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Rinku Nandi

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William Somerset Maugham portrays an awesome family picture in 'The Kite'. In this short story, the interesting matter is the relationship among family members. A simple tale exposes the complexities of human psychology in a lucid and catchy way. In remote past, Maugham scattered the seed of separation which brings the theme of divorce in our modern and loveless society. At present, divorce has become a widespread phenomenon across social classes. Smashing the kite indicates smashing the lovely conjugal relationship in our contemporary society. This destruction of the kite serves as a metaphor for the breakdown of marital harmony. This paper attempts to entrap the vivid word picture of modern society in the short story 'The Kite' which was written in 1947.

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Classification: LCC Code: PR6025.A86

Language: English



Great Britain
Journals Press

LJP Copyright ID: 573393

Print ISSN: 2515-5784

Online ISSN: 2515-5792

London Journal of Research in Humanities & Social Science

Volume 25 | Issue 10 | Compilation 1.0



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I. INTRODUCTION

William Somerset Maugham's 'The Kite' is a remarkable short story, having significance not only in the field of literature but also in our modern society, especially the complexities of human psychology. Maugham was a qualified physician and a very prolific British writer. Writing was his passion. During the period of 1930s, he became the highest paid author.

In 1947, William Somerset Maugham wrote this popular short story 'The Kite'. In the beginning of the story, 'The Kite' employs an open first-person narrator, while a large portion of the story uses a hidden first-person narrator. This story was told

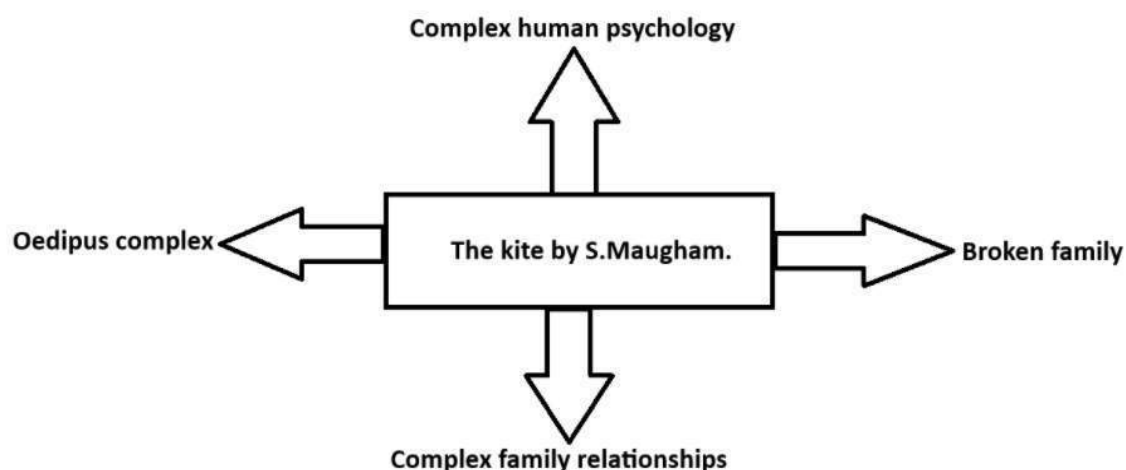
by Ned Preston, who was a good friend of Mr. Maugham. Ned Preston is a prison visitor at Wormwood Scrubs. For that reason, he met Herbert as Herbert is a prisoner there. Ned Preston unfolds Herbert's life story to Maugham. He revealed the step-by-step facts about how Herbert ended up in the prison very nicely. Despite being a short story, it spans a significant timeframe probably twenty-two because in the end of the tale, Herbert is twenty-two.

In the story, we found four main characters Samuel Sunbury, Beatrice Sunbury, Herbert Sunbury and Betty Bevan. If we analyse the story, we clearly understand that Herbert Sunbury is in central point of the story. Herbert is the only son of his parents, Mr. Samuel Sunbury and Mrs. Beatrice Sunbury. In the beginning of the story, we saw Herbert's mother, a little and thin woman but strong, active and sharp. She is the head of her family, though she is a housewife. Being the head of the family, she has a dominating nature to her husband and her son. Herbert is a good boy and later an intelligent young man. Actually, we called Herbert as mom's boy. In the very beginning of the story, we noticed that Herbert's relationship with his mother is not a normal relationship of mother-son rather some abnormal kind of over-possessive bonding. Maugham's story is the study of complex human psychological theories. In that case the famous psychologist, Sigmund Freud uses the term 'Oedipus Complex' which spoils the life of the son. The name 'Oedipus' is associated with the classical story of the king oedipus who unknowingly married his mother. Oedipus Complex manifests infantile sexuality within the child's relations to his parent of the opposite sex. It is a kind of mental state in which the person feels excessive love and affection for the parents of opposite sex. In that part of his life, he has no control over unconscious desires and passions. Herbert was living a life completely

controlled by his dominating mother. Although he had a nice job but, he still used to bring all his salary to his mother. At the age of twenty- one his mother used to give him money for conveyance and small allowance as pocket money this fact suddenly strikes the mind of the reader as something abnormal. Besides, Herbert behaves like a child, although he was twenty-one years.

This story reveals a family picture. The kite became an ideal thing in Sunbury's family. The kite was the only thing Herbert had control of. Herbert felt freedom from daily monotonous life to fly a kite. But Mrs.Sunbury holds the string to feel the pull and tug of the kite on her fingers. Gradually the story developed and Herbert is twenty-one.

The complexity of the story starts when Herbert tells his parents that he has invited a girl to his house for tea on next day. Herbert's words shocked Mrs.Sunbury's ego. This is the turning point of the story. She did not like Betty. Actually, she hates Betty. She tries to prepare tea in best manner. Actually she does not accept the girl as her son's wife. She strongly objects to their marriage. But Herbert overcomes this and marries Betty and shifts from his parents' house. This is really a shocking matter to Mrs.Sunbury. A mom's boy like Herbert takes a drastic step for the first time in the story.



In this story the character of Betty is very fascinating-----the characteristics of a modern fashionable girl though the story was written in 1947. We can't think the fact that a girl like Betty in ancient past visits her would-be-husband's house before marriage. But Betty does this. Betty was habituated to use cosmetics and fashionable dresses like 21st century's women. She curls her hair to make it wavy and wears costly high-heeled shoe. She smokes in the presence of the seniors. Smoking in front of senior members indicates no respect for our senior family members. Betty uses an english slang 'fag' which means cigarette. Through the character of Betty, Somerset Maugham hints at a sudden breakdown of social values. This Sunbury family picture reveals the problems of the generation gap through differences in opinions, values, habits, behaviours

and experiences between younger and older family members.

Mr. and Mrs. Sunbury are continuing their hobby of kite flying. After his marriage, Herbert has not touched a kite because his wife does not like it. A long time passed. Gradually, Herbert is in sport once again. This time, his mother offers him to fly kite. Betty begins to suspect Herbert of delay in returning home. Spying on him Betty knows that what is the real reason. There is a quarrel between the husband and the wife. Herbert left Betty and went to his father's house.

In this story, Betty suspects Herbert again and again----- this kind of manner reveals that there is no trust in their conjugal life. A happy married life means we understand some sort of peaceful

bonding and nice adjustment between all the members of a family. But in this story, we find lack of adjustment in the life of a newly married couple.

In the end of the story, we saw that Betty lodged a complain with the Magistrate that her husband is not paying her maintenance. At last the Magistrate ordered him to pay 25shillings a week for her maintenance but Herbert refused to give Betty. Herbert is imprisoned, and Herbert prefers jail instead of providing the alimony to his wife. This part sheds light on Herbert's complex psychology.

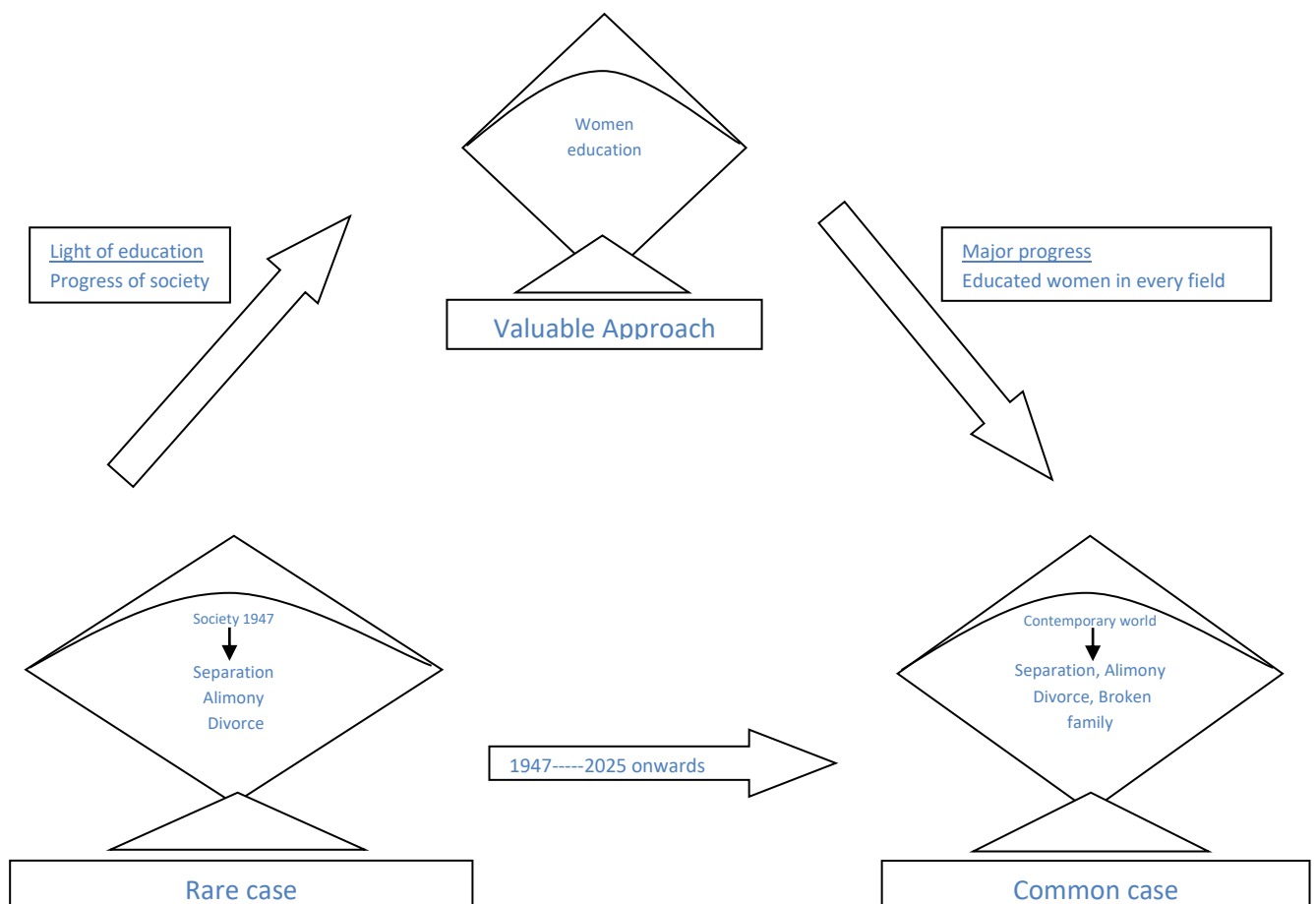
The smashing part of the story attracts the reader's curiosity. Betty wants to save Herbert from his mother's emotional attachment. Betty destroys not only the kite but also wants to destroy the theme of Oedipus Complex. But Betty failed.

Maugham portrays the view of the fragmentation of social life in the modern world. The moral values were changed, and we see many nuclear families and the loveless marriages. Maugham

presents the theme of divorce which is the fruit of loveless marriage. In our modern society the rise of divorce is the ordinary matter and a little thing. Though Maugham in his mind's eye saw the theme of divorce in ancient past.

Maugham reveals the multifaceted separation idea in one short story. Son separated from his parents. Husband separated from his wife. Daughter-in-law separated from her mother-in-law and above all, a boy separated from his normal social life. Just think how fatal the result of separation is. Actually, this many-sided separation idea presents our modern, broken and loveless family without any adjustment.

Maugham focuses the various psychological complexities in human mind. In contrast, Maugham indicates a positive light on women education in ancient society. Betty Bevan was well educated and she worked in a typewriting office in the City. Betty plays the role of a modern independent girl. Today we feel the need of women education for the progress of our contemporary society.



Education fosters a common understanding of values, beliefs and stronger relationships within the family. But in our contemporary world if we glance there is separation, loveless marriage and divorce. Now divorce is every classes' cup of tea in our society. In the end of the story, Maugham explains the ideal of kite-flying. Kite-flying is just like a virus which can not be cured. In fact, divorce plays the role of the virus in our contemporary world which spreads rapidly.

In a nutshell, the kite has multiple implications in this storyline. The kite works as a bridge between the bonding of Herbert and Mrs. Sunbury. Mrs. Sunbury's kite flying suggests that she wants to control Herbert as she controls the kite. On the other hand, the kite symbolizes Herbert's freedom. This kite flying is the cause of divorce. Throughout the story, Herbert's mother and his wife both are trying to control Herbert's life. As a result, Herbert's social normal life was shattered just like the smashing of the kite. In another sense, smashing the kite indicates to destroy the theme of Oedipus Complex. Betty wants to save Herbert from his mother's grip. In the end of the story, the readers saw that Herbert prefers going to jail and controls his life of his own's will.

To sum up, William Somerset Maugham, in his mind's eye, draws the mosaic scenario of broken, loveless, nuclear and self-centered family picture in our modern society. In this contemporary society---social values, emotional attachments and relationships among family members are very trivial just like an insignificant small kite. The story was written in 1947 and in my opinion, Maugham plays the role of an astrologer who foretells the scenario of our modern society through the story 'The Kite'. Maugham draws the perfect picture of complex human psychology, which captures the fragmentation of our contemporary society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The research article 'The Pen-Picture of Modern Broken Loveless Society in Maugham's The Kite' highlights new insights in the field of literature and fosters personal growth.

I'm profoundly grateful to the peer reviewers for their dedicated time. Their meticulous review process and constructive criticism have enhanced this research paper's quality. I appreciate their thorough assessment. I am thankful to all the members of London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science.

I would like to express my gratitude to my parents Krishna Chandra Nandi and Saraswati Nandi for their guidance and support in completing my paper.

Last but not the least,I am grateful to all my family members and some well- wishers who helped me in various ways to conclude the article successfully.

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