

Kumudha; a Traditional Mother in Parasakti and Others in a Plastic Box by Ambai



A. Jayanthi, N. S. Vishnupriya

ABSTRACT: *The main concern of the paper is to study the significance of women in family life. It explores the importance of women in the short story Parasakti and Others in a Plastic Box which is published in the collection, In a Forest a Deer written by C.S.Lakshmi. The story is discussed from a feminist perspective. Most of Ambai's works reveal the lives of traditional women their feelings, love, courage, will- power, search for identity, self-respect, equality and so on. This paper aims to explore the life of a traditional woman who has lost her husband, and is always caring for her daughter along with while carrying her own life. She's interested in cooking and helping her neighbours, politics, playing veena and singing songs with a lot of easel. She is a firm establisher spirituality of her self-identity and hence wants to write her own biography. This paper defends the ideology of Amabi who affirms that women need equal consideration more from the family than from the society. The paper is significant in a way that it helps the readers to understand empirically the social constructivist and cultural glorification of womanhood in Parasakti and Others in a Plastic Box. The paper further stresses on the difference in understanding the very meaning of the word 'Freedom' between the two generations. It delineates how the younger generation calling out for their own freedom unconsciously hinder the freedom of the older generation people without understanding their values, sentiments and attachments. This article views these aspects through the medium of feminism and voices the inner-selves of fictional women out loud.*

Keywords: Affection, Innocent, Mother Daughter relationship, Struggles, Traditional woman.

I. INTRODUCTION

Feminism originated in the western countries, and it shows the political, social, economic and cultural movements that got established for equal rights and equal opportunities for women. In Indian writing, feminism has been establishing the importance of women's social values in society. Indian modern writers are focusing more on feminism in their works. "Parasakti and others in a plastic box" is one of the best feminist works by C.S. Lakshmi. C.S. Lakshmi is one of the famous Tamil fiction writers, whose works have been translated into English by Lakshmi Holmstrom. Her pen name is Ambai, which means 'Woman' in Tamil.

C.S. Lakshmi is a creative writer, and her works discuss feminist aspects, traditional woman, man-woman relationship, caste, love and so on. One of her famous works Andhimaalai published in 1966 won the Kalaimagal

ssNarayanawamy Aiyar Prize.

Some of her works are, *In a Forest, A Deer* (2006); *Fish in A Dwindling Lake* (2012); *A Purple Sea* (1992); *A Meeting on the Andheri over bridge* (2016) and so on. There are eighteen short stories in *In a Forest, A Deer*.

In all the short stories women are the protagonists. In this short story the daughters of Kumudha. Bharathi and Thanam the chief protagonists and both the sisters are sharing their life with their mother, through letters.

II. OBJECTIVES

The story begins with Kumudha feeding a spoon full of rice with ghee to the crows in America where she has gone to console her younger daughter Bharathi who got divorce. Due to her Andhra origin, she calls the crows "Krishna Raa" in any part of the world. Bharathi fed up with the traditional ways of her mother writes to her sister Thanam, how her mother arrived at America with her plastic box, how she prepared Paal-kova for some unknown pregnant ladies in her neighbourhood, how she prepared dry ginger water for another neighbour who had a severe headache. She complains to her sister about the ways of their mother.

I saw that she had just finished stirring up some Paal-Kova, which she had made out of a couple of litters of milk. When I asked her about it, she said that she had been three pregnant women in the neighbourhood. The paal-kova would be good for their health. Then she dragged me to them along with her. Now I'm terrified that these women will invite her to be present when they give birth. [57]

After arriving at America, Kumudha opened her Plastic box, took out the idols of Parasakti, Ganesha, Sivalingam, Murugan, and Little Krishna and worshiped them with milk, kungumam and turmeric every day. She dared not to ask her daughter about her divorce but asked her son-in-law to return her daughter's jewellery and silver vessels. After getting back the jewellers and silver vessels, she even served them food. She didn't develop any kind of hatred towards Bharathi's ex-husband, but at the same time she was very particular about her daughter's belongings saying that they are meant for the safety of her daughter and not her son-in-law.

She is an old kind of mother who doesn't try to understand the current demands of profession. Hence she keeps on nagging her daughter Bharathi with the stories of her recipes and neighbourhood. This irritates Bharathi who wants to finish her office work at home. She was such a traditional mother that she couldn't digest the second marriage of her daughter and leaves for India abruptly when Bharathi gets married for the second time.

On returning to India she is asked to vacate her house which arouse nostalgic feelings in her. Though she feels happy recapitulating the memories of husband, she feels sad for her financial status.

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Only certain amount of money is sent by her son every month which is not sufficient to cater to her needs.

When Thanam invites Kumudha to stay with her, Kumudha gets confused on which item to take and which item to leave. Finally after a lot of contemplation she decides to take the "Plastic box" containing the idols and her old veenai which she had been playing since her childhood.

Though Thanam's house was a small one to settle down, Kumudha was in continuous search of a good place to keep her idols and was carrying on with her daily pooja. Now it is the turn of Thangam to write to her sister of her mother's cooking and her preparation of sambar powder, rasam powder etc. Thus through the story, C.S. Lakshmi tries to explain the daily chores of a traditional woman; her cooking, worshipping and her association with the neighbourhood people. The author tries to portray how the life of traditional women is confined to the window sill and the kitchen.

Kumudha has a different definition of freedom which cannot be understood by her daughters. Similarly she cannot understand her daughter's connotation of the word "freedom". On arriving at her daughter's house, Kumudha tries to cook food for everyone to which Thanam refuses. Because her husband is a self-cook who cooks his own eggs, bread, or rava kichedi for breakfast. When Thanam tries to explain her mom that she should not interfere in her husband's freedom, Kumudha retorts,

"Is that what you call freedom? I can't understand it" she fretted: 'As soon as she arrived, she was anxious to make all those things like rasam and sambar powders before the monsoon set in. [62]

Being a traditional mother, she finds happiness not only in everyday cooking but in extra preparations like salt lime pickle, hot lime pickle, ginger murabba, ginger pickle, fried snacks and sweets for her grandchild. She is also interested in the society and prepares some siddha medicine for infertility for a woman in her neighbourhood. Though Kumudha comfortably carries her gods in a plastic box where ever she goes, she needs a place to set them in for worship. In spite of being little irritated with the behaviour of Kumudha, Thanam has high regards for her which echoes in her statement.

She might sing that Thevaram which begins, "Forsaking all other attachment on your scared feet alone my mind in intent". But Amma is one who is deeply bound to the earth. Even though she might float free like cotton-wool, she'll always feel the need to touch the earth again. Certainly, she could stay either at my house or at yours. But it is bound to be hard for her. She'll tell a thousand little lies: this one to hide that, to hide this. It's not just that Amma needs a place to live: she must reign indisputably in that space. Because Amma isn't just an individual, she's an institution. [63]

III. DISCUSSION

Finally the two sisters understand the fact that it is not a space what Kumudha needs. What she needs is a realm of her own where she can live at her own. On hearing that the house in which Kumudha lived with her husband is still for sale, both the sisters decide to sell off the jewellery given to them by their mother and buy the house for her. They make their brother promise to give away certain amount of money to their mom every month for her livelihood. They plan that on her return from schooling, Thanam's daughter Sandhya

can stay with her grandmother and they both can have a nice time teaching each other, music, English and Kumudha can fulfil her dream of write her own autobiography.

IV. CONCLUSION

Finally at the end of the story, when the daughter finished her writing the letter she could see her mother who was always seated in the easy-chair, in the corner of the street. The green parrots restless flying around the garden and were had ceased invisible among the tree leaves. In this story C.S.Lakshmi portrays the traditional mother Kumudha as a goddess, because she always carry's a plastic box with four idols of gods. Parasakti is an Indian goddess who protects her worshipers like a mother protects her child.

Moreover she is the mother of other gods in the box like Ganesha, Murugan and Little Krishna. Ambai has drawn a parallel between the traditional mother Kumudha who protects her family and the Parasakti who protects the entire humanity. Similar to her locking up of the idols in the plastic box, she has locked up her all her emotions and feelings within her. She never revealed her emotions to her daughter but they have finally understood her feelings and found a way out to glorify her motherhood.

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