

**EMPTINESS OF LIFE IN MAUGHAM'S 'OF HUMAN BONDAGE'****S. K. Thorat**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper attempts to study emptiness of life, which seems to result out of the theme of several bondages upon the characters in the novel. All the characters, except that of narrator's uncle and aunt, are philanderer and consequently suffer throughout the novel. They continuously effort to seek consolation in life, but they have crossed the limit of acquiring passion of philandering which does not allow them to settle in life. On the other hand, the hero, Philip Carey, of the novel anyhow settles in life after a long period of thirty years.*

*Philip Carey, the central figure in the novel, is shown orphan and clubfooted youth. After the death of his parents, Philip feels unprotected under the custody of his uncle William Carey and aunt Louisa Carey. Childless Mr. and Mrs. Carey find it difficult to mould the career of Philip. Mr. Carey wishes to offer him a career of Clergyman. But Philip rejects religious base and consequently loses faith in religion and wonder here and there. It reminds us that of Mathew Arnold's famous line -*

*"Between two worlds, one dead,  
The other powerless to be born"*

*After a brief study of the characters' relationship with each other, it is discovered that they are haunted by the feeling of philandering because of the contribution of several elements. In fact, Philip Carey becomes the victim due to the natural bondage of his parents' death in his early age. His early loss of faith in religion, his deformity, his fragility helps him to be a philanderer. All these elements make him confuse to set a concrete goal in life. Whereas, the other characters- Wilkinson, Mildred, Price, Nesbit, Griffith, Dunsford, Miller equally suffer and disappoint in life because of philandering passion. Indeed, the theme of the novel is relevant to the present situation, for it is a detailed and complete examination of human condition. Perhaps, it is the main reason for its popularity.*

*Keywords : Emptiness, Life, Maugham, human bondage.*

To say, the emergence of Information Technology has presently made human being a mechanic one in which life seems to be insignificant. Everyone is busy in seeking physical happiness and life is going on without knowing its real meaning. In fact, the novel "Of Human Bondage" is a literary form, which mirrors a genuine reflection of real life. A novelist has been playing a significant part in shaping the life and reflecting the virtues and vices in society. There is a long list of novelists, who traveled the World, observed the human life from very close, and shared their experiences with us.

However, William Somerset Maugham is one of the most outstanding novelists in English Literature who views life objectively and dispassionately. Of course, his most famous novel, 'Of Human Bondage' proves his closeness to life – its misery, squalor, sufferings, disappointments and wretchedness. 'Of Human Bondage' is called an autobiographical novel. It is a record of narrator's personal experiences as a child, youth, and as a grown up man. This is clearly reflected in the novel through the theme of human life embroiled in so many bondages – natural, emotional, and economic. The novel opens with the natural bondage of death of narrator's parents. Secondly, he symbolizes a love

cripple as his clubfoot denies him satisfaction in matters of love. Then he becomes the victim of infatuation and gradually turns towards his seduction. Thus, emotional bondage to love leads narrator toward philandering passion. Lastly, he compromises with life by marrying a pedigree girl.

This paper attempts to study emptiness of life, which seems to result out of the theme of several bondages upon the characters in the novel. All the characters, except that of narrator's uncle and aunt, are philanderer and consequently suffer throughout the novel. They continuously effort to seek consolation in life, but they have crossed the limit of acquiring passion of philandering which does not allow them to settle in life. On the other hand, the hero, Philip Carey, of the novel anyhow settles in life after a long period of thirty years.

Philip Carey, the central figure in the novel, is shown orphan and clubfooted youth. After the death of his parents, Philip feels unprotected under the custody of his uncle William Carey and aunt Louisa Carey. Childless Mr. and Mrs. Carey find it difficult to mould the career of Philip. Mr. Carey wishes to offer him a career of Clergyman. But Philip rejects religious base and consequently loses faith in religion and wonder here and there. It reminds us that of Mathew Arnold's famous line -

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Thus, he develops a perfect reverence about his uncle and aunt and therefore changes his mood time to time. His aspiration in various fields challenges him to visit Germany, Paris, and returns to London with useless knowledge of philandering. In this way, “of Human Bondage narrates the life of Philip Carey from his boyhood till he is thirty, tracing his evolution from ‘painful uncertainty and

bewilderment to maturity and spiritual freedom” (Brophy, 15).

‘Man is the slave of circumstances’ comes true in case of Philip's life. Circumstances and bad company of misguided youths waters his passions to be a philanderer. It is in Germany, where he learns more of life than Latin and German Languages. Hayward, an Englishman, plays an important role to impress Philip's imagination. Hayward used to take Philip for long walks and troubled his imagination by composing poetry on love. Then Philip's soul yearned for romance. Later on Philip is caught in the clutches of the most experienced paragon of beauty, Miss Wilkinson. But Philip's shyness avoided her company. Incidentally, she meets him at his uncle's house in London. However, he soon impressed by her girlish ways and humorous talks. She captured a response in him and seduced him. He soon bored with her possessiveness and clinging ways and longed to get rid of her. He has thought of love as rapture. But it has proved to be “a hunger of the soul” (Maugham, 158).

Philip's deformity is equally important reason for his seduction and therefore to be a philanderer. He is ashamed of his clubfoot and frequently tries to conceal it. It is evident during his stay in Paris where he wished to learn art. He meets Fanny Price, a proud, shabby, and dirty girl of twenty-six years. She attracted at Philip and declared her love for him. But Philip rejected her on the ground of her dirty appearance. In returns, she mocks and insults him pointing out at his clubfoot. He felt it humiliating and tried his best to examine either he is fit or not for the love of another girl. Thus, Fanny Price is ‘the first symbol in the book of the meaninglessness of life’ (Brander, 33).

During his medical study, Philip falls in love with a barmaid, Mildred. He attracted at her because once she had insulted him. Soon they become intimate

to each other. But she had some relations with a German named Miller. In spite of that, she began to meet and love Philip. He asks her to marry him to put an end to his torture. However, she betrayed him and married with Miller. Philip dreads to think how he is going to suffer the pangs of love and the “ceaseless aching of the soul” (Maugham, 158). Mildred exploits his weakness of love, and he suffers terribly. He at once tells Mildred, ‘You don’t know what it is to be a cripple. Of course, you don’t like me. I can’t expect you’ (Maugham, 181).

Moreover, fragility certainly encourages Philip to walk on the path of philandering. He frequently changes his resolution. Fragility sometimes proves either curse or bless to human kind; it settles or destroys the life. This is a foible in human nature. Being not constant with a girl or woman, he continuously looks for satisfaction, consolation, and love in different girls. Even after relations with several girls, Philip seems to be unsatisfied.

However, other characters also reveal the same feeling of philandering. Hayward is master in the art of flirtations having his hand in every pie. Griffith is another character who tries to woo Mildred and leaves her when he gets another woman. In the same manner, Dunsford, a college student, is indulged in the philandering. Miller is a German man, deceives Mildred in love, and lastly leaves her with a child. Women characters are equally shown diverting easily. Miss Wilkinson, Mildred, Mrs. Nora Nesbit are living examples of the victims to philandering. This is obviously because of their wrong perception of life. These characters see life from diseased view. Lack of confidence and inability to do the best laid them to the doom. Unfortunately, the life has become bleak, cheerless, and meaningless to them. Thus, they ‘will always seem an inadequate rendering of

life. This obviously limits the value of the novel’ (Walter Allen, 327). Nevertheless, its value ‘comes precisely from Maugham’s honesty, his unflinching acceptance of his belief in the meaninglessness of life’ (Walter Allen, 327). It is ‘a positive and liberating discovery that enables to come to terms with life’ (Cordell, 69).

The novel is not a mere amusement, but the spirit of social reform runs throughout it. It is an essence of seduction of young hearts due to various bondages. Instead of goal setting, the characters become victim of lust for love. In fact, the lust is not fulfilled and their hearts desire more and more. More they desire, more they develop philandering passion within themselves. Because of it, the heart aspires to have hand in every pie. The heart travels here and there without any hold. The root cause for the formation of such type of attitude is the bondage to love.

After a brief study of the characters’ relationship with each other, it is discovered that they are haunted by the feeling of philandering because of the contribution of several elements. In fact, Philip Carey becomes the victim due to the natural bondage of his parents’ death in his early age. His early loss of faith in religion, his deformity, his fragility helps him to be a philanderer. All these elements make him confuse to set a concrete goal in life. Whereas, the other characters- Wilkinson, Mildred, Price, Nesbit, Griffith, Dunsford, Miller equally suffer and disappoint in life because of philandering passion. Indeed, the theme of the novel is relevant to the present situation, for it is a detailed and complete examination of human condition. Perhaps, it is the main reason for its popularity.

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