



FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN MANOHAR MANGOLKAR'S THE PRINCES

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The family is the smallest unit of society. Right from the Vedic times it has been accorded pride of place in our society and literature. The relationships that existed in this unit of society are based on noble ideals and generous personal conduct. This is made possible by the extinction of the ego for which, extolling of virtues and condemnation of selfish vices are professed and practised by our sages and rishis. Because of the distinction between Indian and Western social system and values, the family came to exist in India in all its sanctity. The type of family we had till modern times is the joint-family which had its own merits and demerits.

The greatest changes in Indian social structure came during the British rule when India came into contact with western ideas of liberal individualism, and industrialization. As a result the joint-family system slowly broke up and gave place to the modern nuclear family with the parents and children, without any kinship relations included in it. The solidarity of this type of family depended largely upon sexual attraction and companionship between the couple, and companionship between them and their children. Manohar Mangolkar tells about the break-up of the joint-family in the story of the Big House in *A Bend in the Ganges*, and shows the defects of the nuclear family in the story of the Kerwads in the same novel. Though familial relationships do not form the focus in Malgonkar, he depicts these with remarkable subtlety though not in all variety. He portrays the changes in the pattern of familial relationships under the pressure of such varied influences as education, urbanization, ideological clashes etc.

The Princes is a novel which is wholly devoted to the exposition of parent-child relationship in India at that time. The whole story of princely life is unfolded before the reader through the actions, arguments, reactions, thoughts, and feelings of the father and son, Maharaja Hiroji and Abhayraj, thus making their relationship pivotal to the novel. Since the king had laid down a rigid time table for the princeling, he is taken to his parents only at fixed times. He saw them very little and never together, for they lived in sealed-off compartments. When he saw his mother, she gave him something sweet, but their talk is just like grown-ups. With the father the greeting is various as warm and perfunctory. Thus he got parental affection rarely though he thirsted for it warmly. But the king made this sort of alienation as a precaution to protect the princeling from palace intrigues. Consequently his early days are a blur of perpetual bewilderment, of an almost constant awareness of inadequacy, of desperate striving to make adjustments. Yet he gathers the essentials in his reminiscence.

Though he seldom got parental love, the dominant urge of his childhood is to prove his devotion to his father who strode his horizon like a knight in armour. Yet, he hated his father for his cruelties, to his mother, to his classmate Kanakchand, and also to himself as when he made him eat the eyes of his own pet ram. Since he does not understand the reasons for these at the time, there is resentment in him towards the father. But he takes his first tentative step toward maturity under the tutelage of his father. He agrees to take a whipping without squealing and flinching - the virtue of the public school system of the British, which Kiran had acquired. Though he promises to observe all these, the father stands as an image of hatred before him. Abhay's love-hate relationship with his father can easily be explained in terms of children's psychology as brought out by H.C. Mithal in *Elements of Educational Psychology and Guidance*. As a boy he is subjected to 'mimesis' which is "the general tendency of an individual to take over from others, their modes of action, feeling and thought" through 'suggestion' which is "the awakening of a like mental attitude by means of inner imitation" (48-49). For suggestion to work, there should be two persons, the giver and the receiver; the giver makes a deliberate effort to give it, and the receiver unconsciously accepts it.

Of the four kinds of imitation in children's psychology, unconscious imitation and ejective imitation seem to be at work in Abhay's case. In ejective imitation the child has an attitude of rivalry with the person whom he is going to imitate. His attitude is aggressive and disdainful. As the child grows up, he makes his own standard of conduct,



and begins to criticize his own activities and those of others from that standard. Herein lies the reason for Abhay's tiff with his father in the tiger-rug room which is portrayed in detail.

The father and son live in two different worlds. The son might seem to be a revolutionary before the father who is a taboo-ridden reactionary. Though the father is really so, the son is so only superficially. The primary difference between the two is that while the latter always wants to live in the present, the former is blind to it. He lives in the tightly-knit world of his own principedom and enjoys the security of the old world. To him there is nothing to be worried about the nationalists because "they just don't exist" (14). But the son feels a sense of bafflement in the newly emerging world. Thus we find both of them caught in the twilight world of a change from the medieval to the modern, and the awkwardness of the change is reflected in the tiff.

Abhay feels deflated by the inflated notions of his father and the consequent lack of father-son relationship between them. Their relation is mostly in the nature of ruler and successor. Even the son had to do 'mujra' (bowing) to his father, just like a subject, which shows that familial kinship is far below the sanctity of kingship. He wanted the king to behave like a father to his son, and a loving husband to his wife. He disliked his father's kingly assertions, and wanted to see him as his father first, and king next. But, instead of getting to know each other better, they are becoming strangers. He even wishes for the death of his father so that he could come into his own, and fulfil his destiny like other men. But he does not understand that his destiny is different from other men's. It should be remembered that Abhay is worried about the insecure position of the princes in the light of growing nationalism. Through his arguments with his father he wants to make him conscious more of the insecure position of the princes than of the growing nationalism. This is to be stressed because he is likely to be mistaken for a nationalist, as does his father when he says, surprised, that horns are growing on the fore-heads of lambs.

When Abhay hurls arrows of provoking arguments at his father in order to pierce his kingly bearing, the king storms at him and even doubts his parenthood. When the son is ready to bully him who sullies his mother's honour, the father plays the pucca king, and orders him out of his presence. Living in the rosy, intoxicating world of make-believe, he mistakes tactics for treachery, modern awareness for stubbornness, and practical-mindedness for filial disobedience.

After the tiff Abhay's attitude becomes more formal than before. They are "like two men living under a flag of truce" (22). But he feels a surge of achievement that he could bring down the king to speak like an angry man to his son. All these he attributes to the narrowness and naive values of his youth when he thought of himself as progressive and righteous, and his father as a reactionary. The estrangement actually is the consequence of the generation gap, the natural resistance of the rising generation to everything that the old one stood for.

Thus Malgonkar achieves the specifically historical derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age. Contrary to Abhay's attitude of love and hatred, his father is wholly jovial and relaxed. As part of royal training he takes him during his morning drives through the city when anyone could stop his car to present petitions. He makes him sit by his side during his afternoon audience to his subjects. He also takes him on his visit to the Political Agent. By all these the father draws his son to his own sphere of activities and responsibilities as the future ruler. Knowing that his son is in love with Minnie, he advises him not to write letters to her. Even when Abhay gets angry with him, he does not take umbrage. He is calm and cool. Knowing that his son has great interest in the girl, he pleads with him -"You will cause a lot of unhappiness, my son, a lot of unhappiness to all those who love you, if you go on with this foolishness" (171).

Even now Abhay does not see the king as a kindly, anxious father, having a man-to-man talk with his son (which he really is) because of his headstrong tendency. Even after his return from military training, he believes that his father is hopelessly out of touch with the time. This is true as far as the nationalist agitation is concerned, but one cannot say that the king is indifferent to the son's affairs. He treats him as a grown-up man. In fact, it is Abhay who is out of touch with reality in his insistence on marrying Minnie who he is not sure of. His complaint is that his father does not make things easy for him. As at the first tiff, here also he feels a sense of triumph, a feeling



that he has broken through the clammy web of antiquated taboos. Here we have to note that Abhay understood the values that obsessed his father after he had shifted his whole loyalty and love to him in the light of his mother's illicit relationship with the palace officer.

But these values are also bewildering to him in the days of undirected emotion and undigested knowledge. What happened in his case is aptly summarized by his father, though in a different context—"It is only when one gets older that one acquires a better appreciation of the value of things" (91).

The crux of the novel, *The Princes*, is the complex relationship between the father and son who, clashing at first, come closer later on. Abhay's war-experience and his meeting with Tony Sykes pave the way for his contumacy changing into intimacy. His return to the princely fold is in the nature of the parable of the prodigal son. The father is glad to see the 'conquering hero' back from the wars, but the son is thoroughly disillusioned. Now that realization has come to him, no more does he confront his father with unpalatable truths. Out of devotion to him, he remains in the army for more time than he himself wanted to, and acts as a listening post. He leaves his father to enjoy as much dreaming as he wants. What is notable in the portrayal of their relationship is the see-saw movement given to it. Abhay comes closer to his father when he is no more the ruler, and their relationship becomes stronger. Just as the father is impatient with the son, the son is now fed up with the father's apathy at the State affairs. When everything looked lost, Abhay becomes eager to preserve it. So he seeks the help of his father in his desperate attempts to keep the integrity of the State. The father gives it though he does not entirely agree with the son's views. He acts as an old father doing things to please his son.

Malgonkar makes Abhay an extension of his father through certain incidents repeated in the novel, *The Princes*. That their relationship did not end with the death of the father is shown by Abhay's whipping Kanakchand as his father had done earlier. The whipping episode with which the novel ends has been taken as a major flaw undermining the structure of the novel as a whole. But Malgonkar himself has said that it is part of his trick to show the identity of father and son. His depiction of their relationship is masterly as it is also a reflection of the conflict between the out-dated princely traditions and the modern democratic values. But, if Abhay is unquestionably the character fully developed by him, Hiroji is the one to whom readers respond more, especially in the later parts of the novel, *The Princes*.

The father's tragedy occurred because of his inability to live in the present, it being unpleasant. Apart from stressing his sterling qualities of courage and disdain for danger, Malgonkar gives a lesson, through his tragic death, that it alone is the reward for those who detest the present, and refuse to see the writing on the wall. But whatever faults the father may have, his concern for the son who is to succeed him is a redeeming quality. It is this love of keeping up his heritage that colours their relationship, and slightly qualifies it from becoming the genuine love of a father to son, at least in the early parts of the novel.

Abhav says that his experience in war, and in sex with Minnie, created in him a civilized tolerance for human frailties. This liberalization of attitude does not help in the case of his mother. Abhay himself explains this on the same occasion when he says that he "learnt to tear his mind away from petty and often false loyalties of childhood and youth" (53). This remark is in connection with his mother since he pitied her simply out of his youthful romantic idealism during the days of which he condemned his father's infatuation for concubines.

As regards the father-son relationship, while the story moves in one direction, tending to emphasize the chasm between them, Malgonkar introduces almost unnoticeably certain actions of symbolic value which tellingly shows that the moving apart is only an illusion, that they are really coming close. As opposed to this movement of the father and son which appears contradictory at first, and later on a bonding together, is the movement of the mother and son which appears a bonded one at first, and one of total separation later on. While the moving apart of the father and son is only an illusion, the first filial bond between the mother and the son also is an illusion. Thus Malgonkar's artistic skill can be seen in the portrayal of parent-child relationships, thus making *The Princes* a milestone in the Indian novel of Indian life.



References

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