

# Human Relationship: In the Novels of William Somerset Maugham

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**Abstract - Maugham was a great observer of human relationships with a keen psychological insight into the relations of human beings and his description of these relations is par excellence. Maugham's novels have a psychological dealing of human relationship. He is down to earth realistic and never tried to glorify or moralize any of the relations or emotions of which we human beings are capable of.**

**Index Terms - Introvert, Psychological, Emotions, Autobiographical.**

## INTRODUCTION

William Somerset Maugham was a very introvert person. He has presented his ideas through his characters in his novels. He tried to present his innermost feelings through many of his characters. Since Maugham was keenly interested in the oddities of the human beings. He studied his fellow human beings and inexhaustibly observed varied emotions; the human being is capable of. He accepted that he could not be on one side of the road without being interested in the other side. He was practically mesmerized by the human nature and went to the extent of saying that he “ could never be bored by human beings as these provide him with many varied colorful and interesting experiences. “ His medical background gave him an excellent opportunity to study the most wonderful creation of God-the man. Watching suffering of human beings as a medical practitioner, opened variety of emotions that a person is capable of , and he was able to see the “Life in the row”. His job at St. Thomas Hospital made him watch natural and genuine presentation of various feelings and emotions. He perceived different shades of pain, thin line of Hope, crushing fear, anxiety and death. He never tried to glamorize death as he knew it is always disillusioning which raises t typical type of detachment in human beings. He was furious at the writers who used to glorify suffering as he believed “I

knew that suffering did not ennoble, it degrades. It makes men selfish, mean, petty and suspicious.”

Maugham never took anybody at the face value as he admits that ‘never liked any one at the first sight’. He was a widely travelled man so wherever he went he kept his eyes wide open, free from any prejudices and observed human beings and human relations. Inconsistency of human nature attracted him the most. He was greatly surprised to see that ‘the most incongruous traits should exist in the same person and for all that yield a plausible harmony’. His own sufferings made him sensitive enough to see the intricacies of the sufferings of the others. His own bitter experiences of life used to appear in his works and never let him present a normal and healthy relationship between men and women. He was unduly critical and bitter against the fair sex and portrayed them as the cause of the suffering and disaster of his heroes. Maugham could never perceive and picture a happy marriage and union of lovers. Of Human Bondage, Maugham's most autobiographical novel, tells us the story of unrequited love and the selfishness of the lady. The hero, Philip Carey, suffers for his infatuation for a waitress, Mildred. Blinded by his feelings for her, Philip could not forget her, though he was aware of her unfaithfulness. Philip could not find the reason why he loved the lady though he despised her the most, still he was not able to get over the passion for her. He loved and despised her at the same time. She cheated him several times but Philip kept accepting her blinded to her unfaithfulness which culminated in a deep anguish. He over worked in an attempt to forget his existence and married Sally as a refuge from his suicidal thoughts due to his deformity. In fact Philip's marriage is simply a projection of the marriage that Maugham himself had tried to make. Here we can see how Maugham has presented an unholy and devastating relationship of man and

woman. It was a deep passion for a worthless woman that caused great anguish and agony to Philip.

Walter Fane, the biologist of 'The Painted Veil' marries a Kitty as he was awfully in love with her in a desperate hope that one day she would start loving him.

Kitty married him to get married before her younger sister but could not love him as he 'loves so slavishly' and felt disgusted with him. On discovering unfaithfulness of Kitty, Walter Fane overworked and at his death bed Kitty posed as a faithful wife just in an attempt to seek forgiveness from him. Maugham tried to present the agony of unrequited love and a tense and fruitless relationship between husband and wife. He made them live under the same roof to hate each other the more. Again it is woman who is responsible for the tragedy.

In *Liza of Lambeth*, Maugham has emphasized how the relations become a cobweb for human beings and cause immense suffering under the cover of relationship for life. Liza got infatuated by Jim, an forty year old man, father of children, who was not happy with his wife but had to remain in the wed lock for the sake of his children. Liza blinded by passion surrendered and died by a miscarriage. Again it is unhealthy relationship between man and woman which caused a tragedy. The tragic death of innocent and beautiful Liza shocked the reader and showed the inability of Maugham to produce a healthy relationship. In *The Moon and the Six Pence*, Maugham presented the plight of Dirk Stroeve, the kindest being, who lost his beloved wife to his ailing friend and was still kind to her and provided for her comfortable life, and was ready to accept her, in case she change her mind and return to him. Again Maugham pictured a noble soul suffering at the cruel hands of a sensual and unfaithful lady. In *Cakes and Ale*, Maugham showed Edward Driftfield, suffering at the hands of an unfaithful wife, who left him, and caused great despair to the writer.

After reading all this , a clear picture of man woman relationship emerges and in fact, Maugham never depicted any marriage without tension and disturbance. Maugham pictured woman as the main cause of sufferings and marriage is nothing but an arrangement for woman to gratify all her ambitions and desires. In *The Razor's Edge* Isabel confessed 'she had never loved her husband but as he was rich and she had to marry someone' she married him. So

Maugham could not create a happy love bond in the marriage. Kitty in *The Painted Veil* married Walter Fane for fear of spinsterhood. Maugham's lady characters never hesitate, going outside their marriage for the gratification of their sensual desires. Kitty in *The Painted Veil* and Mildred in *The Moon and the Six Pence* are the perfect example of the infidelity of his women characters. Byron's famous words that love is "woman's whole existence" cannot be applied to the woman in Maugham's works. For the Maugham's female characters love is merely a means of dominating man and through him achieving material ends, comfortable life, social status and gratification of sensual desires.

But, although there were constant disturbed marriages, both the husband and wife have a feeling of responsibility towards their children. Maugham's characters be it Charles Townsend in the *Painted Veil* was not willing to divorce his wife for the sake of his child. In *Liza of Lambeth*, Tim Blakstone perceives no reason to leave his wife which means suffering to his children. He didn't love his wife but he loved his children and cared for them. In *The Razor's Edge*, Isabel didn't love her husband but she didn't want to leave him as he cared a lot for his children and the children adored him. In most of Maugham's novels parents feel a lot of affection and responsibility towards their children. Henry Marturin I *The Razor's Edge* very carefully built up his son , Grey's career and thus secured his future and made him lead a happy life. The tender bond between Isabel and her mother is very touching. We do perceive a deep relation between brother and sister in *The Razor's Edge*. Elliot was always worried about the well being of his sister.

Maugham's novels have a psychological dealing of human relationship. Maugham, himself, was too much attached to his mother and her death was a severe shock to him that he thought he would never "get over". Philip in *Of Human Bondage* suffered the same agony and expressed Maugham's own distress and misery. Maugham presented very skillfully the suffering of a child, his agony and his loneliness. He gave the readers an insight into the innocent heart of a little child like a psychologist<sup>6</sup>. Maugham presented the helplessness and suffering of a child and a pathetic account of a physically handicapped child who suffered humiliation from all. Maugham wanted to highlight the unsatisfactory relationship of the child and the adults of that time. Philip's ruinous bondage

with Mildred in *The Moon and Six Pence* is somewhat an unconscious death-wish because of his club foot. It shows a psychological handling of character which is very complex one and his infatuation for a woman whom he despises the most, is a symbolic suicide attempt by him. Philip's emotions and experiences were Maugham's own as he, himself, had been humiliated severely for his stammering. Maugham showed that a person having been made to suffer for no fault of his, could not cherish normal relationship with fellow men and women, he needs extra love, affection and care to soothe his soul. Maugham had given a detailed picture of the suffering of a handicap that turned into an atheist as God has not cured his deformity. In *Of Human Bondage*, the school boys were unsympathetic and cruel, who were responsible for the mental and emotional suffering of Philip at the school. As a result he becomes introvert and sarcastic, rather cynical also. Maugham himself has said, "I am not a social person, I cannot get drunk and feel a great love for my fellow men. I can never forget myself. The hysteria of the world repels me, and I never feel more aloof when I am in the midst of a throng surrendered to a violent feeling of mirth and sorrow."

Though in *The Razor's Edge* Larry had a deep infatuation for his classmates and friends. Maugham painted a beautiful picture of pleasing relationships in this novel. All the friends were worried about Larry and tried their best to help him. They helped him to get over the shock of war and helped him to settle down. Throughout the novel, Maugham has presented here a true picture of lasting relations and normal human relationship.

Mothers are always very loving and affectionate in the novels of Maugham. Be it Mrs. Bradley in *The Razor's Edge*, Liza's mother in *Liza of Lambeth*, Mrs. Blakestone in *Liza of Lambeth*, Souzanne Rouvier of *The Razor's Edge* or the immoral Kitty in *The Painted Veil*, all have a deep sense of responsibility and love towards their children. It may be a reflection of Maugham's own mother, who had been very good to him. Although Maugham was very cruel towards woman, he has drawn a very convincing picture of mothers.

Maugham has created a complex web of social relations in his novels. Elliott in *The Razor's Edge*, cared very much for society. He always tried to be in the company of great, popular and celebrated. He took great care of his appearance and dresses and thinks it

necessary for a social being. The social atmosphere of that time was reflected very well through his works and the tailor and butler made society attracted the youth of the time. The grand parties were the venues of the relations and for young and beautiful these parties and dinners meant enjoyment and happiness. Young couples go for picnics but infatuation to these parties shows hypocrisy and snobbishness of human nature. Relationship between church priests, vicars etc. with the common people don't seem to be very close in Maugham's works. Maugham himself had a very poor experience of the priests in his life, so was reflected in his works where most of these seem to be selfish and mean. Only in *The Painted Veil* we could see a favorable picture of French nuns, taking care of the sick and the poor of the society.

The pressure of social relations was a pressure that crushed Liza in *Liza of Lambeth*, who could not express her love openly and was constantly insulted by her neighbors and society. In *The Razor's Edge*, Elliott was very much worried about his dresses and furniture to earn a reputation in the society. In *The Painted Veil* Kitty's mother took great care to arrange satisfactory and economic parties under the pressure of the existing fashion.

So it is clear that Maugham was a great observer of human relationships. He had a keen psychological insight into the relations of human beings and his description of these relations is par excellence. He had always derived his characters and themes from the real life situations, so it gave them a fervor and elegance unsurpassable. Maugham was also aware of his limitations also, he wrote "I have seen men through my own idiosyncrasies. A buoyant, optimistic, healthy and sentimental person would have seen the same people quite differently." Maugham touched all the emotions and sentiments of human being very scientifically. He has a psychological insight also. But nowhere Maugham tried to glamorize human relationship. He is down to earth realistic and never tried to glorify or moralize any of the relations or emotions of which we human beings are capable of. Maugham's novels are epitome of human relationship and touched varied and colorful aspects of human heart. His presentation of the relations of men and women, parents and children, friends, fellow workers and society is real and life-like. His works are the true handbook of complicated human relationship.

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