CHAPTER - V

CLASHES OF INTERESTS AND DISHARMONY

A. Clash of Interests

Updike’s major subject since the mid 1960s has been the domestic life of the American Middle Class and its attendant rituals: marriage, sex and divorce.

Marry Me: A Romance is set in Connecticut in the early 1960s and it is the story of a love affair and its turbulent effects in the domestic circle. Jerry Connant and Sally Mathias are 30 years old; each is married and the parent of three children. They come to feel that they must divorce their respective partners in order to start a new life together. Sally is willing enough to leave her husband, Richard with whom she is at odds for some time. Jerry finds it difficult to leave his family for a mixture of religious and personal reasons.

Updike, within a short framework, convincingly portrays the messiness, fluctuations, and conflicts in the domestic circle due to the extramarital affair. Michel Irwin’s observation becomes relevant here and hence it is quoted below:

“Marry Me has a page to page liveliness and plausibility that makes for easy reading. It is difficult to read this novel without an embarrassed sense of intruding on some
private exercise in expiation, escorcism, transcription or hypothesis.”

Jerry Connant, the protagonist of the novel is in mad pursuit of Sally Mathias. Jerry after beginning his love affair with Sally finds time fleeting. In the beach Jerry meets Sally who was waiting for his arrival. He makes a comparison between his wife Ruth and Sally in the matter of love making.

“With his own wife he had a corrupt sensation, often, of convolution and inventive effort, but with Sally there was always, for all the times she had endured this before, a priceless sense of her being, yet once again, innocently amazed.”

Jerry and Sally feel for not being together. Jerry considers himself to be a dead person without Sally. “Jerry how can I live with out You?”. The same way I live with out you. By not living most of the time”. Jerry regrets that by marrying Ruth he had done a bad things though he was aware that she would make a good wife”. I married her because I knew she’d make good wife. And that’s what she’s done.

Though Sally had been married to Richard some ten years their life does not rest in happiness. Sally finds life with Richard very mean. She also feels that Richard has never acted like a husband and acted as her lover only. She states” Richard was always criticizing her, analysing her, When she was young it had been flattering; now it just seemed mean.”
Unable to bear the pang of separation, Sally comes all along the way to Washington from Connecticut to meet Jerry. But Jerry remains tensed because their affair might come to the limelight. Though Jerry wants Sally to be with him, he is not ready to face the situation immediately. Sally feels that she was the wife of Jerry and all other facts remained false:

“She was his wife. This strange fact unknown to the world but known to them, made what ever looked wrong right, whatever seemed foolish wise”.

Jerry and Sally become passionate towards each other. By slip of the tongue he calls her as Ruth. On hearing his utterance Sally highly felt miserable. Sally felt that without Jerry there was nothing in the world. She felt a great void. Though Jerry disliked Sally’s visit to Washington, he made love to her when she came there. She feels, “How dare he tell her not to come and then make love to her when she did come!”

Sally and Jerry remained in a confused state of mind whether to leave their respective partners and children to start a fresh life. They discuss the fate of their children. Sally is willing to elope with Jerry but Jerry points out the emotional strain of separation from her children.

“Shall we just run off?”.

“You’d lose your children”

“I’m willing”.

“You say that now, but a week with me and you’d miss them and hate me because they weren’t there”.
Jerry is under a false notion that if he and Sally marry, the pleasure of love would be lost. To him, Sally remains unattainable. He remains in a middle way and baffled in his relation with Sally.

Sally does not totally agree with Jerry’s point of view. She is aware of limitations of her married life with Jerry. Their marriage would not be wonderful all the time, but it would not be totally bad also. Jerry states that Sally would be a better wife than Ruth just on your animal merits alone”. (P.47).

Jerry is aware of the binding that exists between him and Sally. At the same time he is also aware of the fact that to abandon his family is a sin, because of his atheistic belief. Whenever the topic turned towards Ruth, Jerry felt interested.

“I’ve figured out the bind I’m in”, he told her. It’s between death and death. To live without you is death to me. On the other hand, to abandon my family is a sin; to do it I’d have to deny God, and by denying God I’d give up all claim on immortality. Ruth was the one earthly topic that never failed to interest him”.

Sally had to wait for a long time to catch the flight to Connecticut. She was not able to get a ticket to reach there. She felt very sick of the world and of herself:

"... she felt sick of love. Love, love was what had dogged the world, it was love that refused to let the planes
leave, love that hid her children from her, love that made
her husband look senile in profile".9

At the initial period of their marriage, religion was not a big matter of
dispute between Ruth and Jerry. Only after the children's birth, religion
became a big issue. Ruth was not a believer in the existence of God though
she is the daughter of a unitarian minister, whereas Jerry believed in the
immortality of the soul and in the existence of the other world. Jerry feared
death. As a girl Ruth was compelled to attend the church service and now she
felt guilt and disoriented towards the practice of church. To Jerry's present
state of mind, religion helped him. He began to teach bed time prayer for the
children.

"The baptism of the children became a sore point. He read
theology; he taught the children bed time prayers. Once
wakened from sleep to hear him protest that some day he
would die, Ruth had said, "Dust to dust" and rolled over and
gone back to sleep. Jerry never forgave this. The child's
non-baptism tormented him as a face of his own
extinction"10.

Richard, husband of Sally, was too good to her in reality. He had a
family sense which Jerry did not possess. Richard often helped his wife in
domestic duties. Jerry never assisted his wife in running the family.

Jerry asked Ruth whether any time she had felt she had committed a
mistake by marrying him. He is also interested in knowing whether he is
willing to come out of the marriage knot. Jerry volunteers himself saying that Ruth can quit at anytime.

"...... I'm just asking you if we aren't making a terrible mistake in staying married forever".

"Don't you want to be free?". Ask yourself honestly. All I'm saying is, the door is open".

"You're not saying that. You're saying you want me out". (p.III).

Ruth questions the affair between Jerry and Sally. Jerry admits that when he was aware of the fact that relationship was getting stronger, he did not allow Sally to break it. He also points out why he is sticking to Sally:

"When it showed that we were getting in too deep, she tried to break it off, but I wouldn't let her. It's been me, not her, who's insisted. She's mine. She belongs to me in a way you never have. I can hardly describe it, but when I am with her, I'm on top. When I'm with you, it's side by side".

Normally when women come to know of their husband's illicit sexual relationship they strongly burst out to the core. But Ruth's behaviour is quite unexpected. She is aware of the fact that only because of her failing Jerry has moved to Sally. She asks Jerry not to take any decision immediately whether to give her up or not. She requests him to wait till summer to arrive at a decision.
"I respect your loving her. I know you went to her because of failings in me".

"I don’t know what to do", he said, "I can’t give either of your up".

"Don’t decide now", she said, I’m not ready".

"you must try with me", Ruth told him, to the end of summer?"

"Then decide"

"God", Jerry said releasing her. "you’ve been such a lovely wife". (p.122).

Sally expresses her grief on meeting Ruth regarding her relationship with Jerry. Ruth expresses her opinion whether Jerry had been truthful to either of them. But Sally speaks in favour of Jerry’s behaviour. Ruth’s utterances regarding her life are significant.

"Its better for me to know where I am. I’ve been unhappy all summer without knowing why”. Sally turned. “He tells me everything”. Ruth lowered her own gaze. “I’m not sure he’s been entirely honest with either of us”.

"You don’t know him. He’s painfully honest".

"I don’t know my own husband". (pp.127,128).

Sally charges Ruth that only because of Ruth’s behaviour, Jerry has turned towards her. Sally states that she is aware of the requirements of Jerry. In the opinion of Sally, Jerry is a person who needs love. Ruth also states that only for the sake of children she is enduring the marriage of her with Jerry. She also warns Sally to make sure of herself whether Jerry actually
needs her. Ruth also comes out with a revelation that she and Jerry made love the previous night after discussing the conflict.

"You must take responsibility for your actions Ruth. You can’t starve a man emotionally and then when he turns to somebody else pull a string and have him back. Jerry needs to be loved".

Sally, don’t think I relish my role in this. If it wasn’t’ for those three children I wouldn’t be here. It’s too humiliating.

“You can’t build a marriage on children”.

Ruth said, “He told me last night he wants us both. I don’t doubt he loves you. But he loves me too. “Last night we made love”.

“After everything”

“Yes”.

“You’re smothering that man to death”. No it’s not me. You’re killing him by asking him to rescue and three children... It’s too much for him to do. Find somebody else. Find tougher man”. (pp.129,130)

After coversing with Sally, Ruth asks Jerry to take a decision. For that Jerry states that he is not in a position to decide his future course of action. Jerry states that he is unaware of the fact whether Ruth loves him or not. He asks whether she wants divorce from him.
Ruth states that she does not want a divorce but at the same time she feels humiliated after knowing Jerry’s attraction towards Sally. “There were rules in this mystery like stairway in a castle; she had mistakenly knocked on the door of the chamber...

Jerry pointed out Ruth would not be in a position to understand his idea. He explained to her”. A bind is when all the alternatives are impossible. Life is a bind. It is impossible to live forever, it is impossible to die. It is impossible for me to live with her. You don’t know what a bind is because what’s impossible doesn’t interest you”. (Ibid., p.173)

Children in the family felt a sort of disturbance. Ruth requested Jerry to stop caring about her and the children so that they all could survive. Jerry’s caring created a sort of annoyance. But Jerry comes out stating, “I can’t solve it. I can’t solve it”. (p.174).

Ruth suffered so much in reality as well as in dreams. She was consciously occupied with the fate of her children and home. She had very violent dreams and Jerry expressed his wish that he would like to move out of the house. But at the same time he wanted Ruth to ask him to quit. In an outrageous mood Ruth said that he could go if that would be fine for him. Jerry replied positively. In an irritated state of mind Ruth threw the liquor glass on the floor. On hearing the noise, Charlie, came to the kitchen to know what had happened.

Already the child was growing disturbed. Ruth in an emotional state burst out and started crying. She told the child that his father was not willing to
live with them. On hearing the mother’s utterance the child ‘felt like a whipped cat and fled out from the kitchen’. Updike points out that in the domestic conflict children are the worst affected characters. In the struggle between the husband and the wife, the child remains in a midway and stands baffled.

The domestic conflict in the family makes the child grow violent, disturbed and outrageous in behaviour. Charlie stobbed. Jerry wanted to know the reason of his crying. Jerry consoled the child saying that he would not leave him. After a while, Jerry left home leaving the message with the children that he would come back soon. The child delivered the message to its mother with a sense of dignity ‘as if he were an ambassador to an enemy’. (p.179)

Sally had fled to Florida to her brother’s place. Daily Jerry questioned Ruth whether he had received any information. He wanted something to happen on its own accord. Ruth felt cheated, because Jerry remained highly pre-occupied with Sally’s thought. Ruth felt that her life was becoming a sort of humiliation in the hands of Jerry. “It was humiliating; a man shouldn’t stay with a woman out of pity, or if he did, he shouldn’t tell her”. (p.182)

When Ruth interrogated how Jerry felt without living with Sally, he did not give a convincing reply. He stated that he was losing his mind. “I was never so sure I would have enjoyed living with her”. (p.183)

Ruth pointed out that women are at the mercy of men. She added that Jerry had not properly reciprocated the love of Sally. She requested Jerry not
to interfere any more in the life of Sally as she needs Richard and her children.

Ruth felt deprived emotionally and physically, Jerry stopped caring about her and charged him that he had stopped making love to him. Ruth pleaded to Jerry to forget Sally. Jerry tried to convince Ruth, but Ruth was not in a mood of reconciliation.

"We'll make love to night".

"No. It'll be her. It'll be her in our mind. It's too degarding".

"What do you want me to do?"

"Stop thinking of her".

"I can't"

"Then don't let me see your thinking. When you're in my house, think of me. If you're going to make love to me, make me think it's me. Lie to me. Seduce me".

"You're my wife. I shouldn't have to seduce you". "Make me your wife. Hold me". (pp.184,185).

In Marry Me, Updike with full attention shows marriage to be the inevitable testing ground in contemporary life. The marriage commitment is shaky as most people falter toward divorce, but it stands. There is good reason, other than moralistic or traditional, however, why people usually do not divorce. Josephin Hendin remarks that, "Marry Me is about a man who bewitched between his mistress and his wife, find his destiny in sexual calamity"12.
Updike shows that a man's marriage is his fate. He uses the ordinary suburban love affair for the exposure of the difficulties involved in marriage. "No one has done more to explode male freedom as a myth than Updike in novels of American men whose lives from cradle to grave are structured by women. No other male writer has probed so single-mindedly a man's need of woman..."13.

The protagonist of *Marry Me*, Jerry, is carried away by the fundamental conflict involving the demands of the self versus one's obligation to others. He suffers from guilt because he fails to understand or balance this basic opposition. Updike states:

"I see each book as a picturing of actual tensions, conflicts and awkward spots in our private and social lives. There is no way to reconcile... individual wants to the very real need of any society to set strict limits and to confine its members"14.

In *Marry Me* Updike's thematic focus is domestic conflict arising out of adultery; it points out the liminal space between monogamous marriage and complete sexual freedom. Infidelity is one of the favourite themes of Updike's fiction. Updike's heroes turn the women they sleep with into wives:

"They have a way of seeming almost physiologically bereft in bachelorhood. They seem more unwifed than single... they displace even the men to whom their mistresses are married. Marriage, it seems, does not
guarantee that a man will take the part of a husband.

Husbanding is more mysterious than that... it can exist where marriage does not, and disappear where it does.\textsuperscript{15}

Updike through his protagonist has captured the American personality and the dilemmas it faces. In \textit{Marry Me}, the protagonists Jerry is aware that marriages are permanent but affairs are not. It is difficult to maintain a marriage because it does not generate the same excitement as the affair. Ruth thus makes a distinction between an affair and a marriage.

"Don't you see it's a problem any woman has, when she's a wife there are no obstacles. Affairs are "great", "exquisite" (p.139).

Barbara Leckie's observation remains significant:

Ruth is able to maintain a level-headed distinction between her marriage and her affair. Jerry is unable to recognize the difference in kind between an affair and a marriage.\textsuperscript{16}

Updike suggests a few conclusions. He presents men and society as he sees them. The end of \textit{Marry Me} is left to the reader's choice. Updike has said that the central theme of each of his novels is "meant to be a moral dilemma", and that his books are intended as "moral debates with the reader". He rejects the notion that literature should inculcate moral principles or precepts. As Bernard A. Schopen says Updike has suggested that the
human conscience constantly suffers guilt for transgressing the laws of two different moralities\textsuperscript{17}.

**B. Disharmony**

S. is the story of a woman who leaves her husband as result of her unhappy married life. Her search for a place-relief from domestic unhappiness and disharmony-leads her to an ashram where her expectations are not fulfilled. Leaving the ashram she goes in search of peace and happiness. The domestic conflict in S. is called by the lack of care and interest of Sarah's husband in Sarah as a wife.

The novel S. concerns with S. Sarah Worth, a forty two year old woman who has married a doctor named Charles. After twenty two years of married life with Charles, Sarah finds life to be void. She feels that she has been avoided and neglected by Charles. Through Irving, one of her friends, she comes to know about Arhat-a religious leader. Formerly she was practising yoga along with her friends and also was listening to the cassettes given by Arhat. One day in a desperate state she deserts the house and joins Arhat's commune along with other sanyasins.

Sarah comes into contact with Durga, who claims to be the chief assistant of Arhat. Vikshipte is her group leader. He is from Germany. Sara is made to work in the ashram. The people in the ashram believe that work is worship. After a month she is introduced to the Chief Meditator, who renames her as Kundalini. Thereafter she becomes very close to the chief. The chief admires her physical beauty. Instead of telling this in a direct way, he talks in
a roundabout way. He talks of Kundalini Yoga as he proceeds with her step by step and he copulates with her.

The ashram faces many serious charges. One of the magazines writers that it is a centre for drug abusers and hippies. Enquiries regarding sources of income to the ashram and the expenditure incurred by the ashram are made by the revenue department. All through the novel, the staff and the chief of the ashram and Arhat are charged as having done the brain-washing of their kids. The reader comes to know that valium is used by the inmates.

Sarah is under the impression that Arhat is from India. Only at a very later stage she knows that he is from Watertown, Massachusetts. Sarah feels that she has been deceived by Arhat. She calls him a fraud and a liar. Finally Sara quits the ashram with utter dismay. She finds that she has not achieved anything significant.

Meanwhile, those who have departed the ashram, come and rejoin in the ashram. Arhat turns his attention towards a former inmate of the ashram and welcomes her back to the ashram.

Charles sends her divorce notice. To her shock and surprise, she finds that her friend Midge and Charles are going to marry. After a very long gap, Sarah comes to know about the whereabouts of her former lover.

Sarah’s daughter has left the college in the middle and she is in her family way. Sarah leaves the ashram without informing the Arhat. She starts living in an island named Samana Bay. Sarah’s mission is to attain salvation
and destroy her ego. Till the end of the novel, she is unable to do so but she claims that she is free from all the attractions, and material possessions of the world. Sarah remains searching.

The novel is a mockery of Sarah's claim to destroy her 'self' and also the mockery of the Sannyasins and meditators who proclaim to destroy their ego.

There is a lot of difference between Sarah's domestic life and her life in the ashram. The disharmony in domestic life leads Sarah to a kind of philosophical attitude towards life, men and matters. Life is full of adjustments, readjustments and compromise. The practice of yoga in the ashram is a natural phenomenon. In the life of ashram and yoga, the role of Guru is an important factor. The events in the story are not typically American. The events in the story are not typically American. There is universal significance in the sense that there is a mixture of oriental and western culture.

Sarah's letters to her husband, her daughter and her brother are reflective of her sense of mental release from worry and tension. The description of the intimacy between a man and a woman, as husband and wife, between man and woman, between the lover and the loved especially in the moments of mutual joy and ecstasy in their privacy are described very naturally. There is no obscenity in the description. The language reflects the real, natural situation in moments of privacy.

The novel seems to suggest that divorce cannot be a solution to any domestic crisis. Sarah's flight from her domestic situation is due to her
loneliness. The title ‘S’ symbolically suggests Sarah’s search – a later day Hester Prynne who tries to search for her identity. All her efforts end in vain because she does not realise her own self and her search continues. Harmony and self search are the two major issues of the novel.

Sarah feels women are trapped creatures. She charges Charles how he had treated her like a lifeless article. She feels that she had never been treated with kindness by Charles. Charles had failed to understand her longings and expectations as a human being. “What I want to say is don’t let Charles care you. To him I was another piece of furniture and unless I got coffee spoiled or squeaked like a rusty door he never gave me a glance”\(^{18}\).

Charles has sent a legal notice to Sarah for divorce. Though she says, that she is not interested in Charles, memories of him haunt her mind now and then:

“It's the frightened people that do the damage in the world. I don't have the slightest emotional curiosity about him but I'm beginning to get these legal letters from his hired thug Gilman that make me, honestly worry for his sanity.

How can you share a man's bed for twenty-two years, picking his socks up every morning and trying to make them match when they come out of the dryer and then find him so full of sheer malice and hatred? Married a Monster ….”\(^{19}\) (Ibid, p.137-138).
In the meanwhile, the ashram receives legal notices to submit their revenue account. Since Sarah has become the Chief Assistant to Arhat she replies to the authorities:

“Our policy is to pay all receipts into the Treasury of Enlightenment without any numerical notation that might encourage an ethic of competition and invidious comparison among our benefactors.

How much better it would be to legalize drugs and prostitution and out of Surfeit discover, as did the Lord Buddha, the middle way that leads to non-attachment and nirvana. To quote the Bhagavad Gita: Action rightly renounced brings freedoms and action rightly performed brings freedom.

Sincerely Yours,
- Ma Prem Kundalini,
Asst. to the Arhat.

Arhat is against any organized religion in any form. He claims his ashram to be an educational institution. The ashram faces severe criticism from various corners. The ashram is visited by several official authorities and malpractices have been noticed. One of the associates confesses everything to the officials. Meanwhile Arhat visits Sarah’s room and tries to convince her to touch her tits. Arhat has come in search of Sarah. He compares her to Kalli, Radha and Sathyavathi. Through the eight steps involved in Kundalini Yoga, Arhat slowly mingles with Sarah.

"Maithuna is not what is called in this coarse country "fucking". It is cosmic play. It is lila. The soul's journey is
lila. The emergence of prakrit from purusha is lila. From the truth of the body, Chanda, emerges lila, the truth of the universe brahmananda.

I love it when you explain things. I am nitya maues, eternal man. I am sakaya manus, man unconditioned. I am aygoni manus, man unborn. My linga is all lingas. I am Krishna and you are Radha and we are in Vridavan!"

Sarah realizes that human relations remain always tricky. She has come to a realization that one need not search for freedom or light outside. "Real freedom is within, Midge." "Be a lamp unto yourselves. Be a refuge unto yourselves. Seek no refuge outside of yourself, Midge that's what I am trying to keep in mind in these hectic last couple of weeks...'

The ashram receives a complaint from a parent that it has brainwashed her son. In the usual style, the assistant to Arhat replies to the parent.

Meanwhile, Pearl got involved in a love affair. Sarah advises her daughter to complete her degree first. She warns how she will be trapped once if she entered the wedlock. She is shocked to hear that her daughter has become pregnant, despite her warning. She writes to her as follows:

"You are pregnant. After wounding me in these various other ways you want to make me into a grandmother. I'm not ready, I'm still learning how to live, Why so early? My running off deserting my biological post made you think you had a man ..... Most pregnancies, like most wars, are totally silly,
and aren't intended at all; they come about in a long blink while the mind is essentially asleep. At some point in life a woman becomes her own mother and you have reached it sooner that I did. For the baby's sake, take lot of Vitamin B. complex and zinc-zince for all life-changes that involve metabolism. See? For all your naughtiness I am still your loving Mother.

Sarah comes to know that she has been cruelly deceived by Arhat. Arhat is from Massachusetts. He was a Jewish boy, younger to Sarah by a year and has finished his engineering and administration. Sarah comes out with a real analysis of herself. She is in such a perplexed state, unable to distinguish between the real and unreal:

"I give myself to him totally and where I thought there was this great everything, this mahat, there was nothing. Shunya.... I haven't brushed away even that much pretty prejudice in these seven months. I still love him. My anger is at myself......." (Ibid., p.212) "I don't know what will be happening to me. I waited twenty two years to confront Charles and then it was being out of the house when he came home from work. Sara" (p.216).

Finally Sarah leaves the ashram by sending an unsigned letter to Arhat. She leaves the ashram unceremoniously. In her letter to the master she states that she was not able to come out of her fluctuations and still she is trying to relocate her life.
Sarah receives a letter from Charles that he is going to marry Midge. She points out the limitations of Midge:

“Darling, You’re going to have decibel headache day and night. I love Midge, of course. She was very little negativity……. But for a man who wants a partner who can give him back some resonance at every level, it will be like living with Pearl at age twelve and a half, only not so pretty and with no prospect of growth”\(^{23}\).

Sarah settles in an island and feels serene now. “Charles, I can’t express how serene and benign in I feel about you and me, parting is an illusion. Loss in an illusion, just as is gain; I think I eventually will go to Holland and help Pearl bear our grandchild” (p.260).

Having known the Arhat's divine love, Sarah is not willing to have any further attachments. She needs to be still and feels now she has acquired the means to be still.

By the time Updike came to write the third instalment of what had developed into a trilogy of comic novels based on Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*, the set had acquired certain formal characteristics. He thought that each book must be the first person narrative of a spiritual pilgrim: American religion and its decay; since puritan England would be a theme, there must be footnotes. “I was well into S. before the Hindu and Buddhist terms, proliferating as I became an increasingly enthusiastic disciple of Indian religions, suggested and convenience of a glossary”\(^{24}\).
Men and women in Updike's novel face normal situation in life but the characters act differently in different situations. "S" portrays the life of Mrs. Sarah a disappointed wife in her domestic life with her husband. Updike seems to suggest that the possible solution to domestic disharmony is the character's acceptance of reality, especially the fact that happiness and peace are matters of the mind. It is the state of mind that enables a man or woman to face any disharmony with mental courage and get relief from the mental agony. In S. Updike stresses the fact that woman like Sarah should try to derive peace and happiness in the real domestic situation; otherwise they have to undergo sufferings in life. The novel also suggests that mutual understanding, caring and sharing between the husband and wife is the basis for domestic harmony.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


3. Loc.cit.


6. Ibid, p.36.


10. Ibid, p.78.

11. Ibid, p.120.


