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MARS-VENUS REDEMPTIVE APPROACH  
TO MAN – WOMAN RELATIONSHIP IN HERMANN HESSE'S *SIDDHARTHA*

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ABSTRACT

Man – woman relationship, when built on reciprocity and complementarity not only in the theoretical (philosophical) sense but in the practical realm of life, leads both a man and a woman in relationship to redemption and harmony. Healthy man-woman relationships would naturally resolve conflicts – intra, inter and transpersonal in nature. As harmonized individual men and women increase in number, the society constitutive of individuals would bloom into one of harmony. This paper is an attempt to show how men and women in their relationships can work out their own and their partners' redemption and harmony, culminating in social harmony, by way of understanding and accompanying themselves and others in the Mars-Venus pattern proposed by John Gray. Gray's theory is initially briefed and then the same is applied to Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, a modern classic, to show how the two major male and female characters work out their redemption in and through their relationships, experience harmony and air the same in the society.

**KEY WORDS:** Man-Woman relationship, Mars-Venus Approach, Hesse's *Siddhartha*, Redemption and harmony.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ontology, the foundational philosophical branch, argues that to be human is to be male and female, man and woman. Sexuality i.e. being male or female is "an ontological structure of the human being" (Boff 49). The Christian understanding of human genesis as seen in the Bible holds the view that God "created human beings ... male and female" (Gen 1:27) and commanded them to leave their parents and "become one" (2:24). To be human is to be sexual, always a man or a woman. There is no 'being human' except through 'being a man or a woman' and being a man or a woman are "two different ways of being in the world" (50). It is true that each of them has everything as the other "but not in the same way, or to the same extent" and that clarifies that "neither is enough in himself or herself," the fact of which makes the two "relatively complete, and hence, must submit to relationship, to reciprocity, to complementarity" (Boff 51). Stemming from the same human root, men and women are drawn towards each other for union. Man – woman relationship, when built on reciprocity and complementarity not only in the theoretical (philosophical) sense but in the

practical realm of life, leads both a man and a woman in relationship to redemption and harmony. This paper is an attempt to show how men and women in their relationships can work out their own and their partners' redemption and harmony, by way of understanding and accompanying themselves and others in the Mars-Venus pattern proposed by John Gray. Gray's theory is initially briefed and then applied to *Siddhartha* to show how the two major male and female characters work out their redemption in and through their relationships.

## 2. GRAY'S MARS-VENUS APPROACH

John Gray, a relationship counselor, based on his experience in the several seminars he conducted for over 25,000 participants, captures his experiences in his book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. He defines in the book how men and women are different, metaphorically fixing their origin to two different planets Mars and Venus, and presents strategies to reduce tensions and create more love in relationships. Once they understand the differences, men and women do not have to struggle any longer as the understanding and appropriate approach would resolve tension and conflict. Firstly, Gray explains how men's and women's values are inherently different. Martians (men) value "power, competency, efficiency and achievement" (Gray 17) and therefore men mostly do things to prove themselves and develop their power and skills, even their dress is designed to reflect their skills and competence. They are in general more interested in "objects and things than people and feelings" and even their fantasies are about "powerful cars, faster computers, gadgets, gizmos and new, more powerful technology" (17). Gray makes it clear that "a man's sense of self is defined through his ability to achieve results" and since "autonomy is a symbol of efficiency, power and competence" (17-18), men resent any unsolicited advice or interference that often profusely spring forth from women. When a woman loves to assist her man through advice, the man mistakes it as her effort to control him. On the other hand, Venusians (women) value "love, communication, beauty and relationships" and therefore they love to spend time in "supporting, helping, and nurturing one another" (19). They develop their sense of self through "their feelings and the quality of relationships" and they attain "fulfillment through sharing and relating" (19). For Venusians, "relationships are more important than work and technology" and that is the reason why they are more concerned with "living together in harmony, community and loving cooperation" (19) and that in turn explains why they are more 'people or relationship – oriented' than 'goal-oriented' like men. They are very much involved in "personal growth, spirituality and everything that can nurture life, healing and growth" (20) and their spontaneous advice and suggestion come from this life-spring in them. Venusians are also naturally intuitive, not analytical like Martians. Gray's advice is that a man takes more efforts to empathically listen to a woman in order to understand what she is going through and a woman restrains from any unsolicited advice or criticism.

Secondly, men who are goal-oriented, when met with problems and stress, want to withdraw and "go to their caves to solve problems alone" (32) and once their problem is solved and they are relieved of their stress, they feel much better and come out of their cave. On the other hand, when faced with a problem and filled with stress, women who are people-oriented gather together, share their problems and feel better and eventually find a way of out of the problem. The process of sharing makes the women feel better, while only the solution makes men feel so. Thirdly, "men are motivated and empowered when they feel needed" and when the woman makes him feel needed, the man is energized and he gives love endlessly, while on the other hand, "women are motivated and empowered when they feel cherished" (46) and when the man makes his woman feel cherished (cared for, respected), she gives love endlessly. Understanding of this difference and appropriate response make men and women endlessly give and receive in which a harmonious relationship blooms every time. Fourthly, though men and women use the same words, when they speak, the meaning is different. When a man is upset, he is silent, wants to get into his cave to brood over or find a solution and the woman takes the man's silence as indifference or anger and unwillingness to share. When woman says, "we never go out," (68) a man quotes the last time they went out together but what the woman communicates is that she feels like going out together. Men and women need to understand the language of each other based on their basic value-pattern in order to go on smoothly and steadily. Fifthly and most importantly, the temperaments are different. It is interesting and a little surprising to note that "when a man loves a woman,

periodically he need to pull away before he can get closer” (98) for the reason that he needs to recharge himself by feeling independent and autonomous, not controlled and restrained, and once he is sure of it, he bounces back to the woman for intimacy. But a woman takes the withdrawal of man as a reaction to some mistake of hers and she is afraid that he might not come back and therefore wants to settle it at once. The problem worsens when she attempts to chase him and punishes him when she fails. A woman needs to understand that men are like Rubber Bands and are sure to come back after a while and be a little patient. Men need to explain his need to the woman and assure her of his return soon. On the other hand, women are Waves: “when she feels loved her self-esteem rises and falls in a wave motion” (117). When the wave rises, that is when a woman feels an abundance of love within to give, she profusely gives, but when the wave falls, that is when the suppressed negative feelings surface, she needs to be listened to. A man is confused as to why for no reason, the woman is upset, down and depressed. He needs to empathically listen to her, assure her of his love which will raise her again. Sixthly, the primary love needs of men and woman are different, even though it is all love. Men and women unaware of this may give love in the way they want, not in the way the other needs. In love relationships, women’s primary needs are to receive “caring, understanding, respect, devotion, validation, and reassurance” while men’s primary needs are to receive “trust, acceptance, appreciation, admiration, approval and encouragement” (141) and these are parallel but different. Understanding the basic difference in the value pattern and temperaments that lead to this difference in love needs, eventually result in a harmonious relationship. Seventhly, there is a marked difference in the way men and women handle arguments in a relationship. During arguments, men either “fight or flight” in order to avoid hurts, while women “fake or fold” (164-65). Men, in an argument, tend to put up a strong fight believing “the best defence is a strong offence” by which he hopes to win the partner when actually he loses her, or else, men tend to flight and get into their caves never to come out, which builds a cold war. Since both these are destructive, men need to talk out things at an appropriate time till when he could be in his cave in full awareness of what has happened and assure his woman that things could be handled better at a later hour which she needs to trust and accept. Women, in an argument, tend to hide their feelings and put up an artificial smile on their face. This faking, unless the issue is handled at an appropriate time, blocks the natural expression of love and at a later stage causes emotional explosions. Women also tend to take the blame on themselves and take responsibility for what is upsetting their partner. This folding approach appears very loving and supportive one but in the long run, would lead women to lose themselves. Women need talk out, by their natural temperament, the issue with men at an appropriate time when men come out their cave. Mutual understanding of the differences and patience till the appropriate time would clinch arguments and usher in harmony. On the whole, Gray presents the differences between men and women and signals strongly that an awareness, understanding and acceptance of the same would resolve conflicts and let men – women relationships culminate in harmony. The following section analyzes *Siddhartha* based on the differing basic values and primary needs of Martians and Venusians and shows how Siddhartha and Kamala work out their redemption and attain harmony.

### **3. REDEMPTION IN HESSE’S *SIDDHARTHA***

Siddhartha, a handsome Brahmin’s son, is clever and well loved, yet increasingly dissatisfied with the life that is expected of him. Setting out on a spiritual journey to discover a higher state of being, his quest leads him through a life of renunciation, luxury, wealth, sensual love, courting of death, until, eventually he comes to a river where a ferryman guides him to the ultimate meaning of existence. This story has at its heart Siddhartha’s encounter with Kamala, the courtesan. Their relationship is one of desirous beginning, passionate middle (conquering and conquered) and redemptive summation – an Aristotelian ‘beginning-middle-end’ paradigm.

**3.1. Desirous Beginning (Business-like):** Siddhartha, after leaving the Samanas and the garden of Buddha, realizes that he has been running away from himself and has failed to observe that “the world is beautiful, strange and mysterious” (Hesse 39). Now he is set on living his own self in the world to its lees. He travels towards a town and one night he has a dream in which he suckles of a woman and it tastes to him of “woman

and man, of sun and forest, of animal and flower, of every fruit, of every pleasure" (48) and intoxicates him to pursue the dream. He reaches the town and on the outskirts, he sees a small procession with a woman in an "ornamented sedan chair" (51). He perceives her as "bright, very sweet, a clever face, bright red mouth, ..., artful eyebrows, ..., clear slender neck" (51), etc. and at the very first sight of her, his heart "rejoiced" and he feels that he enters the town "under a lucky star" (51). The following day Siddhartha meets Kamala and their conversation reveals that they have observed each other well the previous day. Siddhartha tells her, she is the first woman he has spoken to without lowered eyes, and requests her to be his "friend and teacher" in the art in which she is "mistress" (53) and promises her to be "an apt pupil" (54) to her. She listens to him with interest but clarifies that he needs to have a lot of money and come to her in 'clothes and shoes.' He recites a poem, "... Better, thought the young Samana, To make sacrifices to the fair Kamala, Than to offer sacrifices to the gods" (56) and is rewarded with a deep kiss with which their love episode commences poetically. She gets him a job and motivates him to be clever, not modest and become an equal with the employer, the merchant: "Aided by Kamala, Siddhartha soon becomes wealthy and is able afford all the pleasures of life" (Ziolkowski 151). Siddhartha and Kamala are mutually in admiration and love. She loves "his voice, ... the look in his eyes" and he addresses her as "My dear Kamala" (Hesse 60) and wishes "good fortunes" (61) come to him from her. Even though both have taken keen interest in each other, they are still business-like in their relationship, because Kamala sees a prospective lover in Siddhartha while Siddhartha sees a worthy mistress of love in Kamala who would lead him in his pursuit of sensual pleasure.

**3.2. Passionate Reciprocity (Middle):** Siddhartha meets Kamala daily. They together in love "plunge to the depths of it blindly and insatiably" and Kamala teaches her pupil 'love' in such masterly ways that he learns it in all its aspects of giving, admiring, and "being conquered as well as conquering" (66). He learns the significance of reciprocity and complementarity in love – "giving and taking become one" (71) - which removes any least feeling of "misusing or having been misused" (66). Their relationship intensifies as "he talked to her, learned from her, gave her advice, received advice" (71). The reciprocity transcends the realm of sex and permeates their entire life. Siddhartha learns it from Kamala that "the correct way to approach an experience" is "through complete surrender of the self" (Liebmann 75). That she understands him "better than Govinda" (Hesse 71) shows how she fills the gaps in a Siddhartha's life. They are so 'passionately' involved with each other's life that with Kamala lies "the value and meaning of his present life" and Siddhartha becomes "her pupil, her lover, her friend" (66). While immensely appreciating Siddhartha for learning "the art well" (73), Kamala commits herself to the relationship saying, "someday, I will have a child by you" (73). It becomes true and she never afterwards entertains any other visitor. Both are passionately involved with the other and there is genuine reciprocity in their love-filled sharing of life.

**3.3. Redemptive End:** Their mutual recognition of a 'detached spirit' in the other opens up their inner space for deeper sharing. Siddhartha shares much about "Gotama, the Illustrious One" (72) and his ardent sharing moves Kamala so much that she confesses, "One day, perhaps soon, I will also become a follower of this Buddha" and there is a clear evidence of a deep conversion in her when she says, "I will give him my pleasure garden and take refuge in his teachings" (80-81). It reminds one of what Zacchaeus in the Bible who on the visit of Jesus, undergoes a conversion and declares that "I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay him back four times as much" (Luke 19: 8). Despite their passionate love – encounters, both divine the other and recognize a 'spirit of detachment' which eventually works out their redemption. Siddhartha tells Kamala, "you are Kamala, no one else, and within you, there is a stillness and sanctuary to which you can retreat at any time and be yourself just as I can" (71-2). Kamala tells Siddhartha, "you have learned my art well, ... and yet you have remained a Samana" (73). It reveals that they both are deep, mysterious and transcendental, passionately working out their redemption. Their ability to withdraw into their sanctuary where they experience an "at-homeness in Atman" (Leibmann 68) is what exactly leads them each to their liberation. Siddhartha renounces everything, returns to the river, guided by Vasudeva, realizes the eternal continuity in the river, the sound 'OM' – "the alpha and omega of every vedic text" (68) - which connects the entire cosmos and him and attains enlightenment in 'stillness' i.e. *wu-wei*, 'non-action' - "letting nature take its own course" (Edwards 88). This stillness in Siddhartha is quite significant as it means,

“empty of desire, empty of dream, empty of joy and sorrow” (Leibmann 71). Kamala symbolically set the golden bird free, “does not try to find him” (Hesse 85) who has disappeared, leaves her old life, shuts the door to the visitors, withdraws into her ‘sanctuary’ to bear the child conceived in utmost love, offers the pleasure garden to the Buddhist monks, leaves to meet Buddha, meets Siddhartha instead, and dies peacefully. Their final words to each other affirms their attainment of peace and redemption: Kamala to Siddhartha says, “Have you found peace? ... yes, I see it. I also will find peace” to which without a gap whispers Siddhartha, “you have found it” (113). Her final wish to tell him that seeing him is as good as seeing Buddha is an evidence enough that he has attained Buddhahood and by perfectly resonating with him, she too has attained it.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

From the desirous beginning to the redemptive end, the relationship between Siddhartha and Kamala flows smoothly soaked in reciprocity, because they understand each other’s values and needs and respond with care, which in Gray’s theory is essential to a harmonious relationship between a man and a woman. Kamala keeps herself bright, beautiful and charming, cares for Siddhartha’s wellbeing and helps him get a job and become a rich man, communicates herself very affably and cleverly and she remains committed in her relationship with Siddhartha even after he leaves her. All these gestures of hers go to show that she values love, communication, beauty and relationship, which Gray attaches as primary to Venusians, women. Siddhartha from their first meeting goes on proving himself with skills of poetry, fasting, waiting, thinking, set on his goal like a stone “that finds the quickest way to the bottom of the water” (60). Kamala finds him “the best lover ... stronger, more supple, more willing” (73). In love and business, Siddhartha proves himself to be exercising enormous power and competency and emerges victorious with efficient handling of people and business. All these show that he values ‘power, competency, efficiency and achievement’ which Gray attaches as primary values to men. Kamala has a concept of her ‘self’ in terms of her relationship all along her life upto the culminating one with Siddhartha, which for good takes her into her sanctuary and redeems her. Siddhartha has a concept of his ‘self’ in terms of his achieving his goal of finding the truth about his self, living the self fully, and pursuing beyond renounced life, luxury, sensuality, etc. and attaining enlightenment in ‘stillness,’ all in a spirit pursuing and achieving. In their relationship of reciprocity and complementarity, there is abundance of need-fulfillments: Siddhartha cares for her, understands her, respects her, is devoted to her, validates her love, all he does in truly-passionate love. Kamala trusts him (his nature of quest), accepts him (a Samana in spirit), appreciates him (for his strength, will, quest), admires him, and encourages him in his journey. Both Siddhartha and Kamala are united in love, yet remain detached in spirit. It is that spirit of detachment that constantly leads them to their sanctuary wherein their redemption blossoms freely opening up to eternity of bliss. In a similar way, if every seeker in a love-relationship could enter the sanctuary of love with the spirit of detachment, then s/he is sure to, eventually, attain bliss, the Buddha-hood.

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