

Is Cupid a Moralist or a Scientist? - Deconstructing the 'Love-Triangle' in Select Modern Texts

- Keya Das

Abstract: There can't be a more universal and complicated emotion than love. The stock theme of a female-centric love-triangle yields to writers a great opportunity for exploring this complication. The cultural dichotomy between the East and West placing the 'woman' in different footing makes a very interesting comparative study of her role in a love relationship as depicted in their representative bodies of literature. Limiting the scope of the paper to the complicated nature of a triangular love-affair in some of the modern Bengali and other texts, the paper offers some insights into the reasons why the European lady-loves are more vitalistic, active and decisive than their Indian counterparts like Bimala, Padmini or Maloty. Of multiple motivations behind the woman's stance in the triangles are love, lust, money, societal approval, politics domination and many others, and the final decision often is guided by the complex interaction among all these. The self-assured Shavian stance of the central woman assigning her the decision-making role is mostly missing in the Indian love-triangles. The cultural hegemony of women's sexual inhibition as a different mode of male domination regulates the psyche and sexual behavior of the Indian women—irrespective of their class, education, breeding and sense of morality—brand feminine sensuality as 'evil'. Any serious insight into the biological facts or power politics is forbidden. The paper after examining the complexities of different love-triangles comes to the conclusion that female sensuality is no evil, but the evilness is a construct of the male-dominated culture both in the East and West.

Keywords: Triangular love, Feminine sensuality, Biological urge, Socio-economic determinants, Intertextuality.

MAN lives on LOVE, feeds on LOVE.

It is LOVE that builds relationships, family and society. The theme of a love-triangle¹ (we have chosen the one with a lady being the amorous destination of two vying men) always yields a great opportunity to the writers to explore this complication at the maximum. In this comparative study, the Indian (with special emphasis on Bengali) and a few English texts have been analysed to peep deep into this phenomenon. The cultural dichotomy between the East and West placing the 'woman' in different footing makes a very interesting comparative study of her role in a triangular love as represented their literature.

For Indian love-triangles, the modern classics by Tagore (*Ghare Baire*, 'Home and the World'), Sarat Chandra (*Grihadaha*, 'Home Burning') and Narayan (*The Guide*) written in the early 20th century and Karnad

(*Hayavadana*) and Buddhadeb Bosu (*Raat Bhore Brishti, It Rained All Night*) from the contemporary years have been analysed as an attempt to look into the complications of triangular stories there especially from the feminine perspective. Thus, limiting the scope of the present study to some of the modern English and Indian texts, attempts have been made to find out why and how the stance of the central woman is to be defined in terms of her relationship with two men and what is the role of prevailing value system, morality and the individual self interacting constantly with them in structuring that triangle.

The Indian wives (the central women in the triangle are mostly wives in Indian texts) caught in the web of a love-triangle can be grouped into *Sita*-figures and *Radha*-figures: the former loyal, chaste and virtuous at their heart, but the latter voluntarily exercising infidelity and radical in their outlook. Bimala and Mrs. Das (in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Interpreter of Maladies*) were victims of their over-credulousness initially goading them to trust the deceptions of Sandip and anonymous Punjabi friend respectively, as Sita did trust Ravana's deception. But more importantly they strictly adhere to the notions of conjugal fidelity and love. Beside falling prey to delusions and deceptions despite all their love and innocence (as Sita did violating Laksmana's caution about the safety mark, *Lakshmanagandi*), beside being stigmatized by the patriarchal society, another important aspect about these Indian *Sita*-figures is that, in the process they came to their final realization about the absolute necessity of the social attestation for true love to sustain. Sita learnt it after returning to Ayodhya from *Ashokaban*; Bimala did after coming back 'Home', Achala had her lesson after returning to her '*Griha*', and so did Mrs. Das coming back again to her cultural root. This is what may be called '*rite of initiation*', a kind of coming to terms with the social and moral responsibilities involved in one's love or sexual relationships. Before it takes place, all of them were confined to the boundary defined by dominant patriarchal ideology, satisfied (if not necessarily happy) with their '*ignorantly calm conjugal life*'. This *iter itineris* or coming outside may symbolize their attempts to defy this patriarchal authority. But once they come out of it, they miserably failed, and could realize the omnipotence of the reality. This physical shift is indicative of the bigger shift from their stratified existence to the harsh realities, a kind of self-discovery, an epiphany. Nikhil could understand it well. He didn't want Bimala to love him simply as her husband (i.e. a rightful possessor of her body, mind and soul) out of a social and cultural obligation. He wanted her to see the world outside, to find herself out, and then to love him as a true individual, a real '*man*' (not ever better than Ram in some respect?), who outranks any other like Sandip with his courage, patience, tolerance, confidence, self-respect, dignity love, respect, liberal and progressive views and all that.

Following the same track, there is the conclusion of the misguided wife coming back to her husband Mahim with her final realization. Whereas

Mahim belonged to a poor family, Suresh was rich, conservative, a boyhood friend. Since birth he was culturally trained by the rural orthodoxal Hinduism and Brahminism. With the growing disillusionment about Mahim, Achala got infatuated with Suresh for his affluence and deceptive grandness. She could realize, or was rather subtly deceived into the belief that intellectuality doesn't matter unless it's augmented by financial and social stability. When Achala could also learn to differentiate between the true gold in her husband and an apparently bright alloy in his rich friend Suresh, she came back to her husband and also was wholeheartedly accepted by Mahim, whom she left after being intrigued into an elopement by Suresh. Her realization also significantly takes place when she is away from her family and community. Thus this element of displacement is much instrumental to bring about a movement in both literal and metaphorical senses. If this epiphanic realization is a step forward to self-discovery and psychic deliverance (from all stagnations), the initiation is to take place as soon as there is some movement away from the centre. Decentralization is a must for the democratization of human relationships, which would form the basis of emancipation in a socio-political sense. In Indian cultural hegemony, polygamy has never been praised or prescribed: woman's strict confinement to the domestic sphere had ever been a part a part of, or condition of man-woman relationships, leaving room neither for the process of dissolution of feudal concept of property-succession (Engels 1948) to take place, nor for democratization of marriage and conjugality (Mandell 1995, Gerda Lerner 1986).

In the Indian culture (or socio-political schemata), many sexual inhibitions are thrust upon women in a way most hostile to the biological aspect of love. Women are preordained to struggle all their life with all these cultural 'should-nots' sometimes facing serious challenges from the new generation of women educated, liberal and progressive. With the rapid spread of women education, with the popularization of Brahmo Samaj ideologies, the tension between the traditional cultural norms and desires to establish the Self at par with the men intensified. And naturally, literature of the time is to be faithful enough in its representation of this tension between the professed patriarchal demands of orthodoxal culture, social surveillance and the different reality underneath. The tension issuing forth from this conflict is beautifully captured in their presentation of the love affairs by the dramatist and the writers of the narratives.

The central paradox in the Indian representation of this triangular-love is that, despite the ampleness of examples of incest, debauchery and lustful sexualities in the Hindu mythologies, the society has hardly any approval or tolerance of all these in practice in common man's (more precisely women's) daily life. Rather, it's the society well-known for its conservative notions about sex and marriage. Sex is never permitted outside marriage till date, and married women have to unquestionable *patibratas*, husbands

have all the authorities over the body, soul, mind and everything of the wife and so on. Radical and Marxist feminists would argue that the society generally sensors these love triangles and advocates monogamy because, if woman has sexual allegiance to more than one man, the question of heir and inheritance would be problematized.

Scientifically love is a biological instinct, the final outcome of a process working through three phases: Lust → Attraction → Attachment. As such, flesh has its own role to play leading to attraction in the second step. But if it remains unrequited and thus fails to pass on to the next step, then things become jeopardized. Legends are often found to have been strongly based upon scientific truths. As for example, the Hindu legendary love-triangle of *Ayan-Radha-Krishna* serves as an example offering a possible solution (only biological but not ethical) to the problem of unsatisfied *amor*, an unrequited love through polygamy. Women practicing adultery are married but remaining quite dissatisfied with their sex-life. In a sense their predicament may be equated with that of *Radha*, whose husband's impotence² pushed her into the snare of *Krishna* the greatest lover and musician. His flute is an irresistible amorous call, a temptation to tear all the strings of social bondage. Though there is some biological reason or justification behind this adultery, but biology cannot be a dependable alternative for moral norms by any means—so *Radha* is still called *kalankini* 'ignominious' or 'disgraced'. The Marco-Raju episode in Narayan's *The Guide* may be taken for an example of intertextuality (Kristieva 1980) with the legendary triangle story being retold in a modern way. Marco the impotent historian takes the place of Ayan and Raju the *Krishna* figure the 'unlawful' but 'potential' lover with all his captivating words and manners being the musical flute to tempt his *Radhika*, i.e. Rosie. But the vehement protest of the society—though the voices of Gaffur, Raju's mother and uncle—is actually the voice of Indian orthodoxical cultural heritage. Rosie married Marco not out of love, but for a respectable social settlement in order to avoid living the life of a Devadasi like her mother. But the modern education made her conscious about the rights and prerogatives of a wife. It's evident that her husband is not interested or potent to give her a normal conjugal life; she confessed to her mother about her never becoming the mother.

In Buddhadev Bosu's novella. *Raat Bhare Brishti* published in (1967) depicted a love triangle which explicitly allowed sex to play a critical role in human relationship. Nayonangshu here is another *Ayan* figures in his passivity, inertia and sexual weakness. The story involves Maloty, an attractive Bengali woman, who commits adultery. Her husband, Nayonangshu, is a person unable to satisfy her in many ways. Making love to Jayanto, her husband's friend, finally gives her that pleasure. Politically saying, the husband's passive acceptance here at the end is indicative of the patriarchy crumbling to pieces in the face of the question of woman emancipation. While Tagore's Nikhil has a broader ideological view on woman's place in society, Nayan is but a naïve follower. But, both of them

are in a sharp contrast with Lawrence's Baxter or Mr. Chatterley who are the products of patriarchal agenda of male domination.

In Mann's *The Transposed Heads* Sita stands for the Feminine Principle and so is Padmini in Karnad's *Hayavadana*. After the transposition of heads, both get what she dreams of – a husband with an intellectual's brain and a strong, muscular body. But gradually the intellectual head makes the body lose all its virility. The wives are dissatisfied again. Devadatta the Brahmin husband Kapila his friend were aware of their respective inadequacies and plus points as well. To think of a union of these plus points – flesh and spirit – there is the need of Padmini. If Mann's aim was to stress the ironic impossibility of uniting perfectly the spirit and the flesh in human life, Karnad in his "*Hayavadana*" tries to pose existential ideas like the problem of Being and the metaphysical anguish of the human condition (Naik 1984). Both in Mann's novel and here, the illusion of achieved completeness melts away. Karnad gives his thesis: completeness, as Padmini conceives of it, is impossible to achieve; the flesh and spirit will ever remain separate.

Chandri forms the centre of an exceptional love-triangle in Ananthamurthy's *Samskara*. She is different in multiple senses. First, she was a concubine, Naranappa's woman, but not a wife or never supposed to be one; secondly, her sexual union with Praneshacharya took place as a matter of chance with no amount of love or interest on the man's part; and lastly, no amount of amorous pangs, deception, heartbreaking was involved in her sex-relationships. Both Padmini and Chandri are neither *Radha* nor *Sita* figures; they are more like mother-figures carrying forward the natural agendum of birth and reproduction. Padmini dreamed to reproduce a being uniting Brahmin's intellectuality and an artisan's physical attributes, the mission where she failed measurably. Like her, Chandri also attempted, consciously or not, to unite the seed of the *Crest Jewel of Vedantic Learning* and her vigorous lively physique. The combination was impossible without the union, and the union itself never to be permitted by the society in *agrahara* took place in the jungle. We can have a hint that sometimes social inhibitions and conservatism are a great hindrance to the natural cause of biological progress; we have to resort to nature to carry forward the biological process of evolution. Conceived of as the Feminine Principles, both Padmini and Chandri rose above their selves, all individual failure and painful anguish (in case of Padmini) or success and jubilation (in case of Chandri). They tried hard to deconstruct and reconstruct man to create back the whole again as per the Platonic parable of the wholeness of Being. And in doing that, they had to have some element of sacrifice, a self-destructive instinct, which pulled down all the walls of their secured life. But this sacrifice gives them *shakti* to play Nature, to propel the cause of fulfillment, betterment and completeness. Thus, with strong symbolic overtones, they are more on the track of Shaw's Ann or Louka.

How should we place Candida beside these four women: while they strove to unite opposites, to procure a better genes for the sake of human

progress, Candida made her deal in favour of a 'weak' husband voluntarily rejecting the 'strong'. A big WHY, indeed! As already explained, authority over and protection of man in the domestic sphere, and her belief in artist's inadequacy and lack of adaptability in the domestic sphere led Candida to the decision. On the other hand, Chandri and Padmini as Feminine Principles shoulder the responsibility to further the mission of eco-feminism. Eco-feminists differentiate women's attitudes and values from those of men. They have faith in superiority of women to men in certain respects *e.g.* the qualities of creativity, sensitivity and caring, which men can never develop (Shiva 1999).

Often love-triangles result from the severe conflict, on the lady's part mostly, between (to borrow the phrase from Eliot, 1920) the '*tradition and individual talent*', between the social and moral obligations thrust upon and the individual's desire for emancipation of her Self from all. Devadatta, Nikhilesh and Morell can be put in the single bracket because all of them believe in love that is not ensured and guaranteed to them by the institution of marriage. If love be so, then it is to be redeemed as a serious attempt at devaluation of their Selfhood. Nikhilesh didn't protest against Bimal's attraction toward Sandip, because he believed in that she should have the liberty to make her choice, and was confident that after gathering her knowledge about the hypocritical 'world', she would surely come back to her 'home'.

Why the European lady-loves like Candida, Constance, Clara are natural or vitalistic, more active and decisive than their Indian counterparts like Bimala, Padmini or Rosie? The decision-making role is of the central woman is not much evident in Indian love-triangles, since the cultural hegemony of male domination prevailed on the Indian women—irrespective of their class, education, gender—much more than an insight into the biological facts. If Narayan's Rosie, Lawrence's Lady Chatterley, Hardy's Tess are seen going beyond the marital boundary in their sexual behavior, Shaw's Candida, Karnad's Padmini or Tagore's Bimala did refrain from going to that extreme, in spite of the fact that they were provided with a freedom to choose on their own. As regards the ladies' motivations behind their stance in the love-triangles, there are many be sociological, political, economic, religious, cultural, racial and many other factors. There must have been always a complex interaction among different forces like sex, true love, monetary or social security, societal approval, political ideology, Foucauldian (1980, 1982) power dynamics and politics of domination to name a handful of major ones. If in the Indian love-triangles women in general faced societal disapproval (all of Rosie, Achala, Bimala did), English texts show a greater amount of tolerance (if not all unambiguous approval) on society's part (Connie, Candida, Clara being examples). Women confinement to home is a patriarchal claim founded not on women's biology alone but on private property and monogamous marriage, economic and political dominance by men and their control over female sexuality. Unless the basic

structural arrangements of society is transformed, patriarchy must be there (Mandell, 1995).

Lady Constance Chatterley, Maloty and Achala represent the barest from of feminine sensuality, whereas Greta Conroy and Ruth are the paragons of an elevated form of devoted love. All these women stand on the common ground that, in spite of being married, they develop sexual allegiance to a 'second' man³. Now, what about Maloty? Was she fortunate enough like Candida? Or as paralyzed by the male-dominated society as Constance? Answer is not so clear, as Bosu kept the answer to himself or left it to the imagination of the readers. The story involves Maloty, an attractive Bengali housewife, who commits adultery. Her husband, Nayonangshu, is a person unable to satisfy her in many ways. Making love to Jayanto, her husband's friend, finally gives her that pleasure. But is there peace? They remained seated all night hearing the sounds of rain outside, speechless, dumb and inexpressive. That is all what this short story is about. There awkward silence when it had been raining all night is highly suggestive and rich with ambiguity shrouding the whole scheme. Water ('rain') is one of the primal elements, so a root of all lives. In this same sex can be equated with this as a life-begetting element. The inherent ambiguity is that both can be equally destructive. Both rain and sex are the agents of reproduction or regeneration as well as of destruction. Adopting the naturalistic viewpoint, Bosu has thus successfully explored the inherent relation between these two elements, one natural other human. Sensuality is 'evil' in humans, as it's natural; it's 'good' only when Legitimized by society through the system of marriage. Bosu has touched upon, no matter whether intestinally or not, the existential issue of the dangerous animosity (or rather a serious conflict of interest) between natural and societal demands. Nayon's and Maloty's sleepless, apparently calm night after the issue of 'illegitimate' female sensuality came to light suggests the need to accept the overpowering nature of 'evil' in order to substance their human existence. Any protest or complaint is meaningless since the opponents nature (Shavian 'evil'), red in tooth and claw's is there to take its toll, as objectified by the howling incessant rain all through the night.

All is well when the husband can stoop to come down from the height of his patriarchal sense of possession to approve of woman's right to her own sensuality. In Joyce's *The Dead* also we have the approval but not of her sensuality but of her heart's devotion to a 'second man' her emotional attachment to Michael who died long lack. Gabriel inwardly felt a kind of admiration for Greta's devotion, the purity of her love for Michael. Is it to be called cowardice, a moral weakness or unmanliness on the husband's part? The truth is that, the greatest can be the humblest; the strongest can stoop the lowest. Tagore's Nikhil had that strength – patience, tolerance, admiration of the individuality, broader vision, liberation from narrow self-confinement. thus, epitomizing this new definition of Maleness, both Nikhil; and Gabriel represent a new generation of liberal individualists

who can put woman at par with men in possible sense, who can believe evilness of 'evil' is never gender dependent.

Love and its success is the complex sum total of so many individualistic forces and demands always interacting with the socio-cultural, economic, political agencies. Cupid can win his Psyche's love only through negotiation with all these different powers. Neither is it about the scientific agencies like adrenalin, monoamines or other love-hormones, or about biological need and instincts. Nor can Cupid be simply moralistic with the principles of should and should-nots, as both 'good' and 'bad' are represented by Him. Amorous relationship is always a complex phenomenon where every aspect of love, sex and sensuality, irrespective of moral attestation, is to count. Furthermore, morality also does not offer a fixed set of universal rules; it is highly temporal and epoch-specific. What is 'good' today may be considered as an 'evil' tomorrow. For the Victorians, or for any patriarchal system, explicit forms of women's sensuality are socially objectionable, but for the modern women like Clara it is natural and biological, a '*religion of blood*'. Shaw also thought, what is natural is moral. As such, then what's there to surely depend upon? Humans might have shifted from morality to science for his inspiration and guidance, but love and sex still remain as problematic as ever. True that, on an idealistic plane, the imaginative and romantic people like Marchbanks '*can never associate beauty with a lie*', but it's far from the reality. Not to over-sentimentalize the issue, women are no epitomes of virtues necessarily; they also have to live her life on this vile earth biologically. So their sexuality is not to be equated with morality incarnated. But the point is that men should not fix the sexual or moral codes for women. Gerda Lerner (1986) has beautifully analysed how man's control over female sexuality is central to women's subordination. The following quotation from *Soul Mountain* (2001) can throw some light on this polemics of woman sensuality and the question of morality:

—'*Do you believe that sensuality is devoid of evil?*' I ask.

—'*All women are sensual but they always give a sense of goodness, and this is essential to art,*' he says.

—'*Then don't you believe in the existence of beauty which is not devoid of evil?*'

—'*That's just man deceiving himself,*' he says curtly.

Now, at last, one can understand, why Cupid—no matter whether a moralist, a scientist or a staunch socialist—is only a male, but not a **MAN**.

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