

W.S.MAUGHAM’S MODERN AND BIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LOVE IN HIS COMEDIES

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ABSTRACT

‘W.S.Maugham’s modern and biological approach to love in his comedies’ deals with his different approaches to love, sex and marriage. Maugham was very practical and subtle in his approach to love. Being a medical man, he believed that love was a biological requirement based on sex. Actually, it was sex which predominated and love hardly existed in life. Maugham was always scientific and logical. Maugham proved to be a greater psychologist in his comedies; he added humour with love and sex. Being a scientist, he emphasised the element of sex as the fundamental aspect of love. His women or heroines were advanced having different approaches to love and sex, they changed their colours frequently being sometimes practical, realistic and passionate. For some of his heroines, the marriage was a matter of convenience.

I. INTRODUCTION

Maugham had also established himself as a brilliant writer of comedies in modern times. His treatment of love gave a peerless touch to his comedies, they became extra-ordinary charming, delightful and fascinating. He was also, basically, a writer of comedies, he was not at his best in his tragedy, and he gave up drama writing because he thought that Shakespearean drama should be revived. But as a writer of comedies, he was simply superb, and they were highly sparkling with love, satire, humour and irony. The background of love imparted a unique touch to his comedies; they had always been enjoyed, appreciated and admired by spectators, readers and critics.

II. FINDINGS

Maugham was very subtle and practical. Being a medical man, he believed that love was a biological requirement based on sex. Actually, it was sex, which predominated and love hardly existed in life. Maugham studied love and sex under three headings – 1. Woman as a symbol of love and sex, 2. Woman and her sex appeal and 3. Attitude to love, sex and marriage. As a man of science and scientific background he rationalized love and presented it in his comedies in a rational and realistic manner.

Maugham also painted love with all its artificialities and hypocrisies, because sex was always at the root. Maugham proved to be greater psychologist in his comedies, he added humour with love and sex. Being a scientist, he emphasised the element of sex as the fundamental aspect of love. His women or heroines were advanced having different approaches to love and sex, they changed their colours frequently being sometimes practical, realistic and passionate. Lady Frederick realising the importance of love told Admiral in the beautiful comedy ‘Lady Frederick’: “ And believe me when

the two young things love one another, it is better to let them marry. Love is also a very rare thing in this world; one really ought to make the most of it, when it is there.”

Maugham was writing comedies with a different purpose, he widened the scope of them by giving a broader conception of love. Lady Frederick, with all her eccentricities had a heart of gold, therefore, she reflected her humanitarian love by releasing the young boy-Marquess of Mareston from her entanglements and ultimately going to her befitting partner Mr. Paradine Fouldes. Maugham depicted this rational and psychological love comparing it to infatuation representing the modern trends. “Goodness is the only value that seems in this world of appearances to have any claim to be an end itself. Virtue is its reward.”

Maugham also realised that the demand of love and sex was always beyond the reach of mankind. Maugham’s approach was different, love was biological need and could reach to realistic and universal aspects of life.

Maugham combined sincerity and practical wisdom in his heroine ‘Penelope,’ even the title of the comedy had been given after her. She loved her husband Dickie from the core of her heart: “I have simply worshipped the ground he walked on. I have loved him as no man was ever loved before.” ‘Penelope’ was a wonderful comedy having all simplicity of expression and nobility of design, at the instance of her wise father Dr. Golightly, Penelope provided all unlicensed freedom to her wayward husband to bring him back.

Maugham used many obstacles and scandals in the path of marriage. In modern times, the institution of marriage must be saved from ruin and destruction. Penelope was disgusted with her husband’s flirtations with her own friend Ada Ferguson. She cried out: “I’m going to divorce him. I’m going to make an awful scandal.” Her father Mr. Golightly, being a professor of Mathematics was a very rational and calculating man so advised her to ‘take every opportunity of throwing him into Ada Ferguson’s society..... The father further advised her simple daughter:

You must keep guard on your tongue and your eyes
and your smiles and your temper.

The practical professor gave another piece of powerful advice to her daughter: “A wise woman never lets her husband to be quite - quite sure of her. The moment he is, cupid puts on atop - that becomes a church warden.” Maugham dealt with the social traditions and etiquettes prevailing in the middle-class people rather than in the aristocratic society. Marriage was supposed to be very precious and important among the middle-class people. “The social order in ‘Penelope’ differs from the earlier plays, because the characters come from the middle class rather than from the gentry. This social order is also restored in the resolution of the play...”

Maugham presented another kind of love in his remarkable comedy ‘The Land of Promise.’ Love and marriage had been symbolised for creativity, Norah Marsh declared her love for Taylor in the end knowing her own fertility: “.... Love has been growing in me slowly month by month and I couldn’t

see it.” Being a scientist, Maugham was concerned with creativity; love and sex were symbolical of pro-creation. Norah had finally decided to settle down in an Eastern village Manitoba after marrying Taylor. She proclaimed: “We are its mothers and the future is in us. We are building the greatness of the nation. It needs our courage and strength and hope and because it needs them, they came to us. Oh, Frank, I can’t go back to that petty narrow life.’

In his another comedy ‘Smith’, Maugham gave a very rational and biological approach to love. Freeman, a very laborious farmer came to Rhodesia for the sake of meeting his sister Rose there and for finding a wife for himself. Although, he was supposed to be uncivilized in his attitude to life, he was very realistic and practical in his approach to love and marriage. He felt sorry for the so-called civilized people of the West who had no love, family and children. They were simply groping into the dark having no happiness. Freeman observed: “... a woman could suffer no greater misfortune than to have no children.” But, the so-called modern ladies like Rose despised children: it was the wastage of ‘the youth in having children.’ Freeman was practical like Maugham: “But if you put a strong healthy man and a strong healthy woman together, love will come.”

Maugham could take love as a biological factor. N.K. Naik observed: “The theme in both ‘Smith’ and ‘The Land of Promise’ is almost identical - the contrast between the artificial hothouse life and false values of upper-middle class society and the healthy natural life and true values of the farmers in the colonies who struggle with nature to turn a wilderness into cultivated land.”

During the second phase of his dramatic career between 1914 to 1926, Maugham wrote wonderful comedies, like ‘Our Betters,’ ‘Caroline’ (The Unattainable), ‘Caesar’s Wife,’ ‘Home and Beauty,’ ‘The Circle,’ ‘The Unknown,’ ‘East of Suez’ and ‘The Constant Wife’ etc. All these charming plays reflected his approach to comedy. Maugham presented both Lady Frederick and Pearl as sex-symbol; they symbolized sex-appeal and the spirit of infatuation. They further represented the Life-Force and the woman’s hidden powers of fascination.

Congreve presented love, sex and marriage in an ornamental manner with wit, fun and satire; Maugham depicted love, sex and marriage with all frankness in the modern context. Pearl having her rich background enjoyed the life of England with free sex and uncontrolled pleasures. She observed: “One of the reasons we Americans like London is that we can live our own lives and accept things philosophically.”

In his another beautiful comedy ‘The Unattainable,’ Maugham presented a different aspect of love and marriage. A woman could remain lovely and exquisite, so long as she was unattainable. Caroline, a very attractive woman of thirty five, tall, slim with humorous eyes and charming smile, lived in a very decent house in Regents Park. Her lover Robert used to visit her frequently, as her husband with whom she had estranged relations, used to live in Nairobi. The fear of his coming back added to their pleasure. But the news of his death broke their charm, she was no more unattainable.

The lover had no interest in marriage, he, therefore, declared: “... a woman is more desirable, when she is unattainable.

Maude in ‘The Unattainable’ had a very frank opinion: “After mature consideration, I have come to the conclusion that one husband is not enough for one woman.” Caroline having the same opinion was very happy: “Good Heaven; I’ve found one much more than I wanted.” She thus, symbolized the extremity of sexual desire in the western women. In another delightful comedy, ‘The Constant Wife,’ Maugham admired firmness and constancy in love. Constance, the heroine loved her husband John devotedly. Maugham presented an ideal love between husband and wife in the drama. Marie Louse always praised this: “I do like to see a husband and wife so devoted to one another as you and John.”

In the upper-middle class society in England, people had been suspicious about the success of a marriage and the adjustment of husband and wife: “But they were being granted woman’s rights and they did not know how to use them, nor did the male know how to acknowledge them.” This is the historical background from which Maugham’s attitude reflects the social incongruity of the social structure, the inadequacy of the social law to meet the new requirements which it has set out for itself.

Maugham satirized love and marriage in his most pleasant comedy ‘Home and Beauty.’ Maugham has escaped a Swiss Prison but has contracted tuberculosis of the lungs. He stayed in Russia for a short time, then he came to England and finally to Scotland. He wrote the delightful comedy in high spirits in a sanatorium during the last winter of the First World War (1914-1918) for pleasing people. “It was written in the highest possible spirit. It was intended to amuse.” Maugham satirized homely love and beauty in the background of war. The heroine Victoria was sand-witched between her two husbands – the two former heroes of the war – Major William Cardew and Major Frederick Launders. The first hero was supposed to be dead, but he was alive. Victoria married the second time to Major Frederick Launders. But when Major William Cardew came back, he was stunned to find that he has been deprived of both home and wife. Maugham represented the most ignoble features of a women during the war, she gave up both husbands – the war heroes and went to the third-one – Paton – a young bachelor and a builder of ships. She was fascinated by his riches and property; he had already earned a lot of wealth during world war. She finally, came to know: “The war is over now I think I’ve done my bit. I’ve married two D.D.Os. Now I want to marry a Rolls Royce.” She also knows the sexual weaknesses of a man who was like a unicorn animal to forget ‘his native caution’ after hearing ‘the froufrou of a silk petticoat.’ She went after Paton after deserting her two husbands who were enjoying the food brought by the businessman. Maugham used the satirical element; he exploited human hypocrisy and manners. “War - like suffering brings with it not only the heroic but man’s most selfish detestable qualities as well.”

In another charming comedy ‘The Circle’, Maugham depicted human emotions, feminine frivolity and male lust for career and greatness. He exposed the hypocrisy of love among aristocratic classes. Maugham exposed the modern civilization. Lady kitty and Elizabeth were the victims of this

civilization and their own passions sentimentally called love. Both Clive Champion Chenoy and his son Arnold Champion Chenoy suffered immensely because of the whims of their wives. Maugham had presented the modern irony of humanity, by exposing the love of aristocrats, politicians and the elite of England. They had only sex and no love sexual enjoyment was all in all. Women were all the more non – sincere and faithless. The circle of misfortune continued in the family of Chenoy, both the father Clive Champion Chenoy and his son Arnold Champion Chenoy suffered, because their wives deceived them. Consequently, the senior Chenoy cried out: “The men of my family are really very unfortunate.” Thus both Ibsen and Maugham had the same ideology regarding love and sex. “What matters is what you are, not what you do.”

‘The Sacred Flame’ and ‘For Services Rendered’ were the beautiful comedies by Maugham of his last period. In ‘The Sacred Flame,’ the dramatist had given a wonderful treatment to the themes of love and sex. Stella, the wife of the invalid husband Maurice fell in love with this younger brother Colin for ‘the madness that possessed me.’ And it resulted in pregnancy. Maugham presented a modern concept of morality. The mother – in – law of Stella Mrs. Tabret found out a convenient solution; she gave heavy sleeping dose to her invalid son in order to put an end to his suffering as to the entire family’s. She gave her logic: “I gave him life and I took life away from him.” Thus, both the mother and Stella kept the sacred flame burning alive. Maugham presented ‘a society which places correct behavior ahead of the fundamental passions and in doing equates goodness with chastity.

Maugham started writing dramas at very mature age; his treatment to love, sex and marriage was thoroughly practical, rational, matter-of-fact, scientific and biological.

Maugham presented sex like Bertrand Russell as a natural requirement. “Sex is a natural need like food and drink.” Maugham also believed in the Life-Force, in which women had a greater power than that of men. Women like Pearl, Lady Frederick, Caroline, Victoria and Violet etc. exhibited sexual fascination in order to capture men in their traps. They enticed and entangled their men and crossed the limits of morality and decency. They produced a cosmic disaster, because they possessed the power of sex. M.C. Kuner depicted their psychology: “These women inflict pain not because they are parched by a thirst for authority but because they are so blinded by the overpowering urge that the sense of decency or responsibility is obliterated. Regardless of whatever impulse quickens it, women’s power is not Shavian joke but cosmic disaster.

III. CONCLUSION

Maugham presented the varieties of love in the most realistic manner. He also sharpened his art and craft by the theme of love. He satirized love and women, marriage and social customs. Only sex was a reality as a life-force. He also exposed the hypocrisy of love among aristocratic classes.

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