

The Manifestation of the Life of Woman in Sarah Joseph's 'Aalahayude Penmakal'

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Sarah Joseph is established among Malayalam writers as a proponent of feminist literature. Sarah Joseph's novels like 'Aalahayude Penmakal', 'Maattathy', 'Uthappu' depict the problems faced by women in the society.

Sarah Joseph's 'Aalahayude Penmakal' is not only the story of a place or family, but also the story of daughters. It is the story of woman's suffering, courage, confrontation and pain. Throughout their entire life, life becomes a question mark. The snow peas plant which trails on sorrows is a constant presence in this novel. The novel starts by portraying the picture of snow peas plant with blue and violet flowers and leaves shining with green colour. The snow peas plant was the life of the women of Kokanchira. It survived by sprouting, fading, and wilting. Finally when it falls down by the flood caused by the downpour which swallowed Kokanchira, the lives of those women also end in that disaster.

A little girl named Annie is the protagonist in 'Aalahayude Penmakal'. The development and evolution in the story are portrayed through the external and internal perspective of Annie. She is present throughout the novel. A majority of feminine reflection can be seen in her experiences. Annie lives in the middle of a group of women. The scenes around her deeply influence her. The lives of the women whom she sees give her only doubts and complaints. She is the daughter of a mother who is waiting for her husband who left them. For Annie, her life is filled with worries, doubts and sorrows only. The suspicions and sorrows of her mother who was abandoned by her husband affect Annie also. Though Annie tries to find happiness in little things, the problems of her family and place which affects Annie too outdo that happiness.

As a member of the society which has been thrown to the wasteland of main society, Annie gets insulted in her school and society itself. The life of Annie as a girl living in Kokanchira which is a place of scavengers, rickshaw wallahs and rowdies mostly gives her bitter experiences. In addition to her mother's worries, the grandmother who is worried about her children, the elder aunt who is a midwife and who hasn't delivered and the younger aunts who are bargained in the marriage market like cattle—all shatters her little mind. Annie has strong objection against the injustice in society. But she doesn't understand many things completely. For Annie who is not free from doubts, life becomes a big riddle. Annie gets shocked seeing her mother and elder aunt killing the illegitimate son of younger aunt. The pains gifted to a woman by her femininity falls as a poke in Annie's mind from her childhood itself. For Annie, her life is filled with shocks and endless doubts. Annie understood that being the member of ignored community, she doesn't have the value of even the huge dogs in the houses of the rich people who came to live at Kokanchira. Annie who didn't know the love of father loved and got close to her father's younger brother Kuttippappan. Kuttippappan who was a TB patient gifted his disease to Annie along with his ideas and the life of the little girl Annie reaches to the complete stage of misery. She is not able to escape from the miseries which await her.

The grandmother (Mariyam) who knows Aalaha's namaskaram and the history of Kokanchira is an important female character in 'Aalahayude Penmakal'. The old woman who delivered ten times and who is not afraid of anyone—through her oral history and the stories told by Annie's mind she becomes the image of Aalaha whom she worships. Her Aalaha's daughters transfigure into women who are part of battle for survival. Kokanchira Mariyam is the biggest example for the mental power of woman. Her life from the beginning to end was full of miseries. She gave birth to ten children. God has taken back three of them. The children who are alive give her more pain than that. She endured for her children after the death of her husband. For Mariyam it was a battle for life and death to hold on to the lives of hers and her children in this world. The grandmother is not able to keep her children's life secured. Eldest daughter Kunjila became a widow at the age of fifteen. Eldest son left the place before years. Another son is always sick. The lives of the children who got married were also not smooth. A daughter Chinnamma left the home because of the disaster which was made intentionally. When the lives of her children shatter in front of her, the life of Kokanchira Mariyam gets arrhythmic.

While pouring the knowledge about the history of Kokanchira, the grandmother tells the granddaughter Annie the stories of difficulty which she had in bringing her children up. Mariyam and her children sought refuge in Kokanchira during the beginning of war as they had no other place to go. Only the aged parents were with them. They got shelter in the colony of the scavengers. Mariyam who went in search of fire to cook the only tapioca with her saw the burning fire in the heavy rain. When she went closer, she understood that a dead body was being buried. But thinking about the faces of the children crying out of hunger, she pulled out two pieces of burning fire wood. She says to Annie that 'It is a courage which we get when small children (like coconut shell) cry.' The grandmother's life is such struggles. Her act was the result of the courage which a woman has from the suffering which only a woman can bear. For her, Aalaha's namaskaram was only a tie towards life.

Kokkanchira Mariyam's daughter-in-law Kochurothu is a totally different character in this novel. She is the symbol of endless waiting of a woman. Though she blames the cruelty of her husband who left her in her youth by giving a daughter, she hopes that he will return some day. Her ambition is to die after showing the father to her little daughter.

Kochurothu with a virtuous mind is the personification of innocence and her life is filled with only suffering and sacrifice. Though her husband abandoned her she considers her husband's house as her own. 'There may be many things in my house. But is it right if I and my daughter covet for that?'-This is the mind-set of Kochurothu. She nurses her husband's brother who is a TB patient without any hesitation.

Kunjila is another character where the sufferings of the life of a woman got coagulated. The novelist convinces us the truth that the life of a poor girl is for being stamped by others. As she was a girl in a poor family of five daughters, her life became the one which could be used by others and throw away.

Kunjila was a leaf caught in a storm. She returned home on the seventh day of her marriage with the smell of eucalyptus and frankincense. It was the last smell given to her by her husband Itty. Kunjila is a representative of many women who lost their lives in the trap of marriage. Itty was like a hollow tree/tree eaten by termites while marrying Kunjila. His family wanted him to know a woman before his death. Kunjila became the scapegoat for it. The life of Kunjila who became the wife of a man of forty years and who became a widow at the age of fifteen lost all the colours thereafter. She looks after her big family by engaging in various jobs. She starts the job as a midwife by handling the delivery of her mother. She was forced to stop it when a baby dies in the womb of the mother. In between the love of compounder Kunchan had for Kunjila made many other problems. Kunjila gets restrained within the four walls of the house when Kunchan compounder suddenly commits suicide. She restrains into the darkness by hiding her face having dark spots/melisma. Life became painful for Kunjila also who didn't experience any happiness in life.

Cinnamma and Chiyamma pass through the despicable situations of life which a woman faces in today's world. Both of them are beautiful girls. They pass through the miseries of life which is suffered by the girls of poor families anywhere. They help their family by stitching knot and lace in button company. They also have the duty of stitching bouquet and hair for wedding. Chiyamma's marriage was also fixed along with the mass wedding conducted by the church.

The novelist portrays the pathetic picture of a girl whose life is bargained in marriage market. She is sent to the groom's house with a debt of two thousand rupees which is to be given. While leaving after marriage Chiyamma is more worried about her life which is going to be miserable in the name of the two thousand rupees than the expectation about the new life.

Chinnamma refused to marry when the idea of mass wedding was presented. But her life was thrown into another misery. She was a girl who always filled her eyes with laughter. Last she reached an entirely different situation. She didn't expect it. She refused to see Kochouseph who came to see her.

When Annie said that she liked him, Chinnamma says 'Then you marry him child, I have another one.' Then she laughs without stopping. That laughter got changed into cry then. The disaster given by the other person subverted her life totally. Her elder sister and sister-in-law saved her from that misery. From that time, Chinnamma's laughter disappeared. One day she ran into the house and pushed all colourful sarees away and took the white sarees and The Bible with black cover. Then she said 'I have no peace of mind.' One more woman among the list of many who get cheated in the name of love. For these girls life became a burden in one way or the other.

Nonu and Cherichi convince that the life of a girl means tears and slavery. Nonu is the second daughter of Kokkanchira Mariyam. Her sister-in-law's brother Lazar married her. She got fed up with the painful life with Lazar; she left the

place with the blacksmith boy who was her neighbour. Nonu is not able to withstand when the person who is supposed to protect her punishes her without any reason.

Cherichi doesn't have happiness or peace of mind even when she lives in the midst of wealth. The Deacon who married her without buying anything from her house doesn't like to continue the relation with that poor family. After getting married, Cherichi had to put an end to the relation with her family to a certain extent. Even if she lives in the midst of wealth, she loses her peace of mind while thinking about her home and her siblings.

The black Kunjaram who loves Pranchi who is a TB patient, the women of Ettumuri who finds enjoyment in being scolded by the drunken husbands, white Kunjaram, KochuMary and Elsy who became orphans after the death of compounder Kunchan, Kochannam teacher- all of them turn to be the personification of women who take all sufferings and miseries and try to smile and bring up the life like a snow pea plant by providing water and manure. The novelist gives a picture of courage and sacrifice to these characters. From the little girl Annie to the grandmother, there are many symbols of the problems faced by women in our society.

The novel clearly gives the picture that the lack of education, independent perception of life, views etc. lead a woman to slavery or in a condition where her existence is questioned. Annie is different from other female characters. She has objection against many injustices in the society. Her little mind longs to question them. May be she got that mentality from Kuttippappan, who was an idealist. Woman should have a perception like this on everything. If a woman changes from the sole attitude of getting married and realize the problems which affect the society and self and respond to it, she herself may be able to find the solution for many of her problems.

The writer has a clear aim in portraying each character. The problems facing by each character are the problems faced by entire women in our society. The novel does not forget to criticize social conditions which make the life of woman miserable. Annie, grandmother, big aunt, Kochurothu, Chinnamma, Chiyyamma –all show the lives of women filled with complex problems.

'Aalahayude Penmakal' is not only the story of a mother and five daughters. It is the story of, the underprivileged womenfolk where white Kunjaram and black Kunjaram, Kochumary etc. are also included. Beyond the story of the growth and fall of the village of Kokkanchira, an unforgettable perspective of women is given here by Sarah Joseph to the history of the place.

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