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Bonding of Man and Woman in Mahasweta Devi's Short Stories *The Fairy Tale of Rajbhasha, Divorce and The Saga of Kagaboga*

Jaya Singh

Research Scholar

Department of English and MEL

University of Allahabad

Abstract:

This paper aims to discuss the nature and importance of bonding in the relationship of man and woman. The bonding between man and woman is one of the most discussed topics in the literature; still newness is delivered in each story. Bonding needs a sustained effort to make, continue and take to its final destination. Bonding is need, but regulated by the internal and external elements. All these three stories reveal the nexus of internal and external elements in man and woman bonding. The Play of emotions and socially prescribed roles develops conflict and tension, which lead to disowning and rethinking of relationships in new light and perspectives. But one thing is sure that love plays vital role in all the bondings and it betrays socially imposed frame work of roles in relationships in crucial phases. Mahasweta Devi is known for realistic depiction of the character, situation and society. She never compromises with the technique and never tried to present the romanticized picture of the realities. To read her texts, it needs immense patience and psychological preparation for the understanding of very common but untouched chords of human emotions and its impact on the development of the characters, that connects us to very real world of emotions.

Keywords: Bonding, Emotions, Elements and Roles.

The great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman. The relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child will always be subsidiary. (Lawrence 130)

Lawrence in his essay laid stress on the importance of man and woman relationship for the sake of humanity and advancement of human bonding in creative manner. Bonding is a very natural need and force of human survival. But the concept of bonding is made of various elements and fabricated with emotions. The list is long, but in the context of selected three stories; elements can be categorized in internal and external influencing and guiding elements. The internal element refers to the very basic need of love, care, concern, emotional protection, tensions, pretension and the external elements refers to socially prescribed gendered roles, gendered behavior and delimiting of thought process. The dynamics of human relationship is bonding. The basic matrix of emotion in bonding works as a roller coaster; highs and lows are part and parcel. Human beings are driven by the varieties of emotions and circumstances in relationships. The most difficult thing in relationship is to assume and chart out expected behavioural patterns. It is not only emotion but the power structure and social forces also drive the nature and participation of people in the bonding. Relationship is created within the discourse and proscribes roles and behavioural patterns to the people.

Initially the bonding of man and woman in Indian culture was represented with utmost respect, and seen as equal with each other, complementary and sharer of responsibilities. They were always included in the society building and expected to contribute for the larger goals of life. The invasion of Muslims and outsiders has brought change in the status of women in the society. Men started asserting power on women and assigned them the subordinate position. They were treated like physical assets than human being. In this connection, it is worthwhile to quote from the words of Sri Aurobindo:

Women in ancient India, contrary to the sentiment of other ancient people, were not denied civic rights, although in practice this equality was rendered nugatory for all but a few by their social sub-ordination to the male and their domestic preoccupation. (Dialogue 48)

Indian writers till twentieth century have discussed about that what a relationship ought to be but, twenty first century has taken a new term in the delineation and depiction of bonding of man and woman. It has more worked on to present things as it is. Previously writers were concerned with the moral and romantic tone of the relationship than adultery or politicization. R.K. Narayan states well in the context:

Totally different conception of Man-woman relationship from ours and it can certainly be demonstrated that marital bliss is a more frequent subject in Indian romantic novels. (Mujherjee 48)

Among other writers, Mahasweta Devi doesn't believe in the romanticization of relationship. She has depicted things as it emerged from the hard ground reality of life. Devi has represented the varieties of behavioural patterns and unpredicted nature of man and woman relationship in her short stories. She has hit the very elementary nature and functioning of bonding between man and woman. Within the complicated matrix of emotions, human relations emerge as a very powerful and lasting bond. It goes through all highs and lows, but the commitment of hearts take relationships to its final destination with leaves note of faith for each other. Religious patriarchy and feudalism, brings lots of pressure and transformation into the relations of couples; Sorjum Josmina and Kulsum Arshad while the last story depicts the odd experiences of an old couple.

The story, 'The Fairytale of Rajabasha', has an ironic title. It gives the impression that it is a story of a beautiful and happy life of Adivasi Sarjom Putri and Josmina. But behind the veneer of the title, the story gives a different picture of life that is hostile and cruel to Sarjom and Josmina. Both of them live at Rajabasha in south Bihar.

The story starts with a fairytale of arranged marriage of Sarjom and Josmina according to adivasi rituals. To make this dream come true to win "bubbling and lively as the river Koyena in the monsoons", Josmina as his wife, Sarjom borrowed money from Nandlal Shahu and gave his thumb impression on a blank paper. He bought the cows to give to Josmina's father to grant him permission to marry his daughter according to his adivasi customs.

Ultimately, they get married and their fairytale starts from here and moves poetically till rain stopped and starvation starts. In this story, Mahasweta Devi attacks the moneylenders and landlords. She shows, through this story, how innocent people like Sarjom and Josmina are trapped in the trickery of Nanadlal Shahu. He allures Sarjom and Josmina with job offer and sends them to Punjab. The fairy tale of Josmina and Sarjom ends here and begins the tale of pain, suffering and oppression. Sarjom and Josmina become victim of human trafficking and lose control and possession over their lives. Nandlal and Malkhan Singh are the people who make money by selling innocent illiterate tribals.

Josmina and Sarjom are kept locked in non-working hours like cattles. They are sold to Niranjana in Punjab. Niranjana exploits the couple at his best. He never allows them to take even a breath. Every time he keeps husband and wife separate to satisfy his lust by exercising power over Josmina. Josmina becomes pregnant and finally gets abortion under pressure from Niranjana. Somehow, they run away from the clutches of Niranjana and reach Karnal Singh. Here the situation for Sarjom is little better, but the suffering and exploitation of Josmina still continues. Again they decide to run away from this place and also succeed in their venture. Now they are at the door of Pritam Singh. Pritam assured not to touch Josmina but later on he starts sending her to others. Thus, life becomes hell for this couple. Every times things go wrong and Sarjom becomes helpless to save his wife from wild dogs like Niranjana, Karnal Singh and Pritam Singh.

Eventually, they manage to move to their native place. But according to the norms of their community a woman who carries seed of *dikhu* in her womb is not acceptable in the society. The fear of becoming outcast made Josmina to kill herself by drowning in the river Koyena. A woman who herself was like the river full of life and beauty, is forced to kill herself into the river, to save her husband from the burden and blot that is imposed by society. The crux of the story is manifest in the following lines:

Josmina went to the river Koyena. She took off her sari, her cheap brass bangles, her chain and ear studs, and placed them on rock. Sarjom would bury all these with her. She entered the water, stayed afloat, then dived down deep clasping a rock under water. Oh Koyena, please ask kolhan not to make Sarjom pay a penance. He doesn't have money. He only had twice twenty rupees left. How can he pay? (80)

In this way the fairytale of Sarjom and Josmina ends. But "The wind blew, The Koyena flowed on, the fairytale of Rajbhasha did not end, not all fairytales do . . ." (81). This story questions the issue of a woman's right over her life and body. Though Josmina and Sarjom were not wrong anywhere but they became only victim of sly system of money makers who have no value for human life. The whole process forces an innocent woman to die for the sake of her husband and to get rid of the burden of penance ritual. Society always looks at a woman as sacrificing her wishes and life.

The next story for discussion is 'The Divorce' (Talaq). Mahasweta Devi is a writer who knows very aptly how to record the variety of human emotions, its intensity and highs and lows of minute circumstances in the relationships. The title of the story gives an idea, but the

undercurrents of the story reveals various layers of clashes and shifts of emotions and identity. The story revolves around the couple, Kulsum and Arshad. Kuli is the second daughter of Gonu among three daughters, who complained her father regarding his choice of match for Kuli. One thing is sure from the story that Kuli is a woman of independent thought process and decisions. She asks her father, “You chose him? No property, no poultry, nothing. Felt like adopting someone?” Kuli’s statement shows the plight of a woman for being choice less in marriage; a woman has to marry with the person who is selected by the elder members of the family. Patriarchy holds power to make woman powerless in her crucial decisions of life and rules over the women by accumulation of power and decision making.

Gradually, Arshad’s soft and loving nature convinces Kuli to accept the relationship happily and live in content and peace with him. She enjoys the real bliss of marriage with Arshad. Understanding between Kuli and Arshad bring happiness, progress in terms of material and emotional fulfillment. Their son also does well in studies and got recruited in the shipping company. Situation takes odd turn in the happy life of the couple when the grandson falls ill and Kuli and Arshad quarrels on the petty issue of his treatment from the local doctor or from the doctor of big city. Argument became bitter and in the fit of anger, Arshad shouts Talaq thrice to his wife Kuli. This event in the story critiques the unjustified codes of Islam religion, where a sudden gust of emotion spoils the bond of marriage, and leaves a woman abandoned. Once the word ‘talak’ uttered thrice, cannot change the reality and unable to fill the gap and to mend the damage in the relationship. Kuli leaves home to goes to the home of her elder sister Phuli.

Her experiences at the homes of sisters, makes her nostalgic and unhappy. She was cleverly driven by her sisters to un-follow the advices of Arshad, but her son convinces her to come back to the family. The road of coming back was not easy for kuli, first as per the Islamic religion she has get married with some other man to be divorced and after that she can reunite with Arshad. The law of remarriage with the same man is very difficult and almost unacceptable to the dignity of a woman. Kuli is a brave woman and she refuses such law and gives priority to her mutual love and understanding with Arshad. In the dark, she ran away with Arshad to live together. On the way, “Arshad said, I can’t see. Give me your hand. Hold one end of your stick, I’ll hold the other. I can’t hold your hand any longer! Come along, carefully now. Otherwise you’ll trip.” Kuli is a fighter woman but somewhere her self assertion is not enough to live alone as an individual after divorce. It seems that love conquers at the end of the story, in reality story also draws attention towards the issue of women’s independent identity that is neither recognized nor liberates a woman from the shadow of man due to social protection, shelter and identity.

Polygamy is also a reason of disruption in relations. The husband of Kuli’s elder sister married thrice, marriage institution in Islam allows men to marry many times, but it causes serious damage to the identity and emotional health of women. The dissatisfaction in the relation of Phuli has transformed her as envious sister and quarrelsome wife. Marriage institution is made to bring peace and settlement, but instead of this purpose it has become exploitative system for women and heterosexual relations are imposed to restrict them in a certain sphere. Physical assets do not assure for the bliss in relation, Kuli’s both sisters lack bliss of marriage, though they are richer than Kuli.

The last story for the discussion is 'The Saga of Kagaboga'. This is truly a heart touching tale of an old couple Mohini and Sadananda. According to oral tales of villagers, Sadananda and Mohini choose each other in childhood at Utruni mela by garlanding. The act of garlanding is considered as very auspicious and divine will, and later on Sadananda and Mohini got married. Story depicts the cultural aspects and belief system of innocent villagers through the marriage of the couple. Married life of a couple faces many ups and down. They raised two sons, by the time; sons leave them to settle in the city. Leaving of home by the sons has caused immense grief and unhappiness to Mohini and led her to talking-to-oneself disease. The "conversation between husband and wife ceased 16 years ago. They communicate through the invisible Kagaboga." (11) Friction between husband and wife leads to silent relationship, loneliness within the wedlock and soaring anger. "The hazards and complexities of man-woman relationships, the founding of individuality and the establishing of individualism of her characters". (Raji Narsimhan 23) Sadananda suggested Mohini to consult doctor for her ailment. But it aroused the anger of Mohini and she speaks, "Am I responsible for Hindustan-Pakistan? Did I tell you to leave our homeland? Why did you leave everything to your nephew and come away? Even if you did, how come everyone else's life has improved while I'm still in this condition? A marriage made in heaven indeed! When we came we left behind all our precious belongings, and now you call me mad! Is it mad to talk a lot?"(15)

Poor, ailing mother Mohini registers her anguish through silence and conversation with Crows and Cranes. She expresses deepest pain of separation from her sons in such words, "My life has been torn apart. What else is there to say?" (16). Love still exists between Mohini and Sadananda. They do care each other and take decisions together on the matter of disposing land. There is no law for poor and old people in the country, to save from injustice of feudal lords and land owners.

All three stories delineate subtle emotions of relationship of man and woman. In the first story, the relationship of Sarjom and Josmina depicts immense devotion and love; the "Divorce" story depicts the intensity of need and emotional bonding and the last story "The Saga of Kagaboga" shows the unspoken caring bond that lacks emotional intensity but bound with duties and respect. Every bonding reveals a new kind of dimensions in relations. But Devi has painted a weird but very realistic picture of man and woman relationship.

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