



## WOMAN'S QUEST FOR EMOTIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT FROM THE OTHER MAN: "AN ANTIDOTE TO BOREDOM"

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### **Abstract**

*Home is never 'sweet home' for Deshpande's woman character, but rather a 'Karma Bhumi' where she sweats out in her wifely and motherly roles. In their relationship with men they are at all times expected to serve. An 'Antidote to Boredom' is once again about the husband-wife relationship in which millions of other women like herself, in a loveless marriage devoid of all color and imagination. Wife is unhappy, depressed and frustrated in her marriage life as she is bored of the dull and the daily routine of house that is the cause of disharmony in her relationship with her husband and because of lack of love, care, compliments, understanding and companionship from her husband which leads her to search for emotional fulfillment from the other man in her life. This, another 'he' fills her life's vacuum with his care and understanding. The two fall in love as man and woman, but their love remains unconsummated as the 'wife' backs out from the relationship. When she takes this decision, realization dawns upon her that what she had let go off was not a mere moment to antidote to boredom, but, rather, the best part of her life.*

**Keywords:** *Husband-Wife Relationship, Loveless Marriage, Disharmony.*

Deshpande's woman is dissatisfied with her existence as a wife of an indifferent man and finds herself involved with a young widower. The theme of the story is isolation and monotony. It depicts the ennui of a wife who starts feeling a kind of gulf between herself and her husband due to the schedule he rigidly sticks to. The wife gets bored of her husband's passivity, his blindness and his stolidity. Dissatisfied with life the protagonist thinks. Her husband has never been demonstrative of his affection towards her. The dull and routine behavior of the husband is the focal point of the story. They have been married for twelve years. Of the two sons, who provided at once the bridge between the two, one is dead and the other aged five is in school. The wife feels discontent with the dull routine of her days, the unchanging pattern of her life. She reveals her hatred for imperceptiveness in the following way. On the contrary, there is the boundless capacity for loving and giving in the wife which remains unaffected. For her the word love is used only in books and movies, not in reality. In her case it has been proved to be an illusion.

The protagonist feels that there is no affection at all between them; the only thing holding them together is habit and a child. There pervades dull barren silences between them that she feels life "yawning and yawning. she goes unnoticed, her excitement, her restlessness, even her boredom and discontent too has passed him by. Incidentally, among the chaos of discontentment a young widower comes in her life as an antidote to boredom. She happens to meet him frequently at her son's school. She is drawn to him. Their casual acquaintance soon develops into an affair which has the effect of making life absorbing for her. Though the wife is enjoying his company, she is constantly nagged by the doubt whether she is merely seeking an antidote to boredom in her affair. She develops, however, a feeling of guilt towards her son, though not towards her careless and indifferent husband.

At other times she experiences a conflict between her loyalty to her husband and her infatuation for the stranger. She tries to ignore the feelings of passionate desire between them because she knows how it would be afterwards. Plagued with such feelings of guilt and shame, she once plans her holiday with him during her husband's ensuing tour to Delhi. It is at this juncture that the husband invites her to join him during that trip. Startled at the unusual invitation, which would result in the miscarriage of the anticipated pleasure with the other man, she evasively replies: "Next time perhaps. I don't feel life it this time." "If I were you, I would make it this time." (68) But when her husband, cool and composed, hints at his being aware of the goings-on between her and the stranger, she retraces her steps, as it were, and resumes her role of a docile wife. A flood of shame and guilt sweeps over her with a revelation that she was pursuing the mirage. She suppresses her longing for adventure so as not to disturb the even tenor of her life. She lets the opportunity go, bitterly regretting it later that "it had been no mere antidote to boredom, but the best part of my life." (69)

It can be said that the middle aged wife of this story is one who goes against the norms of the society and temporarily strays from the fold but she has no regrets for her act. Worn out by the programmed questions and answers of her husband, she finds solace and happiness in the company of a widower who cares for her. The husband and the wife are completely estranged though they live under the same roof. She recollects that neither her smile nor her tears are ever noticed.

But is the decisive step taken because of boredom as the title suggests? No. It is ironically worded. Her feelings are made amply clear by the closing thoughts of the protagonist in the story. She oversteps the boundaries of societal and moral propriety because she is neglected, because she has to shed tears for her dead child in secrecy, because there is chasm between her and her husband. No Savitri would stay in this manner. Her attempt to satisfy her emotional needs is a clear



defiance of the sati image that insists on the negation of the self. Her defiance is short-lived but she rises against the oppression and neglect practiced by her husband. Again, it must be noticed that she returns not because she is afraid of the conventional morality but because she realizes that her husband in his own callous way 'cared' (68) for her.

Through her 'An Antidote to Boredom', Deshpande has tried to critically analyze the reason of the trauma of moving apart of two lives united in wedlock. It is too much of togetherness that can actually harm the husband wife relationship. That is too much of everything, barring love and excitement. Buried under a dull daily routine, the husband and wife mechanically perform mundane duties ending up in a man-woman relationship which just gets carried on as a part of a social convention. Instead of the passionate man-woman relationship full of love, they both, especially the woman dreamt of, besides, the everyday requirement of tea, breakfast, lunch, dinner, children and even sex at times which is what is shared between them. The absence of the expression of emotions verbally or through actions is to such an extent normal, that, any communication by the woman about 'missing her husband', to him is highly embarrassing. This leads on to the woman's search for emotional fulfillment from the 'other' man in her life. She has come to the realization that her relationship of marriage with her husband is merely for procurement of basic necessities in terms of food, lodging, clothing, a source of continuity of family name through the children they have and that expectation of fulfillment of any desire beyond this by her husband is futile. Ironically, her filling up this vacuum with another man helps her live better in her marriage with her husband. This is her way of preventing the hollowness and monotonousness of her relationship with her husband to gobble up her marriage itself. The wife habitually visits her son's school to seek the admiration of this other 'him' and the very thought of meeting him and his noticing even the minutest details about her appearance serve as nectar to her quashed morale as a woman. Her devaluation by her husband generates a craving for love, even if outside marriage, and it is this 'other' man-woman relationship which gives everything that she ever wanted such as, love, care, appreciation, compliments, understanding and companionship. The Indian patriarchal social system preaches that even just to survive, leave alone throb with life, a woman must be attached to a man, by kinship at birth and then later on by marriage.

Deshpande's protagonist admits about the joy she gets from this other man in the story that, "His frank admiration was as refreshing to me as coldwater on a hot day. Until then, nobody had care what I wore, how I dressed? My husband denied me nothing but there was not one sari with associations. Not one sari that was special to me because of something we had done together. Something he has said to me". Deshpande shocks her reader by letting her protagonist disclose her feelings about her physical association with her husband, "as a habit with him, a body to be loved once or twice a week, so that love-making became just another chore, dull like treading a path one has walked, many a times, wondering, thinking about those women who did it for money and did have the same feeling of being cheated, of being defrauded of something that was the right of our womanhood." Another pertinent observation of Deshpande's woman protagonist in 'An Antidote to boredom' is that unlike other woman protagonists of Deshpande, it is not the desire to assert her individuality that is the cause of disharmony in her relationship with her husband, but rather, her intense desire for giving and loving and the failure of her husband to receive and reciprocate. She is fully aware how important this 'other' man-woman relationship was for her to overcome her marital frustration and also for harmony with her own internal self and thus, she does not feel any sense of guilt. However, equally aware of the social repercussions, she and her 'other' man choose to remain silent about their man-woman relationship. It becomes a precious, much cherished source of inner fulfillment which her husband had failed to accomplish. However, discontinuing this relationship, forced once again into the dull obligation of her marriage, her search remains unfulfilled.

The research paper reveals the fact that extra marital affairs always prove to be a source of a positive comprehension of their emotions to Deshpande's women characters. Nevertheless, irrespective of how strong the pull of such male-female attractions of their male friends, Deshpande's women are hard core moral conventionalist to, who believe in upholding the sanctity of their marriages. No matter how much unfairly abused, and ill-treated, they still believe in conformity to norms and compromise to any extent for the sake of harmony in their relationships with their husbands rather than turn out as rebels.

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