

LOVE, CONFLICT AND ALIENATION IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *MOVING ON*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the nature of Manjari/ Shyam and Manjari/ Raman relationship by studying it in the light of Sartre's philosophy of conflictual nature of love and relationships. Sartre in his phenomenal work *Being and Nothingness* describes love as a conflict. According to him, human freedom is especially at risk in its encounter with the Other. The Other poses natural threat to one's freedom. Human being checks and curtails its possibilities by trying to possess the other. Hence, love that aims at the completion of Self through the mediation of the Other often ends in conflict. To elucidate the idea of inevitability of conflict this paper will analyze the character of Manjari in detail. It also tries to show how Manjari in loving Shyam adopts an attitude of indifference and masochism and becomes a sadist in her relationship with Raman. Apart from this, by providing relevant examples from text this paper will also elucidate how conflict in relationship gives rise to the feeling of self- alienation or alienation from the Other.

Keywords: Love, Conflict, Indifference, Hate, Masochism, Sadism, Self, the Other, Sartre.

Introduction

The French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre is well-known for his philosophy on human relationships. His book *Being and Nothingness*, significantly the chapter *concrete relations with Others* outlines various attitudes that *being-for-itself* assumes in its relation to Others. In order to understand Sartre's account of nature of love relationships it is worthwhile to cast a cursory glance on his major ideas. According to Sartre human consciousness or *for-itself*¹ exists as lack. It is surrounded by nothingness. To escape this negation it projects itself towards others in order to fulfill itself. Love, as Sartre states is one of the primitive relation of the *for-itself* to the Other.

¹ For-itself: In philosophy of Jean Paul Sartre the human consciousness is referred to as for-itself, being-for-itself or pour-soi. The being-for itself is nihilation of Being-in-itself. It is a consciousness that conceives itself as a lack of Being and hence desires for a Being. (*Being and Nothingness*, 630)

It enables a being to complete itself by uniting with other being. The literature as we know is suffused with motifs of merging and fusion of one being into another. The annihilation of *Thou and I* boundaries, the absence of subject/object distinctions are the most common ideals of love. However, Sartre opposes such romantic notions of love. According to him, the union or the fusion of one being into another is impossible because the consciousness can never form single transcendence. It can assume the state of either “*trans-descendence*, when the self apprehend the other as an object and integrate him, or as *trans-ascendence*, when the self experience the other as a transcendence which transcends it” (*Being and Nothingness* 408). In other words, the consciousness in its encounter with the Other either dominates or subordinates itself to another. Therefore love as Sartre asserts, “. . . is an enterprise. . . [that] put me in direct connection with the Other’s freedom. It is in this sense love is a conflict” (366). The central idea around which Sartrean theory of concrete relationship with others is based is that to love other means to possess other, but only objects not free subjects can be possessed. Thus, love is a project in futility. Nevertheless, human beings love or maintain relationships with each other to achieve justification their existence. As Sartre remarks through love, “my facticity² is saved. My facticity-as-for- Others- is no longer a fact but a right . . . whereas . . . Before being loved we were uneasy about that unjustified, unjustifiable protuberance which was our existence, whereas [in love] we felt ourselves “*de trop*” we now feel that our existence is taken up and willed even in its tiniest details by an absolute freedom . . . this is the basis for the joy of love when there is joy: we feel our existence is justified” (*Being and Nothingness* 371).

Shashi Deshpande’s novels are greatest articulation of Sartre’s theory of conflict in love and relationship. Like Sartre she too believes that two beings can never become one. Her novel *A Matter of Time* presents this idea concretely “Sa-hriday. . . in the sense of oneness is an impossible concept . . . it is two hearts beating. They can never beat in such unison that there is only one sound. Hear that? Two hearts, two sounds. . . Sa-hriday there is no such thing. There can be no such thing (Deshpande 24). *Sa-hriday* etymologically denotes an integration of two beings into another. Such fusion destroys the possibilities of alienation or separation of any sort. However, the truth is that the characters in Deshpande’s novels experience dreariest kind of alienation in the state of love. Her characters love each other or marry out of love. They enter into union with intense passion and utter faithfulness however their relationships end in chaos. The love that figures in *Moving On* hints at the impossibility of such utopian integration. It, in other words, deals with the problematic of relationships. The relationships, as depicted in narrative are not the zones of comfort, rather springboards from where the existential conflicts of characters ensue.

Analysis

Love is an enterprise i.e. an organic ensemble of projects towards my own possibilities. (*Being and Nothingness* 366)

The above mentioned statement by Sartre describes love as a project through which person realizes his/her possibilities. The goal of this projection is to attain the fullness of being through

² Facticity: The facticity refers to the limiting factors of human existence. In other words, these are the objective facts that cannot be changed. Facticity as Sartre explains comprises of necessary connection of for-itself with the in-itself, the world, our past. In addition, the facticity of freedom is that freedom is not able to be free. (*Being and Nothingness* 631)

the use of another being. Likewise, Manjari the protagonist of novel *Moving On* attains the fullness of her existence by falling in love with Shyam, a cinematographer who comes to her home to take a picture of her mother for a magazine cover. Unsettlingly, within short period she decides to marry him against her parents' wishes at the tender age of eighteen, leaving her career and education in the middle. The encounter of Manjari with Shyam touches her existence as a whole. He reveals the hidden dimensions and potentialities of her being. The simple, docile and eager-to-please girl turns rebellious overnight. There is a violent eruption of her feelings for him. As Sartre states, "In order to get any truth about myself, I must have contact with another person. The other is indispensable to my own existence as well as to my knowledge about myself (*Existentialism and Human Emotions* 38). Likewise, in Shyam's contact Manjari finds a new being that she is unable to access. She feels estrangement from a tomboy kind of image that she has formed about her, "I was never the girl boys whispered endearments or wrote love letters to; . . . I was always a good pal of the boys, the sakhi of girls, I would always be the extra dancing in the background, the sidekick, never the heroine" (*Moving On* 184). Nevertheless, the new knowledge of being beautiful and feminine is now bestowed on her. The *look* of Shyam objectifies her as beautiful and innocent, as he states, "It your innocence that's what I love (*Moving On* 184). Commenting upon the nature of the penetrating look that the Other casts upon Self, Sartre remarks, "I am possessed by the other; the other's look fashions my body in its nakedness, causes it to be, sculpts it, produces it as it is, sees it as I shall never see it. The Other holds the secret of what I am" (*Being and Nothingness* 364). Therefore, through Shyam Manjari comes to realize the charms, grace and suppleness of her body. He, to quite an extent becomes a source of her self-revelation.

However, it is important to understand that by loving Manjari's beauty and innocence, Shyam inadvertently confers an object-state on her. As Sartre states, "The Other freedom is the foundation of my being. . . But I have no security; I am in danger in the freedom. It moulds my being and makes me be, it confers values upon me and removes them from me" (*Being and Nothingness* 366). Likewise, by objectifying Manjari, Shyam transcends her consciousness. In such a situation her possibilities become dead-possibilities. That is to say, Manjari is alienated from the possibilities of asserting her subjectivity. She is deterred from doing anything that makes her look astute or malicious in Shyam's eyes.

Manjari initially appropriates Shyam's freedom by accepting the identity that he confers upon her. The reason for such acceptance lies in the attitude that she adopts towards him: that is an *attitude of love*. In this mode of existence, the look of the Other though objectifies but it is a look with another structure. The gaze of lover does not create the feelings of shame or fear rather it gives rise to the feelings of being loved. Therefore, the self doesn't experience any threat to its freedom by the Other. It willingly consents its objectification because this objectification in turn fosters peculiar power upon it. Firstly, the Other must recognize the absolute value of the object, objectified. For instance, in narrative Manjari for Shyam has to be his world, the chosen One instead of being one woman among many. He must assign absolute value to her. As Sartre says, a person in the state of love desires:

. . . no longer be seen on the ground of the world as 'this' among other "thises" [merely an object among other objects] but the world must be revealed in terms of me. . . In one sense, if I am loved, I am the object through whose procurement the world will exist for the Other; in another sense I am the world. (*Being and Nothingness* 369)

Thus, the Self wills his/her objectification however, it also alienates the possibilities of the Other. The Other can only look upon it only as an object of love, admiration and cannot devalorize it as “ugly, small, a cowardly” the qualities that represent the finitude of an object (*Being and Nothingness* 369). A person in the existential situation of love thus enjoys a peculiar *subject-object* position. He gives and demands at the same time. Likewise, Manjari consents to be an object for Shyam’s consciousness but at the same time, she seeks absolute possession of his consciousness.

Shyam and Manjari relish in the absolute value and /positivity that they impart to each other in the initial stage of their marriage. They achieve unity through their physical for each other. However, their intimate togetherness subsides after the gratification of their carnal desires. As Manjari states, “Shyam and I had recklessly plundered the lavish riches of touching and caressing. Yet, at the end when we lay together on a narrow bed, there seemed to be an immense distance between us” (*Moving On* 313). Hence, the inner need to justify the existence through the Other remains unfulfilled. The failure to obtain a *big chance* that Shyam desperately waits for making money in his film career never arrives. On the other hand, the demands of Manjari to have a home of their own, to stay together become impervious. In the existential tension of constant conflicts, Shyam gradually disassociates himself from Manjari, taking her as a potent threat to his *freedom*. His project of *for-itself* to “work for a big banner movie” directly collides with Manjari’s demands to accept the profession of an assistant that enables him to earn though meager but “guaranteed money” (*Moving On* 313).

Analyzing within existentialists framework, one can infer that the conflict in their relationship arise because they are unable to overcome the facticity of human existence. The individual freedom, as existentialists believe is often at risk in its encounter with the Other and this perversion of freedom creates alienation. In this context, Manjari’s consciousness poses natural limits to the freedom of Shyam, hence she represents his facticity. For instance, Manjari constantly presses Shyam to accept any work that he is offered to irrespective of his liking for it. Moreover, she wishes him to take care of her and their son Anand by spending time with them. Thus, Manjari in a way denies him the autonomy of being self-directed agency. He is envisioned as an Object by her who is fettered to fulfill her economic and emotional necessities. In failing to fulfill all that she has desired, Shyam ceases to exist as an absolute value for her. Furthermore, her judgmental look transfixes him as a *failure* in the materialistic world.

As the relationships are not unilateral, rather reciprocal by nature or the individual as existentialists believe is “ceaselessly tossed from *being-a-look* to *being- looked-at*” therefore, Shyam at his end retaliates (*Being and Nothingness* 408). He belittles Manjari by calling her bourgeois, “I never knew you were so money- minded. I never thought you were such a bourgeois” (*Moving On* 210). The repetitious *never* existentially hints at the problematics of relationships. The relationships end because human beings can never fully understand each other. One may try to grasp the consciousness of the Other but no access to the consciousness is ever possible. Moreover, the shift from innocence to bourgeois image hints at the attitude that Shyam now assumes towards Manjari. He now frees his subjectivity from her hold by transcending her transcendence. Therefore, their relationship from love shifts to a Second attitude that a being adopts in its concrete relation with the Other that is an attitude of indifference.³

³ Indifference: Indifference, in Sartrean philosophy indicates the collapse of the subjectivity of the other. It is a kind of blindness that a being adopts with respect to others. The for-itself in an attitude of blindness act by means of

Manjari and Shyam go indifferent to each other. Hence, *indifference* that indicates “collapse of the subjectivity of the Other” aggravates their alienation (*Being and Nothingness* 380). To get rid of the discomfoting aspect of their relationship Manjari moves to her parents home and involves her with them. Shyam comes to meet Manjari and his son at her home but a sense of separateness has seeped into his being. Manjari too at her end claims, “I shut myself out of his [Shyam’s] world, a world that I’d made so completely mine until then” (*Moving On* 288). In such a situation, Shyam feels his existence to be devoid of meaning. His personal and professional life has collapsed to work well. To compromise with his existence he indulges in doing some piecemeal work that he hates absolutely and thus he is also alienated from his work. Hence, in his failure to set things right for him and for his family, he adopts an attitude of hatred towards her. Hate, according to Sartre implies:

The fundamental resignation; the for-itself abandons its claim to realize any union with Other . . . it wishes simply to rediscover a freedom without factual limit; that is to get rid of its own inapprehensible being-as-object-for-the-Other and to abolish its dimension of alienation. (*Being and Nothingness* 410)

Hate thereby implies an attitude of *for-itself* that seeks to regain its freedom (*Being and Nothingness* 411). Shyam asserts his freedom and overthrows Manjari’s by establishing a relationship with her sister Malu. Manjari discovers this fact when her sister gets pregnant. To worsen the matter Malu accuses Shyam of raping her. The rape and consequent pregnancy of Malu by Shyam marks an end to their relationship. The incident of raping her sister is a symbolic representation of death of Manjari’s consciousness. It devastates any possibility of their union. Nevertheless, hate that person adopts is also a failure. It is self-defeating because the victim now is in position to completely possess the meaning of the Other. That is to say, Manjari now confers an identity of exploiter or rapist on Shyam. This inability to escape the objectifications that the Other impose upon the self, triggers an extreme sort of alienation. As Sartre claims:

He who hates can never recapture what he has alienated; he has even lost all hopes of acting on this alienation and turning it to own advantage since the destroyed Other has carried the key to this alienation along with him to the grave. (*Being and Nothingness* 412)

In order to free him from the alienating experience of being hated by Manjari and others, Shyam finally commits suicide.

However, the drama of conflict and alienation continues as Manjari after Shyam’s death turns masochist. Here masochism⁴ does not mean perversion rather it indicates an effort of the *for-itself* to maintain relationship with the Other. Masochism, as Sartre indicates “is the assumption of guilt” (*Being and Nothingness* 379). Likewise, in the throes of guilt Manjari objectifies her as callous and harsh. At various points in narrative she calls her murderer or

determined conduct. It scarcely notices *anyone and acts as if being were alone in the world*. It brush against people and avoid them, as one avoids obstacles. (*Being and Nothingness* 380)

⁴ Masochism: Masochism as Sartre defines is an attitude that a person adopts towards himself. Instead of trying to absorb other’s subjectivity, a being dissolves his/her subjectivity in the subjectivity of the Other. In the other words, being for-itself transforms itself into a pure object for the Other in order to get rid of its unjustifiable subjectivity. (*Being and Nothingness* 377-8)

termite who is responsible for the destruction of Shyam. Hence, in the constant play of self-accusation she behaves as masochist.

Nevertheless, the consciousness comes out of the vertigo of self-hate by taking the active role where it confronts its anguish. And Manjari confronts her anguish by maintaining sexual relationship with her tenant Raman. However, it is important to note that this relationship is purely physical devoid of any emotional strings. With Raman, she is the free creator of norms, and the one who would decide the course of each event. As she says, “I try to assert myself. . . New rules for this new territory. He can never come into my house. . . He can never approach me . . . the decision will be mine, mine alone. He has to accept this” (*Moving on* 285). This clarion assertion of Manjari can also be seen as the projection of her revenge from Shyam who has reduced her being to non-entity. Moreover, at this point of her existence she adopts an attitude of sadist. As Sartre explains, “Sadism⁵ is an effort to incarnate the Other through violence, and this incarnation “by force” must be already the appropriation and utilization of Other. (*Being and Nothingness* 399). In the similar way, Manjari takes Raman as a means to attain her end of sexual pleasure, “Only the body, his body... my starved body, no thoughts, no feelings only sensations” (*Moving On* 257). Behaving like sadist she envisions Raman as *all flesh*. However, she cannot free her from the feelings of alienation because the look of Raman objectifies her. As Sartre puts:

The sadist discovers his error when his victim looks at him; that is, when sadist experiences the absolute alienation of his being in the other’s freedom; he realizes then not only that he has not recovered his being outside but also that the activity by which he seeks to recover is itself transcended and fixed in sadism. (*Being and Nothingness* 405)

The immense feeling of guilt envelops Manjari each time she makes love to Raman. Unable to flee the identity that Raman’s look confers upon her, she in her exasperation puts, “something about the way he looks at me makes me uncomfortable. . . I bathe three times a day. . . scrub myself when bathing as if I want to flay myself” (*Moving On* 259-60). However, her guilt or the voice of conscience paves way for her self-understanding. It summons her to the responsibility she owes towards Raman. Her acceptance of responsibility is metaphorically indicated in narrative through the motif of *blindness*. Manjari recollects her childhood incident when her mother calls her *ghodi* for her habit of clumsily banging into things. The use of *ghodi* thematically hints at two aspects of Manjari’s existence. The horse symbolizes the unleashed sexual power, the force of vital sexuality. At the same time, it indicates the shortsightedness because the leather eye patches prevents a horse for seeing something on either side. Symbolically, these two aspects sufficiently summarize the existential movement of Manjari in the world.

Ghodi, Mai called me. Yes, I was like a horse with its blinkers on, an animal with tunnel vision. And I’m still the same. . . Unable to see the reality. . . How long will I live this way? Making mistakes, hurting people. Making them suffer. How long will I go on this way? How long?” (*Moving on* 298)

⁵ Sadism: Sadism is opposite of masochism. A sadist envisions the other as an object. His effort is to ensnare the Other and other’s body in such a way that he treats it as flesh so as to cause flesh to be born. Thus sadist aims at enslavement of the Other’s freedom through the flesh. (*Being and Nothingness* 400-5)

The self-questioning therefore gives the authentic transparency to her about her own being. She comes to realize the self-defeating attitude that she has adopted towards others. And finally, by the end of narrative by actively acknowledging her responsibility towards self and others she is able to achieve authentic existence.

Conclusion

Hence, from above discussion it can be concluded that the relationships which human beings consider as intrinsically meaningful often end up in meaninglessness. The belief in permanence of things represents the inauthentic mode of existence. Love, as Deshpande believes, is ephemeral and its joy withers with same rapidity with which it have once blossomed. As Gopal the protagonist of *A Matter of Time* claims, “We want love to last, we think when we begin that it will but it never does; it transforms itself into the desire of possession, a struggle for power” (168). Likewise, Manjari with the limited purview of her life believes that her love for Shyam will outlast the practical concerns of existence. However, the things happen otherwise and conflict takes on its course. Accordingly, she feels alienated from Shyam soon after her marriage. However, by the end of narrative Manjari achieves authenticity by accepting the facticity of existence. She exquisitely ends the narrative by stating:

The search is doomed to failure . . . we will never find what we are looking for, we will never get what we'r seeking for in other humans. We will continue to be incomplete, ampersands all of us, each one of us. Yet, the search is what it's all about. . . the search is the thing. (*Moving on* 343)

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