

Chaman Nahal's *My True Faces* : A Study in Conjugal Unhappiness

Dr. Vitthal A. Ugemuge

Head Department of English

Ashok Moharkar Arts & Commerce College, Adyal.

Abstract: Often behavior about the generation gap which stands for the lack of proper appreciation of the feelings and emotion of the older generation by the younger generation and vice-versa. But, of late the modern society is confronting another serious problem which could be safely term as the gender gap. Though the gender gap has been all along there in the human society but it was never so conspicuous as it is found to be in the modern age. In the past man and woman used to take life as an act of compromise for the peace and happiness of one and all. It is too that the bread earner or the man did have greater say in the conjugal and family affairs; whereas the woman made greater sacrifices for the sake of love and harmony in life. Her sacrifice and humility greatly help in keeping the family intact. But the trend is fastly reversing in the modern society in which modern woman is whine for equality and unrestricated freedom in all the sphers of life. Consequently the concept of conjugal happiness is fastly vanishing. Chman Nahal has presented an indebt a study of the various reasons of conjugal unhappiness in his well known novel *My True Faces*.

Introduction: Due to the growing influence of money and matter in the modern age, man often thinks that conjugal happiness is a consumer product which could be had from the market by spending some gold coins. This illusion makes him hunt for peace and happiness throughout his life but without success. Searching physical happiness, he sometimes visits ultra-modern hotels, pub-houses and even red-light areas where joy of flesh is sold and bought. Temporarily he feels satisfied so long as he is under the influence of liquor. The moment he comes out of the influence of liquor, he finds emptiness and disillusionment gazing upon him. Subsequently a realization dawns upon him that joy and happiness does not flow either from a human body or a material object. In fact it is outcome of one's attitude. He also realizes that the passion of lust in consuming in its effect. The more indulges in the joy of the senses, the more he feels restless and hungry of it. This reveals that joy is not present in any material object, living or non-living. This realization comes to man when it is too late. He has little time to mend his ways and behaviors. In such a situation he greatly shocks and repents over his drawbacks and past foolishness during the fag end of his life. During this period he comes to know that by practicing moderation, self-control and restraint he could have made his life an island of peace and beauty. He also realizes that the art of mutuals adjustment is essentials for achieving real happiness in life. By inflicting pains and unhappiness on our fellow beings, how can we have lasting peace and happiness in life. Is it not foolish to hope for nector from a poison tree?

In the pursuit of achieving material success and glory moderns man begins to run after the superficialities of life. His life become a ceaseful toil for things transient and attractive. His obsession with matter makes him often disregard noble qualities like fellow-feelings, and kindness while trasacting his daily business. This habit makes him self-centred and completely practical. He becomes heartless while moving on the way of glory and success. But a stage comes in his life when he begins to suffer from an impinging sense of loneliness and boredom. To his great dismay, he finds himself placed amidst hostile forces, with no sympathizers around. The situation has a breaking effect on

him. He either drowns himself in wine or commits suicide to overcome his suffering. In some cases, he undertakes a life of spiritual quest. Bitterness and uneasiness also creeps into his conjugal life partially due to his impinging sense of loneliness, and partially on account of his insatiable love for money and matter. Home ceases to be home in majority of the cases.

Chaman Nahal's *My True Faces* is an account of a modern youth, Kamal. It portrays the story of his early life as well as that of his subsequent years during which he prospers but also suffers on some counts. Breaking up of the joint family, in the pursuit of individual freedom and happiness, happens to be the fashion of the modern society. Every young couple has a preference for a nucleus family to have unrestrained freedom and joy. Lack of self-control and the spirit of mutual adjustment turn their life into a sordid affair. Husband and wife lead a cat and dog life after a brief conjugal happiness. They start accusing each other for petty things and finally they part with each other to avoid unsavouriness and bitterness. Similar things happens with Kamal when he fails to live up to the expectation of his wife Malti, a woman of modern tastes and habits. One morning he returns to his mother, being bored and tired of Malti. He tells her about his conjugal unhappiness :

Yes there was, and I'm sick of it all said Kamal without further prompting, as though he was only waiting for her to ask. 'I don't care about fights; I can take them and deal with them as they come. It is the endless strain. She keeps on about something, all the time ! A trivial little thing and she will pick it up and go on with it, hour after hour, hour after hour – you said this. You said that. Your mother said this. Your father said that – I think I'll go crazy under the pressure.¹

Searching causes gripping conjugal life of the modern man, Nahal suggests that the traditional sense of superiority of male is at the root of many conjugal problems. Even in the modern society, majority of male members treat their spouses as slaves. They want them to submit to their every whim and fancy. But a girl of modern tastes has inordinate sense of freedom. She is never ready to accept any kind of interference in her affairs, no matter it is from her husband.

Generally it is presumed that the conjugal tension is the outcome of western education. Women having western education, generally develop hostile attitude towards men. They start looking upon them as tyrants. This attitude makes them question and challenge each and every decision of their counterparts, Suspicion and disbelief of woman at large are giving birth to social tension in modern Indian life. Modern youths also lack in spirit of toleration and adjustment. Being ignorant of their traditional values they fail to tackle their female parts properly. Being in terrific hurry to be free from their defiant female counterparts. They apply for divorce withouts knowing that it can not be a satisfying solution to their problems. In the traditional Indian society persuasion is used as the most effective tool to settle such problems. Being an aged an experience lady, Kamal's Mami offers her voluntary service of mediation. She tells Kamal : "May be if I see Malti, I can tell her a few things. I can at least tell her how lonely a single woman can get." (13)

Being the product of a traditional family, Kamal relishes the suggestion. He feels that her mediation could be useful in ending the impasse between him and his arrogant wife. He tells her : "Yes, Mami, that might be useful. When can you come? Can you go with me today?" (13) When he comes back to his residence, he finds that Malti is not there. He thinks that she must have left a note

to inform her whereabouts, as she is “a methodical woman”. Kamal’s traditional background makes him think that the institution of marriage brings a young man and a young girl together for keeping the circle of creation in motion. He wants that his wife Malti should bear at least two or three children for his family. He wants to domesticate her for the purpose. But Malti looks upon the institution of marriage with a different angle. She thinks that marriage allows a young man and a young girl to have the full play of sexuality without any hindrance. When she becomes pregnant, she develops a distaste for her conjugal life. She starts looking for separation from Kamal on some count. In one of her confrontations after becoming pregnant, she reveals her intentions to Kamal. She wants to get rid of the child in her womb also so that she may find a job to have an independent life.

Kamal is stunned to hear her decision because such separation is not allowed in “Hindu dharma”, that too when a woman is pregnant. The traditionalists take marriage to be a pious union and wish that it should continue life long. To them, the act of procreation is a pious social service. But Malti is not at all sentimental about it. Hence in reply to Kamal’s hint that “You have my child in you,” (20) she tells : “I’ll hand the child over to you, when it is born.”(20)

Since her confrontation with Kamal at Okhla the warmth of conjugal relationship begins to vanish. She becomes negligent towards her domestic life. Man and matter become insignificant for her. Pregnancy becomes something undesirable and unwanted. It not only spoils her beautiful feature but also her mental peace and happiness. As time passes, she goes on increasing in size and her femininity suffers a gradual decline. Tenderness of feeling evaporates from her life. She gains in confidence and boldness, when Kamal asks her about her depression and uneasiness. She makes a bold statement and reveals her aversion to the act of child bearing.

Generally it happens that a young man and a young girl get attracted towards each other when they are full of passion. In the initial stage of their getting closer, they disregard their different family backgrounds in the name of modernity. But when the passion is spent, they begin to drift apart, accusing each other of being untrue and unfaithful ways of life, whereas Malti’s modern background and affluence make her yearn for physical comfort and unrestricted freedom. She starts accusing her husband, Kamal of putting her into a sort of prison, by making her pregnant. Accusingly she tells him : “I used to be as free as a bird and you’ve clipped my wings”. (71) Malti believes in unrestricted freedom and she considers marriage to be a social licence to indulge in uninhibited act of sexuality. The child in her womb comes in the way of her reckless behavior. Consequently she rejects the Indian concept of motherhood which every Indian woman considers to be the culmination and bliss in her life.

Kamal’s attitude to pregnancy related problems is quite different. He considers it a normal routine of every married woman. In stead of consoling his wife, he frankly tells her : “All married women go through it.” (71) It is for the first time that Kamal realizes that everything is finished between him and Malti. The rottenness of their relationship leaves him fazed and disturbed. He feels the shadow of death and destruction looming large around them. However he adopts a persuasive gesture and tries to pacify Malti who is defiant and unyielding. She laughs down Kamal’s demand to bear the child first, as irrational. She warns him of extreme step in case of any intervention from him.

Kamal is awestruck at her violent, irrational behavior. Her abhorrence for him becomes obvious. She considers him to be the sole cause of her suffering. She doesn’t allow him touch her body. In a fit of anger she runs towards the temple well to end her life in it. But on reaching the parapet of the well, she retraces few steps and changes her previous stand. She begins to feel for the

child in her womb and says : “ ‘No’, she said. ‘No, I won’t die. I shall live. While I don’t value my life, I can not kill the infant in me.’” (74) It seems, she is rather pretentious and vacillating in her behavior. Like many pseudo-modern women, she seems to be adept in blackmailing tactics. Somehow or other she wants to tame her husband in her tune. To divert Kamal’s attention from her hollow threat, she says : “Yet I wish I didn’t have this child. It has chained me to you. I wanted to be free, and it has chained me to you.”(74)

Conclusion: *My True Faces* reveals not only the gap existing between a husband and wife coming from different family backgrounds but also the gender gap among working people. M.K. Naik sums up the cause of Kamal’s unhappiness in the following lines :

Nahal has, on the whole, succeeded in enlisting the reader’s sympathy for Kamal, whose Odyssey is certainly of much human interest. It can not however be said of Malti who remains shadowy and inconvincing² ...

: Works Cited :

1. Chaman Nahal :- *My True Faces*, 1973 New Delhi : Vision Books Pvt. Ltd. 1978.
2. M.K. Naik : “Faceless Face” Rev. of *My True Faces*, *Indian Books Chronicle*, Vol. 4, No. 3 Feb. 1979
3. D.R. Sharma :- *The Novels of Chaman Nahal*. “The Indian P.E.N.” Vol. 45, No. 1, 2 Feb. 1979.
4. O.P.Mathur :- *The Modern Indian English Fiction*. Abhinav Pub., New Delhi, 1993.
5. K. Venkata Reddy :- *The Novelist as Affirmationist : The Achievement of Chaman Nahal*, *Critical Studies in Commonwealth Lit*, New Delhi. Prestige Books, 1994.

