



Different kinds of bondages depicted in Somerset Maugham's novel of *Human Bondage*

A Vasanthi

Assistant Professor, KG College of Arts and Science, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

The present study examines the various and popular bondages prevailed among the human relationship. Human race is not an independent one, here both men and women are interdependent. These bondages initiate from the birth of a human being. Then it leads to different stages. William Somerset Maugham's "*Of Human Bondage*" is an autobiographical novel. Some of his personal experiences are recorded in this work. The author in this novel treats the themes of sex and economy and their major role in deciding human relationships. These two decide bondages in every individual's life. The writer shows male chauvinism also responsible for these bondages. The instances shown in the novel are of variegated shades. The protagonist Philip Carey is moulded with the alloy of imagination and many personal experiences of the author. Every individual has strong bondage with nature, this can be also defined by the term 'destiny'. Philip feels that the society treats him as a murderer, since his parents died immediately after his birth, there he begins his life with the bondage of environment. The major character is a clubfooted one, this deformation is a bondage that inflicts self-suffering, and here the bondage of torment starts. Since birth until death a human being remains in all these types of bondages. This analysis explores the various factors responsible for all the human bondages that remains the reality of human race.

Keywords: clubfooted, human relationship, male chauvinism, personal experiences, murderer, sex and economy

Introduction

Somerset Maugham was a British novelist, short story writer and playwright. He was a modern writer and became popular during 1914 – 1939. He lost his parents at the age of 10 and was raised by his paternal uncle who was emotionally cold. He was not interested to become lawyer but took more effort, trained and qualified as a physician. His first novel was *Liza of Lambeth* (1897), it became more popular. This book made him a reputed writer and he gave up medicine. He offered his full time for writing. His successful period was from 1914, during that period he produced 10 plays and 10 novels, all remained well known. In 1915, Maugham published his masterpiece *Of Human Bondage*. Initially it was criticized and described as the romantic obsession of Philip Carey, the protagonist of the novel. Theodore Dreiser, the American Novelist and Critic, referred the work as genius. He compared this novel with Beethoven's Symphony and his review elevated its rank. Maugham expressed *Of Human Bondage* is semiautobiography but it contains more autobiographical elements. Maugham portrayed himself as the central figure of the novel Philip Carey. The deformity shown for the protagonist is clubfoot that is rather than the author's deformity of stammering. Maugham intermingled the fictional and non-fictional which is the speciality of his work. This novel picturises the emotional isolation of a young man and his view on his life. Philip Carey is highly sensitive about his handicap. Though he is clubfoot that gave him confidence instead of inferiority. He meets different women of different attitudes and develops relationships with them. His extraordinary confidence is the reason for these relationships. His first flirt with Mildred is unforgettable to him, even amidst many relationships. After his marriage with Salley, he puts an end to his emotional excitement at the age of 30.

Depicted Bondages

The mother dies after giving birth to a child is a nature's game.

Philip's father also dies of blood poisoning. Our body is the prison for our immortal soul. When time comes it gathers the strength to break the prison and releases itself. The orphan Philip Carey feels that all treats him as if he were a murderer. According to the author it is an environmental bondage. The monetary bondage keeps man in fetters. The ritualistic bondage keeps man in touch with myths of various religions. Deformation is a bondage that causes self-suffering. The barren women have bondage with self-guilt and underestimation. Philip considers his school as his prison and many children have the same attitude. The maid of Vicarage Mary Anne explains the domestic servitude as bondage. Earning for one's livelihood is a professional bondage. There is inter-dependence in sex, or else one cannot satisfy the other. There is a domestic bondage, which cannot allow a person to live as per his wish. This is evident in Mrs. Cary's life. She is not allowed to wear flower or feather. The economic bondage makes a person to go against the tradition or society's rule. Human beings cannot escape from all such bondages since his birth till death.

"He disengaged himself from Miss Watkin's arms, and she kissed him again. Then he went to her sister and bade her good-bye too". (Chap. I, 9, e-source)

The bondage of birth

Birth is an inevitable bondage one cannot escape from it; one has to live as one has born. Philip born with a club foot and he is not an ordinary boy. Another tragedy is his parents die at his birth. He was blamed for that apart from his disability. Children are born with genetic characteristics. These genetic characteristics express their originality and remain throughout their life. This is nature's bondage. He cannot behave differently as he is possessed with genetic qualities. The individual thus imprisoned in the human body unable to react or respond though he wished. His subconscious mind also supports the nature's order. He

remains the same all through his life. Sometimes the child may be born with a silver spoon or the child may be born in poverty like a handicapped, malnutrition and with some miserable diseases. The bondage of birth is the source of desperation.

“He was very happy in the large, warm bed, with those soft arms about him. He tried to make himself smaller still as he cuddled up against his mother, and he kissed her sleepily.” (Chap. I, 3, e-source)

The bondage of body

The nature even controls the body. The body is not allowed to function freely. It has to follow certain rules and conditions. An old man's body won't co-operate with all his desires. The age factor restricts the entire joy of life. The man in his death bed, if he is so attached to life is like a leech. Mr. Carey is an example of an old man, who wishes to live long but his body couldn't obey his desire. No one will be ready to accept them as invalid or incapable. Miss Wilkinson tries to enjoy the life to the fullest. The spirit inside the human body fights against the desires. The body never obeys the command of the spirit. Living being cannot escape from this bondage. In several occasions, the human spirit finds expression of lust. “She looked at him with a new interest, and brightness came into her faded eyes.” (Chap. LXXXVIII, 893, e-source)

The bondage of the spirit

Spirit rebels violently against the body. Mildred is an example for this case. Mildred was “tall and thin, with narrow hips and the chest of a boy”. She is a waitress in a restaurant and Philip falls in love with her. When she finds a wealthy person she refuses Philip and accepts the other. In the later part of her life, she was in a helpless situation as she became street prostitute. She expects Philip's love but Philip was not in a position to accept her. The spirit rebels against the refusal. There is no limit for human desires. Philip wishes to have Mildred as his own and his underrating of her as a girl of good demeanor. He used her to satisfy his lust. He is not ready to accept her as his life partner. There is a struggle between the need and morality. The desires of spirit compel Miss Wilkinson to have sexual relationship with Philip. This is the case of Norahan too. Miss Wilkinson's spirit persuades her to trap Philip to satisfy her physical pleasures. Philip feels jealousy when he observes Mildred's attention for other men. Miss Wilkinson also feels jealous as Philip develops friendship with the daughters of Major from India. Jealousy of sex is common for both men and women. The human mind tries to escape from the agonies through enjoyments. Sex is a source of joy but unfulfilled love inflicts pain in the human mind. Philip wishes to see Mildred but he is scared to meet her. The sex desire is due to the compulsion of spirit. The human body is only the medium to seek enjoyment. The ecstasy one enjoys in sex is preserved in the mind as the body is connected to the spirit. At times inter-dependence in sex brings agony for the human soul. One cannot at the same time have sex and keep the woman as his wife for the whole life. The satisfaction of desires is necessary for both the body and the spirit but that doesn't mean that one has to ignore one's spirit and involve in wild desires of body. Philip wishes to see Mildred but he is not sure whether it is out of love or fear. Death is the end of human life. Philip watches death with more curiosity. Death allows the spirit to escape from the prison of body. When we compare body bondage and spirit bondage, spirit bondage is more complicated.

‘You can't imagine what a pleasure it is to me just to sit opposite and look at you. I've yearned for you. I was sick for a sight of you.’ (Chap. LX, 590, e-source)

The economic bondage

Monetary need compels a person to disregard moral and ethic values. Fancy price dies of hunger. The model girls in the art studios have to face the degradation of nudity. They are even subjected to molestation and harassment. The human self-experience is the most racking factor of the economic bondage. In this novel sex and money are the two major objects which human beings long for. Sex gives pleasure to physique. But money is needed for every individual's existence. Without money none can achieve anything. Before money morality is null. ‘Women have no real feeling for art,’ he said. ‘They only pretend they have.’ (Chap. LXV, 633, e-source)

To lead luxurious life and for the existence the girls are even ready to sell their body. Circumstances force an individual to do mean jobs like prostitution and gambling for money. Money reaches the place higher to God. The protagonist, Philip's income in the beginning is not sufficient to satisfy his needs. He struggled to get a steady income. Philip sold the domestic articles in auction for money. Every individual is disturbed by the thought of money. Professor Frau gets worried over the decision of the tenets vacating their rooms. The English man advises Philip for his self-tidiness.

“He was very poor and made no secret that the lessons he was giving Philip meet the difference between meat for his dinner and bread and cheese.” (Chap. XVI, 143, e-source)

Without money the life remains meaningless. The life of young artists in Paris is governed by money. Money is the next ruler for a man. Getting freedom from this economic bondage is impossible for all. Its clutch is too strong. The Bohemian like Cronshaw is least worried about money. But Fanny Price fails in making both ends meet. Without money one cannot pursue one's hobby or improve one's talent. Philip finds living in Paris more expensive. Fanny Price commits suicide as she finds the source of income is insufficient. Though Miguel Ajuria, the Spaniard, expresses her hatred for money, she lives in the very bad circle of money. The love affair between Philip and Mildred is governed by money. Mildred responds Philip's love with the worth of the gift given by Philip. The love decreased and increased according to the value of the gift. Philip says, “I suppose money is important than love.” The child of Mildred needs money for rehabilitation. Maugham writes about the suicides, “Thing, I noticed people don't commit suicide for love, they commit suicide only for money.” When a man gets the sufficient wealth then he starts comparing himself with others and he worries about his social status. He becomes more selfish. For a rich man a thing of luxury may be necessity but for a poor man it is an exciting show. Most of us expect money with less effort or through fortune. Each and every individual is consistently pestered by the thought of money. The bondage of money never allows us for the renunciation of worldly life and adopts austerity. If one avoids the glamour and glitter of life will be isolated. Monetary needs troubles all. The life of mendicancy is not comfortable. The mendicant, the beggar, and the economically deprived suffer from the pangs of poverty. All curse their fate for their plight, all remain dissatisfied of their condition.

Conclusion

Of all beings in the world, human beings are the most blessed species. Man is a social animal and loves to be gregarious. No man is an island and everyone is part of a whole humanity. Unfortunately, human beings are discriminated one against the other on the basis of race, religion, colour, creed, economy and so on. Liberty, equality and fraternity suffer a setback here and it causes inhuman behavior. Human beings love each other for the mutual happiness and joy. Love never stays for long. It ceased to exist as man cools of his passions. Sex is passion for the man when it is tasted. Philip cannot forget Mildred because she was wild and frank. She becomes an easy prey to the love of other men. Her destruction is an example for the human degeneration. Philip the protagonist of the novel used his disability of club-foot as a stepping stone to come up in life and gain social recognition as a man of success to lead happy domestic life. Initially his disability affected his growth but later his social mingling lifted him. The novel also depicts Philip's early experience with women, especially the old governess Miss Wilkinson and the penny novel writer Norah Nesbitt marked with pathos and disdain. Social support can moderate the intensity of a stress reaction. Social support gives the thought of our importance and value by others. Philip longs for such social support.

“During his last year at St. Luke's Philip had to work hard. He was contented with life.” (CXVI, 1170, ebook)

Though initially it remains unanswered, but finally, Philip finds compassion and tolerance for all his questions like his introspection, his shyness, his feelings of inferiority, and even his obsession with Mildred and so on. Sally Athelny's sincere concern raises Philip to the peerage. He regained self-confidence with the support of Sally. Maugham's real point of view in this novel is that the protagonist has finally overcome his disability with the proper social bondage. This paper centers the importance of social bondage and its importance in lifting an individual from his isolation to happy domestic life. As Burt says, even in the imagery of the final scenes of the novel the reader senses Sally's affinity to nature and the fulfillment associated with harvest. *Of Human Bondage* was initially called *The Artistic Temperament of Stephen Carey*, then *Beauty from the Ashes*, a quotation *Aspects of the Novel*, EM Forster wrote: "The final test of a novel will be our affection for it, as it is the test of our friends, of anything else that we cannot define." He might have been writing about W Somerset Maugham's masterpiece, *Of Human Bondage* from Isaiah. *Of Human Bondage* is Maugham's bildungsroman and it is the book in which he demonstrated — in a way that was much more self-evident to the Orwells or Connollys than it is to people today — that English fiction could be written with the apparent conversational ease, the elegant, all-but-invisible plain style that the French had perfected in the late 19th century.

This paper also proves that the various social bondages lead an individual to either constructive side or destructive path. The readers can also witness the social bondages give self-realization to each and every characters.

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