

CHAPTER - IV  
CONCLUSION



The present study has made a modest attempt to provide a comprehensive critical statement on man-woman relationship in the stories of Katherine Mansfield. The stories have not been examined chronologically. They have been divided into convenient groups thematically united. And thus grouped, most of the stories of Katherine Mansfield can be said to deal with the theme of man-woman relationship in its three major aspects of marital relations, friendship between man-woman, and pre-marital, adolescent love. Occasionally, attempt at a lesbian relationship seeking "understanding" also constitutes an important, though, contrastive, dimension of this general exploration. One cannot say of course that Katherine Mansfield explores all these aspects with the same degree of emphasis. It is obvious that in general there is greater exploration of man-woman relationship in its two major contexts - the context of marriage and the context of pre-marital, adolescent love. But this does not in any way mitigate the importance of those few stories which analyse man-woman friendship or attempts at lesbian relationships.

One major group of stories deals exclusively with man-woman relationship in the context of the institution of marriage. It has been shown that Katherine Mansfield in her exploration of marital relations takes cognizance of three related aspects - (1) the biological act of child-bearing, (2) the patriarchal nature of family institution and (3) the

authoritarian role of the husband representative of male-dominated society. In a number of stories such as 'A Birthday', 'Poison', 'Frau Fischer', 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel' 'Je- ne Parle pas Francais' as well as the Burnell stories, this triangular framework of her themes is abundantly present. It is within this framework that Katherine Mansfield explores the problematic of selfhood in marital relations. The exploration reveals that man-woman relationship as it occurs in the social institution of marriage creates a divided self, a split identity. The feminine self is torn between the polarities of the real and the unreal, appearance and reality, looking and being. Given this problematic of selfhood most marital relations are characterized by inauthenticity and lack of the dignity of being. With occasional exception of a character like Jonathan in 'At The Bay' most men in Katherine Mansfield's analysis of this relationship are prisoners of traditional middle-class morality. They are just after security and comforts. They are either domineering patriarchs or authoritarian husbands. As a result of this, most of Katherine Mansfield's feminine characters, deprived of any dignified and authentic footing in reality, are thrown back on the resources of fantasy and dream which only serve to increase to their tragic loneliness.

One can thus say that in her exploration of man-woman relationship in the context of marriage and the family



out a feminist case by constantly contrasting sensitive, spiritually hungry females with complacent, authoritarian husbands and domineering patriarchs. The result is in most of her stories marriage turns out to be a living together of the incompatibles.

It has also been shown, however, that Katherine Mansfield's exploration of man-woman relationship in the context of marriage is fraught with a certain degree of ambivalence. Thus is said in the sense that while Katherine Mansfield is aware of the tensions and the problematic of selfhood inherent in marriage, she does not project like D.H. Lawrence anything like an ideal man-woman relationship. The comparison with D.H. Lawrence has shown that like Lawrence she does not define the terms of reference of an ideal man-woman relationship.

The reasons for this are not far to seek. While Katherine Mansfield shows a few feminine selves making abortive attempts at lesbian fulfilment in the psychological sense, she is perhaps more interested in portraying adolescent love in which lovers behave like children. In these stories there is a constant harking back to the world of innocence as contrasted to that of experience. Man-woman relationship in this paradise-like world of innocence may fail because ultimately the demands of the world of reality assert themselves. Despite this failure, love in this innocent childish

world is characterised by authenticity, freedom and dignity of being. In this marked emphasis on the innocent world of children, one notices what is perhaps, a Victorian element in Katherine Mansfield's fiction. Her child- characters such as Henry and Edna can be described as a Twentieth Century extensions of Dickens' child characters like Pip, Little Nell, Amy Dorrit, Nicholas etc. In these love-relations the lovers behave like children, the naturalness of human heart is preserved in contrast to the inauthentic man-woman relationship in the adult world. This relationship, however, is more in the nature of partially positive contrast- partially because her child-like lovers ultimately meet their tragic failure. Innocence and the naturalness are self-sufficient lonely values, incapable of sustaining the larger world of reality. And this is the major difference between the child characters of Katherine Mansfield and those of Dickens in whom they provide an idyllic resolution. In the stories of Katherine Mansfield there are idyllic settings but no idyllic resolutions.

By thus placing Katherine Mansfield at a midpoint between Dickens and Lawrence it is possible to make a tentative generalization : Katherine Mansfield, with her involvement in the world of innocence had something of the Victorian sensibility in her, at the same time she was also

fully conscious of the problematic of selfhood in the institution of marriage. Hence the feminist case, she makes out for most of her heroines. But here also she does not assume a radical position such as that of D.H. Lawrence or to take a later-day example, Kate Millett. She can thus be described as a pre-modern writer in the period of High Modernism.