

CHAPTER - II
THE CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE

The very first collection of Katherine Mansfield published in 1911 has two stories entitled 'A Birthday' and 'A Blaze' which could be said to provide two major points of reference for the analysis of man-woman relationship in her fictional work. The stories are well contrasted in terms of theme and character. The story, 'A Blaze' is about Elsa, her husband, Victor and her one time friend, Max. Even after Elsa's marriage with Victor, Max wants to continue his relationship with her. Elsa's beauty has evoked firey passions in his heart and he feels that she has "lighted the bonfire" and she cannot "prevent her house from burning". Fully conscious of the fact that she is another man's wife. Elsa does not respond to him. In a chivalric expression of kneeling before her, Max makes a passionate declaration of his love. He says :

" I feel like a savage. I want your whole body. I want to carry you away to a cave and love you until I kill you - you can't understand how a man feels. I kill myself when I see you - I'm sick of my own strength that turns in upon itself, and dies, and rises new-born like a Phoenix out of the ashes of that horrible death. Love me just this once, tell me a lie, say that you do - you are always lying ". 1

There is a kind of primitive ferocity in Max's declaration, coupled with a kind of death-wish. That's why he says to Elsa that 'both of them are rotten to the core'. Elsa's response to this loaded, unfettered expression of love is this :

" I'll make a confession. Every word you have said is true. I can't help it. I can't help seeking admiration

any more than a cat can help going to people to be stroked. It's my nature. I'm born out of my time. And yet, you know, I'm not a common woman. I like men to adore me - to flatter me - even to make love to me - but I would never give myself to any man. I would never let a man kiss me..... even ". 2

The passage quoted here is important because it brings out an important aspect of the man-woman relationship theme in the early creative period of Katherine Mansfield. Elsa, supremely conscious of her beauty and power, knows that it is in her nature to seek admiration from men. She loves being adored and flattered by them. But she describes herself as a woman 'who is not common' and 'who is born out of her time'. Elsa is thus fully capable of making decisions and choices. It is true that these decisions and choices occur within the institutional framework of marital bonds. In the scene towards the end of the story, she is a loving wife in the arms of a proud husband. What is important here, however, is to note this strong confident nature of feminine sensibility in the presence of which Max is a rejected lover and Victor is a proud husband. The story, 'A Blaze' then exemplifies one important type of man-woman relationship in Katherine Mansfield; important because it constitutes a point of reference. In this man-woman relationship, the marriage bonds are intact. The value of marital fidelity is maintained but within this traditional frame of morality, Mansfield describes a woman who is 'born out of her time' because she can dominate, decide and arrange the course of her life.

If one compares this story with another, entitled 'A Birthday' one gets a perfect contrast. The hero of this story is Andreas Binzer, the husband of Anna. Anna is having labour pains and Andreas goes out to call the doctor. The portrait of Andreas as drawn in the story is that of a typical, successful authoritarian husband. While Anna is suffering in the labour room, Andreas is busy calculating and arranging his life in practical terms :

" A boy? Yes, it was bound to be a boy this time..."
 "What's your family, Binzer?" "Oh, I've two girls and a boy ! " A very nice little number. Of course he was the last man to have a favourite child, but a man needed a son. "I'm working up the business for my son ! Binzer and Son ! It would mean living very tight for the next ten years, cutting expenses as fine as possible; and then - " 3

The portrait of Anna as drawn in the story is that of a dutiful, obedient wife who tailors her life to the needs of her husband. Andreas is the product of male-dominated society-strong, practical, successful. He is the patriarch of the house. While Anna is suffering in the labour room upstairs, Andreas looks at a photograph of his wife taken only four years ago and ruminates :

"No," he reflected, "that smile is not at all her happiest expression - it was a mistake to let her have it taken smiling like that. She doesn't look like my wife - like the mother of my son." Yes, that was it, she did not look like the mother of a son who was going to be partner

in the firm. The picture got on his nerves; he held it in different lights, looked of it from a distance, sideways, spent, it seemed to Andreas afterwards, a whole life time trying to fit it in. The more he played with it the deeper grew his dislike of it". 4

The passage shows that at the centre of marital life stands Andreas' radiating power, confidence and domination. The emphasis is on 'my wife', 'my son', 'my firm' and he handles Anna's photograph as though it were an object of possession. He would like to throw away the photograph but for its expensive frame. The proprietary instinct of a possessive patriarch is clearly shown here in vivid terms. That is why towards the end of the story when Dr.Erb comes down to tell him that Anna has delivered a boy, Andreas exultantly declares, 'nobody can accuse me of not knowing what suffering is,' Ironically, The statement is not so much of an expression of his sense of suffering as of his proud male ego. Behind his apparent sensitiveness and equally superficial knowledge of suffering, Andreas is a typical supreme figure of a patriarch. For him Anna is just a creature to be arranged as he wills it in the total scheme of his practical life.

The two stories thus, establish in contrastive terms some major dimensions of the man-woman relationship in Katherine Mansfield. One, the man-woman relationship is governed by the marital bonds. In other words, there is a strong impact of the social institution of marriage with its traditional morality and values of fidelity. Katherine Mansfield thus, provides a contrastive focus on the man-woman relationship as it occurs in the

social institution of marriage. Anna's life has completely receded into the background. She is just a shadowy figure in her husband's life. Elsa, however, is substantial, capable, within the marriage bond, of limited decisions and choices.‡

But not all women characters in other stories are like Elsa, though most married men are like her husband, Andreas. And this leads us to another very significant aspect of man-woman relationship that Katherine Mansfield explores in her stories. Broadly speaking, this aspect is psychological in that it is concerned with the problem of happiness and selfhood implicit in matrimonial life. Happiness and selfhood constitute a major problematic of man-woman relationship in Mansfield. In a story entitled Poison, the husband asks his wife Beatrice, 'You have been happy, haven't you?' and Beatrice says, 'Happy? Happy? Oh, God - if you knew what I feel at this moment..... Happy ! My Wonder ! My Joy ! ' and declares in her husband's arms, 'Yes, I am yours'. Immediately afterward, however, the postman brings the newspaper in which the news of some poison trial is flashed. A grim contrast to their early passionate love making is provided when Beatrice talks about her sense of guilt in relation to the process of poisoning inherent in married relations:

"Haven't you ever thought" - she was pale with excitement - "of the amount of poisoning that goes on? It's the exception to find married people who don't poison each other - married people and lovers. Oh," she cried, "the number of cups of tea, glasses of wine, cups of coffee that are just tainted. The number I've

had myself, and drunk, either knowing or not knowing - and risked it. The only reason why so many couples" - she laughed - "survive, is because the one is frightened of giving the other the fatal dose. That does take nerve! But it's to come sooner or later. There's no going back once the first little dose has been given. It's the beginning of the end, really- don't you agree? Don't you see what I mean?" 5

The husband tries to describe his wife Beatrice as some one who fills others with radiance and new life. But as he drinks from the glass he finds the taste 'bitter and queer'. The symbolism of poison thus comes full circle in this story. Mansfield thereby provides a deep insight into the very structure of man-woman relationship as it occurs in the context of the social institution of marriage.

Katherine Mansfield carefully selects the details of marriage institution as they affect man-woman relationship. One major detail is the biological fact of child bearing. In 'At The Bay' for instance, the innocent world of ^{Linda Burnell's children is contrasted with} Linda's own sense of exhaustion and the loss of freedom brought about by child bearing. In the story 'Frau Fischer', the young narrator heroine declares that she hates child-bearing. In the story, 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel' the two young daughters of Colonel Pinner, Josephine and Constantia live a spiritually impoverished life because their entire growth has taken place under the patriarchal authority of Colonel Pinner. Even after the death of their father they feel his dominating presence everywhere. Their growth is stunted and their sense of being entrapped seems to be inevitable. A few examples of

the authoritarian husbands are Stanley in the Burnell stories, Harry in 'Bliss' and Colonel Pinner in 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel'. Mansfield thus notes three decisive aspects of marriage institution as they affect man-woman relationship- the biological fact of child-bearing, the patriarchal institution of the family and the traditional authoritarian role of the husband who is another example of male-dominated society. The psychological and existential analysis of man-woman relationship which comes up in her stories is thus firmly rooted in an awareness of biological facts and sociological categories inherent in the institution of marriage.

It is quite obvious that Katherine Mansfield does make a subtle and continuing distinction between love and marital loyalties. Love is an individual emotion. It is an expression of one's identity and general orientation in the world. It is related to the categories of freedom, authenticity, choice and, on the whole, dignity of being. In the rigid institution of marriage with its own traditional values of male dominated society, this love is either lost or it is impoverished or it turns into guilt, hatred, or sometimes into a passive self-destroying kind of tolerance. The possibilities are multiple and they are all explored by Katherine Mansfield. But as has already been said that the major focus is on the problematic of selfhood and happiness.

This problematic context of man-woman relationship occurs as a recurrent theme in the stories of Katherine Mansfield. In the



story, 'Je ne Parle pas Francais' the narrator hero, describing his friend Dick, says :

How can one look the part and not be the part?
Or be the part and not look it? Isn't looking - being?
Or being - looking? At any rate who is to say that it
is not ? 6

The distinction made here between looking and being - between role and identity, appearance and reality - is significant because it sums up the very nature of the problematics of selfhood; consequently, references to the divided self or two selves abound in Mansfield's stories. It is this divided self which is at the root of the identity crisis of most of her heroines.

The Burnell stories are a major example of this problematics. The Burnells constitute a family in which with the grand mother, on the one hand, and Linda, Stanley and the children on the other, covers three generations. The grand mother Mrs. Fairfield lives with total acceptance quite characteristic of her old age. Totally resigned to fate and life, she has no complaints, nor regrets. The children, Isabel, Lottie and Kezia establish a self contained world of innocence. This world is an idyllic one. It includes games, make-belief animals and the garden. It is a joyous world of childish pranks and exciting adventures. The apparently calm and internally turbulent world of Beryl, Linda and Stanley is posited between Mrs. Fairfield's world of quiet acceptance and the children's world of joyous innocence.

Beryl is the young, unmarried sister of Linda Burnell. The family has shifted to a new house in a colony close to the sea beach. Stanley has done everything to make the house luxurious and self-sufficient. But the change of place in no way cheers up young Beryl. She continues to suffer from a kind of internal vacuum. She is a lonely girl to such an extent that she has no one to whom she can communicate her loneliness. She feels that her youth is withering away. She is full of romantic dreams with a wistful longing for someone who would make her life meaningful. But for her this waiting is full of restlessness. She writes letters as an act of communication in which nothing really gets communicated. Mansfield again describes the theme of the divided self in Beryl's psychological make-up. The distinction between the real self and the unreal one is made thus:

It was her other self who had written that letter. It not only bored, it rather disgusted her real self.

"Flippant and silly", said her real self. Yet she knew that she'd send it and she'd always write that kind of twaddle to Nan Pym. In fact it was a very mild example of the kind of letter she generally wrote.⁷

There is a kind of romantic narcissism in Beryl's character which is brought out in the mirror image, recurrently used in the stories. The mirror image has a double function; it brings out the narcissistic element in Beryl and it also establishes the tragic contrast and opposition between the two selves - the real and the unreal one :

How despicable ! Despicable ! Her heart was cold with rage. "It's marvellous how you keep it up", said she to the false self. But then it was only because she was so miserable - so miserable. If she had been happy and leading her own life, her false life would cease to be. She saw the real Beryl - a shadow..... a shadow. Faint and unsubstantial, she shone. What was there of her except the radiance? And for what tiny moments she was really she. Beryl could almost remember everyone of them. At those times she had felt: "Life is rich and mysterious and good, too". Shall I ever be that Beryl for ever? Shall I ? How can I? And was there ever a time when I did not have a false self?g

This sense of inauthenticity, of a non-genuine existential mode is the source of tragedy in most man-woman relationships that Mansfield describes in her stories. This is evident in the married relationship of Linda and Stanley. Stanley is a successful businessman, full of complacency and smugness. He lives his life on routine track of money, house, children and success. His values are drawn from the ideal of security. Linda, however, has a sensitivity which goes beyond the value of security and domesticity. She is also full of dreams, wistful desires and aspirations which do not find fulfilment in her actual life. They constitute an inner secrecy in which she alone participates in her loneliness. These dreams and aspirations are described as "they" :

They listened, they seemed to swell out with some mysterious important content, and when they were full she felt that they smiled. But it was not for her, only, their sly secret smile; they were members of a secret society and they smiled among themselves. Sometimes, when she had fallen asleep in the daytime, she woke and

could not lift a finger, could not even turn her eyes to left or right because THEY were there; sometimes when she went out of a room and left it empty, she knew as she clicked the door to that THEY were filling it. And there were times in the evenings when she was upstairs, perhaps, and everybody else was down, when she could hardly escape from them. Then she could not hurry, she could not hum a tune; if she tried to say ever so carelessly - "Bother that old thimble"- THEY were not deceived. THEY knew how frightened she was; THEY saw how she turned her head away as she passed the mirror. What Linda always felt was that THEY wanted something of her, and she knew that if she gave herself up and was quiet, more than quiet, silent, motionless, something would really happen.g

Like her sister Beryl, Linda, too, is waiting for someone who does not turn up. The loneliness of Linda is brought out in the symbol of the aloe plant which blooms once in hundred years.

The Beryl story is continued and explored deeper in 'At The Bay'. Here once again the two sisters Beryl and Linda continue to live their life of boredom and loneliness. Set in the country close to the sea-beach, the story describes all the people living in the colony. A contrast to Beryl and Linda is provided in the character of Mrs. Harry Kember. Mrs. Kember is a modernized woman who smokes and treats men as though she is one of them. Her non-conformist ways of behaviour create in the whole neighbourhood a number of rumours about her. She is reckless, bold and free. Meeting with Mrs. Kember at the bay only increases Beryl's sense of waste and boredom.

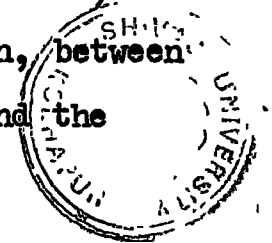
Beryl who feels that she is living a buried, cloistered life, longs for adventures. She has romantic dreams of her union with someone :

It is lonely living by oneself. Of course, there are relations, friends, heaps of them; but that's not what she means. She wants someone who will find the Beryl they none of them know, who will expect her to be that Beryl always. She wants a lover.

"Take me away from all these other people, my love. Let us go far away. Let us live our life, all new, all ours, from the very beginning. Let us make our fire. Let us sit down to eat together. Let us have long talks at night."

And the thought was almost, "save me, my love. Save me ! " 10

But instead of a young, chivalrous knight who would infuse meaning into her life, all that Beryl gets is a clandestine offer from Mr.Kember for an illicit affair. She is tempted a bit as Harry Kember waits under her window and asks her to join him in the dark bush. But Beryl, brought up in the traditional morality, doesn't have the courage to do so; so she rejects Harry and comes back to her life of seclusion and boredom. In the character of Beryl Fairfield, Katherine Mansfield thus handles one important aspect of man-woman relationship - the gap between a woman's dreams and the failure of those dreams in actual life. Even though the character of Beryl is drawn in the romantic mode, the dissonance between Beryl's dream and its materialization, between fantasy and fulfilment; between youthful aspirations and the



heavy middleclass morality is a genuine one.

In the description of Stanley and Linda's married life, this gap between reality and dream, fantasy and fulfilment is handled with a greater degree of social as well as psychological realism. A contrast to Stanley is provided in the character of Jonathan, a close friend of the Burnell family. Jonathan has also been living a closed life of routine and boredom. Like Stanley, he has been working as a clerk in a government office. It is a life which hardly offers any freedom, adventure or genuineness. The difference between Stanley and Jonathan, however, is that Stanley is totally unaware of possibilities which exist beyond his routine official and domestic life. Jonathan, however, has intimations of the far-away shores of life existing beyond the immediate circle of his clerical routine. But he is helpless, weak. He is full of new ideas, schemes and plans but they all lead to nothing because he is incapable of action. He tells Linda:

"Tell me what is the difference between my life and that of an ordinary prisoner. The only difference I can see is that I put myself in jail and nobody's ever going to let me out. That's a more intolerable situation than the other. For if I'd been - pushed in, against my will- kicking, even - once the door was locked, or at any rate in five years or so, I might have accepted the fact and begun to take an interest in the flight of flies or counting the warder's steps along the passage with particular attention to variations

of tread and so on. But as it is, I'm like an insect that's flown into a room of its own accord. I dash against the walls, dash against the windows, flop against the ceiling, do everything on God's earth, in fact, except fly out again. And all the while I'm thinking, like that moth, or that butterfly, or whatever it is, 'The shortness of life ! The shortness of life ! 'll

Jonathan knows that he is a prisoner of routine. But Stanley, in his complacency and superficial versions of happiness, lacks this important self-knowledge.

What affects the Linda-Stanley relationship is precisely this - Stanley's complacent mode of life and Linda's awareness of the finer and meaningful possibilities of existence. Like Jonathan and of course, unlike Stanley Linda, too, is aware of a coveted world which doesn't unfortunately actualize. This leads her to boredom and a tragic sense of waste which is adroitly brought out in the 'flower' and 'leaf' imagery :

If only one had time to look at these flowers long enough, time to get over the sense of novelty and strangeness, time to know them ! But as soon as one paused to part the petals, to discover the under-side of the leaf, along came Life and one was swept away. And, lying in her cane chair, Linda felt so light; she felt like a leaf. Along came Life like a wind and she was seized and shaken; she had to go. Oh dear, would it always be so? Was there no escape ? 12

Linda has married Stanley in spite of herself but, once married, she has played the dutiful wife, loving Stanley and

rescuing him, whenever necessary. Her entire life force is spent in supporting and restoring Stanley and in child-bearing. The result is Linda's own identity, her own freedom are all destroyed. Mansfield drives home this bitter truth of Linda's married life with frank explosiveness :

Yes, that was her real grudge against life; that was what she could not understand. That was the question she asked and asked, and listened in vain for the answer. It was all very well to say it was the common lot of women to bear children. It wasn't true. She, for one, could prove that wrong. She was broken, made weak, her courage was gone, through child-bearing. And what made it doubly hard to bear was, she did not love her children. It was useless pretending. Even if she had had the strength she never would have nursed and played with the little girls. No, it was as though a cold breath had chilled her through and through on each of those awful journeys; she had no warmth left to give them. As to the boy- well, thank heaven, mother had taken him; he was mother's, or Beryl's, or anybody's who wanted him. She had hardly held him in her arms. She was so indifferent about him, that as he lay there..... Linda glanced down.¹³

Bored with the biological function of child-bearing out of tune with her complacent husband, she is lost to some extent in dreams which can no longer be fulfilled. Linda Burnell is a representative of many heroines in Mansfield. An ironic contrast to Linda's married life is provided in the character of Mrs. Stabbs, the shopkeeper. Mrs. Stabbs' husband had died of

dropsy. In her conversation with the maid-servant Alice she remembers her dead husband and shows his photograph to her. As ^{she} remembers her dead husband, she tells Alice, "All the same my dear freedom is best". Mrs. Stubbs represents a negative kind of alternative to both Beryl and Linda. Her freedom is not a product of choice but inevitable consequence of her husband's death. It is the compulsory and imposed freedom of widowhood. The lack of freedom and genuineness one sees in the lives of Beryl and Linda, thus, ironically culminates in Mrs. Stubbs' forced freedom. In thus choosing a young, unmarried girl, that is Beryl; a married woman, that is Linda Burnell and a widow that is Mrs. Stubbs - Katherine Mansfield explores three types of man-woman relationship, each of them characterized by isolation and boredom. Beryl the young romantic girl waiting permanently for a lover who would make her life meaningful ultimately finds partial temptation in a seducer like Harry Kember. Linda Burnell, her life tied down to the dull, quotidian life style of the Stanley household, is denied all the possibilities of freedom and fulfilment while for a shopkeeper like Mrs. Stubbs, her husband's death provides a kind of negative freedom.

The stories of Mansfield show her awareness of the fact that while marriage is an institutional organization of man-woman relationship in terms of security and familial continuity, it also implies a delicate balance of emotional needs and passions. Behind the institutional facade of marriage, there is

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essentially an encounter between two beings who, pitted against each other, must come to terms with the problem of selfhood and mutual happiness. If the encounter doesn't take care of these mutual claims and demands the result is a split identity, a divided self. Generally, Katherine Mansfield provides an account of this inner encounter between husband and wife from the point of view of wife but occasionally she views the situation through the eyes of the husband also. One such story is 'A Married Man's Story'. It is one of the unfinished stories of Katherine Mansfield but still, in its existing form, it does have an important bearing upon our thematic analysis. The narrator hero of the story is trying to record his musings on his married life which ultimately take him to an exploration of his tragic past. His father was a chemist who poisoned his wife and after her death merrily took some other woman. The incident has left a traumatic impact on the mind of the narrator. He is now living what is apparently a routine life of married happiness. But behind this superficial security of married life, there are some disturbing questions which constantly prompt him into analysing the situation. For instance, he says that he cannot connect his baby with his wife and himself :

Each time when I come into the hall and see the perambulator I catch myself thinking: "H'm, some one has brought a baby ! " Or, when his crying wakes me at night I feel inclined to blame my wife for having brought the baby in from outside.¹⁴

The narrator here provides an interesting contrast to Linda Burnell who also doesn't love her children. Continuing in the same vein the narrator poses some basic questions about man-woman relationship inherent in marriage :

Why do people stay together? putting aside "For the sake of the children", and "the habit of years" and "economic reasons" as lawyers' nonsense- it's not much more - if one really does try to find out why it is that people don't leave each other, one discovers a mystery. It is because they can't; they are bound. And nobody on earth knows what are the bonds that bind them except those two.¹⁵

Mansfield here is trying to explore the very nature of marital bonds. One important thing is to note that these marital bonds have nothing to do with children, or financial security. Naturally the musings of the narrator then assume a more radical dimension as evidenced in the following quotation :

Human beings, as we know them, don't choose each other at all. It is the owner, the second self inhabiting them, who makes the choice for his own particular purposes, and - this may sound absurdly far-fetched- it's the second self in the other which responds. Dimly- dimly- or so it has seemed to me - We realise this, at any rate to the extent that we realise the hopelessness of trying to escape.¹⁶

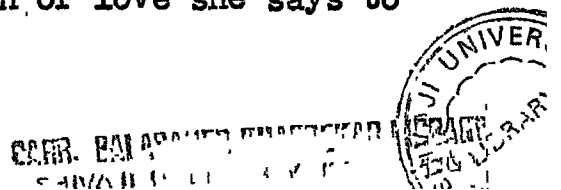
In this radical dimension the problematic of selfhood in the context of the social institution of marriage becomes central.

Once again a distinction between two selves is made. Each human being has two selves. In marriage it is not the primary self of one partner which responds to the primary self of other partner, it is one secondary unreal self responding to another secondary unreal self. It is this existential inadequacy which accounts for the unsuccessful marriages such as that of Linda and Stanley, for instance. It is in this context that one can understand Mansfield's handling of man-woman relationship theme :

A story such as 'Honeymoon' provides ample evidence for the foregoing analysis. The story describes the young couple, George and Fanny on their honeymoon in France. Fanny is a young newly-wed wife, dutifully worshipping her husband, and George is an enthusiastic young husband out to prove himself before his wife. Beaming with happiness, they go round several places on a sight-seeing tour. They keep on expressing their love in passionate, playful terms. Fanny has fully geared her life to her husband :

But she'd made up her mind long before she was married that never would she be the kind of woman who interfered with her husband's pleasures.¹⁷

But in spite of this decision and the consequent of expressions of their wedded love, a dark shadow of suspicion suddenly looms across Fanny's mind. In the sudden rush of love she says to George :



"Darling", said Fanny. "I want to ask you something fearfully important, promise me you'll answer. Promise".

"I promise", said George, too solemn to be quite as serious as she.

"It's this'. Fanny paused a moment, looked down, looked up again. "D you feel", she said softly, "that you really know me now? But really, really know me?"

It was too much for George. Know his Fanny? He gave a broad, childish grin. "I should jolly well think I do", he said emphatically. "Why, what's up?"

Fanny felt he hadn't quite understood. She went on quickly : "What I mean is this. So often people, even when the love each other, don't seem to- to- it's so hard to say - know each other perfectly. They don't seem to want to. And I think that's awful. They understand each other about the most important things of all." Fanny looked horrified. "George, we couldn't do that, could we? We never could".¹⁸

It's clear then that in the analysis of man-woman relationship in Mansfield marriage has central and significant place. And in her exploration of this embodiment of man-woman relationship she shows a divergence existing between the social institutional aspects of marriage and the intimate, highly subjective feelings. A happy marriage is a rare thing in Mansfield's stories. In every marital relationship that she describes, there exists behind the facade of domesticity and

security a lurking danger, a hidden explosive which can immediately destroy relations and affinities. The result thereby is, as has already been noted, two contradictory opposed selves deprived of any grounding in love and authenticity. Further, since marriage and the family are related social institutions, Katherine Mansfield occasionally provides a significant variation by shifting her focus to the loneliness of the individual in the family as a whole. An interesting example of this is the story, 'An Ideal Family' in which the head of the family, old Mr. Neave finds himself isolated from all other members including his wife Charlotte. Mr. Neave is a successful man in his business. He has wealth, a fine, fashionable house, a hard-working son and beautiful young daughters. But as he grows old, Mr. Neave discovers a communication gap characterizing his relations not only with his children, but surprisingly, also with his wife. "An Ideal Family" is, therefore, a unique story of Katherine Mansfield in which she describes even the loneliness of a patriarch caused by his progressive loss of control over other members of the family.

It is thus clear that in Mansfield man-woman relationship is fraught with a certain degree of ambivalence between security and freedom, love and sex. This is because the secret self that Mansfield constantly refers to yearns constantly for understanding- a key word recurrent in her stories. But this understanding or communion in terms of relationship is precisely

what is denied to the secret, real self, It is the unreal self which dominates thereby creating a complex world of fantasy and dream, romance and illusion. At the centre of this world is a loneliness which is tremendously tragic. A story like 'Revelations' is another evidence. The heroine of this story, Monica Tyrell, is married to a successful husband, Ralph. She is a society lady, spending her time as much in beauty parlours as on lavish parties. But once again the problematics of selfhood and freedom assumes central importance in this story. Monica knows that she has a 'real' self. She particularly discovers this real self in the company of her hair-dresser. But Ralph refuses to take her real self seriously, indeed with an overbearing, superior attitude characteristic of male-dominated culture, he says to her, 'My darling, you'll not believe me, but I know you infinitely better than you know yourself'. Monica wonders 'how' could she have loved a man who talked like that. She realizes that her dignity of selfhood is not recognized and freedom is denied to her. One wintry morning she decides to be free. Mansfield uses her favourite image of mirror to emphasize Monica's sudden leap in the world of freedom. The image serves a double purpose. It emphasizes Monica's mask that is her unreal self and also her desire for her own identity, dignity and freedom :

A wild white morning, a tearing rocking wind.
Monica sat down before the mirror. She was pale. The
maid combed back her dark hair- combed it all back-

and her face was like a mask, with pointed eyelids and dark red lips. As she stared at herself in the bluish shadowy glass she suddenly felt- oh, the strangest, most tremendous excitement filling her slowly, slowly, until she wanted to fling out her arms, to laugh, to scatter everything, to shock Marie, to cry : "I'm free. I'm free. I'm free as the wind". And now all this vibrating, trembling, exciting, flying world was hers. It was her kingdom. No, no, she belonged to nobody but life.¹⁹

Monica, of course, fails. Her desire for freedom receives a setback when she comes to know that George, her friend at the hair-dressers has lost his little daughter. The incident impinges itself upon her consciousness and foregrounds vividly the tragic reality of death :

Oh, how terrifying Life was, thought Monica. How dreadful. It is the loneliness which is so appalling. We whirl along like leaves, and nobody knows- nobody cares where we fall, in what black river we float away. The tugging feeling seemed to rise into her throat. It ached, ached; She longed to cry.²⁰

Monica's euphoric sense of freedom is contrasted with the inevitable tragedy of death. Helpless, she realizes that her adventure for freedom was an act of mock-rebellion. And in spite of herself, she ultimately goes to attend the party arranged by her husband at The Princess.

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A story like 'The Stranger' is another powerful example of Mansfield's concern with the insubstantial emotional basis of marital life. The story describes in vivid details the reunion, after a long period of separation, of Hammond and his wife Jane. Hammond is passionately waiting at the port for the ship to arrive so that he could receive her. As she comes out, Hammond passionately welcomes her. But even in this passionate gesture of welcome, there is a feeling that something is slipping through his hands :

He groaned for love and caught her close again. And again, as always, he had the feeling he was holding something that never was quite his- his. Something too delicate, too precious, that would fly away once he let go. 21

Despite this feeling, Hammond is longing for the moment when they would be alone together in the hotel. The couple is constantly disturbed but after a series of disturbances, they find themselves alone in the hotel room. He wants an assurance from his wife that she is really glad to be back with him. While giving this assurance, his wife tells him that aboard the ship, the stranger had died in her arms alone. This naturally triggers off a feeling of jealousy. He cannot bring himself to face this incident in which his wife shared a deep ineffable feeling with a dying man. He realizes that their evening is spoiled and that " they would never be alone together again".



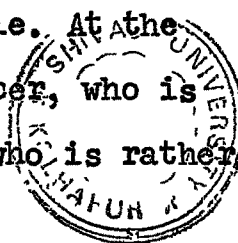
The story is thus an excellent example of a marriage relationship structured on the possessive, propriety attitude of the male.

At the beginning of this chapter a story entitled 'A Blaze' was analysed to show how Katherine Mansfield creates a heroine, Elsa, who confidently knows that she is an 'uncommon' woman 'born out of her time'. She seeks admiration from men but strictly within the terms of reference decided and defined by her. Elsa's declaration of independence, of course, does not cross the limits of fidelity and loyalty. But still she is an important character who can be linked with other women characters such as Mrs. Harry Kember in 'At The Bay' and Isabel William in 'Marriage a la Mode'. Thus Elsa, Mrs. Kember and Isabel constitute a changing spectrum of feminine selfhood in Katherine Mansfield. As has already been noted, Elsa's independence tries to maintain itself within the marital bonds. Mrs. Kember enjoys an independence to the extent of being a non-conformist in a society which observes traditional morality quite faithfully. Mansfield says about her that 'she treated men as though she was one of them'. She smokes and plays bridge and wears strange clothes. It seems safe to surmise that her non-conformist identity gives her enough inner security to leave her handsome husband, ten years younger than her, to his extra marital affairs.

Isabel William provides the extreme point of this spectrum. She is married to an ordinary man, William, who holds

a job in London and comes home every week-end. Isabel is longer happy with her married life. She spends most of her time in the company of fashionable pleasure-loving group of men and women. One week-end, when he comes home, William realizes the basic incompatibility of their marriage. He goes back to London and writes a letter about divorce saying, 'God forbid my darling, that I should be a drag on your happiness'. Her pleasure-seeking friends make fun of William when she reads^a part of the letter to them. Here now is moment of decision for Isabel. Should she be a dutiful obedient wife? or should she continue a life of fashion and merry making with her friends. For sometime she is in two minds but finally she puts aside the thought of writing to William and laughingly joins her friends who are waiting downstairs.

An analysis of the spectrum of these three heroines as well as of the stories discussed earlier thus, reveals that Mansfield's attitude towards man-woman-relationship in the context of marriage is an ambivalent one. She knows how sensitive women like Linda, Monica, Mrs. Hammond, Anna and Others suffer from loneliness and loss of selfhood in the institution of marriage. She also shows that within this institution of marriage only a very limited kind of independence, as exemplified by Elsa, for instance, is occasionally possible. At the same time, women-characters such as Mrs. Harry Kember, who is something of a non-conformist and Isabel William who is rather



indifferent to the institution of marriage, are not drawn in a sympathetic light. In any case, Katherine Mansfield sees them as rather weak and not so viable alternatives to Linda Burnell, Monica^{and} Mrs. Hammond.

One has, therefore, every reason to believe that while Katherine Mansfield is fully aware of the tragic tensions, and the problematic of selfhood in man-woman relationship as it occurs in marriage, she does not posit anything by way an ideal man-woman relationship. A comparison here with D.H. Lawrence will not be out of place. Lawrence too, was opposed to the social institution of marriage in which he saw nothing except a falsification of genuine relationships. In 1913, in a letter to Collins he wrote 'marriage is not a marriage that is not a correspondence of blood'. Lawrence thus posits an ideal man-woman relationship in terms of his theory of blood correspondence. His novels provide many examples of this. Thus Birkin and Ursula in Women in Love gradually come to exemplify what is for Lawrence an ideal man-woman relationship. It is interesting to note that like Katherine Mansfield, Lawrence, too, is concerned with the problematic of self-hood. Thus in his novel The Lost Girl, published in 1920, Lawrence poses this question about the heroine of the novel, Alvina. 'What is one's own real self? It certainly is not what we think we are and we ought to be'. But while Katherine Mansfield is content with depicting the tension and loneliness of man-woman relationship

in marriage in terms of an ambivalent attitude, Lawrence goes further and posits an ideal man-woman relationship in terms of his concept of blood correspondence. This comparison, then, between Lawrence and Mansfield, leads to what is perhaps an obvious conclusion: D.H.Lawrence was a modern artist who sought to provide alternatives to the corrupt Anglo-saxon morality in terms of an altogether new ethic of human relationships, while Katherine Mansfield's sensibility is that of a transitional, pre-modern writer. Hence, anything resembling the Lawrentian love ethic is absent in her exploration of man-woman relationship theme.

