

**CHAPTER - III**

**MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIP**

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In this and the next chapter the different themes in *The Lotus Leaves and Other Stories* are discussed. This chapter concentrates on the major theme, i.e. man-woman relationship in the five stories of the collection. The other themes are discussed in the next chapter.

A theme has greater significance than any other elements in the short story. A theme is different from a subject-matter. But why the short story writer arranges the events and action and allows the characters to pass through them ? It suggests the theme to the readers. In short, the theme is the writer's purpose of narrating a short story. It is a certain conclusion on human experience - may be moral or about human values or serious concern on human life.

Literature reflects the complex interpersonal relationships between men and women, the social conditioning in their formation and vis-à-vis and an author's attitude to these relationships.<sup>1</sup> Indian English Literature extensively deals with the theme of man-woman relationship which has great social and cultural significance. Naturally, the theme of man-woman

relationship is a recurring theme in Indian English novels and short stories. The Indian English women writers' projection of the man and woman relationship in their literary works bears important significance.

In their works "the theme appears in many forms and in many contexts of meaning."<sup>2</sup> Jai Nimbkar too gives the central place to this theme in her novels and short stories. On close observation there appears to be a certain paradigm of shaping of the gender relationship out of emotional requirement while the social conditions making it a meaningless relationship. Jai Nimbkar states about it in her interview with T.N.Geetha,

"I am more attracted to people and their relationship and the way these are formed and affected by social conditioning and emotional requirements"<sup>3</sup>

In the light of this statement her five short stories in *The Lotus Leaves and Stories* are thematically discussed below.

*The Lotus Leaves* develops the theme of an American's infatuation for Indian woman, associated with colonialism. William Levin, Pratap's friend's brother from America visits India and happens to come over Pratap's native town and stays with him in the grape garden. Sarojini, Pratap's wife has a bias against the westerners for having infatuation for low Indian women. The half-breed progeny in the sweepers colony bears its proof. She doubts Levin as such a Westerner when he photographs and shows casual interest in Hirabai, the bird-scarer in the grape garden. Levin's resemblance with the British in colour raises a doubt in Sarojini. She, as an Indian woman, cannot tolerate such infatuation. The white race has been regarded as superior to themselves by Indians. The attitude is the result of the colonialism. The British took its disadvantage. She reflects,

“Like the English the  
conquering  
white heroes sleeping with  
the lowliest and filthiest  
women and leaving a  
progeny of half-breeds of  
whom nobody is proud.”<sup>4</sup>

But the Indians take pride in the shameful infatuation. She observes ironically.

“The woman’s people were so humble that they were proud even of this. Sarojini thought of the fair-skinned, blue-eyed blonde girl in the sweeper’s colony, perhaps some district collector’s daughter or grand daughter, collecting the towns excreta. Little saheb’s daughter, they called her.”<sup>5</sup>

Sarojini, as a local guide, shows Levin the festival of horses in the town. Levin comes to know from her conversation that Sarojini finds the farming dull. She suffers from loneliness in the isolated grape garden. Pratap is involved in the garden work to the extent of negligence of his wife. She tells Levin,

“It gets so lonely here, sometimes I wish I could go away and never come back.”<sup>6</sup>

Levin asks her why does she not follow her thoughts?

She expresses her helplessness,

“That wouldn’t help. I have never really thought in terms of making, a separate life for myself. I don’t know if I can.”<sup>7</sup>

Sarojini expresses her despair as :

“I feel the world is so much full of promises, but I am not in it.”<sup>8</sup>

On their way back from the festival of horses to the garden Sarojini is slightly affected by the impact of Levin’s manliness. She takes Pratap in Levin’s place,

“Sarojini, in a moment of swift wistfulness, tried to imagine him in Levin’s place. But couldn’t.”<sup>9</sup>

At night, she goes with water to Levin’s room. Before that she straightens her saree and smoothens her hair in front of a mirror.

Sarojini is thrilled by infatuation for Levin. She goes in his embrace unknowingly under the spell of infatuation. The writer narrates,

“She just stood there, compelling him to meet her eyes. When he looked at her, there was something in his eyes which sent a little thrill of fear through her. She walked into the arms he held out for her”.<sup>10</sup>

This moment of temptation was temporary, because she withdraws herself suddenly by the odor of his unwashed body and the suffocating nearness. She quickly goes out with a surprise how his embrace has released her. She learns from this incident how a white man’s infatuation works on Indian women. The writer comments,

“She had suddenly arrived at the knowledge of how little Saheb’s daughters happened”.<sup>11</sup>

Sarojini is ashamed of her moment of infatuation for Levin. In fact she has disliked Levin photographing Hirabai and has been watching herself asleep under a tree after the festival of horses. She cunningly informs Pratap about Levin's infatuation to Hirabai,

“You know, our friend  
Bill is enamoured with  
Hirabai”<sup>12</sup>

Sarojini is again a subject of Pratap's neglect and loneliness.

The story narrates Sarojini's anger for the Westerner's infatuation for low Indian women and their progeny from such relationship. Her emotional requirement allows herself to embrace this relationship and she learns through her self-experience what infatuation is. But she suddenly comes out of it with alert as her social conditions are different.

*Cross Cultural Communication* has the theme of an American girl's infatuation for an Indian boy temporarily staying in San Francisco. She is engaged to that Indian boy. They spend their evening in the night club in the midst of music of the drummers. They watch the Negroes dancers. The boy opens a conversation with her about the close



similarity between himself and these Negroes. He says to her that his external appearance deceives her otherwise he is like the negroes with his ugly living style in India. He tells her,

“Don’t you see, I seem attractive because I come from the exotic East. But what you know of me here is only my outermost skin.”<sup>13</sup>

To end his melancholic mood she compels him to go to see Flamenco dancing. Again here the boy recalls the memories of the Indian dancing. He again broods over his Indian way of living at his home in India. He tells her the details of his old dirty home in India.

“And my family lives in a rickety old house. The walls haven’t seen fresh paint in a hundred years and they have little holes in which bedbugs live. We cook on the floor and eat on the floor and have a

cow and a buffalo and  
 their calves sharing the  
 courtyard with us. The  
 whole place smells of  
 cowdung".<sup>14</sup>

This irritates her. She scolds him for disturbing with talk when she watches the show and listens the music. Yet he continues to tell her further about the dust and heat in Indian summer which will spoil her racial beauty. He tells her that he is telling this with a sudden thought how difficult it is for her to live in India, because he has to return to India with her as his wife. He gives a faithful picture of the humble living of his family in India. With his information she becomes stunned. She has lost interest in him. She suddenly takes away from her finger the engagement ring. He tries to convince her that it is a mistake on her part. But she says that she is not mad. She has taken the decision to break the engagement. It comes as a surprising shock to him.

The theme of infatuation in this story is also associated with colonialism. Americans' consider the negroes as inferior to them. His own comparison with the negroes and his dirty home in India create a sense of

colonialism in the minds of the both fiancés. He is affected by the sense of his inferiority and her superiority. This racial difference adversely affects their gender relationship as fiancés. The colonial superiority of that girl compels her to break the engagement with the boy of her choice because she thinks that both of them can't be on equal footing after marriage when they will come to India to settle. Their relationship as the fiancés is broken due to their different social, racial and financial conditions of their life styles. Her earlier attachment and subsequent engagement forming their gender relationship has been really the result of her infatuation for Indian boy out of the emotional requirement.

The second type of man-woman relationship projected by Jai Nimbkar is amorous love relationship. In the story *With Intent to Kill* Madhukar, the laundry clerk, loves Parvati, maiden from Maratha caste. They are in their prime youth and only filled with romantic love. They adore only the feelings of love. Out of their emotional need they want to establish gender relationship through marriage. But unfortunately the high Maratha caste of Parvati and low caste of Madhukar as Parit i.e. washerman become a difficulty in their love affair. Indians marry within their castes. Inter-caste marriages have no social sanction. But

the intensity of their frenzied amorous love will not allow Madhukar to keep quiet. He finds out a way of marrying Parvati after elopement from his place to big city like Bombay. But again he has a difficulty of adequate funds. His poverty associated with his low-caste are the major obstacles in the success of his amorous love. Madhukar's plan is to kill the Bairagi in the lonely Shiv Mandir outside the town and to usurp his hoard of money in the Mandir collected from alms. He attempted it. He is very happy to inform this to his beloved. He rushes to her place in the late hours of night. Happily he tells her his plan :

“He laughed softly and released her. “Look”, he said. “Look”. He took a wad of paper money from his pants pocket. “Now we can go to Bombay. We'll get married. In the big city nobody will care that you are a Maratha and I am a Parit”<sup>15</sup>

Further he tells her,

“Now your father can’t do anything to us We’ll be gone before he knows anything is wrong. Now go home. Tomorrow night we’ll go”.<sup>16</sup>

She questions him with anxiety if somebody suspects him as a murder of Bairagi. He assures her this may not happen and he tells her his dream,

“How can they ? Nobody saw me. Except the cat, and cats don’t talk. Don’t be afraid, Paru. There will be no trouble, I promise. We’ll be together and I’ll take care of you With this money we shall open our own laundry. We’ll be rich”.<sup>17</sup>

This is the turning point and climax in the story because, his sweetheart doesn’t like his attempt of Bairagi’s murder. According to her he is a man of God. Madhukar is a frenzied lover, so that he has killed the man of God for her sake. He says to Parvati,

“That is how much I love you”<sup>18</sup>

But she has lost esteem of Madhukar as her lover,

Next day, Madhukar is very happy, hoping that his plan is going to be successful. He heard nothing about Bairagi's death from anyone. However, his happiness is short lived, as Parvati meets him at night under the banyan tree to report Bairagi's survival. She tells him,

“ He was badly hurt but not dead” Her breath caught on the word, “Now they are bringing him to the government dispensary”<sup>19</sup>

Fear-struck Madhukar walks away fast silently to know this. The story ends with a suggestion of their immaterialised man-woman relationship. Their love affair is an outcome of their frenzied emotional requirement but it is adversely affected by the Indian social conditioning of caste and class. Their relationship can't come into existence.

*A Friend of the Family* projects altogether a different kind of man-woman relationship. It is on the psychological level. Lilo, the wife of Shekhar's friend Narendra, tries to establish a relationship with Shekhar in psychological excitement for her emotional relief. It is caused by her innate laziness and intellectual mediocracy.

Liloo knows Shekhar since her marriage with Narendra. In the course of time she has developed the psychological excitement for Shekhar. The excitement blossoms fully with the news of Shekhar's arrival. She is very happy but tries to hide the excitement from her husband. She thinks,

“I was pleased at the way I came alive this morning at breakfast when Narendra read Shekhar's postcard. I had to leave the table on some pretext so that Narendra might not see my sudden joy. Even afterwards I had to keep toning down my excitement while Narendra went on and on”.<sup>20</sup>

The story narrates the stream of her mind the friendship between Shekhar and Narendra their life together in London, Shekhar's unimpressive appearance, her probing to Shekhar about the girl of his choice and his marriage etc. She takes extreme psychological delight in recalling such matters about Shekhar that day. She takes

extreme care to dress, to apply perfume and adore with jewellery out of excitement.

Sometimes she has hallucinations that Shekhar has responded to her excitement,

“I can’t tell whether Shekhar underwent a transition or not. He seemed to have become friendlier, more open with me before he went away. Acceptance is the word. He seemed to accept me. He drew me into discussion deliberately which he had not done in the beginning.”<sup>21</sup>

Again she thinks, “It was a partial compliment, but I was satisfied with it”.

It is Lilo’s one sided excitement without response from Shekhar. She observes,



“Nothing of what I felt was expressed. There was no chance. We were never together, the two of us except for a few seconds occasionally, and that with Narendra’s return imminent, didn’t count”<sup>22</sup>

Shekhar does not visit her during Narendra’s longer absence from the city as she expects. She thinks,

“After all, he could not be entirely immune to me. Or perhaps, as I did, he also wanted our relationship to mean no more than it did”<sup>23</sup>.

Often she wonders how Shekhar and Narendra are close friends. It seems to her that they are friends out of their mutual need.

Shekhar’s abrupt decision to leave Bombay for Calcutta for a job as a journalist brings an end to this relationship. To her surprise, Shekhar simply answers that he is tired of Bombay. He has very formal conversation

with Liloo. She is confused about this relationship. She reflects,

“I haven’t missed him so much as I expected to, but I have wondered whether he went away because of me, whether at last he was getting seriously interested in me and wanted to cure himself of it”.<sup>24</sup>

Further Liloo questions herself,

“Has Shekhar come to mean more to me than I care to admit? supposing the feeling is mutual, what then? what are we to each other? I don’t like to answer the question”<sup>25</sup>

The farewell is rather unemotional for Liloo. Narendra and Shekhar are excited. Liloo is mute. She observes,

“Strangely, for the bright over head light is on, Shekhar has not seen me. I stand unmoving savouring the quick

tightening in my chest, content  
to put off the moment of  
actual meeting”<sup>26</sup>

She takes the farewell as an end of the relationship. She is convinced of its emptiness. She rationally evaluates the relationship as, “I have been a blind fool”.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, it seems, Lилоo spins the yarn of her excitement for Shekhar as her emotional requirement out of her laziness and mediocracy. However, she is convinced that it is like a bubble of water now.

*Metamorphosis* deals with one more different kind of man-woman relationship. It is about the adolescent calf-love of one postal clerk for a familiar handicapped girl. Now the girl is a famous singer with fame named Tarabai Kharkar while he is comparatively insignificant person. He had extreme fascination for Tarabai as an adolescent girl. Eventhough she was a cripple she was his beloved. This calf-love has a very deep impression on him.

He has learnt about Tarabai’s musical concert and has attended it recently. Then he goes on a courtesy call to her place. Now, they meet as strangers. She has totally forgotten him. But he has nourished his calf-love for

Tarabai over the years with delicacy, even though he is married.

He has nostalgic memories of his adolescence attraction for Tarabai. He recalls the memories of her beauty in her youth.

“There were slight dimples at the corners of her mouth and her eyes gleamed. Over the years he had preserved the memory of this scene, glorious with its romance and heroic self-sacrifice, pushing away the overtones that did not fit it”.<sup>28</sup>

As a teenage boy, his limited knowledge of love making was to get married with his dream girl and he did it so. Now he recalls his proposal of marriage to her on one evening in her father’s garden. But his emotional requirement is not accepted by Tarabai as a girl on account of her physical deformity,

“And what will you do with a cripple like me ? She had asked. Even now the memory

made him wince. He had been  
angry because of her constant  
joking about her deformity”.<sup>29</sup>

He visits her now as an unfamiliar person. He is disappointed. He gives her his identity. Then it is followed by the formal talk on each others personal and domestic life. Her yesterday’s musical concert has impressed him. He is happy as well as envious of her.

Over the years he has worshipped her as a beloved in his mind. The earlier night he has nostalgic memory of her which compels him to establish once again contact with her. In the pleasant meeting he has recurring memories of their adolescence life together,

“Do you remember that  
holiday I spent at your  
house in Bombay?”<sup>30</sup>

She says,

“What a silly boy you were”<sup>31</sup>

But he never smells intimacy of the past acquaintance in her conversation. She uses only formal and casual words.

Now he feels the change in her attitude to him. The writer comments,

“He recognized his cue. He got up and left, wondering about the change in her which had altered the girl he had known out of recognition”.<sup>32</sup>

However, he was not ready to accept the change in her. His calf-love for her compels him to think,

“She really was the same as she always was, only he had failed to know her before. Crippled or not, she looked upon the world as her oyster-an oyster which yielded an unlimited number of pearls”.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, he adores her as his unique beloved since his adolescence due to his calf-love for her. During the long years of change in both, he has maintained that love for her as his emotional need but the circumstances have changed so much that there is a least possibility of continuing the relationship. Yet his innocent calf-love is not prepared to accept the change at all.

To sum up, the analysis of the above five short stories substantiate Jai Nimbkar's statement about the theme of man-woman relationship in her interview taken by T.N. Geetha as stated above.

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### **CHAPTER - III**

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