

CHAPTER III

NEW WOMAN IN *SET IN AUTHORITY*

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New Woman in *Set in Authority*

The novel, *Set in Authority* shows the different types of characters. There are many women characters in the novel. Mainly the ladies are Anglo-Indian women. But among them Jessica Arden and Dr. Ruth Pearce are two different sorts of memsahibs. Both have different roles in their own life. Jessica Arden is the wife of Eliot Arden who is the chief commissioner of Ghoom in Bengal. Ruth Pearce is the doctor in Pilaghur which is the capital of province, Ghoom.

Jessica Arden is the conventional wife of Eliot Arden and Ruth is the unconventional career woman who possesses the new thoughts about her career and life. She is a new woman and called a Pundita by Sir Ahmed Hossein who is the District and Sessions Judge of Pilaghur. She is an independent woman and a friend of Eliot Arden and lives as a single and professional woman. This new woman reminds us about the novel *Odd Women* by George Gissing. Ruth is resembled with its characters Alicia, Virginia and Monica who are “odd” because they are single women and regarded as strange. Ruth does her duty everywhere in Bengal and does not get settled service in Pilaghur society, she does her duty courageously and ready to go anywhere for her service. She herself manages her own life independently. In her social life her nature is very frank with men, that is why she becomes a close friend of Eliot Arden and makes very philosophical conversation with Sir Ahmed Hossein about his friend Syed Mahomed Ali who has just received a decoration from Sultan for his researches in early

Islamic history. She collects information about society from all sources around her which shows her awareness about society as new woman. Ruth is an emancipated clever woman. She is a strong-willed, educated and career-oriented woman so she attains the sense of self through her occupation. Ruth is the fully developed character. Eliot Arden and Sir Ahmed Hossein are impressed by her views about the social and political situation. When she speaks with Ahmed Hossein, he comes to know about her intellectual qualities and calls her Pundita. She asks many questions to Ahmed Hossein about the spiritual things. Though she is a new woman, she believes in man's birth and rebirth and refers to Pythagoras to prove her opinion. According to her knowledge, the people have believed Pythagoras since two thousand years. Our soul has the experience of sums and numbers from each birth. So we need not to teach those numbers as we have the knowledge of the sums which we apprehend and conquered long back.

As a new woman Ruth thinks over the problems of the marriage system in Indian society. According to her, after marriage a husband presents himself as the lord and master, and a wife must tolerate his whims and orders whether she likes it or not. She becomes a slave to him Hiria, Ruth's Ayah is a conventional woman but sometimes she speaks like an emancipated woman though she is an illiterate. She comes in Calcutta with her mistress Ruth. But very soon, she wants to return her own house in Pilaghur for the marriage of her youngest daughter who is just fourteen. Hiria thinks that, it is disgracing that her daughter is not yet married because it was the tradition in India that the girls should marry in their early childhood and obey all the rules of the family.

They were so childish that they could not understand the meaning of marriage, husband, and the family customs. The people in the family were orthodox and had possessed the patriarchal views. They supposed that the serving and caring of husband and children, the bearing of babies is the prominent work of the women. The only role of the woman is as a wife, mother or daughter. She has always a secondary position in the family. Here she presents us the picture of Indian society and its rigid marriage system. But sometimes Hiria behaves and thinks like a new woman. She does not make difference between a son and a daughter as she considers them equal. She says,

But to me it was always alike—son—d'otta, d'otta, son —
from the same pains they come . . . (239)

According Hiria, the marriage of daughters is a heavy business because we have to give in their marriage. But Ruth does not accept this convention of girl's marriage at early stage. She rejects Hiria's thoughts of marriage and proves that any woman can live without the marriage as well as she can be an earner and get a good status by having education. As a self-realised person Ruth understands that marriage does not give happiness to women. They can be neglected and depressed in their own house by their husbands. In this strong patriarchal system women circle around their domestic duties and provide the emotional support to their husbands. But according to Hiria, it is the order of God that all women should marry, however they are rich or poor, Hindustani women or Sahib People. Hiria criticizes marriage custom in other countries where women get married late. Here, Hiria presents herself orthodox because she follows the patriarchal tradition of

marriage. She does not want to make herself free from the traditional world. But Ruth is very intelligent woman and her thoughts are innovative with this matter. She remarks that every woman can take advantage of her rights, like in employment and independent accommodations. Hiria's question troubles her mind then she gives her very fine answer. She tells her that,

That is foolish talk, Hiria-there is plenty to be done in the world besides marrying (239).

Ruth explains that, inspite of marriage a woman has many problems which she can solve at her own level best. That's why marriage is not an ultimate thing in woman's life. Ruth emphasizes that woman's strength lies in her self-understanding, education and decision-making. So, in order to regain her individuality woman needs to be assertive and enthusiastic. Through education and self-dependence woman can get her rights and achieve her social identity.

According to Hiria Ruth has a strong heart, so she is able to prove her individuality in her life and profession. Ruth is a single woman and a doctor by profession. She earns money for her own survival and manages her own business by her own philosophy and thoughts. Ruth is also a social worker; she serves the people by giving them medicine. Having the knowledge of political life, she mixes up among the people easily. In the difficult situation of Arden's life, she becomes a detective for finding out the truth of 'Morgan Case'. Morgan is a British soldier who is the murderer of a native. The villagers call him Morgan because he is a British man. He becomes the victim of court matter. He is in the jail Ruth dares

to meet him in the prison and makes his inquiry. It indicates but her boldness like man. During stay in Calcutta, she meets the same native who is reported to be murdered by Morgan. She finds out the truth of this matter and discloses that no one is murdered in the Morgan case. She also discovers that, it is a big plan of native people against the regiment and finds out that many downcast people, mainly Gobind who is the chowkidar of Delhi-Lodon-Bank, his son Surat, and Afzul Aziz a native who teaches Hindi to the British people are involved in this matter.

Thus, a woman can take part in social and political field with courage and confidence, and attain reputation and prestigious position in the society. Having the knowledge of political and social fields, Ruth criticises the fraud and fake management of the government and investigates the Morgan case.

During the absence of Mrs. Arden, Eliot Arden visits to Ruth. He expresses his worries to her and she supports him at her level best. She is always in favour of him. She makes philosophical discussions with him about the 'Morgan Case' as does not want Mr. Eliot Arden to support the Viceroy. According her, Mr. Eliot Arden has to think by his own mind because he is an independent man and he himself has rights to take decisions, as a Chief Commissioner. She thinks that, whatever action he takes, it would be right for him and he should not surrender to the Viceroy. It shows her pride and awareness towards the exploitation of the authority.

Ruth has her own personal and independent views for which she participates in the agitation. She plays the prominent role in the

anti-Government agitation which begins in the Dufferin Hospital for women. The women in hospital have been writing and working continuously on behalf of the condemned soldier. Ruth makes an effective speech to a large audience which gathered in the Town Hall. This incident becomes unusual for the ladies in India, because during the British rule the women in India were not allowed to do so as well as they did not have rights of education. That is why they were traditional by their nature. They were not free to express their thoughts and did not have rights of decision-making. The patriarchy restricted them to stay in house and obey their husbands. They were supposed to do their duties near the *Hearth*. So, the courage showed by Ruth is considered as the matter of public importance by women in India. Through her lofty principle and courage that she makes the speech before the people. The news paper in India makes it prominent news of paper.

She is not an emotional woman and does not want to spoil her personal freedom. She is amazing combination of wisdom and youthfulness. The rejection of the natural life of love, and marriage is the prominent feature of the new woman. Being educated Ruth achieves her social identity. She states that woman can get her rights, self-dependence and true identity through education and occupation. She rejects Arden's love and his sympathy and is related to him only on the ground of their shared principles and ideals. When he expects physical love from her, she does not accept it as a common woman and thinks over it again and again and makes herself free from friendship bonds. Duncan has presented a very ideal character Ruth who is self-confident, assertive and ambitious. She is conscious of her individuality,

dignity and independent identity so she ends friendship forever and tells him the real meaning of their relationship. She appeals him,

It is my bane-it spoils my life. But so far, not you. So far I have felt differently about you Your ideals were my bread of life, and I thought – mine were yours, wasn't that happiness enough for us both? (189)

Ruth wants to become the M.D. in London and to fulfil this goal of her life she has to practice first for two years. She wants to complete her aim at any cost. So, she sacrifices Arden's love for her career. She tells him, 'Yes, I do really want my M.D. And I want' (189). She is a hardworking woman. According to the nature of her occupation, she sees her out-door patients and gives them medicine. She gives the clinical instructions to her dozen Eurasian girl students. As a doctor, she does her routine hospital work and marches towards her purpose. She wants to take the advance knowledge of Medical field. She continues her work and does it unusually well. Having the good status, she has been appointed to the charge of the Fund's Hospital in Calcutta.

With contrast to Ruth Mrs. Jessica Arden is a traditional kind of wife. She is a lovable woman who always worries about her children and husband. Though Jessica is the traditional woman, she is highly knowledgeable. She reads Nietzsche and wants to translate Omar Khayyam which shows her talent of the literature. She loves her husband and children very much. She tells her husband Eliot Arden, 'I have to shade my eyes even to see you' (222). According to him, she is a poor woman and suffering from a mild attack. She can no longer avoid it and very soon it will gobble

up her. But as a traditional wife, she does not know exactly what to do about it. She even conceals it from her husband. She is not mentally strong and becomes very sensitive and emotional if someone is sick in her family. So, Mr. Eliot Arden does not mention his worries to her because she is not courageous as Ruth. She is not well enough to bear suspense and tension. Mrs. Jessica Arden is also much concerned about her children as well as the servants. She orders her servant old Nubbi Bux to take rest when he gets something like Pneumonia and feels sad for him. It shows the opposite natures of Jessica and Ruth.

Mrs. Arden seems to be confined to the traditional roles of caring the children and making the house. Her husband is her protector and provider. She is happy with her role as a traditional housewife. She wants people to identify her with her husband's name. It shows that Jessica is a typical Indian housewife. Ruth reads a lot of books which she borrows from Eliot Arden. Her taste of reading is very high. Being courageous, she reads any type of book. She is a versatile because she knows many languages like English, German and Hindi. Having the knowledge of many languages, she reads the translation of *'The Nature of Man'*. According her reading, there are many things in this book which people want to believe. But such a book can be proved itself very emotional for the ladies like Mrs. Jessica Arden. It can make her miserable, because she is mentally weak. According her, Mrs. Arden should read a book, which will give her mental pleasure. That is why Ruth offers her such a book like *'Life Beautiful'* to read. This book has a real charm in it and it will give her real happiness of life. In the view of the people in Pilaghur, Mrs.

Jessica Arden is always a loving woman. When she gets the news of her son that he is suffering from typhoid, she runs towards him at Heidelberg to take care of him. Mrs. Arden believes in rebirth. She believes that, her husband and she herself have met in some previous existence. It shows her deep affection and love towards her husband. She is a fine example of a traditional and a devoted wife. She says,

When my husband and I were first engaged, I used to have that feeling about him most strongly – that we had met in some previous existence (120).

Her husband is everything for her and her life is meaningless without him. She often tells her friends that how much she and Eliot are made for each other. She is so kind and charming to everybody. But she is too generous to accept the relationship between Ruth and her husband Eliot Arden. Mrs. Arden has two objects in life; one is to look after her children, and the other to 'keep up' with Eliot. She utters,

The worst of having a clever husband was that you always had to think about being left behind in his interests and pursuits (222).

Eliot Arden is everything for Jessica, as the novelist says, 'Eliot is her sun' she circles round him, warms by her revolutions (148). Whether she keeps up or not, it is plain that she can never live without him. Inevitably, she joins his group and participates in his conversations. Actually she is not interested in such types of parties. She thinks that she is useless for such things. Though she likes simple living, she participates in such activities only for the

sake of her husband. She does not feel jealous, if her husband dances with other woman. She utters,

Now isn't it a good thing, Sir Ahmed ... that I'm not a jealous woman? There is my husband dancing again with Mrs. Lemon! (148)

Mrs. Arden always knows where he is, and what he is does. She knows that Eliot Arden has a close friend Ruth but she does not mind it and accepts their friendship with generous mind and praises the status of Ruth. She states that, Ruth is a learned and very clever lady. She accepts that Ruth is quite a wonderful surgeon and does the most difficult things of life. Mrs. Arden observes that, the Indian women still observe *Purdah* and it is a great boon, perhaps it makes a woman just a trifle thing. In *Purdah* tradition, the women are ignored and neglected for all their feelings. They are muted by the patriarchy and spend their whole life in suffocated atmosphere. They lose their self and do their household chores in the kitchen, bedroom, attics and in the inner courtyard. The women are prohibited to take part in the important discussions and decision-making by the orthodox family members. According to the patriarchy women feel secure while they are in *Purdah* or *Burkha*. So, Mrs. Arden thinks that this tradition is a boon or blessing to the women in India. She compares Ruth with the orthodox women in India. She says that Ruth is a successful woman because she has some splendid principles of life. She is very learned character for Mrs. Arden. She informs Sir Ahmed that 'Dr. Ruth Pearce is a lady of very fine intelligence' (150).

Some things are significant about Mrs. Arden. She is the active member of the club, which is the heart of Pilaghur. She tries to get much information about the city affairs from the club. She visits to the library of the club and tries to put into her novel what she sees there. Ruth is interested in the higher views in a life, books, and ideas. She reads many books. She is a lady of fine intelligence but Mrs. Arden is a social woman who wants to give people some pleasure by arranging the ball-room and a dinner parties. Ruth thinks over her own position and status in life. But for Mrs. Arden, her husband's status and his position is very important and valuable. She is proud of him. At first Mrs. Arden meets to Mr. Eliot Arden at Oxford when she is in England. Her previous name is Jessica Cowper. But after her marriage with Eliot Arden, she devotes herself to her husband and takes care of her children. As said in the Hindu myth she is the *Patiwrata* of Eliot Arden who obeys him as her God. People often describe her as 'such an interesting woman'(82). But Mr. Eliot Arden does not like the remark which he considers critical about her. Once, the Viceroy visits them and he calls her 'bright', 'A bright woman like you,'(82) but Eliot takes it as insulting one. By this incident, it is proved that Eliot Arden has the patriarchal views about his wife. The novelist says that her brightness is like a Kaiser-i-Hind medal for her (82).

Sara Duncan tells us about some other new Anglo-Indian women in this novel which can be called the new women. Mrs. Deirdre Tring is the widow of John Tring who is the biologist in Oxford. After the death of her husband Mrs. Deirdre Tring takes care of education of her son Herbert Valentia Tring and daughter Miss. Victoria Tring. Miss. Deirdre is a woman of new thoughts.

She often says that, 'maternity is an accident' (73) for her. She courageously faces the problems, absorbs the society of London and consumes much social philosophy. She becomes a member of 'Fabian Society' which seeks the peaceful establishment of a democratic socialist state in Britain; it is a precursor of the British Labour Party and many noted intellectuals are its members. She writes her convictions in essays and her impressions in poems. She tries to bring about change in society. Mrs. Tring is the first woman who smokes a cigarette in a public restaurant. (73) Daily, she reads the evening paper to know the news of society. Her endurance power is high. That is why she conquers her passionate widowhood as well as handles the financial problems courageously. She sends her son Herbert to America for his bright future with confidence. But unfortunately, her son proves to be the same person who is accused as a murderer in 'Morgan Case' in India. But till the end of the novel, she does not know that her son who is called Morgan is sentenced to death, but unfortunately, Herbert commits suicide in the jail. Mrs. Tring is really a new woman who is modern as well as courageous. She is a social reformer and a caring mother too. Though she is a widow she never stays at home but becomes financially independent. Having a good position in social and political field she challenges male dominated world. As a new woman she takes her own decisions and fully participates in the political and social discussions.

Mrs. Lenox is also a new woman who is the wife of District and Sessions Judge Mr. Lawrence Lenox. She wants to start a bazaar and *café chantant* in Pilgrimage branch of the Young Women's Christian Association. She is the president of this

association. Mrs. Lenox is thoroughly a virtuous woman. Mrs. Lamb is a fashionable English woman whom the novelist calls the 'Chota-mem'.

These all women are innovative and educated. They are modern as well as philosophical by their nature. But with compared to them, Ruth is only the new woman who plays roles as a friend of Eliot Arden, the detective in 'Morgan Case' and the doctor in Pilaghur. She is mature and fully developed character, and Elfrida suffers due to the lack of maturity and experience. But through her self-realization she recognises her best as an independent and career oriented woman.

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