

CHAPTER – II

**THE DEATH OF THE
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The Death of the Heart (1938) is one of the major novels of Elizabeth Bowen. The theme of this novel is ~~love~~ innocence and guilt. It suggests the betrayal of the innocent heart of Portia, who is the protagonist of the novel. She is partly a mirror-image of Elizabeth Bowen herself. The novel not only discusses the betrayal of the innocent heart of Portia but it also discusses the confrontation of experience by innocence.

The novel **The Death of the Heart**, is the story of Portia, a sixteen year old orphan girl. In her young age, Portia has been yearning for both love and meaning of life, but she fails to get it mainly due to her innocence. The novel consists of three parts – “The World” “The Flesh” and “The Devil”.

Part I- “The World” – deals with the Quaynes family which is well-to-do, cultured and childless couple living in one of the famous parts of central London known as Regents Park. Portia is sixteen year old orphan girl living with Thomas Quayne her step-brother, at Windsor Terrace on yearly basis trial. Portia yearns for family love and expects the same from Quaynes. Both Thomas and Anna Quayne are not interested to treat Portia as their family member. Anna doesn't like Portia's keeping a diary and her indisciplined behaviour. Their family

servant, Matchett, remains cautious at all times about Portia's untidiness, keeps watch on all her activities and surprisingly even acts as a solacer to Portia. Anna expresses her feelings about Portia to her close friend St. Quentin. Anna helps Eddie her friend, to get a job in her husband's company. He loves Portia. Anna wishes Portia to learn and send her to take lessons where she comes in contact with Lilian. In fact, Portia is not at all interested in studies but in order to keep up Quayne's interest, she continues to take lessons. Portia is born out of ^{the} relationship of Mr. Quayne's late marriage with Irene, a widow. The entire affair ~~embraces~~ Anna and Thomas. Mr. Quayne and Irene didn't reside at permanent place because of meagre income and they roamed from place to place mostly living in hotels. Both of them died in course of time and Portia becomes orphan. Portia comes to know about her birth through Matchett and feels guilty. Portia comes close to Major Brutt who is Anna's friend knowing all about Anna's life and even about her unsuccessful love affair with Robert Pidgeon. Major Brutt comforts Portia in his company by giving puzzles to solve. Portia develops relationship with Eddie and gets letters from him who expects Portia not to write anything about him in her diary. Matchett dislikes Portia receiving letters from him.

In the Part-II, "The Flesh" Thomas and Anna leave for Europe tour and they send Portia to Mrs. Heccomb living on the Kentish coast.

Mrs. Heccomb, who was Miss Yarden before marriage, works as a caretaker of Anna and her family. She knows about Anna's love affair with Robert Pidgeon. She is the wife of a retired Doctor, Mr. Heccomb, who has built a beautiful house called 'Waikiki' on the beach. Later on he dies and Mrs. Heccomb has been living since then with her step-children Daphne and Dickie. Their economic condition is not sound and they maintain family somehow. Mrs. Heccomb earns by giving piano lessons and painting. Daphne works in a library at Seale and Dickie ~~works~~ in a bank at Southstone. Portia's new life begins when she comes to stay with Heccomb at Seale. Her life at Windsor Terrace is inactive and boring, but here she experiences a great spontaneity and vitality. Mrs. Heccomb sincerely looks after Portia and treats her as her family member. Portia enjoys life by occasionally going to Church and markets and by mixing with Daphne, Dickie and their friends. Every Saturday there is a party arranged, and Portia feels glad to mix with all enthusiastic friends and even enjoys the sea life. At such joyful stage at Waikiki Portia wishes to have the presence of Eddie, and with Mrs. Heccomb's permission, she invites Eddie. Eddie comes and stays with them for a week but it becomes a disgusting experience for Portia as Eddie gets attracted to Daphne. An occasional relation between Eddie and Daphne troubles Portia a lot. Her quarrel with Daphne spoils the relation. This makes Portia realise that she is cheated and defeated by reality and feels very sad at the heart as she is unable to have Eddie

according to her expectation. Eddie, returning to London, writes to Portia. But with sad heart she returns to London leaving Clara, Dickie and Mrs. Heccomb.

Part-III, 'The Devil' begins with Portia's coming back to Windsor Terrace, London. Matchett notices change in Portia's behaviour and Portia finds the same with Matchett. Portia narrates her experience at Seale to Matchett who thinks it to be Portia's mysteries. Anna and Thomas are happy to know about Portia's enjoyment at Seale. All this makes Anna realise that she lacks spirit to create good relation with Portia. Anna is rather doubtful about Portia's enjoyment of Spring at Seale and tells Thomas that Eddie must not have responded to her. Then after Portia continues with her lessons and once on her way she meets St. Quentin at Mandeville street. Portia comes to know that her secret of keeping diary is told by Anna to St. Quentin. Portia is much hurt when St. Quentin makes some adverse remarks of her keeping a diary. Portia understands that Eddie loves Anna too. In the meanwhile Eddie comes to Anna's house and makes some bitter comments on Heccomb's family and at the same time advises not to send Portia again. Anna doesn't agree with him as she is confident about Portia's behaviour. Anna feels sorry to know that Portia is not happy with them. On the contrary she feels that she has given more freedom to Portia. In course of time Portia comes in contact with Lilian and informs that Anna is reading her diary.

According to Lilian, Anna is a dangerous woman and she also advises that Eddie is not as good as expected and cautions not to be close to him. Portia meets Eddie at Lovent Garden and they discuss about her diary. Portia is upset to know that Anna secretly reads her diary. She is also surprised to see Anna's letter at Eddie's room and requests Eddie to allow her to read the letter. Portia is surprised to know that Eddie rejects her plea. When Portia probes into the matter, Eddie answers that the matter of letter is all about her. This sad event makes Portia lose her heart. At last Portia makes up her mind not to return to Windsor Terrace but decides to stay with Major Brutt whom she loves too. Major Brutt doesn't love her and is not interested in keeping her. He rings Thomas and Anna of Portia's presence with him. At this time Portia feels Major Brutt even betrays her. In the end Matchett is shown on the way to get Portia back.

Bowen's **The Death of the Heart** is a female dominated novel with characters like Portia, Anna, Matchett, Mrs. Quayne, Mrs. Heccomb, Daphne and Lilian. The male characters of this novel are Thomas Quayne, Mr. Quayne, Eddie, St. Quentin, Major Brutt and Dickie. Among all female characters, Portia dominates the major part of the novel. She is a sixteen year old orphan girl belonging to the upper middle-class family. She comes to stay with her step-brother Thomas Quayne on a yearly trial basis. Anna is the wife of Thomas Quayne who

is a perfect representative of stylish upper middle-class woman of London. Matchett is a maid-servant of Quaynes family. Other female characters like Mrs. Heccomb and Daphne belong to the lower middle-class family. Lilian is a good friend of Portia.

Bowen, too, is an orphan and tries to reflect her views on orphanage, isolation and a feeling of insecurity through the character of Portia. Bowen belongs to the upper middle-class family and she portrays the qualities of this class through the characters of Anna and of Thomas Quayne. They lead an isolated life. In this context Robert Rubens remarks:

‘In her portrayal of the Quaynes the author makes a fierce indictment of the moral values of the English upper-middle class. This couple lives a soulless and isolated existence. They are isolated from outside relationships, from political problems and they are even isolated from each other.’¹

Bowen has less respect for the lower middle-class and ridicules it. She makes fun of their habits and way of life. Her negative views of the lower middle-class are reflected through the characters of Mrs. Heccomb, Daphne and Dickie. All these characters are given subordinate roles in the novel.

Bowen seems to have developed an indifferent attitude towards male characters in this novel. She has given less important roles to them. They are subordinate to female characters. Eddie is the most

prominent of the male characters. The male characters like Mr. Quayne, Thomas Quayne, St. Quentin and Major Brutt are quite subordinate. Bowen concentrates on the life of woman in general and male characters appear incidentally in women's life. They are just given a casual reference in the events of the novel. Being a woman writer, she views in a feministic way reflecting the lives of women and male characters have just minor roles to play.

Though other novels of Bowen have expressed war effect, this novel has little room for war effects. It is only Major Brutt and Robert Pidgeon are related to the Army and war life. But Bowen has no particular purpose to treat Brutt in the sense of war effects. As the novel is related with the theme of innocence and guilt it does not preserve room for war life. As Robert Rubens remarks:

‘The Death of the Heart is not only a crushing portrayal of the destruction of innocence, but a disillusioned warning that in the modern world innocence must be lost, that we all must compromise and that we cannot afford to suffer; we must live how we can.’²

This novel of Elizabeth Bowen has the feature of emotional dislocation. It is seen specifically in the character of Portia. Portia is an orphan girl coming to live with her step-brother, Thomas and Anna Quayne. She yearns for love and emotional support but she fails to get it as per her expectation. Hence her emotions are dislocated at Regents

Park. Portia loves Eddie faithfully but in return Eddie betrays her. Her dreams and expectations remain unfulfilled, so she is emotionally hurt and finds no right place for the outlet of her emotions. She is surrounded by loveless world and her aims of sincere love are scattered. Portia feels herself quite mature, but the world around her visualises her as an innocent child. She lives in an unadjustable world of reality. As Ann Ashworth remarks:

‘The difference is that whereas Portia is too innocent and too loving for the World, though too humble, to think so.’³

Portia lives in the imaginary world which certainly conflicts with the real world she lives in.

Anna is a perfect representative of upper middle-class family. Anna lacks love and trust. She fails to get married to Robert Pidgeon. Hence her dream is unfulfilled and so her emotions are dislocated. As a result her inner life is disturbed and emotions are suppressed.

Among male characters Eddie is emotionally dislocated. Eddie aspires for worldly success, but repeatedly sets himself up for failure to achieve status in a world. So he is emotionally dislocated as his dream is shattered. He loves but all his love affairs are unsuccessful because of his inherent hollow and cruel nature.

In this novel Bowen has tried to show that imaginary world conflicts with reality. There is no place for innocent Portia in this

hypocritical world. Portia knows that she is orphan and expects love and understanding from Quaynes but they fail to satisfy her. She finds surrounded by unsympathetic people. She is emotionally hurt and remembers her past life. Her past memories become more alive in part I- 'The World'. She meets and makes friendship with Major Brutt who shows sympathy and gives puzzles to solve, which engages her mind and for^{the} time being lessens her boredom at Regents Park. Portia feels that Matchett understands her and shows affection. Lilian helps Portia ease away the discomfort caused at Regents Park. She feels comfortable with Lilian. Her stay at this place makes her aware that she is orphan and even makes her remember her past memories of childhood. In this regard Paul Parrish remarks:

'Portia's imagination is only barely active in 'The World' the first part of the 'The Death of the Heart'. But she exhibits one characteristic not possessed by Lois or Karren: a vivid memory of love, not for a man, but for her mother. When she remembers her mother, she thinks of their love, the times they spent together, and the places they visited.'⁴

Portia, during her visit to Heccomb's beach house 'Waikiki' notices the contrastive life led by Heccombs in relation to Quaynes at Regents Park which is just different type of life from the confining life of London. In many ways this life is similar to her old life where experience has both spontaneity and vitality. She gains new experiences

at Waikiki. Regents Park symbolises barren life but life at Waikiki symbolises active life. At Regents Park her emotions are suppressed whereas at Seale Portia is full-spirited and here she enjoys emotional life. Portia starts to find difference in the life as she lives among the Heccombs at Seale. According to her, life at Regents Park is quite planned whereas her life in Heccombs family is just unplanned. In that sense both types of life she lives are beyond her adjustment. An innocent girl like Portia cannot compromise with the real life either at Regents Park or at Seale. The life at Waikiki has taught her to recognise the society of different people certainly. It is a novel experience for her. Portia's innocent and loving nature is not properly understood by Eddie and hence Portia loses her heart. She feels betrayed by Eddie. It is like a spiritual death of her heart.

As a mature woman, Anna lives a sophisticated life in London. Her house, Windsor Terrace, is a rich flat in Regents Park. She loves neat, calm and disciplined life. The visit of Portia to Windsor Terrace disturbs her life. Anna Quayne is a selfish woman living in her own world. She fails to understand the emotional need of Portia. In order to avoid the constant presence of Portia, Anna sends her to get lessons, which gives a kind of relief to her. Thus Portia is unwanted at Regents Park. Anna Quayne's interest in sending Portia to take lessons also expresses her sense of duty. As Walter Allen remarks:

'They (Anna and Thomas) are neither evil nor cruel; they are as kind as they know how to be; in accepting the care of Portia they have assumed a duty dutifully. But they have forgotten or grown cold to what Keats called the holiness of hearts affection.'⁵

Anna dislikes Portia keeping a diary but fails to understand that Portia is just purposeless in mentioning everything of her day life. Anna suspects Portia that she writes about her. Her suspicion leads her to invade Portia's privacy. She secretly reads Portia's diary and disturbs the arrangements of bears in Portia's room. The bears symbolise 'innocent nature of Portia'. Anna Quayne reveals to St. Quentin about Portia's diary when they are walking at Regents Park. The frozen lake in Regents Park symbolise the frozen heart of Anna Quayne. Anna is not capable to understand Portia. Anna sometimes repents that their love towards Portia is not adequate. Anna is excited to see Portia welcoming them exclaims:

'Poor child, Oh poor child, Yes, she stood about like an angel. It was we who were not adequate. I was not very. Was I?'⁶

Matchett is a faithful maidservant at Regents Park. She is more experienced and has a noble nature. She likes and loves Portia, and she is the only solacer to her. Matchett has tried to keep Portia conscious of Eddie's letters as well as Anna's orders. She knows that Anna's orders are very important for the welfare of Portia, and advises Portia accordingly. Matchett is also aware that Anna doesn't express any kind

of maternal love towards Portia. When Portia is betrayed by Eddie she runs away to Major Brutt at his Kensington Hotel. Her brother and sister-in-law are too coward to go and fetch her. It is symbolic that they send Matchett to collect her, as the housemaid symbolises love and wisdom.

Mrs. Heccomb belongs to the lower middle-class family. In order to maintain the family she gives lessons of Piano and painting. She is dutiful to her step children. As a mother she aspires to shape Daphne like Anna, and wishes Dickie join the army. But her aspirations are not realised. She loves Anna as she is caretaker of Anna in her childhood. She does not like Daphne criticising Anna and her class. Mrs. Heccomb sympathises Portia for she is an orphan and as an elderly experienced woman understands her feelings.

Daphne hates as she belongs to the upper middle-class. She is free and frank by nature. She feels it her duty to advise Portia that Eddie is not a suitable lover. She has a positive intention of Portia's future. She always tried to entertain Portia with her friends.

The novel provides certain autobiographical shades. Portia is portrayed as an orphan. Bowen, too, has lost her mother at the age of thirteen and her father is mentally ill for the most part of her youth. The situation of orphanhood in the early part of Bowen's life is psychologically expressed through the character of Portia. In the

childhood Bowen leads a life of loneliness, isolation and even of insecurity. These feelings are given an outlet in Portia's character. Portia has been desperate for family affection but does not get it anywhere in the world. The experience of maternal loss in the life of Portia and of Bowen is of similar type and the subsequent experience of loss in adult life seems to be the same. The complete isolation, the need of parental love and lack of permanence in dwelling are the features of Bowen's life reflected in the character of Portia. A crucial factor of Bowen's early life is her father's mental illness when she was just seven years old. By that time Bowen and her mother went to live on the Kentish coast as per doctor's advice. After parental loss Bowen is obliged to live among grown-ups and has an opportunity to observe their habits and ideas. As Bowen loses her mother at the age of thirteen she goes on visiting different relatives of her parents. As Elizabeth Bowen remarks in this context:

'Motherless since I was thirteen, I was in and out of the homes of my different relatives – and, as constantly shuttling between two countries: Ireland and England. I was, it seemed, at everyone's disposition. Though quite happy. I lived with a submerged fear that I might fail to establish grownup status. That fear, it may be, egged me on to writing: an author, a grown-up, must they not be synonymous?'⁷

In the same way, this fear of becoming grown-up is found in Portia. Portia's innocent mind confronts with the experienced world and finds no right place for her in the World.

Eddie, another major character is a portrait of Goronwy Rees, one of Bowen's lovers. It appears throughout the novel that Eddie loves Portia but is not interested in marrying her. On the other hand Portia loves him sincerely.

The Death of the Heart concentrates on the theme of innocence and guilt. It is a story of innocent girl fighting with external realities of the world and the internal conflicts of mind. She finds no right place for emotional expression. Her life internal and external is surrounded by different setting, location and environment. Portia wants that the world should try to understand her feelings and emotions but the world does not try at all. Consequently Portia remains as she is. This is so because she lacks experience of real world. As Ann Ashworth remarks about Portia:

‘She lacks experience and the means of judging stifling sophistication of loveless world; but she is innately intuitive.’⁸

The rest of female characters in the novel are not as innocent as Portia. They have realised their own status and really have experiences with the realities in and around the world of Portia. Their roles are very significant to highlight Portia's character. Both physically and

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