

Social and psychological context of marital discord in Maugham's novel '*Mrs. Craddock*'- A reassessment

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Abstract

Mrs. Craddock is a deeper analytical search of man-woman relations than it is discerned in Maugham's first novel *Liza of Lambeth*. Unlike his debut novel the study of man-woman relationship is carried on with deeper psychological analysis. The novelist presents his own views on marriage and with a view to depicting particular relations between men and women. The novelist handles the subject matter skillfully and studies all essential factors and situations which have significant role in furnishing a typical man-woman relationship. He says that the novel is a picture of life in a corner of England during the last years of the 19th century.

Here W.S. Maugham adopts similar trends. The novel *Mrs. Craddock* presents the pungency in married life and discord between husband and wife. Harmony and the trust have no role to play in the whole texture of the novel. They prove a couple of differing concepts having a twist in their mind antagonistic to each other. The setting of the novel is in London, Paris and in the country side of Kent.

Keywords: psychological analysis, harmony, socio-economic disparity, passion, sensual desires, straightforward.

1. ASSESSMENT OF BERTHA AS A TYPICAL MARRIAGE MANIAC WOMAN:

Bertha the Miss Lays of court Leys (a designation given to her) when returns to the town and when she meets Edward again, they remember their childhood days and it all cheers. This meeting attracts Bertha towards Edward's good physique; as a matter of fact the attraction of Edward's physique is irresistible to her, she wants to surrender herself to this magic of his

personality. Bertha starts to dream of her marriage with Edward without any consideration whether Edward loves her or not. Any notion of their socio-economic disparity in the same society is no hindrance to attaining her object of love. The first site attraction of Bertha does not give her a chance to make rational decision whether she should be the wife of her own tenant or not. This makes her bold enough to overcome the social conventions in which the opinion of the elderly members of the family is sought before taking this ultimate decision. It is the passion of Bertha that rules her mind and body, as the novelist portrays:

Oh, yes she wanted his to take her in his arms and kiss her, in imagination she felt his lips on hers, and the warmth of his breath made her faint with the anguish of love. (17)

Bertha's lust and passion are intolerable to her and she secretly goes to meet her over in the night. She fully determines to secure Edward as the perfect match for her as a husband and ignores all socio-economic mismatches. Unlike Bertha, Edward is a very conscious of his social position as she is his land lady, he hesitates when Bertha in the night stimulates him to kiss her but at last he finds himself helpless before Bertha's lust and becomes her passionate lover. Both lovers in the darkness gratify their lascivious desires. But when Edward comes out from this sensual pleasure he firmly realizes where he stands before Bertha. Bertha's assurance to accept him as her perfect husband takes Edward in her confidence. She accepts Edward as her best choice as a husband. She says to Edward:

"I want no better husband, you can give me happiness and I want nothing else in the world." (21)

Bertha demands Edward's permanent companionship and the roots of this desires spring from her lust, for it is more an infatuation rather than love. Her firm declaration to marry Edward before her guardians Miss Ley and Dr. Ramsay is stimulated by the same desire. To Dr. Ramsay it is inconceivable and inappropriate to argue with a tenant, but for Miss Ley Edward's physique is impressive. Edward does not fit as a suitable match under the requirement that Bertha's guardians expect in her husband. Edward's lower class heritage disqualifies him for the husband of the Miss Ley of Court Leys. But all these socio-economic bars seem insignificant to prevent the union of two persons of two opposite social status.

Bertha is an obstinate girl who under her passion to marry Edward ignores all the suggestions of her guardians. Bertha shows eagerness to marry Edward, but on the other hand her aunt Miss Ley is prejudiced in her opinions on marriage. Miss Ley does not believe in marriage institution and dislikes men; that's why she never married. She suggests that marriage is beneficial for only those women who are not capable to support their economy. So despite the strong opinion of her aunt that marriage is always a hopeless idiocy for a woman who has enough of her own to live upon, Bertha rules the roost and gets married to her tenant.

Bertha's expectations to Edward as a perfect husband are based on fancy. Edward of Bertha's imagination is a caring, talented and above all a permanent companion, who always loves her. Bertha's practical understanding is very poor. She neither logically takes any decision nor desires it. In the world of her fancy, Bertha only looks an extraordinary harmonious married life with Edward. Edward Craddock is a beau rather than a husband in Bertha's expectations, every incident and every moment is mirthful in Bertha's expected dreams where hardness of life has no place. Her marriage mania has narrated by the novelist as following:

Her sanguine temperament never allowed her to do anything half-heartedly, and she took no care now to conceal her feelings; love was a great sea into which she boldly plunged, uncaring whether she would swim or sink. (47)

Edward soon returns from romantic world to practical world and loses the old intensity of love and Bertha observes it very sharply. Edward is a hard worker and he could not remain with Bertha all the time as she had desired. His views on women are very pragmatic

2. COLLAPSE OF REAL AND IMAGINARY ASPECT OF CONJUGAL RELATION: AS CRUCIAL REASON OF CALAMITY:

Bertha when looks the initiation of collapse of imaginary and realistic world before her sight, she could not prevent tearing and these are "the first tears of her married life, the first she had wept since her father's death and they made her ashamed. She tried to control them, but could not and wept ungovernably" (80).

All the dissimilarities between dream world and real world constitute a new theme and mode of additional man-woman relationship in the novel *Mrs. Craddock*. After the marriage of Edward and Bertha the novel emerges out as a story of man-woman who represents different behavioral patterns and contrast views on worldly relations and life. Mrs. Craddock tells the story of Bertha Ley a sensitive and well educated middle class woman who develops a burning passion for a handsome farmer and marries him despite the different. In their stations Edward Craddock turns out to be a complacent male chauvinist.

The novel *Mrs. Craddock* is a depiction of story of typical man-woman relations that belong to different social levels. Bertha is the land lady who has never felt hardness of life and Edward, the tenant who is very laborious and unimaginative. For Edward it is impossible to stay at home all the time only to love her. So the novel becomes the study of a woman who marries beneath her. Maugham brought to the theme of marriage between those of different classes; a candid handling of Bertha's sexual passion.

Lusty and passionate Bertha feels coldness in her husband's behavior and lack of enthusiasm and excitement in marriage life. All expectations of Bertha crash with hard realities of life and just after their return from London; Edward was not the person as Bertha had believed him before marriage. The incomplete expectations of Bertha build the base for inharmonious man-woman relations in the novel.

Bertha's loneliness and her cry are the products of her own erroneous decision to marry a man of worldly affairs, but she does not seem to accept it practically as her guardians do. Every effort of Edward to tame Bertha's agitation is temporary. The internal nuptial problems of Bertha are because of her own impractical choice as Dr. Ramsay and Miss Ley could only presage it. Realities of inharmonious life bring dramatic changes in Bertha's behavior. Bertha, a very talkative girl before marriage converts into an unenthusiastic and silent woman after a short period of marriage.

Bertha's desire of passionate love from her husband is the root cause of the discordance. Edwards's following remark highlights the role of Bertha to create inconvenience in their relations:

“Bertha's a perfect terror. She wants me to spend my whole life in kissing her. Don't you think it's unreasonable, Aunt Polly? My motto is: everything is in its place and season.” (99-100)

Both husband and wife are not one on a particular subject, their frequent blaming on one another for the discomfort in marital relations is an evidence of their contrast temperament. Love is an all consuming passion to Bertha while it is tolerable in its proper time and place to Edward. More than this both belong to opposite milieu, having their own different patterns of life. Bertha is a fun loving lady and wants to live that sort of life which has only happiness and which is completely devoid of every trouble and adversity, but Edward believes in hard work and takes life as it is. Bertha accepts Edward's outer features and his attractive personality as his real self and it is here Bertha an educated and member of high class society makes a serious mistake and suffers in her whole life. Bertha makes her decision which is only based on Edward's outer appearance and it is not sufficient. With all her birth and breeding, she is a woman in whom the primitive animal instincts are strongly developed, and Edward's manly good-looks and great physical strength, the very perfume of strong tobacco and horses and cattle that always pervades him, appeal to this sensuousness in her irresistibly. Her fierce passion fires a feebler responsive love in him, and, in defense of their social inequality and of public opinion, she marries him.

Bertha cannot resist the truth that nothing is going on as she had expected and she loses her temper often and behaves very rudely and abnormally with Edward. Bertha's relations with Edward before marriage as a lover and after marriage are two contrasted phases of man-woman relationship of the same person. Edward, who was always the centre of attention to Bertha before marriage and in whose passionate love she always wanted to sink, finally becomes a bitter heart ache after their marriage.

Unsatisfactory marriage life creates insecurity complexes in Bertha's mind. She loses her patience when Miss Glover tells her that she may die during the birth of her child. She is not worried that she may die but she is extremely frightened with the idea that Edward would marry again after her death. With all her strength she wishes her husband's death for it is the only way to prevent Edward from second marriage. She imagines her husband's funeral and creates whole scene of Edward's burial in her imagination. Unsuccessful marriage life and failure to get full romance in it compels Bertha to wish her husband's death; who was most precious to her before marriage. Frustration of marriage makes Bertha behaviorally abnormal and cynical.

Thus Bertha who was Miss Ley of court Leys and Bertha who is Mrs. Craddock are two sharply opposite sides of same woman and this is also a contrast between imaginary and real situations. Miss Ley of court Leys belongs to the dream world and Mrs. Craddock is a woman whose all dreams have broken down when they are set against the hard substratum of reality. The disorders in the thinking pattern of two persons who belong to contrast milieu also constitute the core substance of novel, in which Mr. Maugham makes no attempt to disguise the fact that the basis of Bertha's regard for her vulgar husband was physical. He handles the general history of the marriage is rendered almost to perfection.

The disillusionment in married life makes Bertha almost hysterical. She pre-assumes the pain of child birth and becomes very nervous and she requests to Dr. Ramsay to make her senseless with chloroform at the time of child's birth. She also requests to Edward to remain with her at that time. Bertha has never seen adversities of life, only the idea of pain frightens her. In the world of her imagination there was no place for such pains but now she was face to face with worldly truths.

Bertha may not be declared a bad woman though she creates instability in marital relations. She is a victim of her wrong choice. Edward's separation even for a moment irritates her. She takes everything very negatively which Edward does. From the core of her heart she never wants to hurt Edward. Edward shows an extreme patience in every situation and he is a creature of the realistic world. He never creates imaginary situation and finds happiness in hard labour.

Bertha delivers a still born baby, after this all her rancor comes against Edward. Now she bemoans on the uselessness of pain that she bore at the time of her child's birth and she becomes very querulous and rebellious.. Edward soon overcomes his grief of still-born child unlike Bertha for whom it is a great loss. For his practical vision Edward is accused of being cruel, selfish and careless husband by Bertha.

Furthermore Bertha's statement "the love I want is the love of the man who will lose everything even his own soul, for the sake of a woman" clarifies her sensual desires or expectations to her husband, in whose point of view this idea is absolutely impractical (148). But Edward's continuous refusal to behave according to Bertha's expectations kindles fire of Bertha and this ego asserts as a land lady to whom Edward before their marriage was a mere tenant. Her question "is the land mine or your?" shows the resurgence of her ego that lay hidden during a brief spell of romance and marriage.

Bertha's situation in the novel is stressed with complications. Her decisions to leave Edward and to go to London and immediately her sense of loneliness in absence of Edward do show her ambivalent position.

In her series of letters addressed to her husband she shows her fluctuating attitude to married life: now ideal then bitter. Thus she obviously shows a web of complex relations with her husband. These are the product of her complex mind, as well as the records of bitter relations between husband and wife. One of her letter declares that separation is the only possible way for their happiness in rest of their life and requests him to forgive her for all discomforts she created. But her next letter is full of complains against Edward, that suggests uncertainty of Bertha's wish that whether she really demanding separation as a solution or again wants to unite with her husband.

The separation of a short period from her husband does not improve her marital agony as she expected. Her hopes to find Edward as a husband of her ideals every time disappoint her. She regrets on her decision to come back and again prefers separation but this time for forever. The excitement and the passionate love in search of which Bertha forgets all bitter experience of past life and returns to Court Leys are always out of her reach.

Bertha's ardent passion dies for Edward with the time and she finds him physically ugly and sexually unattractive. In the novel *Mrs. Craddock* man-woman relations undergoes sharp transition. This transition moves from excitement to coldness, from harmony to disharmony, from attraction to hatred and from happiness to permanent grief. The most significant change can be noted in Bertha's concept of marriage, for whom marriage is no longer a proper way to discover romance in life. Thus her relations to men exist in three phases. In first phase she is a passionate lover and cynical wife of Edward Craddock. In her second phase she is a woman of loose morals having extra-marital sexual connections with a boy and in third phase she is a woman frustrated in love. At last she accepts the authenticity of all those practical or clinical opinions on men and marriage that her middle aged and unmarried aunt has set for herself. So both of these women do possess their own experiences about man and woman relations, Miss Ley seems to have perceived them without getting married, Bertha experiences them by really having gone through these relations.

Bertha in her marital life finally demands freedom either through her death or her husband's, for the marriage is merely a bondage to her and her soul cries out for freedom. In *Mrs. Craddock*, Maugham first fully develops the theme of love as bondage. Thus Bertha is Maugham's first experiment in psychological analysis.

3. EXTRAMARITAL AFFAIR: AN ANOTHER FACTOR OF DISILLUSIONMENT AND IRRITATION IN DOMESTIC LIFE OF BERTHA:

Bertha's frustration of matrimonial relations drags her into extramarital relations with Gerald who is not only her relative but also younger than herself. Gerald's young age and good look stimulates Bertha to search romance that she never enjoyed with her husband. Gerald's relations with Bertha, (who is old enough to be his mother) are purely unlawful and inspired by blind sensual lust. To her Gerald becomes that desired man which she always expected in her fancy. Both Gerald and Bertha become unconscious of their long age gap while they are engrossed in sensuality. Bertha exhibits duality or split of behavior in respect of her relations with two men. She sometimes loves both of them and sometimes desires separation from them. That's why the novel *Mrs. Craddock* is rightly referred as a subtle and even masterly study of a certain feminine temperament that is possibly not so uncommon as we should like to believe.

Gerald's short term interaction to a married woman is promoted by his lust; Bertha fiercely excites his passionate sensuality. Bertha's unauthentic love with Gerald divides her into two separate personalities, in one of them she is a sensual lover of a young boy and in another a married, domestic wife. Few of the chapters of the novel only narrate Bertha's lasciviousness with Gerald in a very adulterous tone. Gerald's separation is again frustrating to Bertha and this sort of symptoms of a married woman is quite unsanctioned according to Miss Ley's lifelong experiences.

Prolonged dejection in marital life and ignorant attitude of her husband brings her to a situation where she has no expectations and life is endless boredom and hopeless affair to her. Her sudden cry and sudden expressionless behavior is quite abnormal that has set by conjugal inconvenience and maladjustment in it. Her decision of suicide obviously projects her dark marriage experiences. Time becomes impossible to pass that is because she has neither any future planes nor any positive expectations from Edward. The death of Edward finally releases her tormented soul from the bondage of marriage and its panic humiliations. Bertha's insanity combined with her presumptuous attitude to married life is laid bare when she refuses to see her husband's dead body. She tells to Miss Glover to do whatever they want with dead body. She is again in conflict whether she is happy or not on her husband's death.

Bertha has shown as a woman who finally rejects Gerald's importance in her life and she conquers her sensuality for a young man like Gerald. She burns all the letters of Gerald without reading them; it is the reason that's why W.S. Maugham calls this novel 'The triumph of love.' It is undoubtedly true that Bertha Craddock only received disillusionment and irritation in her relations to Edward but this is also a fact that she rejects all relations she established with people other than her husband. Bertha's relations to Gerald exemplify the same, thus evidently Maugham's goodness triumphs over his cynicism. The death of her husband finally moulds Bertha as a woman to whom loneliness is most desirable. In order to forget Edward's memories and to have absolute solitary state she destroys everything that belongs to Edward.

4. CONCLUSION:

The novel *Mrs. Craddock* is a study of marital life in provincial society. This study is directly under the points of views of the novelist himself. His statement “every marriage has its moments of despair. The great danger is in the onlooker, who may pay them too much attention and by stepping in render the difficulty permanent” certifies it to a considerable extent (104). The conclusion of the novel comes with the remark of the novelist on man-woman relationship in nuptial life highlighting its psychological aspects.

It is a fact that Bertha’s fanciful and impractical vision raptures her domestic life, but Edward cannot be set free totally from this responsibility. He rarely gives time to his domestic life and hard labor is everything to him. So Edward Craddock appears to have those vigorous qualities which have come to be associated with Lawrentian game keepers, but if he is sexually attractive he is also coarse and stupid.

Two women characters, Bertha Craddock and her aunt Mis Ley are actually two faces of W.S. Maugham’s. Bertha is his passionate, irrational and immature phase, while Miss Ley is quite reverse of it. Bertha and Miss Ley, embody two sides of Maugham’s character: the passionate, over-sensitive side that eventually loathes the person who has made inadequate response to his aggressive love making, and the ironic, skeptical side, which sees the futility and absurdity of everyone, including himself. The novel also has dealing with religious conflicts, disappointing man-woman relations and the problem of loneliness and all are supplementary to each other.

Women characters in the novel have shown conceptual disagreement on their relations to men. For instance if we analyze Miss Ley’s point of view about men, she is quite straightforward and she rejects every possibility of the presence of true love in between the opposite sex. In her opinion all sorts of man-woman relations are only the byproduct of sensual attraction and thus meant just for the satisfaction of sexual greed.

Unlike Miss Ley another woman character, Miss Glover has idealistic views on the same point. For Miss Glover marriage has spiritual values for men and women. Both ladies are unmarried but have completely contrast opinion on the union of man and woman through marriage. Characters of the novel represent variety of temperament and instincts. Edward; a very practical and laborious man, Bertha an impractical and

sensual woman, Miss Ley and Dr. Ramsay very sensible and rational guardians; Gerald a sensual young lover. The character of Edward Craddock, the gentleman-farmer, is drawn with absolute conviction. His lack of imagination, his impassivity, his equanimity, his good nature, his utter inability to put himself in another person's place, even the trait of obstinate vanity which leads to his too timely death-all these things combine to make a human mediocrity that is vividly alive. Bertha his wife curious admixture of sensuality, sensuousness, and intellectual pride is an extremely clever invention, but not so authentic as Craddock. Miss Leys, the aunt suffers, as a creation, from the same defects as Bertha. But Miss Glover, the Vicar's sister, another mediocrity, is in her way as good as Craddock.

Thus the novel is an exposure of mediocrity represented by various characters placed against aristocratic sensuality whose main aim in life is to satisfy their desires. So in this conflict of relations between these two classes it is the mediocre class of Edward that is not able to cope with the romantic expectations of a high class girl Bertha. So the novel *Mrs. Craddock* shows the various aspects of man-woman relations: now exiting then disappointing and ultimately the serious realization of changed outlook on life as shown by Bertha.

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