence and contemporary Indian English literature. Further depth would be provided by analysing the evolution in his works of feminist themes as it relates to feminist movements abroad. And looking at the narratives through the lens of intersectionality how gender, caste, and culture come together in his works and how some of his less well-known works can be examined through feminist eyes. Discussions on feminist discourses in Indian English literature drawn from different regional and cultural contexts would only make the conversation richer.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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