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Love, Marriage and Sex in the Works of Nergis Dalal

Abstract: A writer is a creative artist who fabricates literature as the reflection of his oversensitive instincts having various purposes in mind as sometimes some injustice racks, sometimes some extraordinary beauty allures, sometimes some extraordinary experience of life undulates, sometimes sheer entertainment incites sometimes some deformity in society moves and sometimes nothing only the whims of the brain excites. He creates the universe and the readers find various themes in that. Dalal has also written soothing fiction with five novels and many short stories which are adorned with various themes that knowingly or unknowingly have come in the fiction. This paper proposes to study the themes of love, marriage and sex in the works of Nergis Dalal.

Keywords: Love Marriage, Sex, Instinct, Relation

Love:

It blooms in the pampering of mother, blossoms in the admonitions of father, flourishes in the mischief of brothers and sisters, springs up in the attachment of fiancée, thrive into relation of husband and wife and culminate in the affection of children. All the relations of the world find their shape only because of this sentiment. Even life gets life with the rise of this emotion. All

the poets, writers, dramatists, Litterateurs have explored this enormously in their writings. Complications, winsomeness, intricacy and impression of this cogent emotion are all pervasive. Nergis Dalal, a contemporary writer is no exception. Her fictional works are imbued with this pious feeling of human heart. Filial love, maternal love, love for animals and romantic love are sprinkled in her novels and short stories as she is of the opinion that all kinds of love are necessary in the life of a man. Experience of maternal love; the first flowering of emotions in the heart of a child is the inception of warmth of feelings, nurturing and protection. It is indispensable as this kind of love is the coolest refuge from the fever and fret of life, but the paternal love which is martinet in nature and involves authority and guidance is also vital in life. Dalal is of the view that parenting cannot be done by single parent. Mother as well as father is required for a child. Her story *Christmas Means Love* describes the anguish of a child (whose parents are going to be separated) vividly and realistically- “It was not that he did not love his mother, so young and fresh and slim, with a gentle voice and tranquil eyes. She was necessary to him, smelling of Vanilla and chocolate, cool to touch, the one to whom he ran when he was sick or hurt, who put him to bed, fed and looked after him. But his father was the one with whom he identified- the wonderful being who knew how to throw a straight ball and bat correctly and who greeted his first experimental use of swearwords with a conspirational grin. He was warmly happy in the feeling of comradeship that he shared with his father” (76).

One other kind of love that is described by Lewis as need love which a child feels for parents. The true feeling of a small child for parents is articulated in the most scintillating way by Dalal. The story *Christmas Means Love* exhibits true anguish of a small boy’s heart as he has an intuition of the separation of his parents as his father has gone from his life. Dalal favours reverence for all the creatures of the world. She seems to be extremely fond of animals. In all her novels her characters are shown to have loved pets. She has not left even a single occasion to satirize or chide the people who are callous and show brutality towards animals. Gertrude could never understand how any people claiming to believe in ahimsa could be so unbelievably cruel to animals. It was a constant heartache for her to see the abandoned puppies, the thin and starving bitches, the overloaded bullock carts and the small, starved tonga ponies that were everywhere. Dalal’s heart weeps at the sight of beating of an animal by a man. “This dog –chained up with the chain wrapped tight around his neck. No collar. And Captain Malik was beating him. And then he went inside and left him all hurting and crying, and still the chain was tight round his

neck. We couldn't bear to see him"(Dalal 180). Dalal seems to be surprised to see the utter negligence and neglect towards animals even in the Zoos in the story *Once for the Asking*- "You know, I was brought up to believe that the English loved animals and were kind to them, but this is the most depressing zoo I have ever visited. Those poor, sad elephants, unwashed and scruffy, and those poor, listless cats in their damp cages, longing for a bit of sun. How I wish I could ship them all back to their own countries"(21).

Like other writers Dalal has also explored that universal feeling of romantic love which cannot be explained in words but when it crosses the threshold of heart, the sweetest music fills the air, a unique grin occupies the lips all the time and happiness becomes a permanent gesture. Dalal also indicates towards the real aspects of love through the words of uncle of Tejpore in the novel *Minari*. "What is love? The feeling you have for a beloved child, or for a sister, or a mother? Not the feeling a man has for a beautiful woman. It complicates life unnecessarily" (227).

Some of Dalal's characters also feel the same love which involves passion, attraction, caring and respect. Her story *Once for Asking* states love of an Indian boy with a Japanese girl whose amity is the only silver lining in the clouds of aloofness and loneliness of an unknown country.

"Everyone should have an Eiko in their lives. She made me happy. Sometimes I would think it was all a delusion and that I was suffering from a sort of madness and that if she existed, it was only in imagination and then I would rush home and stagger through the door, and there she was" (24).

Love at first sight, which is the most romantic of all kinds of love also finds place in her writing. Her story *The French Wife* reflects this kind of love. Mr. Kapoor, a retired person who is spoilt and over pampered by his wife's love and care cannot endure the bereavement from his wife and to make life able to live he goes to her sister in Shimla and falls in love with a French lady. "No, of course not. She was staying with my sister-an artist who had come to India on some assignment. It was love at first sight"(Dalal 07).

'Eros' the passionate love is eternal theme of literature, as no best seller or blockbuster has ever come into existence sans this kind of love that exists between two persons as intimate,

amorous, sensuous carnal relationship. This Eros is universal and every young person feels it at heart in the prime of his/ her life. In *Skin Deep*, Naaz becomes the mouthpiece of the author- “An essential element of love is longing for intimacy, the creation of a two-person universe- more fundamental to happiness than sexual desire”(Dalal 133).

Erotic love is still not discussed openly. Mother of Dinesh is worried for the marriage of her only daughter (Neelu) as she is plump and wants her to reduce weight by dieting. Wife of Dinesh thinks it irrational and expresses her opinion that love should be the only basis for marriage not the slimness of a girl. Some sensible man will see a pretty girl with dimples and a very sweet smile and he will fall in love with her (Neelu). But the mention of the word ‘love’ made the mother-in-law angry- “Neelu looked at her gratefully but her mother snorted at the mention of love as though the word were dirty”(Dalal 148).

True love is the best kind of love as it flourishes only when there is mutual understanding, care, fidelity, faithfulness, devotion and dedication. Naaz, when is married with Ramesh, realizes that she is in love as her thoughts asserts- “We liked and respected each-other, and if I was in love with him, my love did not in any way intrude on either his work or his life. We could always count on each-other. He discussed his work with me and I helped him with contracts, legal work and anything else that was not only necessary, but absolutely vital to his success.”(Dalal 236).

Nergis is aware about the obsessive love and she talks about the condition of man in intense love. There is no control of man over his reason when this acute feeling closes all the doors of rationality and wit. There is no name of sagacity and the murderous instincts take charge over him. “He was in love, as only the very young can be in love. There is nothing stranger than the condition of love- the weight, the strain, the anxiety, is a heavy load to bear, if only because among those confused passion and emotions loom dreadful possibilities like suicide and murder”(Dalal 62).

Sometimes illusion of love makes a person wayward. The unpredictable behavior of people becomes reason of anguish. Married with Ranjan, Anita is bored of her marital life; she becomes titillated towards Tejpore, the most handsome and amorous of all men in Minari.

Considering her crush as her true love Anita goes to Tejpore, forgetting all her limitations, but soon realizing her mistake she returns.

Marriage:

When love culminates in beautiful wedlock, the life is doused in dreams, desires exhilaration, exuberance and aspirations. New meanings are explored. Marriage, one of the strongest bonds of mankind and loveliest of human relationships gives new turn to life. It is one of the most favourite themes of writers. Dalal seems to have meticulous faith in the institution of marriage which recognizes intimate and sexual interpersonal relationship of people of different sex. Society recognizes and rituals acknowledge this union of spouses which establishes rights and obligations between them. In her writing she talks about marriage in cross cultural context, about unsuccessful. Marriages initiated by love and also present her view that marriage is not the union of two persons only or of two hearts, it is coalition of two families, cultures and traditions. "I recalled Grandma's advice about the advisability of marrying someone of one's own kind. "You are not simply marrying a man- you are marrying a whole culture, a religion, a family, a way of life. When these are similar to your own, then you have a fair chance of being happily married." (Dalal 109)

Dalal wants this union of two persons and two souls should bring prosperity and happiness to the family as well as society. She is of the view that a person should not marry to unknown figure- "The problem with marrying a stranger is that he hasn't read the same book." (Dala 123).

Dalal is of the opinion that initiation into this vital and pivotal association should not be in haphazard manner as a successful marriage decides whether life would be a bed of roses or a path of thorns. Great thoughts should be given and planning should be worked out for marriage. This alliance should be free from premeditated illusions and disenchantment so that one may not end in fiasco. One should gear up well for the most crucial turn of one's life. "Women who enter into marriage thinking of it as the traveler's perfect land in which dreams are the only reality are doomed to disillusionment and failure. Most continue to claim happiness simply because they dare not admit failure or defeat" (Dalal 139).

The protagonist of *Skin Deep*, Naaz who is remarkably adroit and deft in performing all tasks, sets herself for her marriage- “I set about making my marriage a success in the same way that I had conducted research into my thesis, although this was infinitely more difficult”(Dalal 141).

Jason tells Maya about Michelle- “Heavens, no I told you she works very hard at making her marriage a success, as others work on doctoral theses. She is always storing up facts, changing her perspective, trying to see everything through Indian eyes”(Dalal 47).

Marriage, the most soothing of the human bonds becomes successful when both of the wheels of the cart of marriage move without rut. It is the cooperation of the spouses that makes this institution everlasting. The question raised by Naaz in the novel *Skin Deep* indicates towards Dalal’s opinion about how vital the contribution of both the partners in a successful wedlock is. “Or was it one in which both partners try to encourage the other to grow, to be happy, to share all responsibilities and enjoy a perfect mental and physical accord” (Dalal 142). This loveliest alliance of life makes all other things go on smoothly- “Marriage I decided was like a feather quilt- an effective insulation against the harshness of the outside world, but sometimes a cold wind could penetrate unexpectedly”(Dalal 145).

When two persons decide to tread on the same path hand in hand the path becomes smoother as marriage is like amity between two persons. “That’s only part of it. Marriage should be, first of all, a companionship- a friendship lit by passion.” (Dalal 25).

A number of reasons affect the decision of marriage. According to Dalal- Women sleep with men for many reasons- for security, from a desire to give pleasure, for money and sometimes, but only sometimes, for love.”(Dalal 100).

Dalal does not have less to say about cross cultural marriages. She is of the opinion that the deep rift of difference can never be filled, so the marriages are not successful. The novel *The Girls from Overseas* is woven around the same theme. The story reveals the anguish of foreign ladies who cannot reconcile themselves with the atmosphere of a different culture after marrying with an Indian. It is like ousting of an illusion. All the five marriages shown in the novel are like yoking the life unwillingly due to the unknown conditions and unfamiliar circumstances.

“Five years in India, five years of being married to an Indian, and still she was herself, alien, separate, linked by only the slenderest of filaments to her husband Dinesh, who watched her dress with an absentminded expression”(Dalal 01).

Dalal, a great espouser of harmony and adjustment in marriage expounds that cross cultural marriages bring complications in life as one cannot change his or her upbringing. The long period of more than thirty years of residing together in India could not wipe out the indelible impression which their nurturing had brought. “Alien cultures had many aspects that were not simply baffling but often downright unpleasant”(Dalal 171). Sandy also, having married to an Indian finds life unpleasant and boring as it is not based on love. Both of the persons want an escape, a rescue from such relation which is devoid of happiness and adjustment. She even thinks that- “Perhaps all couples were basically hostile to each other and there was no such thing as a happy marriage. Perhaps unhappiness and hostility were absolutely infallible conditions of any marriage”(Dala 167).

While a successful marriage is heaven alighted on earth, a bad marriage is the shattering of dreams, ruination of desires and crushing of life. “A bad marriage can often destroy a woman whose initial commitment has been passionate and whose fantasies on which such a commitment is based, have forced her to abandon the possibility of alternative options”(Dalal 21).

Sex:

One of the most acute desires of human beings is that of sex. People often avoid talking about it but reality is that it is the most crucial part of marital life, indispensable for continuity of unbroken line of futurity and most importantly the bond between a man and woman. Literature is not untouched of the rendition of sex. This vital activity of man is also a vital part of literature especially of the fictional literature. Dalal has also delineated this physical activity in fairly balanced, poised and restrained manner. In her opinion the instincts of sex are as acute, sharp and penetrating as those of murdering someone. Doors of reason and rationality, logic and sanity, wits and sagacity become closed and the one dominating desire haunts the man. “Intense feelings make a person pass almost immediately from feeling to action, regardless of the consequences. Both sex and murder arouses these same passionate feelings” (Dalal 54).The Story, *The Nude* is the vital example of this. Impecunious painter Robie has become so impoverished that it

becomes unfeasible for him to arrange for a model for his painting. His friend Turner suggests him the name of Mrs. Oliver, a very plump, repugnant lady as an affordable alternative for his project of a nude painting which is the only ray of hope for him to survive financially. The sight of Mrs. Oliver was a shock for life for him as he could not reconcile himself with that plump grotesque figure that was not better than a gruesome ghastly, colossus giant. Finding no way to reject her he tells her to be revived up for the nude pose. As she emerges nude, Robie cannot believe his own eyes, the apricot coloured skin with a unique brightness and wrinkle free smoothness lures him and seduces him. The magnetism and charisma of her body was hard to resist. Robie at once forgets the earlier ugliness of hers- “Under his hand, his skin was warm and glowing, gently burning and enveloping him in its warmth. She lifted one arm lazily and wrapped it about him. He was aware of nothing now but the steady beating of his own blood, and the softness, the warmth into which he was plunging, disappearing into dark recesses which had not known existed”(Dalal 55).

The instincts of sex are predominating and most antic. Its significance in the life of a man cannot be denied or underestimated, without it life cannot move. Dalal is of the view that sex is the whole in itself as indulgence in it is sufficient to forget other things. In *Minari* recalling her experiences of life with Tejpore, Rula tells about sex- “People,” he had said, “often think of sex as a means of reproduction or pleasure. But sex is a whole world of its own- an end to itself.....Sex is more than just an indulgence of the senses, it is something terribly ancient and primitive- a world of sensuality- which could demand the attention of one’s whole life” (Dalal 19).

Dalal sometimes gives a very lively and picturesque description of sex- “She thought without humour, that if they lay in bed thus, breast to breast, and hip to hip, there could hardly be any conclusion but one to such proximity. Even this was disturbing enough- licensed sensuality, with Tejpore a past master in extracting every ounce of advantage from it. She began to feel a familiar sensuous glow creeping upwards from her loins- her breath became a little more uneven, and her hand on his shoulder, curved a little closer to his neck”(Dalal 45).

It is clear from the above discussion that Dalal has portrayed love, marriage and sex in her works vividly and picturesquely. It is quite a great task for an Indian female writer to talk about these themes in such an open and frank manner. None of her contemporaries seems to have

dealt with these issues with such vigor and meticulously. She has given a new a direction to themes which are concerned with women and have been considered till now a kind of a taboo for a woman to talk. Thus, the theme of Love Marriage and Sex has been elaborated and its practical aspects have been boldly discussed by Dalal's personages.

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