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Cultural Dissonance in Manohar Malgonkar's *Open Season*

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the influence of cultural and racial conflicts, as portrayed in the novels of Manohar Malgonkar, with special reference to *Open Season*. The spread of western style industrial societies across the globe has suppressed many unique cultural features of the people of different countries. This inevitably means that cultural differences are responsible for a great deal of conflict, confusion and hostility, when people of different countries come into contact with one another. The unique racial and cultural groups of one country face difficulties in tracing their roots and identity, when they try to settle in not so friendly environment of another country. Hence, this paper explores the theme of East-West conflict in *Open Season*. It is through characters—both Indian and Western—that he portrays different aspects of the conflict. He had also taken care to show that, when it comes to the real values of life, East and West not only reconcile and resolve themselves, but something like a new culture incorporating laudable qualities of both the cultures seems to emerge.

Key Words: Culture, Orientalism, Hegemony, Hybridity.

Manohar Malgonkar (1913–2010) is a significant figure in the canons of Indian literature written in English, especially for his politically charged historical fiction. But to limit his variety and categorise him as a storyteller would be to limit him to being a novelist or storyteller with historical leanings. To be fair to him, we must acknowledge that his body of work is extensive, including eleven novels that combine elements of

history, romance, and military life; two light romances/thrillers; a detective novel; a play; countless essays and articles; two historical accounts; a travelogue; and a sizable collection of short stories that have been collected in multiple anthologies.

Examining Manohar Malgonkar's works provides a wealth of information on their life, diversity, humanity, and aesthetic integrity. His work has actuality and authenticity due to his meticulous acquisition of data, which is evident in the quality of his intellect. Malgonkar offers a wealth of enjoyment in all of his literary works. More than anything else, the diversity of themes and locations demonstrates Malgonkar's skill as a novelist. According to M.K. Naik, "Unlike Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar is a realist who believes that art has no purpose to serve except pure entertainment" (Naik 216). As a result, Manohar Malgonkar's wide ranges of ideas and subject matter have delighted readers. According to Shankar Bhattacharya, "Malgonkar's novels reveal a sound historical sense. History as the theme of creative fiction seems indeed to exercise a special fascination for him" (Bhattacharya 12). Malgonkar has incorporated historical truths into his fictional works, of course, but his characters have autonomous lives of their own. As a fictional writer, Malgonkar's main goal is to write fiction; writing history is only a supporting character in his works of fiction. Cultural strife is present in all of Malgonkar's writings. There could be a clash between Indian and Western cultures, or between Muslims and Hinduism, which is one of India's original cultures. The goal of the article is to highlight the cultural tension in Malgonkar's book *Open Season*.

The protagonist of *Open Season*, Jai Kumar, is set to pursue a construction engineering degree at Princeton, America. His American education will turn him into an excellent engineer. His parents believe that a foreign degree is a sign of prominence that will make him less worthy of a coveted job. But Jai Kumar's parents are perplexed by what is happening in America, so they send him a letter from "Remote Control," or the village home, asking him to come back home right away. While visiting his parents, he realised that India currently needed the assistance of experienced engineers because the rising waters of the dam close to his village have put the locals in grave danger, even though he has fallen in love with an American girl and secured a well-paying job with an American company. However, the India he eventually returns to is not the traditional India; rather, it is a modern India that is thriving and calling her sons and daughters to return and find happiness in meaningful work.

The Hindu culture is represented by Jai Kumar and his parents. He comes from traditional Brahmin parents. Given that their son Jai Kumar will be attending a foreign country with a distinct culture, it is only fitting for them to be protective of their own culture. They fear that their son will become a victim of someone from a different culture. His parents revere their gods and goddesses and follow a strict vegetarian diet. They fast from alcohol and refuse to eat any non-vegetarian cuisine. It is carefully adhered to as long as Jai Kumar is around, but in America, which is far away, things operate differently. There, drinking, eating non-vegetarian food, and even freely mingling with women are all commonplace since Jai Kumar's mother is unwilling to give up her caste, religion, or other beliefs for these reasons. Although the mother is highly concerned about certain imperfections because her kid will have to live in a strange society, the parents are incredibly happy about the prospect of their son. She says "... half the boys, who go to foreign countries to learn, don't come back at all; those who do come back bring their own 'muddams', And they come back with all the bad habits; learn to eat meat, drink liquor. (Malgonkar 8)

Jai Kumar's mother is already aware that he has begun consuming eggs, which is against family policy, because his father wishes to make this kind of allowance given the American winter. Jai Kumar first sees engineer Rachappa, whose son Krishnaswami was already enrolled in Princeton, before travelling to Princeton. The parents of Krishnaswami shared similar concerns over their kid and were not aware of the shift in him. They continue to believe that their son is a devout vegetarian who stays away from both women and alcohol. But Jai Kumar has several issues to deal with when he attends Princeton, starting with his diet. He finds it extremely difficult to sustain a vegetarian diet, therefore he instantly becomes non-vegetarian after recalling his father's justification—"the flesh of animals born in foreign land not forbidden." He is completely taken aback to discover that Krishnaswami, whose parents hold strong beliefs on following religious teachings and other guidelines, has undergone a significant transformation. He is dependent on alcohol and enjoys making out with American women. He is not a vegetarian. Against the wishes of his parents, he eventually marries her and moves to America. Jai Kumar meets Krishnaswami, who introduces him to Abe.

Jai Kumar gradually discovers a new American culture that occasionally clashes with his own. He notices that Krishnaswami has changed, as his parents had previously stated. Abe and Jai Kumar greet each other in ways

that are incongruent with their own cultures. While Jai Kumar greeted with a bent head and shook the extended hand, Abe said "hello" and "hi."

The following chapter, "At the Golden Rod," reveals that Krishnaswami offers Jai Kumar some alcohol even though he refuses to take it. It's his first time ever drinking alcohol. It is then that Jai Kumar learns of Krishnaswami's affair with Judy, an American woman, with whom he has chosen to get married and establish a permanent residence at the C.E.C. Plant in Seattle, where he will receive a sumptuous monthly pay. This work has also made reference to the clash of clothes. Indian ladies, for example, dress in traditional sarees. The mothers of Jai Kumar and Krishnaswami wear specific garments in accordance with cultural customs. It demonstrates how deeply ingrained their culture is in them. In their culture, it is illegal to adopt Western ways of life. They are therefore unable to even imagine drinking. However, the American woman Kate can be seen with canvas ankle boots, blond-yellow hair, and generous buttocks that are too little for her corduroy trousers. Judy is also dressing in tight suits, and they all go out to clubs with their significant others and share drinks. Even elderly women in America dress elegantly and stage a youthful appearance.

Thanksgiving Day, which is associated with the harvest celebration and America's wealth, is observed by the entire country in the novel's chapter "The Last Thursday of November." According to Jai Kumar, this function is quite similar to the fundamental ideas of Hindu philosophy. This ceremony is enjoyable for Kate, her father Harding, Sammy, Abe, and everyone else. Meanwhile, rumours have it that Abe is travelling to India as part of the Peace Corps to help the underprivileged areas there. Jai Kumar is shocked to learn that while Americans are leaving their opulent lifestyles to help the underprivileged and ignorant, Indians are flocking to America in search of fat employment.

Following Abe's departure from India, Kate and Jai Kumar develop a romantic relationship. Jai Kumar is getting better every day and is able to purchase a Rambler vehicle. He becomes a victim of Bert and Nancy's plot while at Kate's house. Bert and Nancy are well-known kidnappers and murders who have come to kidnap Kate and demand money. Jai Kumar successfully manipulates the ring police to have them arrested after much hardship. Since Jai Kumar saved her life, Kate finds herself drawn to him more and more. When Jai Kumar's father reads in the papers about his bravery and heroism (only for a girl, he believes), the parents are

perplexed by his choice to stay in India. When his parents find out that everything happened because of an American girl and that horrible night, they are startled. Since he is aware of Krishnaswami's activities and that he has already relocated to America with his foreign bride, Sabnis, Jai Kumar's father, is extremely disturbed about this development. America is a dangerous place to live. Guns are carried by Americans. One will be beaten unconscious and robbed if they are out late in Central Park, New York. Thus, after the course ends, Jai Kumar's father writes him a note with certain orders to return to India right away. Sabnis is determined to keep both his son and his culture.

With time, Jai Kumar receives an offer from Schlemmer Corporation for a posh job. Jai Kumar is curious and a little afraid to ask Brecht, the person who made the job offer, about the job's potential. Jai Kumar is already aware of his father's guidance. Even Brecht acknowledges the differences between familial bonds between India and America. It is far stronger in India than it is anywhere else. But this is the only place where material prosperity is possible—India is not. Jai Kumar finds it fascinating to observe the disparity in living standards between the two nations. Jai Kumar feels confused upon receiving a letter from his father. The Air India return ticket is in the mail. Jai Kumar's familiarity with American culture has grown significantly over time. He is troubled by his father's letter and is now torn between staying in America and going back to his own country. He now chooses to accept the Schlemmer position. India is not a good fit for his background and mentality. America is now his homeland, a place of opportunity and riches.

We have already witnessed the emergence of romantic relationships between Jai Kumar and Kate. While Kate is supposed to travel to India to finish her master's thesis, Jai Kumar has made the decision to remain in the United States. However, Jai Kumar hasn't told Kate how he feels about her yet. Thus, he informs her about his love and repeats the same thing in his mother tongue.

Main, tumse prem kartaa hun. (93)

He proposes his marriage to her but conflicting views of the two come to the surface:

But don't be absurd! You don't want to acquire just a . . . just a dependant, do you, by marrying me? I want to pursue my career. That's what I have trained for, all my life. (95)

The novelist describes Jai Kumar's state of mind in these lines:

He felt weak. This too was part of the pattern, the pattern of America, whereas his thought processes were still conditioned by his Indian upbringing. Here wives were not merely; they were women first, independent, the equal of men; they had to think of their careers, careers which could not be subordinated to the demands of domesticity. (95)

Jai Kumar has bid Kate farewell. He is acutely aware of her absence. He unintentionally encounters an Indian woman, eventually identified as Neela Rawat, who is being tricked by a foreign photographer into writing something on a piece of paper. "Aap phas jaogee, kuchh likhna nahin," he warns her in Hindi (101). He offers to show her the Metropolitan city later on. As they watch and converse, Neela Rawat discovers that Jai Kumar has changed and is no longer acting in line with his own culture.

The personalities of Kate and Neela Rawat distinctly illustrate the cultural divide; whereas the former longs for an autonomous career, the latter is dependent on her future husband's decision. The following points of view are made evident in the exchange between Neela Rawat and Jai Kumar:

Un-hun, he shook her head. I'm not a working girl.

What do you mean to do?

Do? What other girls do. Get married, look after a house, raise a family. . . .

But wouldn't you want to pursue a career of your own?

Career! What does a woman want a career for? Careers are only for manly women; those who can't find a husband.

That is the difference, between here and there. Here, a girl like you would want to remain independent.... Go on working at her job even after she was married. (112)

The novelist highlights the distinctions between Indian and Western cultures—where women want to be self-sufficient and pursue occupations alongside men—in the line mentioned above. Their priorities do not include

their family. Jai Kumar's contact with Indian woman Neela Rawat opens his eyes. Prior to meeting Kate, he had been dreaming of marrying an American woman and moving to the United States. He now has second thoughts and finds himself drawn to Neela, who is better able to relate to his feelings. In the end, he chooses to return to India and serve his country.

When Jai Kumar visits Rachappa, it is to inform the family of the startling information that Krishnaswami, also known as Sammy, is probably going to have a kid with an American woman. Additionally, he discovers that the building of the dam has not changed, endangering the community. Jai Kumar is concerned about the danger, but Rachappa believes that everything is well with the dam given the rainfall record. Rachappa opposes Indian engineers relocating overseas because he does not want to be implicated. Jai Kumar feels a twinge of conscience over this. The clash of cultures compels Jai Kumar to reconsider his choice. He now chooses to live and work in India in support of his homeland.

He can make a significant contribution to his nation's development as an engineer. In terms of his private life, he chooses to divorce Indian Neela Rawat and forget about his American sweetheart, Kate. As a result, there are many instances of clashing cultures in *Open Season*, each represented by a different character.

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