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WOMANHOOD: TRANSGRESSING THE BOUNDARIES IN SUGANDHI ENNA ANDAL DEVANAYAKI AND KANNATHIL MUTHAMITTAL

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Abstract: This paper intends to analyse the treatment of womanhood in T. D. Ramakrishnan's *Sugandhi Enna Andal Devanayaki* and Mani Ratnam's *Kannathil Muthamittal*. Women are adversely affected in power struggles. Irrespective of age and status, women are abused in the patriarchal society. The mental and physical agony experienced by the female characters finds expression through the two medium; fiction and film. The conventional and unconventional womanhood and motherhood are addressed in a traumatic manner, that highlights the plight of women in the Sri Lankan Civil War. Womanhood portrayed in the two narratives exemplify the role of women in nation building. The choices made by the female characters ultimately defines their inclination towards motherhood or nationalism. This study is an attempt to showcase the different perspectives of womanhood and their bruised self, rather than confining them to typical stereotypes.

Key Words: Psychological trauma, Identity Crisis, Sri Lankan Civil War, Motherhood, Nationality.

Kerala Sahitya Akademy and Malayattoor Award winner T. D. Ramakrishnan's fiction *Sugandhi Enna Andal Devanayaki* and Padma Shri winner Mani Ratnam's film *Kannathil Muthamittal* are two aesthetic works based on the Sri Lankan civil war. LTTE or the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was created as a militant organization in north-eastern Sri Lanka by Velupillai Prabhakaran in 1976 against governmental autocracy.

LTTE aims to create an independent state of Tamil in Sri Lanka against the biased policies of the Sri Lankan government. The ethnic issue arises when the Sri Lankan government recreated laws to rectify the disproportionate favoring of Tamil minority, practiced by the colonial rulers. It leads to the formulation of 'Sinhala Only Act' or 'Official Language Act No 33 of 1956', creating Sinhala as the official language replacing English. Sri Lanka was part of Indian kingdoms in the precolonial era and Buddhism was introduced in Sri Lanka by Mahinda, the son of Indian Emperor Ashoka, in the Sri Lankan reign of King Devanampiya Tissa.

In *Sugandhi Enna Andal Devanayaki* Peter Jeevanandam, a script writer narrates his experiences in Sri Lanka during the pre-production work of the movie *The Woman Behind the Fall of the Tigers* under Transnational pictures. The film within the fiction aims to bring out the Tamil-Sinhalese political scenario. During civil wars, women are adversely affected in power politics. Kooveni, the three year old infant daughter of Devanayaki was brutally raped and murdered, by the secret troop of Maheendan. Devanayaki burned Sinhasailam as revenge for her daughter Kooveni's death. During the Civil War, Sugandhi fought for Tamil Eelam. Sugandhi and Stalin's daughter Kadalpura disappeared and Sugandhi narrated it as,

2009-il Mullaitheevil nadanna avasanaporattathil Isaipriyayodoppam enneyum Sri Lankan pattalakkar pidikoodi. Soundaryam kurach kooduthalaayirunnathinal unnathark kaazhcha vekkanai oru military boatil kayatti colombovilek kondpoi. Athinu moonnu divasam mump Sri Lankan navyumayulla ettumuttalil bharhav Major Stalin kollapettirunnu. Colonel Susayude nethruthvathilulla kadalpulikalil oraalayirunnu Stalin moonnu vayassulla Kadalpura enna kochumakalk endanu sambhavichathennariyilla (Ramakrishnan 248).

It means, 'after LTTE's defeat of 2009 battle, she was captured from Mullaitivu and her husband was murdered in a naval attack three days prior to it. No particulars about her baby Kadalpura were received and Kadalpura's existence itself is doubted'. So Sugandhi blasting CHOGM draws a parallel to Devanayaki burning Sinhasailam. Sugandhi's marriage with Stalin was a political decision made by Eelam. Stalin and Sugandhi never shared love or respect, and the marriage was imposed on her by the patriarchal militant group.

Kannathil Muthamittal or *A Peck on the Cheek* depicts the tale of a nine-year-old girl called Amudha.

Tiruchelvan and Indira, her foster parents revealed her birth secret, followed by Amudha's encounter with her biological mother. Indira's first meeting with the infant Amudha, evokes motherhood in the movie. The scene wherein Indira questioning Tamilchelvan,

Ennadi.. Perenna? Enna pere? Ivalo periya ezhuthalark pere vekka theriyatha? Na pere Vekkattuma? Aah? Na pere Vekkattuma? Avalath azhakai Amudhamaka olithath. Indha kolandaye datheduthikka poreengala? Illiya?... Appo lakshyamellam verum kadha ezhutharathodamattum seriya? Hmmm... Parenga Sri Lanka pakkam kai kaamikkara. Unga amma anga than irukkangala? Unna vittit poittangala? Unak yaarume illiya? Engamma kooda enne vittit poittanga. Indha engineer sir unnepathi kadha ezhuthi sambadichittirukkara. Kadha mattum ezhuthna pothuma, Kelu?

It can be summarized as 'Indira questioned Tamilchelvan the baby's name and with a native pun she named her Amudha. Being a motherless woman herself, Indira empathizes with the child and she inferred the child's roots to Sri Lanka when the infant pointed her fingers to Sri Lankan coast. She sarcastically asked if Tamilchelvan's commitment towards the child ends with writing and earning money, which evoked him'. Tamilchelvan decided to adopt the child witnessing the child desperately holding Indira. As per law, only married couples can adopt children in India. So He married Indira, when she willingly accepted the proposal to marry him as Amudha's mother. Though they were gifted with two biological children; Vinayan and Akhilan, all three kids were treated equally, wherein Amudha turns as the meaning of their love.

Meenakshi Rajarathinam in *Sugandhi* adopted Sugandhi as her daughter and treated equally as Arulmozhi Nange and Yamuna Sreedhar, her biological daughters. Sugandhi was adopted by Meenakshi after amputating both her hands, which was chopped away by the Sinhalese in Canada. Sugandhi and Meenakshi were not close acquaintances. When Meenakshi adopted Sugandhi, she was fatally wounded. It was her refugee period after escaping from torture camp, where she lost her husband and daughter. There are unconventional and conventional mothers whose priorities vary from love for nation to love for children. M. D. Shyama in *Kannathil Muthamittal* and Julie in *Sugandhi* are two mothers who sacrificed motherhood for

LTTE. Shyama delivered Amudha in Rameswaram as a refugee and she left the child in the Red Cross camp.

The only connection she had with the infant was a finger touch. The emotional sequence towards the climax, wherein Amudha opens her “twenty questions” to her biological mother portrays the unconventional womanhood Shyama possessed. Amudha tore the paper after hearing the third answer. Even though Shyama took Amudha’s album, she refused to flip the pages. Tamilchelvan holds an umbrella around the child and her two mothers, when it rains. Indira left both her biological children under her father’s care to accompany Amudha. Indira was even shot, while waiting for Shyama. But even after the gun shot, Indira insisted on meeting Shyama, which deeply conveys the mother-daughter rapport between Indira and Amudha.

When Amudha asked her the third question “*Nan porandhapothu enne thookki vechirukkengala? Na azhuthena sirichena?*” It is thus translated as ‘have you held me, while I was born, did I cry or smile?’ Shyama replied “*unna petha aduthahanam eduthondupoittaha. Ore oru murai oru viralale onnai thotten. Avalovon than*” means ‘immediately after the delivery you were taken away. I have touched you just with a finger and that’s all’. Even though Indira insisted Amudha to ask the questions she prepared, Amudha tore the questionnaire showing her displeasure. The action proves the frustration of the child, who realized the lack of mother’s care and love from Shyama, her biological mother. But understanding Amudha’s psyche, Indira holds her tightly. Amudha’s request to Shyama for a peaceful life in Chennai as well as the proposal of Amudha to stay with her in Sri Lanka were denied. Shyama, prioritized LTTE over Amudha, which turns to be an unconventional prioritizing criteria of womanhood. But, while considering Amudha’s peaceful and secured life with Tamilchelvan and Indira, Shyama’s decision justifies the circumstance. But leaving the infant Amudha in the insecurities, intensifies the question on her responsibility towards the child, whom she delivered. The child’s innocent but the writer’s political stance is mixed with emotion. Shyama said she has commitments in Sri Lanka and she complemented Tamilchelvan and Indira for perfectly bringing up the child. While the child insists on staying, the conversation,

M. D. Shyama: *Unde appa ithu. Unde amma ithu.*

Amudha: *Pokathinga... Pokathinga*

M. D. Shyama: *Ennekkavath orunal ith uddamillatha boomiya maarum. Vidiyam*

varum. Annek thirumbi vaa

Amudha: Ennek Maaa... Ennek Paaa... Ammmaaaaa.....

M. D. Shyama: Vendam. Appadi Kooppitta ennale poka elath

Amudha: Amma... oru thadave. Ore oru thadave engitta vandittu appurama

Poidunga (Kannathil Muthamittal).

In the emotional conversation Amudha asked her biological mother to stay with her. Shyama asserts to Amudha that Tamilchelvan and Indira are her parents and she denies accompanying Amudha. Shyama further offers a ray of hope to Amudha that she can return one day, when there are no wars, and Amudha with her innocent and traumatic heart asked “when is that day”, hinting the hopelessness of meeting her again. Shyama painfully left her in silence. Amudha called her “Amma” repeatedly and Shyama requested not to call her again, since her motherhood cannot move on with Amudha’s cries. The child asked for a final hug and with kisses on her cheeks Shyama left her with a militant posture after looking at the tightly holding the unopened album. Amudha was denied to possess her mother’s picture. The child realized the love and care her foster parents offered and she kissed them, as a gesture of her love. Indira was holding the child in her arms as a treasure. But she never resisted Amudha from meeting her biological parents. They assured Amudha that it was Amudha, who adopted them not vice versa, assuring the child of her status in their lives. In *Sugandhi* though Sugandhi settled in Canada, she always felt the cry of Sri Lanka. Her love for the motherland and ethnicity urged to form a Tamil state forced her return to Sri Lanka. Even with the amputated hands Sugandhi joined the LTTE militancy like Julie. Living in India or Canada as refugees or migrants created insecurities like identity crisis. Meenakshi Rajarathinam, an Indian by origin, lived a short span in Sri Lanka and settled in Canada favours Eelam wars and her daughters, whose paternal roots were from Sri Lanka fought for Eelam in the warfront with Sugandhi.

Amudha’s identity crisis and nationhood begins with her birth and upbringing in India with biological roots to Sri Lanka created trauma. Her concern for Indira and Indira’s love for Amudha justifies multiple shades of womanhood. When injured Indira insisted on revisiting Subramaniam Park, Amudha declined the

proposal, showing the genuine daughterly concern towards Indira. Indira, being an understanding and selfless mother, let Amudha meet her biological mother, hiding her insecurities and emotions as a mother. The tensions of Sinhalese and Tamil can be seen in both the works. There were terrorist attacks and bomb blasts. Irrespective of participation in Eelam, ethnic identity turns as the means of massacre. In *Sugandhi* Julie and Sugandhi representatives of rape victims. In Sugandhi's words,

Colombil Tebil Treesinaduthulla oru valiya kettidathile rahasyamuriyil vech palarum krooramayi peedipichu. Eelaporile vijayam sarkkarile unnathar ende sareerathilanu aakhoshichath. Purath nadakkunna vijayaakhoshangalude aaravathil ende nilavilikal alinjupoi. Oduvil thalarnnavasayaayappol naalam divasam kaalath oru military truckil kayatti avarenne Divine Peal enna rahasya kendrathilek kondpoi (Ramakrishnan 249).

It means 'Sugandhi was raped by the officials after capturing, for the whole four days, until she passed out. She was taken in a truck to Divine Pearl, a secret camp'. In the camp, an order to chop both her hands and to attack her face with acid was given by the higher officials. After brushing her face with acid, she accepted the offer to praise Sinhalese government, withstanding the pain. But she openly criticized the Sinhalese Government in the press conference. Even after escaping to Canada as a refugee, the punishment was carried out. So, from Sugandhi's and Julie's words, the suppression of women by brutally raping them resulting in loss of their integrity, identity and freedom. Such uncivilized patriarchal brutalities challenge womanhood and motherhood. Men in the power hierarchy misuses women. Even in LTTE patriarchal notions were strictly followed, considering women warriors as mere tools of Eelam Wars.

In *Sugandhi* the poem "I am Sad Sad Sad" (Ramakrishnan 66) described SAD as Sugandhi alias Andal Devanayaki, a pop song with visualization. The lyrics further conveys that 'I am the one who lost dream, forgotten poetry, burned love and lost virginity' the lyric turns violent with "I am Mad, Mad, Mad, Kill Me, Kill Me, Kill Me" (Ramakrishnan 295). It describes psychological implications and traumas of women. While considering the songs of *Kannathil Muthamittal* "Vellai pookkal" lyrics offers a ray of hope of peaceful Sri Lanka. But the music was constantly interrupted with bombardments and Shyama's eyes portrayed hopelessness of an independent Tamil state and it further offers premonition of unpleasant results. The title

song “Kannathil Muthamittal” depicts the dominance Amudha in the life of Tamilchelvan and Indira. She experienced the warmth of kisses from her foster parents and biological mother. While Indira sacrificed her time to visit Shyama, Amudha witnessed Shyama’s unwillingness to stay by her side. The kid realized true love and kissed her foster parents.

Sugandhi depicted the decline of Tamil Eelam, with the death of Velupillai Prabhakaran and a fictional attack on CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting) in 2013 immortalizes female fighters of Eelam. Being a 2002 movie, *Kannathil Muthamittal* offers the hope of a peaceful Tamil State as proposed by Eelam. Multiple forms of motherhood along with traumas of female children are detailed. In *Sugandhi*, the infants and women are sexually assaulted. So, a diaspora of identity and nationality is thus created in the psyche of women during the civil war. The characters in both the mediums are confused with the relationships. Along with womanhood, motherhood is often questioned. Civil wars in provincial and postmodern Sri Lanka pinpoints women as victims. Devanayaki, Sugandhi, Meenakshi, Arulmozhi Nange, Yamuna Sridhar, Kadalpura, Kooveni and Julie in *Sugandhi* and Shyama, Indira and Amudha in *Kannathil Muthamittal* faced multiple traumas that are unrecorded in the historical records. The fictional content discusses the conventional and unconventional choices made by women. Through *Sugandhi Enna Andal Devanayaki* and *Kannathil Muthamittal* such sensitive issues are brought into limelight.

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