



## TREATMENT OF LOVE IN SELECT SHORT STORIES OF SOMERSET MAUGHAM AND AKILAN: A BRIEF NOTE

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### **Abstract**

*This paper seeks to explore the theme of love and to what extent these short story writers Somerset Maugham and Akilan succeeded in discussing the theme of love in these short stories. This paper also shows how both the writers used their experiences to portray people and place, their love and hates, deepest thoughts and their passing fancies.*

Both William Somerset Maugham born in 1874 and Akilan in 1922 are popular novelists of the earlier twentieth century and known for their simple and limpid prose style in the field of short story writing too. During the years from 1919 to 1945 at the time of world wars, both the writers continued to write plays but their interest gradually got shifted to the writing of short stories. Born in Paris, first educated at kings school and later at Heidelberg University and became a medical practitioner at St. Thomas Hospital, London. He gave up his medical profession after his immediate success as a novelist through the publication of his first novel **Liza of Lambeth** and took to writing novels, plays and short stories. He delighted his readers in every literary form as he had a detached view of life and wrote in a simple, racy style. Having travelled widely he had been able to depict modern life in its several perspectives in a dispassionate manner. To know him is to know life in all its variety and complexity. Similarly, the Sahitya Academy prize winning author Thiru. B.V. Akilandam, born in Pudukottai, had his education from King's Arts College in Pudukottai. Just like Maugham, Akilan's wide travels made him a popular and well-known writer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and he delighted his readers by writing novels, stage-plays and short stories.

The literary career of Maugham and Akilan extends over more than half a century. They have earned a high reputation in four distinct media, the novel, the short story, the stage play and the sound film. Akilan has also published books of travel, autobiography and a few critical works and his short stories bring 'new heaven and new earth' inviting the readers into a heritage, rich and varied. Most of his stories bring home the point that he seems to move from ironic dreams to aggressive optimism. He envisages man's evolution into a higher level of humanism and an intelligent Pantheism as :

"All human science is an endeavour to discover the truth which underlines the fact that we discover; all human philosophy is an endeavour to understand and to evaluate those truths".  
(Ramalingam 233)

All of Akilan's short stories attempt to demonstrate the genuine antithesis which subsists between fact and truth. Akilan forsakes the realm of fact in order that he may better tell the truth and lures the readers away from actualities in order to present him with realities – Gandhian realities. The critic Ramalingam further adds, "As a Gandhian realist, Akilan is so delicate in his sensitive and loving presentation of this basic dictionary fact and truth; so masterly both in structure and in style" (P.33)

Maugham has to his credit publication of over 150 short stories in such volumes as 1. "Orientations" (1899), 2. "The Trembling of a Leaf" (1921), 3. "The Cauuarina Tree" (1926), 4. "Ashenden" (1928), 5. "First Person Singular" (1931) 6. "The Mixture as Before" (1940), 7. "Creatures of Circumstance" (1947), dealing with the themes of his journey to the South Sea Islands, the life of the exiled Europeans, Maugham's experience both in the Ambulance corps and the Intelligence Department during the war time and the familiar Maugham them; men under emotional stress respectively and four important novels such as 1. "Liza of Lambeth" (1897), 2. "The Moon and Six Pense" (1919), 3. "The Rizer's Edge" (1944), 4. "Of Human Bondage" (1915). After completing the work "Of Human Bondage", he spoke as if he was compelled to write it as a kind of purgation of early and unhappy experiences. He said to John Beavan:

"The Book did for me what I wanted and when it was issued to the world, I found myself free forever of those pains and unhappy recollections. I put into it everything I knew and having at last finished it prepared to make a new start" (Kaus, 42-43)

The Gandhian realist, Akilan, contributed many works both to the world of novels and short stories. He had written hundred and seventy three short stories and eighteen novels and also published stage plays like "Uierpali", essays like "Valvil inbam" and Child literature. The stories of sixteen collections establish immediacy and emotional involvement and authoritative



commentary in the first person narrative. As he is a writer of the poor, his writings are about the pain and pleasure of the poor. He is of the opinion that the hearts of the poor are the birth places of love and sympathy.

Each and every story of his reveals that he is a writer experienced and submerged in a society of poor and down trodden. His subjects are common and he takes themes and characters from his society. His characters are none other than living persons whom we meet in day-to-day life. He introduces the events as they are in real life. He introduces the events as they are in real life. and gives the truth in such a form as he had understood from his experiences. This is something completely new to the readers. Again he seems to find fault with the poor when he says that the poor, though they have nothing, to eat, daily used to go to the theatre, believing the events in the film are real. They lose their originality; a few have lost themselves also. So he condemns the crime, politics and magazines which are not in favour of society in "Oruvelai Choru". To him, artistic creation should shape the society and society in fiction as in life often shapes the man" (Shanmugam, 19)

Akilan believes rather firmly that there should be no literature without man; there are no ideas that exist outside man; it is man and only man who is the creator of all things. He believes in Principle of Gorky. The only think that is in man is his dissatisfaction with himself, his striving to become better than what he is. We should see Gorky and Tagore in his ideas of man and feel sympathetic when we need his stories. He says that man has come into the world to live but he has failed in his effort and merely exists in the world by means of living.

The social reformer, Akilan was also a well-known translator. He had translated many English, German and Russian short stories into Tamil. For instance, the short stories of the French novelist Manppassant have been translated into a Tamil collection namely "Mulu Nilavu". As young men, both Maugham and Akilan were exposed to the horrors of life and to the social fortitude with which the poor often accepted in their search for a meaning behind the seemingly senseless cruelty of fate, they came across the maxims of the 17<sup>th</sup> century French writer and moralist, Francois de La-Rochefoucould. They found a kind of answer in their cynical insistence on the lack of any ultimate purpose in life and on the inability of man to control his own destiny. They both did not believe in life after death and felt justified in using the considerable wealth they accumulated entirely through their own efforts to provide comfortable and pleasurable existence in this life for good and positive experience. They disbelieved completely in altruism and felt that all such supposedly 'unselfish' actions in reality have self-seeking motives. Some critics have pointed out that these attitudes produce a moral vacuum which weakens their work, since it robs it of any ethical dimension.

A recurrent motif in turn of the century writing is appearance and reality in human behaviour. The good-hearted where, the respected businessman who is actually a drunkard and a lecher, the professed altruist who concealed selfish motives, all these are stock figures and they (Maugham and Akilan) use them all. Perhaps, the best examples are the missionaries in Maugham's famous short story 'Rain' and 'Thailaimeraint' by Akilan. While these examples of the disparity between the reality and the appearance can be used to make a serious comment on the nature of the existing world; they are two often content merely to contemplate the contradictory world, they have created with sardonic amusement.

For the last half-century, Akilan has tasted life as a connoisseur, on who knows and is interested in the quality of life for its own sake – the quality of each moment. He is a collector of great art; he has travelled to every part of the globe. The result is that he wrote a novel "Pall Marek Katiniple" which is based on his travelling experience of Malaysia. He has been the friend of many well known people and praised by many nations. Mostly, young people have enjoyed his novels and commented on their values.

Love has always been the dominant theme of writers of literature and often considered as a general theme in world-literature and creative artists have always pondered over the idea of portraying love in their work of art. Defining love, Bertrand Russel says:

"Love when the word is properly used, does not denote any and every relation between the sexes but only one involving considerable emotion and a relation which is psychological as well as physical".  
(Muthu Shanmugam, 350)

Love has two meanings - love, the pure (spiritual) and the simple and sexual love. One can say that there should not be any literature without any theory of love. Most of the literatures deal with the love that happens before marriage. Probably nine-tenth of all fiction is built up around the passion of early love between the sexes. "The passion of love between the sexes is the most universal and normal of all passions" (Lowsajes, 53). This love is also present in the stories of Somerset Maugham and Akilan. Love is the dominant theme in most of their and two from Akilan have been taken to examine the two kinds of love. "A Casual Affair" and "Kurathi", "Episode" and "Kadisi", "Aasai" have been taken for analysis of spiritual and



physical love respectively. The selected stories of Maugham have some resemblance to the selected stories of Akilan in the treatment of love.

Here in the story “A Casual Affair” from Maugham’s collection of stories the writer the mysterious J. Presumably a clerk in the foreign office had fallen in love with the lady-Kastellan. They became lovers and their early letters were passionately, lyrical. They were happy, and they expected their love to last for ever. The lady was never for a moment absent from his thoughts. Then she got married to someone and lived happily. But he was distressed of her unhappiness and dismayed by the trouble that he had brought upon her. He was deeply sympathetic because of what she was enduring at home. And the correspondence was also one-sided, for there was no response from her. He wrote that he would do anything for her. He loved her so much that he was willing to do everything in the world for her. She also know that he was prepared to accept the sacrifice of his love, his life, his career and everything for her sake. Similarly “Kurathi” by Akilan is a first person narrative story of ideal love. This story emerged from Govidan a college student, who went to the north mountain side for an excursion along with his friends, where he lost his friends, things, everything except his being. He did not know where he should take a turn. But a girl and her father from a hut, at the mountain side came and invited him as their guest with their smiling faces. He understood well enough what here smile meant. And he fell in love with this lady namely Rosana and they became lovers. They were so happy expecting their love to last for ever. They was never for a moment absent from her thoughts. And there was Scandal who forced him to leave her. He wanted her, otherwise he would shoot him (Govindan). But Govindan was not afraid. While he begged him again and again to leave her, he did repeat that he meant everything in the world to her. Once Rosana was sleeping, Scandal came with a pistol, and said that he was going to shoot her. But Govindan felt that he loved her so much that he was willing to do everything in the world for her, but not to lose her. So he prepared himself to sacrifice his love. And now, he left her for her own sake. Then due to his circumstance, he got married and had a child; but he did not want to forget her, he still loved her, and her ignorance of the fact made her hate him. In both these stories ‘love’ was the motive of the intrigue.

The lovers, Jack and Govindan, had a chivalrous soul. They had given up everything that made life worth living to save the women whom they loved better than anything in the world. They had experienced an exaltation of spirit that near that them. They loved their beloved still with their hearts. Most of us fall in and out of love and some men can only love once. And in a strange way, they were happy, because they had been able to sacrifice them. Both Kastellam and Rosana were always in their lover’s thoughts. They loved their beloved as much as ever. They never doubted that the love of their beloved was as strong enduring as theirs. Physical love is a sexual desire in a man to be subjected to ill-treatment physically and mentally by the woman he loves. The attainment of beauty, desire and sexual attraction are the main reasons for physical love. Human beauty is determined by sexual attractiveness. It is an intensification of traits common to a certain people at a certain time. In the words of R. Dhandayutham,

“Sometimes love is so violent that the desire become no longer a pleasure but a pain, and then men will kill the women they love so as to rid themselves of the desire”. (PP.26-27)

“Episode” and “Kadasi Aasasi” show how the physical love arises in a man. “Episode” is one of Maugham’s longest stories in which a young postman is portrayed as one falling in love with a college – student Grace Carter. They were happy to be in love with each other. Then there was a blow. He was arrested for stealing money and he was sentenced to two years hard labour. But she was waiting for him. She said the moment he came out, she would marry him. Her parents disagreed with her on this point. She wanted everything to be nice, new, clean and comfortable. She took all the necessary and possible steps to see to it that they could get married at once after his release. But what happened was that when Fred was released, he also said that he released her from his heart cell and he was not going to marry her. She felt as though she had just missed a bus and would have to wait for another as she says; “There is nothing for me to do now but put my head in the gas-oven” (Episode, 110).

Likewise, Akilan’s “Kadasi-Aasai” is a story of a young widow Jeya who fell in love with a young married school teacher Narayan. Once while he came out for a walk, he had an occasion to meet her. From that moment onwards, his heart wanted to see her again and again and she also wanted to see him. Then the blow fell; the society began to talk ill of them; they were strangely breathless. Then he prepared himself to leave the village. At the time of his preparing to leave, Jeya came and fell down at his feet. He did not know what to do and he asked her to go out. But she gave a sight which spoke quite calmly. “I cannot go”. Then he left the place and joined in another school where he got a letter from Jaya. What it contains is:

“My living is more inferior to my death;  
My death is more superior to my livings,  
so I had finished my life”. (KA, 21-22)



These above stories bring home the point that love is not real, it is the love that comes at first sight. Lovers fell in love with each other at first sight. It is not the love that comes out of sympathy or intellectual communication but love that has sexual-attraction, contemplation of beauty. That is the love that draws beasts to one another, that is the love that makes the world a miracle that is the love that gives life its pregnant meaning. In “Episode”, Grace would have thought that the love possessed her so completely that it never occurred to her that any power on earth could take him from her. She did not know what love was. She blindly believed what he said and what he did. She fell into his net and she liked his praising of her beauty. Generally women feel so happy when someone praises their beauty. On summer evening in the country when they had been lying in a field in the country when they had been lying in a field in each other’s arms, mouth to mouth, her desire had been so intense as his. She knew how much he wanted her and she was ready to give him what he asked. Thus, “the ecstasy of love had invested with beauty”. (Shanmugam, 19). Similarly Jeya, the heroine of Akilan’s “Kadai Aasai” expressed her feelings that she did not want to live without Narayanan. Her beauty made him love so intensely as to think that one cannot imagine how exquisite she was. Men do not change passions; they are always likely to be awakened by the brutal instincts of the savage to reassert the domination. But women feel that everything in life is meaningless, the pain and the sufferings are fruitless and futile and there is not object in life. To nature nothing matters but the continuation of the species.

One of the misfortunes experienced by human beings is that they continue to have sexual desire long after they are sexually desirable. And people think that the tragedy of love is death or separation as Jaya wanted to die and as Narayanan wanted separation from her. It is felt that suffering results in resignation or separation and separation is looked upon as a solution to the perplexities of life. Maugham and Akilan are of the view that relation between the sexes is more normal and young women have to learn how to be the companions of young men. Their love dwindles into what is described as a solid and enduring affection as if affection had anything to do with love. Affection is stimulated by habit, interest, convenience and the desire for companionship. It is a comfort rather than exhilaration.

Both the characters of Somerset Maugham and Akilan are not able to slip through the net of love. While falling a prey to their passion. They are formented and wounded mentally and become victims of their own past deeds. It seems it is their fate to be seduced by their own passion. Both the writers used their experiences to portray people and places, their love and hates, deepest thoughts and their passing fancies. They were fortunate to have succeeded in the end and as a result, we the readers have a complete picture of love and live situations.

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