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NEGOTIATION OF HEGEMONY IN RANI MANICKA'S 'THE RICE MOTHER'

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, Lakshmi the poor mother of seven children lives in an anticipation of good times to live a normal life but living in a new country and new culture made her impossible to seize her needs without any pain. The hypothetical necessity to adapt the new culture, to maintain neighborhood, to chase away the poverty and all such social ethics gave Lakshmi no other way except to accept it. Lakshmi in every twist and turn of the story worked hard to save her children from the degradations like drug, sex, charms over infidelity, the chaos and etc. Every time when the dominant hand falls upon her loved ones to crush them down to earth, Lakshmi emerged in-between and tried to confront the influences and she either overcomes or negotiates it. Lakshmi was able to earn employments, housing, education and the social status in the society for her family only because of her attitude of negotiating the situations or circumstances accordingly.

INTRODUCTION

Human is an epitome of his behaviour to record his social and cultural norms and values to his successor by any means unlike any living thing in this world. His first and foremost attempt for the testimony was to draw or paint his ideas in wooden tabs or on the stone slabs. Subsequently his endeavor paved way to language and naturally literature arose.

Literature is a mandatory manifestation of the human society which helped man to share his feelings and to inflame emotions and thoughts for centuries. Literature can transport the obscure ideas easily like we laugh for a comedy and we ultimately cry for a tragedy. Among the Literary Theories, The Cultural Theory is the one which is so near to human mind and heart as it is bounded with the human tradition, creed, and nature and social value. The most significant concepts of cultural theory is The Cultural Construction and Hegemony.

Hegemony can be described as the dominance of a group or a culture over other groups or cultures. Hegemony is all about how a dominant culture influences other groups, particularly in the construction of identity and social norms. In this paper it is attempted to show how hegemony; pride from a tormenter is neutralized. How the main character in the novel strives to maintain the equilibrium in the lives of a family by negotiating the dominance of a group or a society and prevail.

Rani Manicka(1964) is a Southeast Asian writer of Srilankan tamil parentage currently living in UK was born in Malaysia and she had had enough time to spend with her grandmother back in Sri Lanka to ascertain the tamil culture and was educated in Malaysia so she is multicultural with both Tamil and Malaysian cultures. Her first novel 'The Rice Mother' which has won the common wealth writers prize deals with the issues of a Srilankan immigrant family settled in Malaysia and the sufferings after the invasion of Japan during the II world war and the process of integration to survive further.

In the novel a srilankan girl Lakshmi is married to Ayya who went to Malaysia from Sri Lanka a decade before. The couple have seven children and only after marriage Lakshmi comes to know about the truth that her husband is neither a landowner nor he owns any estate and he is merely an accountant working for the a rich chinese. Years went in anticipation of good times to live a normal life. Lakshmi seeks her uncle a mango merchant's help to pay her husband's debts, only with that money Lakshmi was able to repay the loans and look after her seven children. During the II World War unfortunately Malaysia was invaded by the Japanese soldiers and Lakshmi's was the one of the families which fell in the direct hands of Japanese soldiers. The war crime resulted in unemployment and a demanding social life.

When Japanese invaded Malaysia, Mohini; Lakshmi's first daughter was abducted by them, her son Lakshman has become a drunkard and his wife hated Lakshmi for no reason, her daughter Anna is psychologically affected, her son Sevenese becomes a conjurer of smuggling. After Mohini's abduction, Lakshmi's family had nobody to support. Ayya was staying home all day and was feeling sorry for what had happened to his daughter and as usual he is a kind of sloth so Lakshmi had to strive to bring up the children, she managed to marry all the girls and was able to find job offers for her sons and saved her family from the hands of poverty and hard worked to linger in social ethics.

The entire novel is dictated by the characters themselves, Lakshmi narrates her own tale and her daughter Anna narrates her generation story and the grandchildren of Lakshmi narrate the rest of the story. The novel can be called a generational saga as the characters themselves narrate the journey of a family from a poor accountants to one of the aristocrats in Penang.

Lakshmi the mother of the seven children in this story suffers and loses in adapting the new culture and her toils and troubles in the process of integration. Lakshmi in every twist and turn of the story works hard to save her children from the degradations like drug, sex, charms over infidelity, the chaos and etc. every time when the dominant hand falls upon her loved ones to crush them down to earth, Lakshmi emerges in-betweens and tries to confront the influences and either she overcomes or negotiates it.

NEGOTIATION OF HEGEMONY

When Lakshmi was married to Ayah she was told that her husband is one of the richest man in Malaysia and has many servants at his home. The money and the dignity of Ayah's family was the only solace Lakshmi had, but on the voyage to Malaysia the new bride discovered that Ayya family has no reputation at all. This was a big hit to her dream life. More to her pain she came to know that her husband has two sons for his first wife. Lakshmi felt a thunder struck right in her tender heart and she cursed her mother and fate.

During the voyage many times Lakshmi attempted to throw herself into the sea but time calmed her and she changed her mind and was waiting for the fortune to come. Lakshmi had been betrayed by Pali and Ayya, she is no more a queen, she is not going to live a sophisticated life in Malaysia and worst of all is that she had become a second wife. In Malaysia Ayah was running in debt, though she has been betrayed Lakshmi called one of her uncle the mango merchant and gave him her jewellery as collateral and asked for money to pay Ayah's debts. Lakshmi could have lived a paupers life amidst the debts and troubles as it is not new to her but her heart did not bear it and she did what she could do to help the family. Besides the betrayals Lakshmi was able to love and show pity over her husband to save his reputation in the society. She could do this only because of her negotiation to fate. She cannot change the fate but to the most she can use the chance of turning towards the brighter side of the troubles. She made herself ready to endure the toils and troubles due to treachery and poverty.

Lakshmi's first friend in Malaysia was Mui Tsai a Chinese girl of her age in the neighbourhood. Mui Tsai was a mistress to a rich Chinese old man. Mui Tsai came to the Chinese man's home as a maid and as the Chinese man had three wives but no children, the Chinese man made Mui Tsai his mistress. Mui and Lakshmi both became pregnant the same time and Mui had five children though she isn't fortunate enough to live with them. Every time when Mui gives birth to a child, the child is taken to the wives of the Chinese man respectively and Mui was left alone. Mui shared her pain and losses to Lakshmi. After many years Mui Tsai's children came to her house to see the old Chinese man for he is on his death bed. Mui tsai was so eager to see her children, she went near the group of playing children, the children became afraid of and they started to throw stones at poor Mui Tsai and she was standing still. The stones hit her head and she was bleeding. Mui Tsai was craving to live with her children but she cannot, so she had decided to die atleast by their hands. She prepared herself and stood still like a statue to get the stones on her because of the love for the children. Looking this Lakshmi ran and chased brought Mui Tsai back safe and Lakshmi convinced Mui to stay alive and see her children living in fortune. In this circumstance Lakshmi's advise helped Mui and to walk out of her desiderium (longing for the loss of love). Lakshmi helped Mui to reach a deal or negotiate the cruel game that fate has played with her.

During the invasion, Japanese took control over all the schools in

Malaysia, and all the students were forced to learn Japanese language. The Japanese soldiers hated Chinese as their sworn enemies and robbed their houses and abducted their young girls. Though Lakshmi belongs to a Tamil family she was afraid of the Japanese soldiers. So to protect her children she hid her first daughter Mohini under a cellar in the home and she also cut the hair of her daughter Anna so that she could look like a boy while going to school along with her son Sevenese. Lakshmi taught Anna to behave like boys on the roads.

Lakshmi wanted her children to be safe not to fall on the hands of Japanese soldiers and at the same time she wanted them all to be educated. She dressed Anna like a boy and taught her to walk, speak and behave like a boy, despite the fact of the danger prevailing in the society due to the invasion. Lakshmi could have sent only the sons to school and she could have educated her daughters at home, but Lakshmi had a stern belief that only education will throw light over her future. So she took a daring decision to send her daughter to school and this shows how Lakshmi negotiated the hard bites of fate in the name of war crimes with her hope and perseverance.

Lakshmi's elder son Lakshman was once a good student in the school but after the invasion of the Japanese soldiers Lakshman also gradually lost his interest for schools like other children did. Lakshmi was afraid that Lakshman was no more interested in the studies instead he headed with his rich Chinese friends and wandered and became a victim to drugs. To change his destiny Lakshmi spent her money through Mr. Velupillai and hired a job for Lakshman as a teacher in Singapore. In Singapore after becoming a teacher Lakshman was normal and when he had his first month salary he changed his mind and took the money to gamble and he became bankrupt. The debtors captured Lakshman for money and Lakshmi had to pull up her years of savings to save Lakshman not only from the debtors but also from the cruel hands of luxury and unrefined Chinese fetid culture. Here it is clearly visible that Lakshmi did not concede with the domination of a culture over the worthy future of her frail son.

Sevenese the second son of Lakshmi, gains the friendship of the neighbourhood snake charmer's son Rajah. Rajah is one of the oddest boys of his age and he was disliked by everyone in Penang for his barbarian nature of speech and creed. Sevenese was much interested in Rajah for his uncultured behavior and his autonomous living. Both Sevenese and Rajah became good friends and Sevenese spent as much time as possible with Rajah and Rajah taught Sevenese to catch snakes, hunt animals, prey, about using drugs and cheating others for money. Sevenese was charmed towards Rajah for his skills on black magic. The dirty, cheap, rusty mannerisms had a deep influence on Sevenese and Lakshmi too started to fear and worry about Sevenese behavior and character on occasions. The Japanese invasion made many of the Malay people unemployed including Ayya. Lakshmi took this chance to get her son back from the dark dominance and asked Sevenese to go hunting for food like hare, rats, sometimes snakes and birds. This gave Sevenese a recognition and love from his family and slowly he started to keep away from Rajah. Finally Lakshmi untracked Sevenese from the dark influence.

After years passed Lakshmi was about to marry her daughter Anna to a bridegroom in Kuantan, she found the family through a mediator. Lakshman

was a gambler and he took all money he found at home for gambling. Now when Lakshmi was seeking hands for Anna to marry, Lakshman also had an idea to get married so that he can get more money from the dowry and he could try that money in gambling. So it was planned that Lakshman has to marry the sister of the Anna's bridegroom. Lakshmi did not like the bride, the bride seem to be so cunning so Lakshmi showed her aversion but Lakshman was firm in marrying her for the bond of money. When Rani (Lakshman's wife) came to home, she bewildered Lakshmi and always cursed her. In an occasion Lakshman asked money from Lakshmi to start a new business but Lakshmi was afraid of his gambling habit and refused to give money.

Lakshman in the peak of his anger, pulled his mother towards the door and Lakshmi had her head and hip injured. After this incident Lakshmi was not so angry with her son and soon she gave him the money demanding him that he should not gamble and she supposed him to show her the gain he brings out from the money in two months time. Though her son is disloyal, Lakshmi deal with his hardship towards her and gave him a chance to change.

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Narratology is the study of narrative and story structure, which enables readers to understand, analyze and evaluate narratives through the temporal ordering of human speech and action (Barry, 2002:221). Accordingly to Aristotle (Barry, 2002: 224), "a second story relevant to Narratology is the story of the Narratology itself". To Aristotle, a character and an action are essential elements in a narrative or story. A character must be revealed through action and the three aspects of a plot- the hamartia, anagnorisis and the peripeteia. The hamartia in essence means the protagonist's tragic fault or defect, whether physical or moral, thus resulting in miserable occurrence that he or she has to undergo. Anagnorisis means the protagonist's recognition and the realization of the truthfulness and veracity of the situation or event in which he is in. Peripeteia means the turn around stage whereby the protagonist experiences the consequence, often negative, of the defect that he or she have. In the text, for example, the character of Mohini is born as a fair, beautiful, green eyed girl. She is admired and envied by all for her good looks. She is the prized pride of the whole family (page 68). Her beauty becomes her curse as she had to die because of her good looks at a very young age for it attracted unwanted, harmful attention. Another obvious example would be Dimple, Laksman's daughter, another beauty in the family who was just as beautiful as Mohini was, and had intelligence as well, but she too suffered a horrible death, a death that was self inflicted, despite the admonition she received from her well wishers. This notion of Narratology had been further developed by Vladimir Propp (Barry, 2002:226-231) who identified that certain underlying narrative structures remain constant, despite the diversity of story forms and content. He discovered that all stories or narratives consist of seven spheres of action and 31 elements of functions that serve as the basic building blocks to the creation of the fabula or syuzhet of a narrative or story. These 7 spheres are seen as roles rather than characters. For example in the text, the hero is Lakshmi (the rice mother herself), the provider is Ayah who looks into her financial and domestic needs,

the helpers are Lakshmi's five children who provided her with assistance in domestic chores, Lakshmi's mother, a figure whom she gains her emotional strength from and whom she often thinks of, the hero, Ayah himself, whom she deeply had affections for and loved although she was in denial of her actual feelings for years until his death, the false hero, her son Lakshman whom she had high hopes of, but eventually turned out to be a gambler in life, and finally the dispatcher, Mui Tsai, a friend whom she confided in. Gerard Genette (Barry, 2002:231-241) also identified a newer way to look at the creation of narratives or stories with regard to the element of time and space in narration, where the distinction between a narrative and a story evolves. This notion was based on Bakhtin's concept of Dialogism and Chronotope.

CONCLUSION

Lakshmi on her sufferings and strives to take her family and children to a level in terms of employment, housing, education and the social and cultural adaptation in the society, had her in hand profit only because of her attitude of negotiating the situations or circumstances accordingly. Lakshmi has come from a poor family so poverty and turmoil is not a stranger to her. She could have accordingly bared the losses and endure through the tough times of life. but Lakshmi's mind had the willful love for her family and children and that has made a tough will from inside to resist the plight of defeat.

Though Lakshmi has come through the dark compelling love, betrayals, pride and the frailties of human nature, she was also able to cover the second level of integration like religion, culture, family relation and social institution all because of her nature to negotiate the hegemony of fate and the hegemony of dominance.

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