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## **Man-Woman Relationship through Marriage: A Study of Fiction from *New Woman Magazine***

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### **Abstract:**

Writers play an important role in bringing about a change in the society by their contribution to literature and influence people. Marriage is one of the vital events in the lives of people, but due the influence of the West, the concept of marriage is fast changing. Though the stereotypical middle class women still have traditional ideas about marriage and marital life, the urban woman in India is competing with her male counterparts and succeeding both in the work place and also in domestic front.

The author in this article selected few stories from the fiction of *New Woman Magazine* and analysed the changing scenario of the concept "Marriage" by means of the contributions from several writers. It was concluded that the influence of the West has had an impact on the Indian women and they are moving towards the "New Woman" concept in the writings of Indian English Literature.

**Keywords: Indian English Writing, Influence of the West, Writers' Contribution, Thematic Approach, Fiction, New Woman, and Marriage.**

### **Introduction:**

A woman must satisfy her inner-self first to do the roles that she plays and only then can she achieve success in whatever relationships she establishes. But, in the theme of Man-Woman Relationship through Marriage, it is totally contrary as women try to transform herself to suit others' requirements and eventually disowns her own-self and merges completely with what is required by her family. This man-woman relationship shows the struggle of woman against the predatory male dominated society.

Jane, Jayamala and Lynne (2005) stressed that marriage is an important institution in almost all societies in the world. The results of numerous studies suggest that people tend to be both healthier and happier when they are married. As a consequence, the most frequently studied aspect in research on marriage and family relationships is that of satisfaction, or what helps people maintain happiness in their marriages. A second concept that has received much attention in the literature relates to the processes by which individuals develop intimate relationships and, in particular, how love develops over time. In an increasingly diverse and global society, knowledge of cross-cultural differences in relationships and relationship satisfaction has also become important.

SrinivasaIyengar (2012) believed that much of Indian English writings has had no more than a contemporaneous significance; it meant great deal to those for whom it was written, though others might not have thought much about it. Some of this writing, again, inspires in us, strong emotion in terms of personality of the writers' concern and, fortunately, some Indian writing in English can be described as literature by any standard whatsoever.

Tufail Ahmad (2013) clarified that India is also being transformed as a western country, with the organising principles of its politics and society rooted in the European enlightenment. Some key principles that define the West, for example, individualism, liberty and democracy, also inform the foundations of the Indian republic. The system of governance in the West, also practised in contemporary India, is not based on religions or ideologies. As the society is fast changing in the era of Globalisation, Indian women are at par with men in many spheres. The stereotypical middle class women still have traditional ideas about marriage and marital life. In addition to their outside duties, they act as worthy wives by doing the household chores and fulfilling their husbands' desires simultaneously. They play the role of good mothers by taking good care of their children as well but, somewhere down the line their own dreams and aspirations remains unfulfilled. Some educated women who do not wish to play the role of housewives; they take up a job, try and juggle between work and home.

JamunaA S (2013) reviewed few stories from the fiction section of *New Woman Magazine*, which is the face of today's society, where woman as a character take pains in maintaining her individuality without bending to the norms of the society. The author opined that such women exhibited an independent spirit and were accustomed to acting on their own.

The fiction in *New Woman Magazine* contains the relationship between a man and a woman as sometimes good, sometimes bad or bitter. All the stories are woman centric, while male are represented as those who bully and dominate, woman remain tolerant and submissive.

In this paper, the author looks at the various short stories under the Theme "Marriage" of this particular genre of contemporary fiction. In this article, the theme of marriage comprised of three stories from the popular fiction of *New Woman Magazine*. These short stories create an awareness of the issues of marital relationships and how women have to give in to the demands of the societal requirements, usually to have a happy ending.

### Discussions:

The author attempts to analyse how women characters are portrayed under the theme of "Marriage" and what are the problems that threaten their marital happiness. The woman characters in these stories lose their autonomy and individuality, but they rise against all odds only to emerge as a 'New Woman'. The 'New Woman' was a feminist ideal that emerged in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and had a profound influence on feminism well into twentieth. The term 'New Woman' was popularised by American writer Henry James to describe the growth in the feminist, educated, independent career woman in Europe and United States. The 'New Woman' pushed the limits set by male-dominated society.

In the story **The Heart Song** (*NWM, 2008*), the protagonist Sumitra sacrifices her own career at the cost of her husband and family. Her husband Bhaskar, a doctor, due to his frequent transfers, hardly gets time to devote to his wife and to the family. "He was left free to rise in his career while all the calamities---- big and small----were quietly and competently taken care of and dealt with by a force unknown to him (148)".

Though Sumitra wanted to pursue a career, she had added responsibility of taking care of her ailing in-laws. They needed constant attention, as their age was catching up on them. She had to bottle up her aspirations, her dreams for the wellness of the family. "I came into your home just as you came into my life, Bhaskar to enrich it and guide it towards prosperity, happiness and fulfilment. I was 20 then, a post-graduate in literature and apart from being the

perfect wife; I wanted to teach, for I loved children and knew I would make a good teacher (151)". This way she sacrifices her dream of taking up the job as a teacher while serving her husband and her family.

The protagonist task was only to serve the family and finally when her husband retires, she pursues her 'Mission unfulfilled', enrolls herself in music classes to keep her interest alive after so many years of her married life, wherein she had to bottle up her desires and sacrifices her interests for the sake of the family. But eventually, she asks her daughter-in-law pursue a career which she could not do during her younger days.

In the story **Dark Light (NWM, 2010)**, Maya, an obese woman, walks with her plump body into a railway compartment with her huge stomach and her formidable appearance. The commuters were unhappy by her huge bulky presence as she would occupy more space than others. "How dare she inconvenience others with her weight, when there is such little elbow room?" (112), she heard a lady speak about her. Instead of empathising with Maya's situation and her plight, the women commuters in the train, ridicule her for her obese body and mock at her for something which she could not help. Maya develops an inferiority complex due to the treatment that is shown out on her.

The protagonist was ailing from an unknown disease and after diagnosis the doctor declared, "It's schizophrenia. There are other complications too which needs to be investigated" (114). Naush was a supportive and an understanding husband but the fear of his leaving Maya left her hand shaking. "Naush, will you leave me now? She asked hope and despair taking turns to cloud her eyes.... And why would I do that?" Naush was quick to retort in a comforting voice" (114). Though Maya was evidently unhappy, her optimism and courage to overcome her problem surfaced. "I've been too much trouble, haven't I? I like challenges Naush but this is hell of a sniper" (114).

In spite of all the problems, Maya emerges as a confident woman conquering over her fear and her complex, all with the support of her husband. In usual circumstances, the woman undergoes such agony all by herself, but in this story, it is the husband who acts in a supportive manner.

Situations in most of the stories blatantly reveals that the wife, not the husband, who will most often be required to give in, to the end result of a marital bliss. But here, the man i.e. the husband adjusts to his obese wife and sacrifices even his sexual desire for he feels that the wife is 'like a child' and he is abusing a child each time he touches her.

**Rickey (NWM, 2011)** is yet another story which portrays a woman who is subjected to a lot of restrictions and victimised by her husband in every possible way in the wedlock.

The protagonist is the narrator who marries a man much older to her, Suresh, was a knowledgeable man who had unmatched business acumen, but somehow felt that the protagonist (his wife) had to learn a lot how to sit, stand, talk and even laugh only when appropriate. Though the narrator tried hard to mould herself, it actually never happened. Rickey, their son came into the world bringing in hopes and happiness to the narrator's life. Suresh expected Rickey to be like him perfect, manly and authoritative. Even if Rickey cried for a toy, Suresh would yell at him and say "Don't cry like a sissy! One broke, another will come (110)". Saying so, threw a wad of notes on the little child.

The narrator had borne a lot of atrocities from Suresh, her husband, for not being perfect he even slapped her once in front of his employees and publicly abused her for not having table manners. This made her mind strong and even more determined to save Rickey from his father's rude behaviour.

As days passed by, Rickey proved to be a very intelligent boy who loved to take up arts but Suresh imposed his choice of commerce on him. As things were not good between the two men in the family, it was the mother who tried to make amends in every probable manner. Rickey's outrageous behaviour, the tattoo on his neck, his hair style was always shielded by his mother, but once Suresh told her "You woman it's all because of you, you call him your son? He has gone and opened a beauty parlour like a common roadside *nai* (111)". In his anger, his hand shot forward to slap her but another hand caught it in the mid-air. Rickey felt sad at his mom's plight. He asked his mother when she had danced last, she being a terrific Kathak dancer, when she laughed out loud, when she bought her sari of her own choice etc. Rickey empathised with his mother's plight but was clear about his plans of opening a saloon 'Rickey Art' and made it big and successful.

Rickey was found alone one day in his room and to mother's shock, found him dead due to a massive heart attack. Neha, his girlfriend and senior stylist, managed the saloon but the aura around 'Rickey Art' had faded.

Today, when people walk into the Rickey Art, they meet a senior stylist Neha and they also see a 47-year old woman owning and managing the parlour wearing a classy kurti and trousers with her straight hair cut in 5 layers with red and blond streaks, and fringes lining on her forehead.

Though in deep grief, the narrator said, "This was his dream and I can't allow it to be shattered (113)". She realised that though biologically she had given life to her son Rickey, but in reality he had given her life, her identity, and her independence. The narrator plays a role of a good wife and a good mother and though traditional in her approach to marital relations she emerges as a 'New Woman' showcasing her strength and her individuality.

### **Conclusion:**

Strong marriages are the backbone of any society. Unfortunately, over the last three decades in the West, marriages have disintegrated, so have the families. Marriage was once held in high esteem - a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman. Today, marriage has been reduced to little more than a social experiment. The author concludes that the influence of West through the concept of 'New Woman' as propounded by Henry James has caught up on each and every aspect of an Indian woman and even on Marriage. Writers' influence the society in a big way through their writings and the fiction section of *New Woman Magazine* include stories focusing on issues related to women. The select stories chosen by the author like Heart Song (2008), Dark Light (2010), Rickey (2011), only substantiates this statement. Though the women characters suffer pains in their marriage, the issues that precipitate the marital tensions are ultimately resolved. The process of 'give and take' is only the prescription to 'Happy Marriage'.

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