

ELEMENTS OF ESTRANGEMENT ENGENDERED BY JEALOUSY

DEEPA MARY FRANCIS¹ & SUSAN G. VARGHESE²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, Anna University, MIT Campus, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Pioneer Kumaraswamy College, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

An analysis of Guy de Maupassant's short story, "Useless Beauty" and Kamala Das' "The Sandal Trees" is done to bring out the fact how effectively the occidental and the oriental writers of two different centuries have dealt with the suffocation that women experience when matters in wedlock turn quite contrary to their expectations. This paper scrutinizes how the female protagonists of these stories get estranged from their men because of the suffering inflicted on them by their husbands. The main focus of both the writers in these stories is on the crisis that women face when they become victims of sexual oppression and hegemony.

KEYWORDS: Estrangement, Jealousy, Conservative Feminist, Lesbian Feminist

INTRODUCTION

Among the French founders of short fiction in the latter part of the nineteenth century, no one has gained the kind of reputation and popularity which Guy de Maupassant (1850 – 1893) has secured. Kamala Das, (1934 – 2009) who straddles both English and Malayalam languages, has earned an unassailable position among prominent Indian-English writers and has left an indelible mark on the Malayalam literary scene. She has created quite a furor in social and literary circles through her bold portrayal of contemporary issues of sexuality in her literary output. Both the authors are said to be unsurpassed in their realistic presentation of men and matters. What George Santayana said about Charles Dickens holds true of Maupassant and Kamala Das as well. "He has held the mirror up to nature and of its reflected fragments have composed a fresh world, where the men and women differ from real people only in that they live in a literary medium, so that all ages and places may know them" (Charles Dickens: The Life of the Author).

This paper seeks to highlight how the nineteenth century occidental male writer, Guy de Maupassant, and the twentieth century oriental female writer, Kamala Das, stand on a par with each other when they venture to address the key issues that surface when marital life and male companionship begin to pall on women. There is a striking similarity between the heroine of Maupassant's "Useless Beauty" and the heroines of Kamala Das' "The Sandal Trees" in their realization of their apathy and aversion to their husbands and the ruses they adopt to get estranged from their men. The suffocation that women experience when matters in wedlock turn quite contrary to their expectations normally goes unnoticed and unaddressed as women are considered to play second fiddle to men. Though the cultural backdrops of these two authors are different, they, in these two stories set out to address problems which have plagued women and puzzled men in all ages across the gender spectrum.

The heroine of the French story is a Countess and the heroines of the Malayalam story are doctors by profession and these three characters belong to three different socio-cultural backgrounds. Maupassant's heroine, Gabrielle, is "very beautiful, graceful and distinguished looking with her long oval face", "her complexion" is "like gilt ivory" and her eyes are "large" and "grey" (108). Sheela, one of the protagonists of Kamala Das, is a "beautiful" lady and she is an "aristocrat" (11). Kalyanikutty, "whose skin had the colour of sandalwood", is a childhood friend of Sheela. She "wore" the "old

skirts and blouses” of Sheela and “her poverty” is looked down upon by Sheela’s grandmother (2). When she returns from Australia, she is “A perfectly healthy, middle-aged woman dressed impeccably in a sophisticated manner. A beauty who still retained,... the glow of youth in her face and her hair” (10).

ESTRANGEMENT

Psychological and Physical

Estrangement is the feeling of being alienated from people who were once dear and near. Susanne Babbel says, “Emotional cutoff,...is described as [sic] people managing their unresolved emotional issues with parents, siblings and other family members by reducing or totally cutting off emotional contact with them in order to reduce their anxiety” (“Effects of Trauma: Estrangement from Family”). People dare to dissociate themselves from the person who was once very close to their heart, only under highly traumatised circumstances.

Estrangement echoes right from the beginning in the French story. When the couple is introduced, Maupassant says, “Husband and wife sat side by side without speaking” (109). Gabrielle, the mother of seven children, feels that she has been made “the victim of hateful penalty of maternity” which her husband, Count de Mascarat, has inflicted on her “for eleven years” with a jealous attitude to render her exceptional beauty “Useless” to her admirers(110). She recounts that her man has “condemned” her “to the existence of a brood mare”(111). She realizes that their children were considered by her husband as “victories” over her “youth”, “beauty” and “charm” (111). When Gabrielle gains the courage to point out how beastly she is treated by him, he is in for a rude shock and in a defensive manner he says, “You are mad” (110). The pangs of suffering that she undergoes because of the patriarchal oppression get reflected when she gives an outlet for her feelings of outrage and disgust which have been nagging her for a long time. The stigmatization that she suffers becomes explicit when she points out how after every delivery, her husband “recommended to persecute” her with “infamous and hateful desire” to condemn her with “the penal servitude of childbearing” (111-112). Now that she feels that she should no longer be “the victim” of his “terrible selfishness” and decides “to live like a woman of the world” as she has “the right to do, as all women have the right to do”(109-110). In a similar fashion, Kalyanikutty also desires to live like a woman of the world when nights become unbearable for her and she feels that her husband, Dr.Sudhakaran, “is destroying” her “health.” She, one day, tells Sheela that she is “pregnant” and she wants “an abortion.” She sticks fast to her decision telling, “I don’t want to give birth to Sudhakaran’s child” (6). Her pregnancy is contemptuously considered by her as a mere pollution of her womb. As Sheela cannot accept Kalyanikutty’s decision, she refuses to abort her child in her clinic. But Kalyanikutty goes to a midwife “on the outskirts of the city” and gets it done (7).

Both the authors have gone a long way to expose the mind and thoughts of their characters in a vivid manner. Kalyanikutty tactfully elicits from Sheela the displeasure which she nurtures against her husband. The following conversation between Sheela, the narrator of the story, and Kalyanikutty bears it out.

“If I promise you ten lakhs, a house and a handsome young man, won’t you be prepared to give up your husband?” , she said.

“You’re really a wicked creature,” I said.

“Do I become a wicked creature in your eyes only because I can fish out your secret thoughts? I know who you are. You know that I know. And I know that you know that I know,” she said, laughing (6).

Gabrielle, deciding not to become pregnant once again, wants her man to be taken to church for a significant confession. There, before the altar, she declares to him after her prayer, "One of your children is not yours, and one only" (112). She adds that she would never reveal the name of either her lover or the child who had been the result of her betrayal. The "brutal master" and "the amorous man" in the Count receives a heavy blow (109). This revelation leads to estrangement between the couple. Six years after the crucial confession, the Count admits that the punishment given by his wife has been "intolerable" (118). The tension is relaxed when Gabrielle reveals that she only lied to him in order to avoid lying with him, for she says, "I had only one means of driving you from my bed" (119).

Kalyanikutty finds it difficult to sustain her relationship with her husband. She is discontented with her frustrated bestial husband who verbally abuses her. The comparatively refined Kalyanikutty feels that she has been treated with disrespect by her man who "never knew the golden rules of behaviour or etiquette"(18). She turns out to be a hapless victim of verbal abuse and sexual oppression and longs to break the shackles of marriage. Without considering the ramifications of a divorce, Kalyanikutty goes for a marital breakdown, for Sheela says, "One of the doctors who worked in their place came to meet me and said that she was constantly fighting with Sudhakaran and that she was trying to get a divorce"(9).

Sheela takes a little pride in admitting that she and her husband "live in perfect amity" (9). But Sheela's emotional estrangement is underlined when she says, "For civilized people, a marriage that lasts for years, greying and rotting, is certainly impossible to bear no, no, I don't want this much-praised grihasthashram" (12-13). She goes on to add, "He had become almost like a diseased limb. A limb that had to be cut off and removed from me. I knew that he wouldn't be prepared for a divorce" (13). In India, most of the women endure the hardships they face in their marital life, and Sheela is no different. Kamala Das makes a clear cut distinction between the personalities of Kalyanikutty and Sheela telling that, Kalyanikutty got "a divorce two and a half years after her marriage", whereas Sheela finds "it hard to file a complaint against" her husband "in court" as she was born in "An ancient family of generous and charitable souls", to borrow the words of Kalyanikutty (17, 13 and 11). The strategy that Sheela adopts to go estranged is by devising "a number of ways in which" she could "humiliate him" (14). She often reminds her husband, "You must cut back on your expenses. I have to make all the money myself. Don't forget it" (14). Her introspection makes her admit, "If I hated him, wasn't that hatred too something which he had deliberately created in me?" (15). The fear of what Mrs. Grundy says if she physically walks out on her husband makes her get just emotionally disengaged. Sheela is seen to be a conservative feminist whereas Kalyanikutty is basically seen to be a lesbian feminist. Kamala Das has clearly brought out the two different faces of estrangement: a silent withdrawal as expressed in the case of Sheela and a reactive separation which is depicted in Kalyanikutty's life.

A clear analysis of the French story brings to the fore what Maupassant would have meant when he describes Count de Mascarat to be "a perfect husband and an excellent father" (109). Gabrielle ironically points out that the affection the Count had for their children had sprung out of his aversion towards her. And she goes on to add,

You loved your children as victories and not because they were of your own

blood.... And you are proud of them; you make a parade of them; you take them out for drives in your coach in the Bois de Boulogne, and you give them donkey rides at Montmorency. You take them to theatrical matinees so that you may be seen in the midst of them and that people may say: 'What a kind father!' and that it may be repeated" (111).

But after the crucial confession, there arose a division not only between the Count and the Countess but also between the Count and the children, for the Count says, "I can no longer see my children or feel them round me without having my heart burdened with this doubt"(118). The Count admits that he withholds his love for his children when he tells his wife, "the still greater horror of feeling and knowing that there is one among them whom I cannot recognize and who prevents me from loving the others"(119). The "authoritative and despotic" Count has his way until his wife passes from the feminine to the feminist phase (109).

After divorcing Sudhakaran, Kalyanikutty leaves for Australia and marries a man there and when she visits Sheela after twenty-six years, she "was the widow of an Australian". Kalyanikutty expresses her wish to meet Sudhakaran. She tells Sheela, "Perhaps, I'd like to see Sudhakaran again. To spend a few days and nights with him". Having lesbian instincts, Kalyanikutty has an aversion towards male – female relationship. And it is this aversion that makes her think about spending "a few days and nights with him" and to distort the harmony in his marital life. Apprehending that Kalyanikutty's idea "to see Sudhakaran again" will make a hell out of the peaceful family of Sudhakaran, Sheela avoids arranging a meeting between them (12). But later when Kalyanikutty pesters her, she feels "pity for her" and arranges for their meeting. This meeting makes matters go worse for Sudhakaran's second wife. She agonises to Sheela, "She has already enticed and won over my husband and daughter" (20). Kalyanikutty's decision to take Sudhakaran's daughter, Ammini, to Australia along with her, annoys Ammini's mother. Ammini's mother's suicidal attempt eventually makes Kalyanikutty cancel "Ammini's trip" (23). But Kalyanikutty's interference in Sudhakaran's family brings chaos to it. Ammini develops a hostile attitude towards her mother. She tells Sheela, "My mother tried to destroy whatever happiness I'd have had. When Dr.Kalyanikutty started loving me, she became hysterical". Realizing the havoc that Kalyanikutty has created, Sheela laments, "She came on a twenty-two-day vacation. By the time she went back, she'd disrupted everyone's life" (25). Kalyanikutty proves herself to be a maverick and readers will be tempted to think that she is a person who is well ahead of her time. She seems to be the female counterpart of the Count in the French story. As she is seen to exert domination, she could rather be described as a gynocentric figure.

JEALOUSY

Emotional and Sexual

An analysis of the concept of estrangement in these stories would create a general understanding that it has sprouted out of sheer jealousy which was nurtured by the victimizer against the victim. "Jealousy" is defined by Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Oxford Dictionary of the English Language as "mental uneasiness from suspicion or fear of rivalry, unfaithfulness, etc., as in love or aims" (def. 2). Bertrand Russell in his book *Why I am not a Christian?* traces the course of jealousy and says that it "instinctively rouses anger" (119).

When this anger grows to a dimension at which it could suppress the reasoning power, people tend to subjugate fellow human beings. Hence, the victims recognize a need to protect their own rights as they have been treated unfairly in the socio-familial structure of society. Bertrand Russell feels that jealousy and modesty are two natural impulses. He says, "Jealousy I believe has been the most potent single factor in the genesis of sexual morality" in the course of the evolution of patriarchy (119). The patriarch is seen to be suspicious and envious when the woman moves away from the lakshmanrekha drawn for her. Women are seen to be suppressed and they struggle in this oppressively patriarchal society to gain an identity for themselves.

Marriage seems to be a captivity where women are suffocated and subordinated. The aristocratic society does not sanction separation when it is seen to be an escape from a marriage of misery. So, women like Gabrielle and Sheela psychologically rebel against and resent the male-constructed milieu.

Gabrielle's stunning beauty and Sheela's artistic sensibility evoke in the patriarch a hideous jealousy that ends in familial decadence. At the outset of the French story, the author clearly states that the Count is a jealous husband. The Count with "the furious jealousy by which he had been devoured for so long" looks at his beautiful wife and feels "again gnawed at his heart" and grows "rather pale" (108). He does not want her to go for a drive in the carriage of her own accord. He joins her in spite of her disdainful reply. Unable to bear with his authority and being irritated at his amorous advances, the Countess says, "I am not even at liberty to have my carriage to myself now" (109). The savage brutality of the patriarch in "Useless Beauty" is brought to light through the intolerable torture of maternity inflicted on her. Gabrielle tells her man, "when I reappeared, fresh, pretty and indestructible, still seductive and constantly surrounded by admirers,... you were seized by jealousy again"(111).

She attempts to make an escape from the continual pregnancy which her man has inflicted on her for eleven long years with a jealously sinister view. Maupassant stresses the intensity of envy that the Count has nurtured towards his beautiful wife, when he makes her tell of the Count's desire for her, "it is not the desire of possessing me... but it is the wish to make me unsightly"(111). She tells her husband blatantly that once she loses her beauty due to repeated pregnancies, he "will leave off being jealous" (110). Pretending to disclose the most guarded secret of her life, Gabrielle denies her man the slavish use of her person which culminated in their estrangement.

In the Indian – English short story, "The Sandal Trees", Sheela's husband feels that her intimate friendship with Kalyanikutty prevents her from gaining marital harmony with him. He perceives that the shadows of Kalyanikutty haunt him and drive his wife off from his life. He feels sorry for not being able to allure her in spite of his wealth and education. He understands that Kalyanikutty is jealous of him, for he tells Sheela, "That friend of yours, Kalyanikutty – why is she so angry with me?... I think she's jealous of me"(4-5). He keeps a jealous eye on Kalyanikutty and this jealousy in turn gets transformed into enmity which he sustains even when he becomes old. Kamala Das makes this clear for the readers when she makes Sheela's husband declare, "I realized that you were comparing every display of love on my part with hers. I was somebody who had reached you after her. I was a mere drizzle arriving hesitantly, timidly, after a full storm"(26). Sheela too wants to flee her husband's repelling amorous overtures. The strategically maintained silent repulsion of Sheela grows between them "like a sandal tree" (13).

It is the "ignoble jealousy" felt by the Count in "Useless Beauty" that drove him to inflict "abominable male tyrannies" on his wife (110 and 112). He establishes himself "as a man of former days" and admits that he is "a father of the olden time" and "a husband of one of the families of old" (119). Sexual jealousy, as A.C. Bradley observes, "liberates the beast in man" (144). The readers can realize this when the Count says, "I will confess it, you have made me terribly jealous, because you are a woman of another race, of another soul, with other requirements" (119). The challenging of man's unquestionable superiority and woman's strategic move to get emotionally detached from her man is clearly exposed in Sheela's marriage with an elderly relative who fails to measure up to her expectations.

This deep sense of disappointment evokes in her a sharp pang of jealousy towards the women who spend their nights in the arms of handsome men. She goes on to say, "My jealousy incapacitated me like a bodily discomfort". Unable to bear the burden of conjugality with her husband, Sheela "did make attempts at cheating him, at renouncing her chastity"(15). She tries to make her husband feel jealous by sitting close to her male friends. But unlike her friend Kalyanikutty, she does not walk out on her man. She attempts to free herself from the "mental conflicts and the sense of guilt that has plagued" her for years(22). Much to the surprise of the readers, Sheela feels jealous of Kalyanikutty as the latter could successfully get separated from her husband "before they could hate each other." Kamala Das brings out this thought of Sheela when she makes Sheela utter "I felt jealous of her. That's all" (17).

Kalyanikutty's possessiveness towards Sheela is exposed when she broke off all friendships that Sheel had maintained during school days. Sheela's acquaintance with somebody else evokes in Kalyanikutty an envy that ends in disrupting the relation. Her lesbian attachment to Sheela makes it impossible for her to have a harmonious marital life. Sudhakaran's second wife, too harbours bitterness towards Kalyanikutty who has greater influence on her husband and her daughter. She pales into an insignificant home-maker when she is compared with the rich, intelligent and sophisticated Kalyanikutty. Ammini too is furious with her bedridden mother who had thwarted her trip to Australia. There is a strong feeling of annoyance when she retorts "Is there anything uglier on earth than the jealousy of a woman who's not beautiful?"(25). Sheela's husband, who is jealous of Kalyanikutty, concludes that she belongs to the group of women who had come to sow destruction in other's life. In the case of Gabrielle, the dehumanizing effect of sexual jealousy is the primary cause of marital disharmony, whereas what disturbs Sheela's marriage is the mutual incompatibility between the resentment that her man has towards her and his attempts for maintaining an emotional relationship with her. The women in these stories rebel against exploitation and hegemony.

CONCLUSIONS

Both the authors have skilfully traced the impact of estrangement and jealousy on the psychological and physiological levels of their characters. The French and the Indian - English master story tellers, with commendable insight, have brought out the longing for emancipation of the scarred and suppressed women and with telling effect they have presented how women are able to transcend beyond the dilemmas with unflinching clarity. It is jealousy that rocks the marital harmony of Gabrielle and Sheela and makes the two women experience a sense of entrapment. These two women are driven by circumstances from the feminine to the feminist phase of their evolution. Kalyanikutty has throughout been in feminist phase as she is a *femme fatale*. When one reads between the lines, one begins to see that it is the lesbian instinct in her that undermines whatever companionship she forms with men. It is not her attraction for Sudhakaran that prompts her to renew her ties with him, but her jealousy of conjugality thriving between a man and a woman. Again, it is her jealousy of it that drives her to tempt Sheela to terminate her marriage with her man and renew their lesbian friendship.

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