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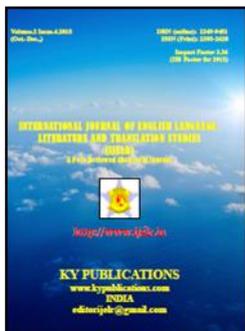
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THE CONCEPT OF COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS IN MANOHAR MALGONKAR'S
THE PRINCES

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ABSTRACT

The riveting story of the struggle for independence and the birth of two sovereign countries is the recurring theme in the history of the twentieth century in South Asia. But it has become trendy to put aside and ignore one part of it, which is the grandeur story of the princely states. The Indian rulers, who had survived after the fall apart of the Moghul Empire, were like puppets brought under the sway of the British Raj. These princes extremely received treacherous and shabby treatment during the British colonisation, and were totally betrayed by the new government of India after independence. They did not gain anything from the British, for in truth; their roots had been cut off from the Indian soil and were left as destitute kings in their own lands. The objective of the article is to show how the majestic, rich, exuberant lives of the Indian princes drifted away along with the British Colonisation, Colonial Encounter between the Princes and the British and finally the merge of princely states into the independent India.

The Princes (1963) written by Manohar Malgonkar, is a true chronicle of the decline and fall of the princely states during the period of the history of India from 1938-1949. It maps the political, economic and cultural consequences of the British colonisation besides which portrays the glorious lives of the Indian princes during the twentieth century.

Key Words: the Princes, the British, Colonisation, Colonial Encounter, Independent India.

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History unveils the profound social, religious, economic, political and cultural transition that many nations have undergone since long. They have discarded some traditional practices while adopting others, catering to new circumstances as conglomeration of different cultures, emerging as new cultures. The idea of modernity caused the process of accepting and adopting alien cultures, which has acquired global identity. Through migration, displacement of people, translation of works, study of comparative literary perspectives and through innovation, colonial expansion and form of globalisation, and the world continuously has been shaken and invigorated by cultural exchange. It can be said that these are the consequences of colonial encounters.

British colonisation in India was not only aimed at the rhizomic exploitation of the colonised in political, economic sectors but also at cultural and psychological levels. It had also resulted in segregating and demoralizing of the prince's lives. It was the princes who welcomed the British to India to invest loans in the Indian market. At that time India was not equipped with sufficient machinery to convert raw materials into products. Therefore, they welcomed the British to invest money and consequently the kings turned as middlemen between the British and their subjects. The British started making inroads into the princes' private lives and slowly encroached on them by annexing states. After 1857 the princes lost their real powers and sold their responsibilities to the British. The states that had survived in 1858 retained their patrimony until 1947, since the British had become the real executors of the kingdoms. After leaving their administrative duties to the British they started leading merry and luxurious life with drinking, huntings, and spending time with their mistresses.

The Princes (1963) is Malgonkar's most successful novel which presents the exuberant picture of the Indian princes, and their majestic culture on one side and their fall and decline on the other. The novelist himself had served in the Indian Army until 1946, and had depicted the plight of the Indian princes during colonisation, which he portrayed through an imaginary state Begwad. What he engendered in the novel was the realistic condition of the last phase of princely India those days. The author himself says that what was happening in Begwad was happening everywhere else in Padmakoshal and in most of the Indian states.

As a prolific writer Manohar Malgonkar covers a wide range of subjects in his works among which Army life, the princely state, Indian history, life in tea plantation, intelligence and counter-intelligence operation, the political scenario of pre and post independence era and the present problems like Brain Drain.

Malgonkar has got immense sympathy towards the Indian princes and his novel too catches the reader's sympathy towards the princes. Manohar Malgonkar unlike the other writers has a long and deep association with the princes. In his interview with Professor Dayananda, Malgonkar spoke about his long and close contact with the princes:

My grandfather was the prime minister in one of the bigger states in India and I grew up ...knowing the princely ways, knowing their peculiarities, knowing the little things that they did different from other people, knowing their little vanities. But that contact grew when I started my profession as a big-game hunter and my clients were the most monied one could think of, were American millionaires or Indian princes and one of them invited me to write the history of his family. So that gave me long enough contact, close contact with his family and with their attitudes and with their peculiarities to be able to write a book about princes. (Mohan, 42-43)

With such a deep and a long intimacy with the 'princes' enabled him to write such a classic authentically. E.M.Forster paid him a rich tribute:

I have just finished *'The Princes'* and should like to thank you for it. It interested me both in its own account and because I am involved-as far as an Englishman can be- in its subject-matter. I happen to have been in touch with a small Maratha state (Dewas Senior) during the years of its dissolution. The parallels are numerous and heart-rendering. I am so glad you have got down a record. Otherwise all would be forgotten. (Mohan, 43)

The princes can be summarised briefly. The scene is Begwad, a small princely state in the Deccan Plateau ruled by Raja Heroji. At the beginning of the novel we are introduced to the two opposite characters the Maharaja Heroji and his son Abhay who are controversial in their opinions. The Maharaja of Begwad, Heroji, is a traditionalist, brave, strong and acts as a preserver of his clan. He is a born prince, has got all princely instincts. He is rigid, extravagant, pompous and an ostentatious king, implicitly believing that they were meant to go on as:

There will always be Begwad, and there will always be a Bedar ruling it-so long as the sun and the moon go round! (Malgonkar, 14)

Prince Abhay, the main protagonist of the novel is depicted as a young man with a liberal English education and full of fresh ideas to reform Begwad. Abhay, not quite eighteen years old, sympathises with the

nationalist whereas his father who lives in a world of his own, remote from the twentieth century, has nothing but contempt for the nationalists who, under the leadership of Gandhi, conducting campaign for complete independence of India. As the novel commences with a conflict between the father and son and as the novel proceeds, the character of Abhay evolves. At the end of the novel we witness the changing attitude of Abhay towards his father. He identifies himself with the values heroically cherished by the Maharaja. Finally he leaves the ivory tower of princely isolation and identifies himself with the common man simultaneously understanding the full implications of the human values in life. Abhay as a narrator of the story depicts the transition period of ten years in the first person:

The map was red and yellow. The red was for British India; the yellow for the India of the princes...For more than a hundred years, the red and the yellow had remained exactly as they were. Then the British left, and in no time at all, the red had overrun the yellow and coloured the entire map a uniform orange. The princely states were no more. We were the princes; no one mourned over our passing...I realize that it could not have been otherwise, and yet I cannot rid myself of a purely selfish sense of loss... (Malgonkar, 13)

The present novel *The Princes* illustrates the colonial impact on the Indian rulers who played a dual role as rulers and as devoted subjects to the British as well. They had a pathetic ending when the British had to quit India. Malgonkar besides portraying the customs and traditions of the Indian princes realistically gives details of the impact of westernisation on the princely states. He also combines fact and fiction with historical imagination of the merging of 565 states into the totality of India.

The encounter between the Indian princes and the British has been clearly seen from the first chapter itself. All the native princes imagined that they would be safe until they were in the shadow of the British. The strong confidence and faith in the British for the princes is obvious in the words of the Maharaja Heroji:

...a tribe that had lived long beyond its day because it had been carefully preserved in the strong chemicals of British protection. (Malgonkar, 13)

However, Heroji says he does not like the British and considers them to be untouchables. His character reveals that the native princes' interest with the British is only for the purpose of protecting themselves and to maintain superiority among their neighbouring states. He is the person who has friendly relations with the British on the surface level, and pretends strong resentment towards the nationalists. At the same time he believes that no nationalist would move a single hair of the British and also has faith in their potency. But he wanted the British Empire to collapse in the hands of the nationalists, which would have paved the way to their independence. The same idea is revealed through the words of Heroji, when he says:

Let the nationalists bleed the British. The more they weaken, the stronger do we emerge. (Malgonkar, 17)

The British had different treaties with different states and these treaties succeeded in maintaining friendly relations, which were camouflaged political tactics from both sides. When the British wanted to control the princes, the princes wanted to protect their kingdom from other neighbouring states. In the novel the British India Company had made a treaty with the Bedars of Begwad soon after the battle of Patalpat in 1803 and it opened an avenue to assimilate with the British.

The British made it obligatory that every Indian prince should learn the English language. Many Indian princes were sent to London for higher education as the British made it obligatory that without English education no Indian prince had the right to ascend the throne. This English education brought about plenty of change in the lives of the princes, like many of them started using English frequently in their speech. As we see in the novel, Heroji, has a habit of resorting to English quotations through which he reveals his philosophy for example, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players". (Malgonkar, 15) And "better to have loved and lost" which he connects with his own philosophy as "...better to have ruled and lost for it is a great feeling—being a ruler". (Malgonkar, 313) Simultaneously English education, turned many Indian princes against their own conservative and feudal values. Lord Macaulay who had introduced English studies in India

said in his famous 'Minute' that the learned Indian should be allowed to absorb English culture and hence form a new class:

A class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect. (Nicholson, 3)

It was a British strategy to make all princes to act according to the British wishes. These learned princes represented the modern class, which fosters the ideas of democracy, equality and fraternity. Thus it resulted in conflicts and clashes among the princes.

In the present novel we witness the clash between feudal and modern ideas of Heroji and Abhay. Maharaja Heroji does not encourage English studies in his land and he believes that English education is responsible for all the problems in British India. But on other hand, Abhay is an idealist with modern ideology and enthusiasm under the British liberal education. Therefore there is an internecine always verbal and emotional fight between the father and the son. They appear more as stranger than as father and son. Abhay does not even sustain his father's presence, which always leads to verbal fight with his father. He says:

I could no longer be natural in his presence, conscious that instead of getting to know each other better we were becoming strangers; two men who had little in common thrown together by an accident. Between us there was always a curtain of increasing formality. (Malgonkar, 24)

During the colonisation the cultural hegemony of the coloniser's knowledge has attempted to degrade the epistemological value and agency of the colonised world. In India all educational institutes provided much space to European literature, which were entwined with self pride of the British, and was clearly evident in Macaulay's words:

A single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. (Gandhi, 144)

English culture, philosophy and their ideology were taught to Indians and thus, in the novel, Abhay has to recite Kipling's poem 'If' as their daily prayer in their college and 'Never Give In' was the guiding principle of the college.

The British used the Princes for their expansion of superiority and had even pulled them to participate in the World Wars in which many of the princes sacrificed their lives. In the novel Abhay too participates in World War II, despite his father's reluctance.

The native princes spent a lot of money in organizing parties and events like hunting to entertain the whites. In the novel Heroji always arranges lavish shooting parties for the British. He is the man in India who could guarantee a tiger. An ulterior motto of pleasing the white was hidden within the hospitalities of innumerable gifts and money to the British.

With the advent of westernisation the Maharani's broke out of the tradition of purdah system and began to mingle freely with everyone. The Maharani, the wife of Heroji, who comes out of the purdah system and elopes with the palace officer Abdulla Jan and finally converts herself to Islam and leaves for Pakistan. Her character is not different to the other characters in European literature, since the Women's Liberation and emancipation movement in the nineteenth century elevated self-realisation, and independence in women. Women emerged out of conservative and patriarchal tradition as full-fledged women.

The Maharani's character can be compared to that of the character of Anna Karenina in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1873-77) and Nora in Henrik Ibsen's *Doll's House* (1879). Karenina who breaks away from traditions and conventions, ends her life in tragic disillusionment. But Nora, who is also against traditions, manages to live her life according to her wish. Thus Maharani's character epitomizes the drastic changes that took place in India due to western colonisation.

The western culture and education elevated the people in India by abolishing Sati, but at the same time segregated the world of the princes, and decultured them. This westernisation was not just a matter of social manners; it included language, ideas and values. In one scene we see Heroji inviting his daughter-in-law, Abhay's wife to consume alcohol in his company, which is a taboo in our culture.

The political motive behind English education was, to make the Indian princes act as pro-Britishers. Speaking English language, following English manners were always given a special status to the individuals in the society. In the words of journalist Ramesh Thapar:

You cannot be a major figure in India if you are not proficient in English. If you don't know English, you are unlikely to be anything more than a social worker, and you may be honoured as such, but you will never be able to rise

into the professions and make your name nationally. This is what we call the English-speaking elite, asserting itself at every level. (Masani, 151)

In the novel Abhay is taught English language, customs and manners by Mr. Moreton, including the art of wearing neckties, and using knives and forks. He is also taught how to play the piano and always plays Cricket, Boxing and Tennis, which are not of our origin. Abhay was also a boxing champion during his college days.

This English education enabled him to develop friendship with an untouchable boy, Kanakchand, who eventually becomes antagonistic towards the princely rule as an active member of Praja Mandal and finally he becomes Educational Minister after the Indian independence. This character is an outcome of the British political strategy of 'Divide and Rule'. Which injected revolutionary ideas in the subjects and finally led to the collapse of the princely states.

Similarly, some of the British accepted and respected the Indian culture in order to acquaint themselves better with the princes. The character Mr. Moreton, Abhay's English teacher who never did anything to hurt the Indian sentiments, gave up eating beef, and would attend the king's court in Indian dress. This character stands as an example of the cultural exchange between the coloniser and the colonised due to the attraction towards the alien culture which itself is endowed with political strategy.

The life of the Eurasians and their place in the Indian society is also commented upon in this novel. The character Minne, an Anglo-Indian girl has a sexual affair with Abhay besides loving Tony Skyes who dies in World War II. Though she is married to Captain (Punch) Christopher Dudley Osbert Farren, A.D.C., she continues her affair with Abhay, which has been entwined with business motives. She always gives an impression of a European rather than an Indian, her thoughts and lifestyle closely resembling that of the foreigners. Her character is similar to the character Mrs. Mainswaring in Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* (1936). Malgonkar has also illustrated the plight of the Eurasians in his *Combat of Shadows* (1962) as:

The Eurasian' of Anglo-Indian' remains even today an alien in India, one who feels rootless and out of place with a painful awareness of rootlessness, of not belonging, not being wanted in the teeming brown world of India. (Krishna Murty, 224)

All the treaties had become futile when the British failed to fulfil their promises to the Princes. After independence they were abandoned at mid sea being robbed culturally, morally and economically. They lost their kingdoms and had to shun their identities and power to merge their kingdoms in the United India. The British deserted them, as well as made them alienated from their own people. In the novel Abhay inherits the throne after his father's death and he spends only forty nine days as a king but he loses his power after independence, by merging his lands into the united India, he began to live as a common man amongst his own subjects.

Colonisation concludes with bringing change in the identities of both the colonised and the coloniser. At the same time British colonisation was resulted in reducing the identities of the Indian princes from rulers to common people. In this regard Stuart Halls' nuanced notion of identity is apt to quote. He says:

...identities are not fixed but subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power... identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Mongia, 11)

In the novel, Heroji gets himself killed, which shows his inability to adjust with the new pattern of values. For him giving up his family heritage and rank is an indigestible truth. Therefore this character may be partly compared to that of the character Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), who hangs himself when he finds his people have become sheep, the sheep of Jesus Christ and missionaries like Okonkwo, the

Maharaja seeks a heroic death rather than be ruled by mediocre people. As a true prince his words and deeds emit royal pride in not accepting subordination to anyone. He takes pride to be a ruler and thinks it is a great opportunity in one's life to be one. He pities his son for not being accepted as a ruler. Prior to signing on the document of merging his land to the untied India, he goes unarmed to the jungle and gets himself killed by a tiger. He wants to die as a king and his final words reveal his pride and valour:

I am rich and we-born; who else is equal to me? I will sacrifice, I will give; in that I shall rejoice.
(Malgonkar, 316)

But Abhay, who accepts his transition from a ruling prince to a common man in changing circumstances, represents a new type of prince for the new society.

The majestic, rich, exuberant lives of the Indian princes had drifted away along with the British colonisation. They did not gain anything from the British, for in truth; their roots had been cut off from the Indian soil and were left as destitute kings in their own lands. Thus this novel is an epitome of the politics played during the twentieth century, in which the princes were victimised.

India is a country, which welcomes everyone and everything, yet, retains its own characteristics. This novel is an embodiment of this concept that all the Indian princes who were affected by the western life have been elevated as true Indians in their spirit.

Therefore we one can consider *The Princes* to be a classic in all aspects. It realistically portrays the struggles of the princes who struggle to retain their position, simultaneously revealing to us the contrast between a feudal maharaja and a young prince emerging in the new world. It not only deals with the clash between the British and the nationalist but also the clash between the British and the princes.

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¹ Manohar Malgonkar and Portrait of the Hero in His Novels 43.

⁴ *Malgonkar Malgonkar*, 14

⁵¹ *The Princes* 13.

⁶¹*The Princes* 17.

¹⁷*The Princes* 313.

⁹¹ *The Princes* 24.144.

¹ *The Princes* 316.