



International Journal of Research in Academic World



Received: 16/March/2024

IJRAW: 2024; 3(4):128-131

Accepted: 19/April/2024

The Fragmented Anglo-Indian Identity: A Select Study of Stephen Alter and Manohar Malgonkar's Works

*¹Pratibha Singh*¹Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Abstract

This paper attempts to study the discourses of Anglo-Indians and their identity crisis in the select works of Stephen Alter and Manohar Malgonkar. The Anglo-Indians found themselves in a difficult situation after the departure of the British from India. Even after getting legal status from the government of India, they found themselves caught between the desire for assimilation and identification with the culture and nationality of their fathers. The Anglo-Indians remained at the bottom of the concerns of both colonisers and the colonized. This led the Anglo-Indians to face the problem of identity. The questions of whom they belong to and how they can recognise themselves are some of the series of posed questions left for them when they were betrayed both by the British and mistrusted by fellow Indians. The objective of this paper is to explore and exaggerate the factors affecting the issues of identity, rootlessness, and homelessness.

Keywords: Home, identity, rootlessness, homelessness

Introduction

The departure of the British from India in 1947 marked a significant turning point in the country's history, leading to the birth of an independent nation and the end of colonial rule. However, amidst the celebrations of newfound freedom, certain communities found themselves grappling with a profound sense of displacement and identity crisis. Among these communities, the Anglo-Indians emerged as a group caught between two worlds, navigating the complexities of their mixed cultural heritage amidst a rapidly changing socio-political landscape.

This research paper delves into the discourses surrounding Anglo-Indians and their identity crisis as depicted in the select literary works of Stephen Alter and Manohar Malgonkar. While the Anglo-Indians received legal recognition from the government of India, their status remained precarious, and they often found themselves marginalized and mistrusted by both colonizers and the colonized. The departure of the British left them in a difficult situation, torn between the desire for assimilation into Indian society and the preservation of their cultural heritage and identity.

Stephen Alter, an American author with a deep connection to India, and Manohar Malgonkar, an Indian author writing in English, offer rich material for exploring the complexities of the Anglo-Indian identity crisis through their works. Alter's exploration of identity in the Himalayas and Malgonkar's portrayal of colonial legacies in India provide valuable insights into the struggles faced by Anglo-Indians in

reconciling their dual heritage and finding a sense of belonging in a rapidly changing world.

The long shadow of British imperialism continues to profoundly impact debates surrounding cultural identity and belonging in postcolonial India. One community starkly emblematic of the hybridity and fragmentation engendered under colonial rule is that of the Anglo-Indians-offspring of mixed British and Indian parentage. As Frank Anthony noted in his seminal anthropological study, the existential dilemma haunting Anglo-Indians is "the crisis of belonging"-feeling neither sufficiently Indian nor British, their existence problematizes ethno-nationalist claims over cultural authenticity and assimilation ^[1]. This paper delves into how two distinguished Indian authors, Stephen Alter and Manohar Malgonkar, tackled the complex subject of Anglo-Indian identity in their acclaimed novels *Neglected Lives* and *Combat of Shadows* respectively. Both mystery-imbued narratives provide textured insights and a non-judgmental sensitivity toward their Anglo-Indian protagonists, who often harbour self-denigrating concepts of their hybridity amidst fraught questions of social legitimacy.

While employing different literary approaches, Alter and Malgonkar collectively depict Anglo-Indians undergoing psychic strife and social marginalization underpinned by racialized colonial taxonomies of cultural primacy centring on white British ancestry. As Suresht Renjen Bald notes, sentiments of "shame of being associated with Indians" pervaded Anglo-Indian subjectivity despite paradoxical yearnings for securing acceptance within Indian society. By

interpreting such fictional representation in conjunction with pertinent anthropological theories on their interstitiality, this paper examines Anglo-Indian negotiations of identity underpinning what Anthony Wall describes as their “problematic place in-between” dichotomized ethnic and national groups.

The lens of Alter and Malgonkar’s novels provides an incisive perspective into this liminal positioning, as Anglo-Indian characters wrestle with ancestral ghosts and historical baggage bequeathed by colonial rule. Their quest for self-assertion beyond racial constructs imposed under the Raj remains an unfinished project that continues to spur questions over the meaning of post-colonial citizenship and agency for minority groups in India. This paper thus argues that analyzing fictionalized depictions illuminates both the psychological strands and material conditions undergirding the Anglo-Indian community’s enduring identity crisis.

Through a comparative analysis of Alter and Malgonkar’s works, this paper aims to examine the factors affecting the issues of identity, rootlessness, and homelessness among Anglo-Indians. By exploring the themes of assimilation, cultural hybridity, betrayal, and marginalization, this research seeks to shed light on the enduring legacy of colonialism and the ongoing search for belonging among Anglo-Indians in contemporary India.

In essence, this research paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of the Anglo-Indian identity crisis and its implications in colonial and postcolonial contexts. By examining the literary representations of Anglo-Indian experiences, this study offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by marginalized communities in navigating questions of identity, belonging, and cultural heritage in a diverse and rapidly changing society.

This paper employs critical textual analysis as the primary methodology to examine literary depictions of Anglo-Indian experiences and identity negotiations in Stephen Alter’s *Neglected Lives* and Manohar Malgonkar’s *Combat of Shadows*. Multiple readings of the novels were conducted to identify relevant thematic strands related to the research questions guiding this study. Specifically, textual evidence touching on the novels’ Anglo-Indian characters grappling with issues of hybridity, cultural allegiance, social marginalization, and self-concept were systematically extracted.

By interpreting the authors’ fictional representation and plot development choices related to these themes, the textual analysis elucidates how Alter and Malgonkar advance certain attitudes and symbolic messages regarding Anglo-Indian identity struggles. This narrative analysis allows for cross-comparison between the two novels to identify points of convergence and divergence in their respective portrayals of Anglo-Indian subjectivity. Furthermore, the discussion contextualizes textual examples against pertinent socio-historical frameworks on Anglo-Indian experiences, including the insights of scholars like Anthony, Bald and Wall.

This interdisciplinary approach combining close textual reading with the integration of relevant secondary literature aligns with established protocols for researching literary works as culturally situated products. By treating the novels as more than self-enclosed aesthetic works, they can be examined as conceptual windows into the real-world identity dilemmas, psychic pressures and social conditions confronting marginalized Anglo-Indian communities in India. Ultimately, the paper’s central arguments and interpretations are grounded in textual evidence from the novels as primary

data sources, which is then analyzed through appropriate theoretical frameworks in the field of postcolonial and cultural studies for a deeper understanding of dominant themes and subtexts. The concluding sections discuss the wider implications of reading Alter and Malgonkar’s literary representations to highlight the political and representational importance of minority voices laying claims over shaping pluralistic Indian society.

Following the departure of the British from India, the Anglo-Indian community found themselves navigating a complex and often precarious position within Indian society. Descendants of British colonizers and Indian natives, Anglo-Indians were culturally and ethnically distinct, embodying a unique blend of Western and Indian influences. However, despite their hybrid identity, they faced marginalization and mistrust from both the colonizers and the colonized.

With the end of British rule, Anglo-Indians grappled with profound questions of assimilation versus cultural preservation. Many sought to integrate themselves into the newly independent Indian nation, embracing Indian customs, languages, and traditions. However, their efforts at assimilation were often met with suspicion and scepticism from the broader Indian population, who viewed them as remnants of colonial rule or as culturally ambivalent.

Simultaneously, Anglo-Indians faced challenges in maintaining connections to their British heritage and identity. Despite their historical ties to British colonialism, many Anglo-Indians found themselves marginalized by the departing British authorities, who viewed them as no longer necessary or relevant in the postcolonial Indian context. This abandonment by their erstwhile colonial patrons left Anglo-Indians in a state of limbo, struggling to reconcile their British heritage with their Indian identity.

Moreover, the legal status granted to Anglo-Indians by the government of India did little to alleviate their sense of displacement and marginalization. While officially recognized as a distinct community with certain rights and privileges, Anglo-Indians remained on the fringes of Indian society, facing discrimination in employment, education, and social interactions.

The mistrust and marginalization experienced by Anglo-Indians from both colonial authorities and fellow Indians exacerbated their identity crisis. Caught between the desire for assimilation and identification with the culture and nationality of their fathers, Anglo-Indians found themselves in a perpetual state of cultural liminality. This sense of cultural ambiguity and rootlessness contributed to feelings of alienation and dislocation among the Anglo-Indian community, exacerbating their identity crisis in the postcolonial era.

The departure of the British from India left Anglo-Indians in a difficult position, torn between two worlds and struggling to define their identity in the aftermath of colonialism. The challenges of assimilation, mistrust, and marginalization contributed to the Anglo-Indian identity crisis, highlighting the complexities of cultural hybridity and belonging in the postcolonial Indian context.

Exploring Stephen Alter's Literary Universe: A Journey through the Himalayas

Stephen Alter, born in the picturesque town of Mussoorie, Uttarakhand, is a prolific author whose literary repertoire spans both fiction and non-fiction, with the majestic Himalayas often serving as the backdrop for his narratives. In his non-fiction works, Alter offers readers captivating insights

into the cultural and natural wonders of the Himalayan region. From memoirs like "To Heaven: An American Boyhood in the Himalayas" ^[2] to travel accounts such as "Amritsar to Lahore: A Journey across the India-Pakistan Border," ^[3] Alter's writing provides a vivid portrayal of the region's history, politics, and spirituality. His exploration of topics like the significance of the Ganges River in "Sacred Waters" ^[4] and India's majestic elephants in "Elephas Maximus" further showcases his deep reverence for the natural world. In his latest non-fiction endeavour, "The Cobra's Gaze: Exploring India's Wild Heritage," Alter unravels the mysteries of India's wildlife, captivating readers with his passion for conservation and exploration.

In the realm of fiction, Alter's storytelling prowess shines through in novels like "Neglected Lives," "Silk and Steel," and "The Godchild," where he skillfully transports readers into intriguing fictional worlds. "Renuka," "The Rataban Betrayal," and "In the Jungles of the Night" continue to captivate audiences with gripping narratives that intertwine human drama with the wilderness of the Himalayas. His collection of short stories, "Aripan & Other Stories," showcases Alter's versatility as a writer, offering glimpses into diverse lives and experiences. Alter's imaginative exploration of classic characters, such as in "Feral Dreams: Mowgli and His Mothers," and his award-winning novel, "Birdwatching," demonstrate his ability to engage readers across genres. His most recent novel, "Death in Shambles: A Hill Station Mystery," adds another layer of intrigue to his literary universe, leaving readers eagerly anticipating his next literary endeavour. Stephen Alter's literary journey is a testament to his deep connection to the Himalayas and his unwavering passion for storytelling, resonating with readers worldwide.

Escaping from History: Stephen Alter's Neglected Lives

In his novel *Neglected Lives*, author Stephen Alter delves into the fraught psychological terrain of Anglo-Indian identity against the backdrop of pivotal historical events. Through complex characters struggling to reconcile their hybrid cultural heritage, Alter explores the quest to escape the burdensome legacies of India's colonial past. This paper analyses how Alter's fictional portrayal elucidates the intergenerational trauma resulting from the racial, religious and political contradictions embedded in India's history.

Alter invokes events like World Wars I and II and the violent Partition of British India not just as historical context, but as integral shapers of his protagonists' hybrid identities. The characters are haunted by "history's dead or deadening remainders that are carried forward to prey on the living"-unable to escape the aftershocks of watershed moments in the subcontinent's history. This complex interplay between public and personal histories is key to understanding the novel's preoccupation with conflicting cultural allegiances, the futility of simplistic racial binaries, and the lure of imaginative escapes.

As the son of American Presbyterian missionary parents, Alter brings an insider-outsider view that enriches his exploration of cultural hybridity. His autobiographical writing indicates a reluctance to stake unambiguous claims to India as his homeland, stating that he considers himself "country-born" but respects the complexity of ascribing clear cultural ownership. This liminal positioning infuses *Neglected Lives* with nuanced insight into the psychic toll exacted by unresolved questions of belonging.

Alter's anguished protagonists are shackled by ancestral ghosts and historical baggage they yearn to slough off, suggestive of the author's discomfiture with caching simplistic identities. Their quest for self-definition beyond ossified ethno-religious identities that engender violence animates the novel's central concerns. Alter pointedly refuses to romanticize the Raj or valorize those who enabled colonial rule, while also rejecting facile judgments of his characters.

Through psychologically complex portrayals situated against pivotal historical moments, Alter's *Neglected Lives* insightfully unpacks the trauma underlying Anglo-Indian experiences of unresolved hybridity and uncertain belonging. The novel sheds light on the enduring personal repercussions of the unhealed fissures underlying the Indian subcontinent's history.

Manohar Malgonkar: A Multifaceted Literary Legacy

Manohar Malgonkar (1913-2010) stands as a towering figure in Indian literature, known for his versatile talents as both a fiction and nonfiction author in the English language. His life mirrored the diverse landscapes of his literary creations, spanning roles as an army officer, big game hunter, civil servant, mine owner, and farmer. His notable novels, including "The Sea Hawk: Life and Battles of Kanhoji Angrey" and "A Combat of Shadows," transport readers across historical epochs and action-packed narratives. Works such as "The Princes" and "A Bend in the Ganges" delve into the socio-historical contexts of pre-independence India, weaving together intricate tapestries of culture, history, and human drama ^[5]. Malgonkar's historical accounts, such as "The Men Who Killed Gandhi," offer profound insights into pivotal moments in India's history. Moreover, his collection of short stories, including "A Toast in Warm Wine and Other Short Stories," showcases his narrative versatility and keen observations of human experiences. Through his literary legacy, Malgonkar continues to captivate readers, offering profound glimpses into the essence of India's rich tapestry of history, culture, and human endeavours.

Manohar Malgonkar's Portrayal of Anglo-Indian

Manohar Malgonkar's novel "Combat of Shadows" provides profound insight into the complex identity issues and racial anxieties plaguing the Anglo-Indian community under the British Raj in India. Through characters like Ruby Miranda, the novel lays bare the "throbbing, compulsive craving" of Anglo-Indians to gain acceptance into mainstream British society by shedding their stigmatized Indian roots.

Ruby Miranda, a teacher appointed in a British-owned tea plantation, serves as the quintessential example of the Anglo-Indian dream of complete assimilation with the colonial masters. Her "secret, unspoken dream" is to marry a white British man, which in her eyes is the "passport to the dreamworld of Eurasian womanhood". Such an alliance promises escape "to the reserved, all-white clubs" and a chance to wash away the "contamination" of her mixed lineage. Like Ruby, many Anglo-Indians desperately clung to even "imaginary strands of relationships with the sahibs," hoping to cement a superior racial identity as proxies to the British rather than natives. As Frank Anthony notes, interacting with the British on equal terms became their desperate "hallmark for prestige" due to pervasive post-colonial stigma.

This colonially-infused racial self-hatred fuelled the Anglo-Indian fantasy of miscegenation with the British. As A.J. Thomas observes, the "greatest ambition" of Anglo-Indian

women was "to give birth to a Euro-Indian child with blue eyes and blonde hair". For Ruby in the novel too, marrying Henry Winter, the British plantation owner, promises "blue-eyed, flaxen-haired children" to launder her impure lineage. Escaping the "smothering, enveloping peoples of the Indian soil" becomes an existential quest for Anglo-Indians like Ruby to attain the privileges of ruling-class whiteness. However, the novel gradually exposes the futility of this deferential quest for acceptance under a racially stratified Imperial system. Through repeated instances of racism, rejection, and betrayed intimate encounters between the British and Anglo-Indians, Malgonkar emphasizes that the desire to ossify colonial hierarchies through interracial liaisons is ultimately doomed to fail.

By anatomizing the social psychology and misguided aspirations of the marginalized Anglo-Indian community, Malgonkar provides an incisive literary exploration of the racial and cultural limbo endured by Anglo-Indians in their struggle for identity and belonging. Works like "Combat of Shadows" underscore that the alienation faced by racially mixed communities cannot be resolved through assimilation or denial of their hybridity. Rather, the ambivalent legacies of the Imperial past necessitate constructing pluralistic, syncretic identities in post-colonial contexts.

Manohar Malgonkar is a prominent Indian English novelist known for his vivid storytelling and mastery of the English language. His classic novel *A Bend in the Ganges* exemplifies the remarkable storytelling possibilities of contemporary Indo-Anglian fiction. Malgonkar's reputation was established through his complex character portraits and nuanced social commentary, which were praised by Caribbean author V.S. Naipaul. His authenticity and willingness to tackle complex themes were a hallmark of his unique voice.

However, Malgonkar's contribution to the evolution of Indian English literature remains underappreciated today. As one of the last novelists to personally witness India's independence struggle, he provided valuable insight into how social and political forces shaped Indian identity. Through his fiction like *Combat of Shadows*, Malgonkar compelled readers to grapple with the promises and failures of a postcolonial society.

In assessing the landscape of contemporary Indian English literature, Malgonkar deserves credit as a pioneering novelist of singular creativity. His prodigious output and stylistic range cement his reputation as one of the most versatile English language Indian writers of the 20th century.

Conclusion

By exploring the complex social psychology and personal experiences of Anglo-Indian protagonists in *Neglected Lives* and *Combat of Shadows*, Alter and Malgonkar collectively shine an illuminating light on the profound identity issues confronting this community excluded from dominant Indian and British ethnic folds. Their sensitive fictional portrayals reveal Anglo-Indians trapped in an interstitial state, internalizing the pervasive colonial-era racial hierarchies that valorised British ancestry as the apex of cultural legitimacy while denigrating their mixed heritage as a mark of impurity or inadequacy. Unable to secure unambiguous belonging in either their Indian or European cultural lineaments due to these embedded prejudices, many Anglo-Indians endured a corrosive psychic effect, desperately seeking escape into an imaginary realm of social acceptance and coherent identity.

Yet the novels complicate easy judgments, depicting characters shaped by their traumatic colonial legacy but who cannot be wholly defined by it. Their Anglo-Indian protagonists' complex negotiations of cultural influences, romantic relationships, family obligations and professional goals underscore the importance of grounding their quest for self-assertion in evolving socio-historical realities rather than static notions of ethnic legitimacy. By emphasizing the persistence of their hybridity amidst losing the last vestiges of their privileged intermediary status, both Alter and Malgonkar privilege Anglo-Indian agency in reconstructing identities that meaningfully reflect their interwoven cultural memories rather than older fantasies of assimilation with groups that reject their belonging.

Ultimately this examination reveals that the promise for reconciliation and self-acceptance lies not in Anglo-Indians severing parts of their composite heritage but discovering self-definition through celebrating the creative potentialities of their syncretism. As Anthony wrote regarding community members he admired, "Far from being trapped in the past, they have walked out of the shadows of history" by pioneering dynamic models of hybridity for navigating complex questions of citizenship and minority rights in India's unfolding national journey.

References

1. Charlton-Stevens, Uther. *Anglo-India and the End of Empire*. Oxford University Press, 2022.
2. Blunt, Alison. "Geographies of diaspora and mixed descent: Anglo-Indians in India and Britain." *International Journal of Population Geography*. 2003; 9(4):281-294.
3. Caplan, Lionel. *Children of colonialism: Anglo-Indians in a postcolonial world*. Routledge, 2020.
4. James, Sheila Paris. "Anglo-Indians: the dilemma of identity". *International Journal of Anglo-Indian studies*, 2003, 7(1).
5. Alter, Stephen. *All the way to heaven: An American boyhood in the Himalayas*, 1998.
6. Alter, Stephen. *Amritsar to Lahore: a journey across the Indian-Pakistan border*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
7. Alter, Stephen. *Sacred Waters: A Pilgrimage to the Many Sources of the Ganga*. Penguin UK, 2009.
8. Shoshani Jeheshel and John F. Eisenberg. "Elephas maximus." *Mammalian Species*. 1982; 182:1-8.
9. C. "Mussoorie Writers Stephen Alter reads from *The Rataban Betrayal-The Chakkar*." January 18, 2020.
10. Marian Josephine Gracias. "History and the (un) making of identifications in literary representation of Anglo-Indians and Goan Catholics." *PhD thesis*. University of British Columbia, 2000.
11. D'Cruz, Glenn. *Midnight's Orphans; Anglo-Indian in post/colonial literature*. vol. 1. Peter Lang, 2006.
12. Aithal S, Krishnamoorthy and Rashmi Aithal. "The British and the Anglo_Indians Encounter in Malgonkar's *Combat of Shadows*." *International Fiction Review*, 1982.
13. Shrivasta, A., and Vats, K. "The relevance of Thrill in the Novels of Manohar Malogonkar and Its Contribution to the Literary World of Anglo-Indians Literature." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*. 2023, 14(1).
14. Miglani, Seema. "Historical Narrative: A Study of Manohar Malgonkar Fiction", *Vayu Education of India*. Print, 2009.
15. Aithal S. Krishnamoorthy, and Rashmi Aithal. "The British and the Anglo-Indian Encounter in Malgonkar's *Combat of Shadiws*." *International Fiction Review*, 1982.