



SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS: A STUDY IN VANDANA SINGH'S *THE WOMAN WHO THOUGHT SHE WAS A PLANET*

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ABSTRACT



Science Fiction writer Vandana Singh's short story collection *The Woman who thought she was a planet* is a collection of ten stories including the title story. Though Vandana Shiva writes a science fiction, she is a feminist writer where all her stories conquer the issues of women. The complexities of human mind and relationships are sketched so well in this collection of stories that it turns out to be one of the best creations of all time. In Vandana Singh's words "Reality is such a complex beast that in order to begin to comprehend it we need something larger than realistic fiction"

Keywords: *Alienation, Symbiotic Relation, Family, Woman, Loneliness*



The present paper focuses on Vandana Singh's story *The Woman who thought she was a Planet*. It is a study on the symbiotic relationship between the couple who had been together for forty long years. The protagonist Kamala was estranged from her husband and being isolated she confines herself in her own imaginary world. The ex-bureaucrat and moral hypocrite husband Ramnath Mishra neglected his wife all through his life and later witnessing his wife's strange behavior makes him angrier rather than being worried. At the end Kamala frees from her selfish husband by imagining herself as a planet and flies away to the universe. Vandana Singh justifies why her protagonists are alien in A Speculative Manifesto "Because haven't we all felt alien at some time or another, set apart from the norm due to caste and class, religion and creed, gender and sexual orientation?"(203).

Ramnath Mishra had failed to understand his wife beyond her body. They had lived together under one roof for many years but lacked love and affection. His wife Kamala performed her duty as a loyal wife till his retirement. Then he observes a drastic change in her and is unable to comprehend it. She announces "I know at last what I am. I am a planet". (39) The two people Ramnath Mishra and Kamala who are bound to be together for life long under the sacred institution of marriage are unable to communicate and this results in latter's loneliness. After her husband's retirement when the children are far away from home she questions her relationship with him and is disturbed. Ramnath Mishra stays at home all the time and is engrossed in learning the news of the world but is unable to read his wife's mind. Both had worked hard for the children but now, when they do not have any work to perform, to stay together under one roof was unbearable. Kamala had performed her duty as a wife all these years and had understood that her husband worked for her and children and was unable to give much time to her. Even after retirement her husband though stayed with her remains aloof. She had managed everything alone but to be alone in presence of her husband was hurting her. The negligence from her husband started torturing her and she started considering herself as a planet.

Planets revolve round the sun and her life was centered towards him. She had sacrificed her whole life for this man who could not love and care her. She had neglected herself and her body to raise his children but at the end she is unable to get consoled by her husband. Even Ramnath was happy in his work and from distance it was bearable for both of them. When Kamala started unwinding her sari then Ramnath was shocked and became conscious of his neighbors. "A planet does not need clothes" justified Kamala. Kamala was not ill but she had a revelation that she is a planet. "I used to be a human, a woman, a wife and mother. All the time I wondered if there was more to me than that. Now I know. Being a planet is good for me". (40)

The sudden behavioral change in his wife disturbed Ramnath and even he made his wife understand that she is not a planet but a living soul, a woman. He describes his wife that she is not a planet which circles a star, large in size and living things crawl on it. As a husband he is not guilty that even after living forty years he is unable to understand her feelings. He thinks only about the false prestige and the society. He recalls when a great aunt had gone mad, locked herself in the outdoor toilet of the ancestral home and began shrieking like a Sarus Crane. She was sent to the insane asylum in Ranchi as their family was tired of peering neighbor's. Who sympathized falsely for biting on her husband's arm. Ramnath is now concerned about his honour and dignity and calls Dr.Kumar to help him. When she goes completely undressed Ramnath is horrified and manages to put her gown improperly. He did not have the knowledge of his wife's favorite dishes so that by eating that may comfort her but he asked his cook to make whatever she liked. Now Ramnath was helpless. The ego in him was crushed. He aspired for a daughter who could have helped him in this situation. The man who had worked hard and risen up to the ranks of a minor bureaucrat in the state government was vulnerable. He scanned all the female relatives in his mind but many were either dead or living in other towns. In the day time he read newspapers and his evenings were spent in the senior club by playing chess with other retirees. For the first time Ramnath was unwilling to leave his wife



alone at home and guarded her so that he could protect his honour. Outwardly it appeared that she was normal but she was disturbed inside. She was engrossed in her own private world. Ramnath was not able to sleep well that night and had nightmares of planets and naked women. He was afraid of his wife and found her as stranger after living for many years. The next morning Kamala displayed a normal self, only with her friends. When Dr.Kumar examined her and she was declared absolutely normal. The doctor feels if she was behaving strangely then it could be mental which is not always the sign of disease. He adds "Women are odd – they act strangely when they are hankering after something. She should go out, may be go visit one of your sons. Grand children would do her good."(44) Kamala rejected Doctor's advice and Ramnath took her for walk in the evenings. Within a week she had tried twice to remove her saree and had gone half naked. To persuade her to wear saree he had said that a planet has atmosphere and she should wear grey saree. Ramnath was muted when his wife said "At last you believe me, Ramnath" (45) Ramnath's pious and dutiful wife had called by his name. She had changed and this revelation was indigestible for Ramnath.

Ramnath started thinking of sending his wife to asylum in Ranchi. Asylums are dangerous as the sufferer is taken far away from the guilty people. Unless the victim is soothed by the guilty the mental health cannot be retained. Ramnath thought it would have been simply nice if she died and was even ready to kill her himself rather than living this sort of life. It shocked him the different ways he was thinking to murder his wife. This thought gave him pleasure. He had ritually thought of suffocating her and strangulating but he had doubt about the inference of the forensics people.

When he was carrying out his thought in to action he observed something from her mouth moving. First he thought it was blood but he noticed small moving things. It was insectoid, alien about as tall as his index finger (47). To his horror they crawled on to him covering his body beating and biting at him with short, sharp appendages. He was unable to save himself as they were plenty but in

despair cried for help but Kamala slept peacefully as it had come out of her. Ramnath wanted to forget it as nightmare but the bites and bruises were real. Kamala bathed his wounds with dettol and warm water. She was not sent to her ancestral village for the past five years as there was something important than that like her son's marriage or his retirement and someone was needed to supervise the servants and run the house. Kamala consoled Ramnath by asking him to be calm. "The younger ones probably want to find a place to colonize. If you ever want to be a satellite, Ramnath, let me know. The little animals are good for a planet. They have restored my health." (48) Children who are true from their hearts give unconditional love.

A satellite is an object that orbits another object. A woman after marriage forgets her maternal house and adjusts to her husband's house. It becomes her world. She gives everything to her family. Without any expectations but at the end, when she discovers she has wasted her life for thankless family it hurts her. It makes her sad that neither her children nor her husband values her sacrifice. She was always neglected, always taken for granted. If at all her husband reciprocated her feelings then she would have been the happiest person on the earth itself. She aspire him to be a satellite, which revolves round the planet. It is very clear that if he becomes a satellite then there would be transmission between the two. Kamala feels the insectoid as her creature as they come out of her. Ramnath denies being a satellite and she confesses that "A Planet needs a sun, my journey is just beginning." (50)

After this confession Kamala becomes restless. She loved going to park, play with balloons, and buy balloons for the kids. She started releasing balloons to the air. She later stretched her arms out to them in full blissful yearning. Slowly and majestically she began to rise over the ground inch by inch. The inches she was moving upward her husband was thinking that his family name and honour sinking into the ground. Everybody was calling her name. Ramnath was thinking to escape or to commit suicide. He got angry how she could leave him like this. He wanted to start a fresh, run away by



the late train and disappear. "A sob caught in his throat. How would he manage now with nobody to look after him?" (55) He rushed to the bedroom to collect money, her jewelry and cloths. But he was unable to move from that place as he was caught in the web of insectoids. Like his wife he also suffers at the end. Loneliness in the form of insectoids attacks him badly. Ramnath who is responsible for his wife's psychological illness is punished at the end. He should have stood by her and given emotional and mental support. It is so pathetic that family members are unable to help each other and allow suffering. Many Indian wives suffer injustice, cruelty, discrimination from her family which leads to their depression. Kamala's story is dedicated to all dutiful Indian wives' who suffer alone and hopes freedom from their husbands.

The science fiction is a very popular genre of our present generation. As Robert Scholes opines "We need suspense with intellectual consequences". It enthralls idea in such a way that it gives more pleasure to the reader who knows it is far from reality. Women are always labeled mentally ill when she moves away from her stereotyped roles. They are easy prey of depression as they are devoid of any outlet. Each and every woman suffers silently and battle it alone in her own way unsuccessfully the inhumanity bestowed by her own family. A woman needs love, affection, support, attention, listening, understanding and self-love. Communication between the couple is essential for a healthy relationship. Vandana Singh's stories push women to the imaginary world and provoke them to think in different way to retain sanity of mind.

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