



## **SOMERSET MAUGHAM'S NARRATIVE SKILL AS SOMETHING REMARKABLE ILLUMINATING THE DEPTH OF TRUTH AND HUMAN NATURE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This article is an attempt to lay focus on Somerset Maugham's narrative skill and his depiction of truth and human nature in his works and he has created new combinations of characters and events are presented in a crystal clear manner through his writings. He has shown his mettle in his writing style with clarity, simplicity and euphony, he by analyzing such themes as God, love, hatredness, wealth, pride and also deals with philosophical thought in a stylistic way.*

**Key words:** *Usage of Language, Narrative technique, Style, Human Nature.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

William has been hailed as a prolific narrator, a popular playwright, a reputed short story writer and an entertaining novelist of the twentieth century. He is a humorous writer, whose wit and humour sparkle, startle and delight the readers. In the words of Sen Gupta, wit is concerned with the incongruity and opposite in between words, phrases, fancies and opinions and human delights in abnormalities of character. Thus, wit is a clever usage of language; it delights only in the combinations of words and fancies as seen apart from character. Wit of Maugham subordinates his comic intentions. It is the instrument by which the narrator

**DR. S. CHELLIAH**

1Page



exposes the realistic nature of his characters. However, life is a big humour to Maugham. According to him, the very purpose of such humour is delightful and artistic. In short, Maugham is a serious artist of ridicule, satire, wit and humour. The purpose of such humour is to provide relief from the burden of life. Life is neither totally a comedy nor a tragedy. It is not even a love story, but it is a mixture of all the three including many other things, Real life is different from novel life. H.G.Wells, John Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett contemporaries of Maugham are materialists. But Maugham stands by realism.

Maugham is the innovative narrator who has created new combinations of characters and events for us. He has never failed to write appealing matters for his readers. Ted Margon even suggests: “Maugham, in many ways, is to the twentieth century what Charles Dickens was to the nineteenth” (P 4). Maugham was neglected for a longer period but he became more and more famous later in his life and after his death. His personal reminiscences in the form of articles and books, and several scholarly and critically sound books have helped the readers for the study of Maugham’s novels. At eighty five, William Somerset Maugham was truly one of the world’s great writers. Critics called him cynical, bitter and cruel. Gerald Sykes, who admires Maugham’s enormous gift as a craftsman, suggests that sinister influences vitiated his attitudes:

*“Contradictories are also the opinions of his critics  
who in his twenties, said he was brutal  
in his thirties, flippant in his forties,  
cynical in his fifty, competent and then in  
his sixties superficial .... Somerset Maugham  
has been called the most creative talent in  
the field of the English novel” (Klaus 23).*

*The Razor’s Edge* was considered as a prelude to the narrator’s conversational style. Calder says:

*“Mr. Maugham announces that the section dealing  
with Larry’s conversation might well be skipped –  
but that without this account he would not  
have considered it worthwhile to write the book”  
(PP 90-91).*

Style is essential for a good narration. Maugham was fully aware of the qualities of good style. One has to write lucidly, simply, euphoniously and yet with liveliness and then one writes perfectly. Style literally means manner of writing. Style is personal and each writer has his own style. The style of a cricket player reflects the manner in which he bats or bowls



Maugham follows a style of his own. He tried to write with ease, but it proved laborious to him. In his book, *The Summing Up*, he said:

*“Nature seldom provides me with the word,  
the turn of phrase, that is appropriated  
without being far-fetched or common place” (32)*

In his book namely *Somerset Maugham*, Brophy writes;

*“Though he practised assiduously lucidity,  
simplicity and euphony, he was not able to  
write as he wished to. He made many  
concessions to himself in his style. He  
used any word unhesitatingly, if appealed  
to him” (P 22).*

Clarity is the essential aspect of style. Maugham expresses what he means with crystal clearness. Despite his stylistic defects, Maugham registers progress in his narration. Cardel says:

*“Maugham style in **The Razor’s Edge** is  
the lucid, smooth and adult prose style” (P 209).*

Maugham’s writing is direct, simple and lucid without any obscurity and his manner of writing is appropriate. He writes persuasively and provokes his reader to read nonstop. So, he writes with appropriateness and persuasiveness. He deals with philosophical thought in a stylistic way. In this way, his achievement is something remarkable. In the words of Lorry, he challenges God :

*“If all good and all powerful God created the  
world, why did he create evil?”  
(The Razor’s Edge 256).*

Larry is unhappy in his personal life. Suzanne does neatly reveal: “.... He told me about his friend and how he died to save him” (184). She appreciates Larry’s good nature and peculiar attitudes:

*“He was a strange lover, very sweet, affectionate*



*and even tender, virile without being passionate if you understand what I mean, and absolutely without vice. He lived like a hot blooded school boy. It was rather funny and rather touching when I left him, I had the feeling that I should be grateful to him rather than he to me” (186)*

Maugham has great admiration for Dryden, Swift, Addison, Hazlitt, Newman and Samuel Butler since they inspire the writers to develop a simple, lucid and euphonious style. He finds remarkable simplicity and ease in Swift, balance and euphony in Dryden. What appeals to him in Hazlitt is sensitiveness, precision, clarity and eloquence. He points to the music, grace and lucidity in the best prose of Newman. He regards Hume and Berkeley as the models of good prose. Burt writes:

*“....Maugham’s watch words were simplicity, lucidity and euphony in that order; that his models were from the Augustan Age and Neo-classical period – Dryden, Swift, Voltaire; and that he admired Maupassant and Kipling for their sense of form, order and simplicity” (P 37).*

Sometimes, Maugham’s style is sensuous:

*“She put her arms around my neck and began to cry too, and kissed my lips and eyes and my wet cheeks... “ (Cakes and Ale 132)*

Elliot Templeton’s dying words display Maugham’s progress in his art and he has established his writing with a style of clarity, simplicity and euphony. But he uses idioms and phrases lavishly and flash backs here and there. The readers get much impressed with his narrative technique. This is the peculiarity of Maugham. His ability to narrate story is noteworthy. For he creates a direct association between the reader and the read. Brander observes:

*“He has natural aptitude for dialogue, and the best passages in his novels are little scenes which might have been from the stage” (P 6).*



Brander adds further:

*“Maugham had, of course, used the first person singular in **The Moon and Six Pence**, **Cakes and Ale** and many of his short stories and in **The Razor’s Edge**, however, the narrative person is more Candid and transparently Maugham than that of any other work, and for the first time in his fiction he calls himself Mr. Maugham. Though there are qualities of caution, restraint and guardedness, he is mellower and warmer than in any other piece with the possible exception of **Cakes and Ale**, detached in an articular way from the central conflicts of the story but sensitive to the difficulties of the characters, he is able to be compassionate and generous” (P 297).*

When Maugham published his novel **Cakes and Ale**, he was considered as voluptuous writer. His heroine, Rosie, is unchasteful in her personal life. Maugham contradicted Victorian attitudes towards life – men and matters. He can be called a career maker because he has analysed the topics such as God, love, hatredness, envy, wealth, pride, goodness and evil deeply. His satire and irony attract the reader to a great extent. Thus, he becomes a successful narrator of the twentieth century literary world. Larry’s indifference to worldly pleasures gives Maugham enough opportunity to twist the story of the novel, **The Razor’s Edge**, have and there. As a child, he is obstinate; as a navigator, he becomes a misfit. The death of his intimate friend, Patsy, brings about a tremendous change in his personal life. Suzanne learns from Larry the circumstances leading to the tragic incident. Patsy has risked his precious life in saving Larry’s life in a war. It shows his sense of responsibility. The death of Sophie, is a great shock to Mr. Maugham. Larry is upset. It is quite an expected incident. Hence Maugham reveals his pathos as he narrates the circumstances leading to the great tragedy of Sophie, In life, she meets with failure after failure. Her tragic end is pathetic. Thus, Maugham has explained pathos vividly and succeeded in narrating something tragic. By narrating a pathetic incident, Maugham explains pathos vividly and arouses our feelings.

Maugham has encouraged his readers through his comic and delightful novel **Cakes and Ale**. But what he has revealed in his narration is not applicable to Indian customs and manners. As a realist, he has imitated the 19<sup>th</sup> century novelists Balzac and Flaubert who were in favour of



realism. Maugham has discussed the concepts of Indian mysticism in his novel *The Razor's Edge*. It is sub-titled *The Facts of Life*. The hero walks along the path of hazardness and difficulty in order to attain perfection in life. Larry is a true portrait of tolerance and forgiveness. He has no complaint against Isabel who has renounced him only for the sake of his craze for materialism. He takes no vengeance against her. Instead, he cures her husband who is suffering from severe head-ache after his financial crush.

Maugham's acute power of observation is something remarkable. In spite of a trivial plot, Maugham has introduced deep characters. Their problems have been revealed sympathetically and ironically. He has revealed the depth of his characters through dialogues and interesting situations. Their conversation is really interesting. Larry, in *The Razor's Edge* learns that death is dreadful and repulsive. It has acted as a teacher. He is disappointed when his friend dies in saving his life. Again, Sophie's death ends the novel. Larry becomes a taxi-driver and wants to be a good Samaritan. Maugham's attitude is unromantic. He has been labeled as a brutal and cynical writer. He portrays emotions such as sex and love, hatred and anger, materialism and jealousy in his novels, especially *Cakes and Ale* and *The Razor's Edge*. They are acceptable and their themes are derived from the narrator's own experience. Maugham's satire is a composition of vice or folly with experience. Humour dominates his satire and his aim is to realize the vice and folly through wit and humour.

Maugham has destroyed the sanctity of love and marriage in *Cakes and Ale*. Isabel loves Larry, but marries Gray in *The Razor's Edge*. Maugham's ironical end gives dissatisfaction to us. Sophie's death and Larry's unmarried pursuit as a taxi-driver in America, leave us in an air of suspense and dream. But his wit and humour give ample scope for us to read these two novels non-stop. His narration is apt; his style is suitable; but he is not a classic writer. He is not at all an omniscient writer too. Like Hemingway, Maugham reveals their emotions – internal and external. His narrative technique illuminates the depth of truth and human nature. He is out and out concerned with narrating life in its complex situations. Therefore, it would be interesting to read his narrative pattern. He always writes with humour and irony. A surprise ending is the narrative technique of Maugham. One can enjoy his delightful narration from the beginning of the novel to its end. His style is simple, lucid and euphonic and he uses limited vocabulary and common phrases and idioms. His dialogue is witty and humorous. To conclude, it may be stated that Maugham's words are humorous but what he speaks is something reasonable. Dialogue is the medium of expression through which the narrator gives animation to his narrative skill, and he avoids tedious, and difficult tracks in reaching his primary goal of enjoyment for his primary aim is to give pleasure to the readers through such simple and lucid style linked with satire and humour.



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