

## A Study of Psychological Tension of Women in Ian McEwan's On Chesil Beach

B.Sivaranjani<sup>1</sup> and Dr.C.Shanmugasundaram<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University,

Annamalai Nagar, Tamilnadu, India

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Annamalai University,

Annamalai Nagar, Tamilnadu, India

### Abstract

The goal of this research is to examine the psychological tensions in the minds of a female character named Florence Pointing in Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach*. In the novel, both virgins Florence and Edward getting married in the early 1960s, before the sexual revolution. They both spend their first night of marriage in a hotel room, but sexual troubles separate these lovers, and their marriage lasts only one day. The novel relies heavily on psychological tension. McEwan discusses how society influences the lives of two individuals throughout the work. These two lovers were pulled between society conventions and psychological wants. Florence's psychological state is marked by anxiousness throughout the narrative, prompting her to decide to leave her marriage within a day.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Love, Sexual, Anxiety, Psychology, Tension, Sexuality

Ian McEwan's McEwan is one of the most famous modern novelists and his position seems to be more secure with every book published. His work is valuable for this study for the great emphasis it places on the poetics of the individual. The search for happiness and self-actualization, presented in his novels, shade light on our attempts to treasure this precarious individuality. It also points to the risks associate with such attempt. Along with a cross-cutting humanistic commitment the political prospect in McEwan's novels is of utmost relevance to the understanding of the liberal experience in the twenty-first century. Beyond his literary and aesthetic merits, McEwan's novels are important texts to be studied seriously because there is an argument to be made through them. Not only are they the works of an internationally lauded author, but they may also be read as communicating a political message, a message about the challenges and limitations of liberal democratic societies in the twenty-first century.

In *On Chesil Beach*, McEwan predominantly talks about sexual relationship between both husband and wife. Sexually related topics cannot be spoken outwardly but McEwan has beautifully written this novel with extraordinary

character description. Love story of couple and their tragedy explore in the opening paragraph of the novel. This novel begins with a quote "They were young, educated, and both virgins on this, their wedding night, and they lived in a time when a conversation about sexual difficulties was plainly impossible. But it is never easy" (1).

In *On Chesil Beach*, both virgins Florence and Edward getting married in the early 1960s, before the sexual revolution. They both spend the first night of their marriage in a hotel room nearby Chesil Beach, but the sexual difficulties divide these lovers apart. Edward and Florence, who are engaged in a strong relationship, that result in a remarkable action and endings. This married couple confronts sex together in the hotel bedroom, when they both moved to the bedroom, the narration shift to the past. It explains the childhood memories of these lovers and how they have fallen in love with each other. Through the background story of Florence and Edward, the readers not only understand their situation but also the time in which they grew up. Florence and Edward came from different class, both are well educated, and they experienced the same trauma in their home.

Though Florence belongs to an aristocratic family, her psychological condition is very different because of the circumstance she lived.

McEwan gives some glimpse of event to know that psychological condition of Florence. Florence does not have a close relationship with her family also. In her childhood itself, she saw her mother reserved and undemonstrative nature. She never kisses her daughters. So, she developed a close bond with her father that leads to not only responsible for her intellectual and personal virtue and her severe sexual anxieties based this incident.

Florence went on a trip with her father in a boat. That night her father undressed behind her; young Florence was feared to seeing his father. Whenever Florence and Edward are about to have sex, suddenly she remembers this incident, her brain completely pre-occupied with flashes of images floating to the surface. On a psychological level, there is a hint for the Florence problem with sexual intimacy. McEwan makes symbolical representation to his readers. In this book, he didn't make any proper plot for this incident. Some critics said that Florence may be Asexual. Whenever Edward is undressing Florence reminded a sailing ship trip with her father when she was 12 years old. A women should get ready both physically and mentally to getting marriage, as a young virgin Florence didn't have a understanding of herself, this scene is also example for her psychological tension was increased from the childhood, she never talks about this incident to anyone, As a child she does know what had happened. Her psyche was wounded by some incident,

Here came the past, anyway the indistinct past. It was the smell of the sea

that summoned it. She was twelve years old, lying like this, Waiting, shivering in the narrow bunk with polished mahogany sides. Her mind was a blank, she

felt she was in disgrace ... It was late in the evening, her father was moving

about the dim cramped cabin, undressing, like Edward now. She remembers

the rustle of cloths, the clink of a belt unfastening or keys or loose change.

Her only task was to keep her eyes closed and to think of a tune she liked. Or any tune. She was usually sick many times on the crossing, and of no use to her father as a sailor, and that surely was the source of her shame. (12)

As a young girl, she does not know what sex means. So, this sexual fear is quite reasonable for a young girl. Florence had another experience from a book. While reading a book she reads that sex means of entering and penetrating. She was so shocked to see these words. She has no interest at all. According to her, sex is the most disgusting and abusing thing in the whole world. Now lying on the bed, she is thinking about these past horrifying and disgusting. Florence's plot of the story is uncertain and unacknowledged. Some critics felt that this could be considered as the ambiguity.

This two incident, makes lots of chaos and confusion in the mind of Florence, she do not want to consummate her marriage,. On the whole this novella shows two different views about sexual relationship, one is Edward who ached to have sex. He stopped masturbating for a week because he wants to be fresh in his wedding night. He is in a high state of excitement who was eagerly ready to share his life to Florence both physically and mentally, whereas young Florence feels the word sex itself disgust and awkward. Florence is completely shaken, many times her claustrophobia started to increased, but she firmly wants to give whatever Edward wants. She tries to confine her feeling and she thought that she will overcome this kind of sexual fear, and tired her level best but couldn't do that. She tries mentally prepared herself but could not bear to do that kind of sexual pleasure. The fear of being abused was too strong to bear. Again, Florence finds the whole idea of having sex is deeply disturbing her. Whenever Edward tries to get her attention, she manipulates Edward by asking some questions about the past. Florence raises so many questions within her mind, at last she resists the action of Edward and started to walk away from the room.

Understanding women psychology is very important, in order to lead peaceful life, Edward is unaware of handling a situation and he lived in a society where he embedded himself in archetypally patriarchal and grows with the masculinity pride, though Edward loves her deeply he fails to understand the mind set of Florence. Here Tyson explains

Culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles.

Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective,

decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. (83)

Edward believes that he is right, and he acted on their conviction. Edward's pride keeps him bound by the conventions of ideology. He acted according to the understanding of a natural, universal order. But he has no idea how to help her relax. Sex is something that has to come normally. Here Florence feels ashamed whenever Edward comes close with him. According to Edward sex is the price that love had to pay.

She feels so nervous she wakes up suddenly runs into the beach. Edward is confused and follows her and they had a quarrel. Finally, they come to know the truth about each other. Now Florence offered him to marry other women for sex. Generally, married women possessed with their husband and they feel angry and jealous when their husband has any illicit relationship. Here, the Florence case is entirely different. She married today morning but she allows her husband to have sex with other girls. Florence loves Edward she wants to spend her entire life with him without sex. She is ready to take any risk just to see the happy face of Edward and she trusts his partner more but Edward feels humiliated. At last, Florence lashes out her perception of sex. For Edward, this is an unexpected twist. He didn't expect this answer from Florence.

He scolded her by using the word "frigid." Frigid a terrible word, insults Florence every deeply. As a husband, Edward does not give any respect

towards her feeling and emotions. He shouted that "you needed a husband, and I was the first bloody idiot who come along" (156). Florence went on her way by telling sorry to Edward and their marriage ends that night.

Lack of understandings leads to separation. If Edward did not expect so much in that night, they may gradually enjoy sex with each other. Edward understands her problems properly and they could make a beautiful romantic life. But ego, lack of understanding, sex, makes them separate. When they depart each other, they feel the emotion of destruction, they never make any further decision to re-build their relationship. These Youngsters reconstruct their life, Edward marries other women, and Florence concentrated on her music.

Edward in his old age admitted that he loved Florence more than any woman in this world. The feelings behind these words are much deeper and much intense. This shows that years may roll on. But Edward cannot forget his lady love. His memories of her are still fresh in his mind. The last page of this novel clearly defines that, "Love and patience- if he had them both at once- would surely have seen them both through" (166). He feels guilty for his actions. But Edward realizes this too late when he was very old and wise. Here we can note the brilliance of McEwan. He gives self-realization to Edward character but there is no use. Most of McEwan's fiction gives self-relations at the end.

At the beginning of the novel, we feel that society is the antagonist to their relationship. However, as the novel progresses, they become antagonists to one another. This couple's life is constructed through love and deconstructed through sex. On Chesil Beach is considered a normal novel, but McEwan tries new techniques in order to give the young readers a strong awareness about the topic, which cannot be spoken, but critics like Karl Miller says "On Chesil Beach is more than an event. It is a masterpiece. The very idea that informs it, fascinating and unfamiliar, is masterly" (99).

This novel is set in reverse order. Chaos started on the wedding night, which led to catastrophe. When analysing the character of Florence, we

need to know that her psychological imbalance creates many problems in her life. People in this universe all explore the feeling of psychological changes in their lives at certain point. Sometimes a psychological mind of a person changes for many reasons, like a broken romantic relationship, a toxic circle of friends, failed passion for one another, bad drinking problems etc. In the case of Florence, she never tries to tell her problem to anybody. As a partner, Edward never lends his ears to hear her worries. If Edward has a stable mind of analysing, he could have corrected his errors. Here Edward did not correct his error instead he feels for breaking relationship with her. All humans have certain hopes for the future, but not every person's dreams become reality. Edward and Florence have many dreams to be together for ever. But they separate within one day.

To sum up, McEwan's novels invite us to contemplate our contemporary condition and reflect on liberal democracy as a product of our virtues as well as vices. The problems of human hubris, uncertainty, and fragile rationality are unique problems of modernity, but are also perennial problems of humanity. The characters in McEwan's novels exercise their agency but still end up disrupting authentic social relations. McEwan's novel suggests that modern conditions result in an impoverished sense of the Self and the social. The project of the Enlightenment, while truly increasing liberty, also made technology, science and the idea of progression values in themselves. Within an educational context, this project exemplifies how to augment theoretical and abstract discussions by rooting them in lived experience.

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