CHAPTER-IV

A CHANGE OF HEART
A CHANGE OF HEART

Henry James' A Change of Heart was first published in the Atlantic Monthly. It is the third and last of James' early dramatic experiments. The 'comediettas' preceding A Change of Heart were simple two character or three character conversation pieces. The play is an attempt in small compass to create a play in French fashion - each entrance and exit marking the occasion for a scenic division after the from in which French plays were cast. As a result this dramatic trifle boosts of no less than fifteen scenes.

The central idea of the play is cheating of women by a knave. The play has four characters; Robert Stavely, Charles Pepperel, Margaret and Martha. Robert Stavely is the good samaritan in the play whereas Charles Pepperel is portrayed as 'narrow minded, rancorous prig'. The two women Margaret and Martha are portrayed as the persons who were cheated by Pepperel.

Charles Pepperel who can be considered the villain in the play, loves Martha. She believes him and falls in love with him. Martha finds his true
colour as comes and bids farewell to her. She becomes depressed for having trusted 'a rank adventure'. Pepperel speaks to Martha rather philosophically

I'm not so bad as you think. You know it's

said that unless we are saints we hate those by whom

we're wronged. Of course if were saints, we've not

wronged any one.¹

Martha, insulted, suppresses her suffering and vows to forget him. She snubs his request to forgive him as he is engaged to Margaret, a rich, prosperous lady who is under the guardianship of Robert Stavely. Robert is Margaret's cousin.

Martha finds it hard to forget the betrayal and speaks to herself in the second scene,

Life, you're hard. Six months ago I fancied it the last

humiliation to become a paid servant, - for what am

I more? But it's the greatest humiliation of all, I

verily believe, simply to be a woman; that includes

the others: to listen and believe and trust as a

woman! well, the world tells us that it's a great privilege to suffer as a woman.\

James' sympathy towards the women can be seen through this character. Martha involves herself in her duty as a maid and despite her sufferings she engages herself in the party that was given by Margaret. Pepperel sees Margaret as a lucrative woman and decides to propose to her for an engagement.

Robert, guardian and cousin of Margaret arrives at Margaret's house to attend her birthday party. He meets Martha and senses her suffering. He comes to know that Pepperel has deceived her. He says to Martha that he abominates Pepperel. Martha doesn't reveal her episode to Robert and he goes on to say that his cousin, now-a-days, is getting into the evil hands of Pepperel. Margaret who is pretty, clever, charming, positive and obstinate cannot judge Pepperel. She shows a whole lot of affection towards him as this man had induced so many sugar-coated malicious words in her mind.

Pepperel even dares to present Margaret with a golden ring at the party but she instantly rejects this offer and then asks some time to decide. This irks Robert and he vows to break this unholy alliance.

2. Ibid., p. 104
Robert considers Pepperel as ‘a man a woman cannot marry’. He speaks to Martha on Margaret’s infatuation to a crooked fellow, rather philosophically,

*Mis Noel, the gods do avenge themselves! they don't come nowadays in thunder and pestilence; they don’t blast our crops nor slay our children; they quietly punish us through our own passions. Here’s the proudest girls in the world infatuated with a man whose arm, if she really knew him, she would refuse to take for five minutes at a ball.*

Robert seeks Martha’s help in busting the malice of Pepperel, to rescue Margaret from the iron clutches of this ‘cool impostor’. Martha rejects initially but later as the play reaches the climax agrees to help Robert. Robert asks Pepperel to disclose his intention to Margaret. Pepperel doesn’t heed to his warnings and says to him that he would go on his mission to marry her.

Robert tells Margaret about the evil intentions of Pepperel and further tells her that he would prove his character in an hour. She doesn't

---

digest this and feels that Robert's interference has made her more intimate with Pepperel. She reveals this to Pepperel who already knows the plot and boasts himself as 'a man about whom stories can be told'. Margaret, who lacks the power of judging a man's character foolishly says to Robert that she is 'glad to love a man who has enemies' and further says that enemies, are a proof of strong nature.

Robert Stavely feels that the relationship between him and Margaret is 'a pretty pair of alternatives'. He wishes not to love her a this rate as she is in the web of a 'superior scoundrel'. He prays to show her 'the dingy disbahille of his iniquity'. He starts to collect the facts and figures to make Pepperel a complete dunce before her beloved cousin. He meets Martha and says to her that Margaret has given him an hour to prove his case. Martha replies in a different tone,

Martha. Poor Mr. Stavely! you see what is to try and help people in spite of themselves.

Stavely. Do you think we ought to shrug our shoulders and let them pass?

Martha. Our own troubles make us sceptical. We say it's a weary world, at best, and a
little more or a little less" 4

Martha's matured, philosophical words concerns Robert as she is the only person who has a proof Pepperel's earlier love affair with her. She even tells Robert that she wants to burn the letter written by Pepperel. Robert tells Martha to keep that note an hour longer so that it can be made possible to submit to Margaret.

Margaret and Martha meet in the ninth scene. Margaret says to Martha that Robert is taking too much interest in her story. She alleges that Martha is running after Pepperel and her cousin Robert wishes to marry her. She blames both Martha and Robert for their jealousy. This notion of Margaret was infused by Pepperel for his own advantage and to escape the forthcoming danger 'in an hour'. Margaret tends to think that there was a conspiracy to delink her from Pepperel. Margaret tells Robert that Martha had spoken bad of Pepperel and says that he was compared as the blackest of villains. She even says that Martha is dying out of jealousy. These words pain him. Robert considers Martha 'the angel of forgiveness, the soul of generosity'. He blames Pepperel for creating lot of problems.

Meanwhile, Pepperel comes to Martha with an offer to forget her immediate past and not to reveal her relationship with him to Margaret. His offer is monetary and Robert tells Martha to decline it. Pepperel pleads Martha to take the money for 'her immediate and substantial advantage'. Enraged Robert tells him to save his conscience. Frightened Pepperel senses a coming danger and is hurt as defeat is arriving at his threshold and speaks to himself to beg pardon from Stavely,

Jupiter Tonans has forgotten his thunder to flirt with - with

Hebe! if I were only an old pagan, I'd spend the

money in vows! Truly, I am pagan enough for that!

But what the deuce does he pity me for? 5

Pepperel turns towards the door to push himself out, where he meets Margaret, who was hearing the pleadings, flatterings and the swaggerings of Pepperel in order to satisfy Martha. Margaret comes to know the misdeeds and the character of this 'monster of vice', Pepperel. Margaret repents for her misbehaviour with Robert Stavely and Martha and comes to know that they are the people who loved her like anything since the inception.

5. Ibid., p.110
Martha who had swallowed the humiliation tells Robert to give the love and affection which he used to shower on her before the advent of Pepperel. Robert comes forward to Margaret and says,

Stavely.  Really, I'm afraid you must despise me!

Margaret.  (After a pause) No, I feel good-natured.

(To Pepperel) I give you noice, I'm not always so.

6. Ibid., p.113.

The notice to Pepperel still brings a ray of hope to take another advantage of winning her heart and he begs once again. The damage created by him is at a greater level and no woman forgives him to leave him deserted.