



ISSN: 0976-3376

Available Online at <http://www.journalajst.com>

ASIAN JOURNAL OF
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Asian Journal of Science and Technology
Vol. 09, Issue, 02, pp.7488-7492, February, 2018

RESEARCH ARTICLE

SUPERB PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN AS 'WIVES' IN THE WORKS OF A.J. CRONIN AND LAKSHMI: A NOTE IN COMPARISON

*Dr. Chelliah, S.

Professor, Head & Chairperson, School of English & Foreign Languages, Department of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai – 625 021

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 18th November, 2017
Received in revised form
26th December, 2017
Accepted 12th January, 2018
Published online 28th February, 2018

Key words:

Analysis, Portrayal, Agony,
Problem, Theme,
Culture, Contemplations,
Difficulties, Proper.

ABSTRACT

This paper is nothing but a brief analysis done on the portrayal of women characters depicted by the two writers A.J.Cronin and Lakshmi who belong to two different cultures and ways of thinking with a focus on the problems and problems faced by women in the patriarchal society, bringing home the point rather clearly that contemplations to remove the difficulties of women are mostly out and out useless, unless the difficulties themselves are understood in the proper perspective, for a growing or emerging society depends largely on the women who play a significant role at home and in the society. It specially focuses on the superb portrayal of women as 'wives' – pictured in the works of A.J.Cronin and Lakshmi.

Copyright © 2018, Dr. Chelliah, This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is nothing but a brief analysis on the portrayal of women characters depicted by the two writers, A.J.Cronin and Lakshmi who belong to two different cultures and ways of thinking. The problems and agonies of women have been handled as themes of novels by many writers. Naturally any novel that depicts the life of a woman attracts women in general. A woman holds an important place in society. The claim that one has understood society will be partial or incomplete unless one has understood the position of women is true indeed. Contemplations to remove the difficulties of women are mostly useless, unless the difficulties themselves are understood in the proper perspective. A growing or emerging society depends largely on the women who play a significant role at home and in the society. Hence the study of women can never be underrated and ignored. Generally speaking, any woman is interested in the stories about women. Stories that highlight the pain, pleasure, accomplishments and failures of women do kindle a deep interest in the women readers. The stories that reflect the real emotions and feelings of women in general, do have a perennial charm. Since novels are supposed to be a microscopic analysis and portrayal of the society, women play a greater role in them. The society's attitude towards women and its concept of a woman in her different roles can be discovered in an author's depiction of women characters.

*Corresponding author: Dr. Chelliah, S.

Professor, Head & Chairperson, School of English & Foreign Languages, Department of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai – 625 021

Lakshmi and A.J.Cronin chosen for this brief analysis belong to the twentieth century and they are not far removed from us in time. Dr. Thirupurasundari who wrote under the pseudonym 'Lakshmi' is a Tamil novelist who won the hearts of many readers through publication of 106 novels in which she portrays the travails and pains of woman in a captivatingly realistic manner. Novels that depict domestic scenes always attract people. "A domestic novel gets that appellation when it pictures the problems of a family. The difficulties of a joint family, may be portrayed in a domestic novel or the problems of a single family may be highlighted" (Geetha 75). Lakshmi is said to won the hearts of many readers because of her realistic presentation of facts in her novels. Archibald Joseph Cronin shortly known as A.J.Cronin is "a writer in the tradition of Maugham whose outstanding virtue is his capacity to tell a good story well" (Wolfgang 231). He has written several novels that portray human feelings and sentiments effectively. He has also pointed the miseries of women viewed from different perspectives. He has to his credit publication of such outstanding creations as 1.Hatter's Castle (1931), 2.Three Loves (1932), Grand Canary (1933), 4.The Stars Look Down (1935), 5.The Citadel (1937), 6.The Keys of Kingdom (1941), 7.The Green Years (1944), 8.The Northern Light (1958) and 9.A Song of Six Pence (1964). A.J.Cronin's career as a doctor has enabled him to portray with ease different types of people. The western culture with its manifold intricacies, the tantrums of the fashion-conscious women and a few dedicated souls that sacrifice self for higher causes do find their due places in his novels. The Lakshmi's novels also, similar characters are found. Despite the difference in cultural variations, the lot of Cronin's woman

does not differ much from that of her counterpart in Tamil Nadu. A close reading of novels reels the fact that the woman is the same everywhere. The hopes of women, their wishes and the consequences of thwarted ambitions are all the same throughout. Different types of wives have been pictured by A.J.Cronin and Lakshmi opinions are divided about the role of wives. Francis Bacon feels that wives are young men's mistresses, companions for middle aged husbands and nurses for the old men. In the words of Andrew Jackson, "Heaven will not be heaven if he does not meet his wife there. Dryden in his work "Suggested Epitaph" writes:

"Here lies my wife: here let her lie:
Now she's at rest, and so am I"

In Lakshmi's novels, one can come across many types of wives. They, true to the requirements of a typical Tamil wife, never prove false and show a steadfast love for their husbands. But a few of Cronin's heroines are shown in a different light. Some of them are devoted wives, whereas a few of them swerve from the path of devotion. Among the galaxy of wives, some are devoted and loyal and never for a moment deviate from the path of virtue and loyalty. Cronin's *Citadel* and Lakshmi's *Meendum Vasantham* focus their light on the devoted wives, Christine and Meera. In Tamil Nadu, the position of women is not rated high and any ordinary wife of a middle class family is constrained to play different roles. According to Lakshmi, a woman faces endless trials and tribulations in society. There are so many restrictions and constraints for a woman here. The dowry system that oppresses so many families is an evil force. Many marriages are wrecked and prove to be a disastrous mesh that traps women as victims. Numerous unwanted factors crush her spirit and throw her into an abysmal pit of frustration. So, Lakshmi feels that at least in the works of fiction, problems must be resolved in the end which can waft the fettered soul of a woman into a state of freedom and marital bliss. Lakshmi might have encountered many problems peculiar to the feminine world in her career and from her deep resources she has been able to delineate convincing life situations. The theme of 'The Love Triangle' that lured Shakespeare and many other eminent writers has charmed Lakshmi and A.J.Cronin. No other factor in a woman's life can shatter her peace so effectively and completely as 'the other woman'. This theme is seen in many of the novels of Lakshmi. The wandering husband who drifts along his passion finally returns to his haven of home life. Cronin's Catherine in *Citadel* and Meera in Lakshmi's *Meendum Vasantham* resemble each other in several aspects. Their fortitude in distressing situation, their silently-bourn agony, their anxiety over their husband's welfare, their self-effacing love and readiness to forgive their repentant husbands – all prove the fact that women are fundamentally the same as pictured in the novels of Lakshmi and Cronin – whether she be a western lady or an Indian lady. Both the heroines emerge rather victoriously after undergoing the period of stress and tension with redoubled energy and stoic courage. Cronin has depicted Christine as a simple devoted wife. She does not care for the sophisticated circle and derives comfort in the stillness of her subdued life. All the glamorous parties and get-togethers are stifling and abominable:

"Andrew : 'First rate chaps, these chris's
been a wonderful evening, hasn't it?'
she answered in a thin steady voice:
'It's been a hateful evening'" (The Citadel 180)

Christine is not able to run along the blind rush of fashion because of her depth of character. Unlike Meera, she is resolute and strong. Occasionally despite her calmness, they have arguments, for she has a mind of her own. Cronin brings in an element of religion in his novels. When the threatening reality her husband's indifference clouds her soul and when earthy comfort and love prove to be just a deceptive mirage, Christine turns towards God. Andrew, her husband is surprised to see her reading the Bible. The conversation turns to the Bible and Andrew makes fun of the holy text. Christine says:

"Possible your Plaza friends, the sophisticated circle
wouldn't appreciate the fact. But it is atleast good
literature.

"Is that so! well, let us tell you this, in case you don't
know it – you're developing into a blasted neurotic
women"

"I'd rather be a blasted neurotic women and
be spiritually alive than a blasted successful
man – spiritually dead"(The Citadel 48)

Even at the time of reconciliation, Andrew's affirmation "From now I'm going to make things up to you", does not elicit a rapturous reply.

She says:

"Alright, alright my dear. I don't mind how it is,
so long as were together. I don't want you to
run after me. All I ask is that you don't
run after anybody else" (The Citadel 264)

The woman who emerges out of Cronin's powerful strokes is strong minded with abundant devotion to her husband. Lakshmi touches upon a few traits of Meera. The devotion for her husband and the immense frustration that she experiences when she feels neglected are given more importance. She lacks that vivid and throbbing life that is discerned in the heroine of Cronin's *Citadel*. Meera is depicted as per the demands of Tamil culture – following the traditional conception of an ideal woman; a woman who never utters a word of protest against the authority of her husband – a woman who suffers all the hardships without a groan – a woman who has to bear all the pressures and tensions in life with a smile. Lakshmi observes in an interview with Rajalakshmi that the position of woman has deteriorated now. At least in those days women were not working but now the troubles and problems of a career woman are numberless. Meera too is a career woman but she never asserts her rights and never demands anything from her husband. Though Christine belongs to a different culture, Cronin highlights this tender nature in her also. She is never found as a rude wife. When Kasthuri's [Meera's husband] friend tries to attract Meera, she avoids him. When she shares this agony with her friend, her friend says:

"Wedlock (Thali) is not the only fence for a women. Her chief and the most important fortress and protection is the love that she has for her husband. No thief can trespass that to seduce her... Men do try to attract me, despite my old age. A pervert does not bother about age or about the fact that the woman is another's wife. We couldn't have had *Ramayana* if Ravana had had this sense" (Meendum Vasantham 140).

This observation portrays clearly the state of women. The very fact that a woman is married cannot protect a woman. The intensity of her love for her husband serves as the most powerful weapon. Lakshmi's conviction is projected in this statement. Kasthuri and Andrew are dissatisfied with the pattern of their existence. The drudgery of reality crushes them in incapacitating them to find happiness in simple life. Both swerve from loyalty because of their desire to be introduced into the world of fashion and sophistication and are dazzled by the splendor of the affluent circle. The domestic storm that shakes the heroines consequent upon the altered disposition of the husbands is accentuated by numerous incidents. Both the artists throw light on such incidents and both handle them with superb skill and an understanding of human psychology. When Andrew falls a victim to the charm of Mrs. Lawrence, he decides to upon a room at Welbeck street to cater to the needs of the rich and aristocrat. The proximity of Mrs. Lawrence is the alluring factor. Similarly Kasthuri's decision to work in Sangamithra's Hospital stems out of his affair with Kirthika, the sister of Dr. Sangamithran. In the end, both the heroines meet with an accident and Andrew is left a widower, Kasthuri – a reformed husband. Andrew who has been drifting for a while, bewitched by the flashy world of fashion realises his folly and curses himself for his indiscretion and infidelity – Kasthuri also finds himself in a similar situation. His deeper involvement with Kirthika results in serious misunderstandings at home. But the questionable behaviour of Kirthika vexes him and the chaotic rush of the blind adoration is checked. The truth that Kirthika has not been true to him drives him back to Meera. This process of repentance and the subsequent reconciliation is hastened by the accident that befalls Meera. The hero who has been modeled to be the champion of love and fidelity, rushes to the hospital where their reconciliation is announced to the world.

Cronin and Lakshmi give their own authorial observations in the course of the novel. The passages like:

“Her (Meera) husband is now a changed man. His laughter and mischief had disappeared. Why does he get irritated so often? Even small matters upset him. Why this change? It was a mystery to Meera” (P 230)

“He (Andrew) was so touchy now – the sign of his own conflict – a word from her Christine would set him off, instantly provoke a quarrel” (P 207) reveal the fact that the harmonious lives of Meera and Christine have been upset. The husband's anger is not without a cause. The internal turmoil and the alluring feminine force outside the marital link, give rise to such acrimonious words and bitter resentment. The writers arrest the attention to the readers and come out with their own comments on the flowing tide of events. The intervention of the authors in such contexts assist the reader's understanding and turns their attention in the proper direction. Thus, it is seen that these two writers paint life with all the vivid reality and resemble each other in various aspects since their raw material, the human mind with all its potential's is the same all over the globe.

Lakshmi's heroine Vidya in *Koondukku Veliyea* (outside the cage) is another ideal wife. Her husband Niranjana's childhood has not been a pleasant one. He has been the victim of his mother's deadly hatred because his father who came to him soon after his birth in the hospital met with an accident and

died on his way. He is aware that “the experiences of childhood leave deep indelible scars in the mind, which can never be forgotten” (Koondukku Veliyea 93). Vidya tries hard to soothe and revive her husband. She is bent upon instilling courage in him and says:

“Am I not here to take care of you as a mother,
to love you as a wife, to share your joys and
grieves as a friend, to make you happy as mistress”
(P 70)

Even though Niranjana's relatives reject her, she never harbours and evil thought against them and tries to bring about a harmony in the family where there is only discord and hatred. Such devotion and self-sacrifice is not seen in many women. Cronin's heroines also are capable of such stoic devotion. Grace Conroy as pictured by Cronin in *A Song of Six Pence* is another devoted wife. She accompanies her husband to a Catholic temple, though her religious conviction is different. He son observes:

“Such was her attachment to Father. I am convinced she would have willingly accompanied him to a Hindu Temple if he had professed that faith” (P 31).

After the death of Lawrence's father, Grace continues her husband's business and remains firm till the end. Such sacrifice and devoted loyalty are virtues that are appreciated in the wives and both the writers have highlighted these valuable virtues. Even when Grace's emotions are momentarily swayed by the influence of Sommen, she is able to extricate herself from it and observes with equanimity: “There was your father, Lawrence and now there's you. I suddenly discovered there wasn't room for anyone else”. (P 179). With a sense of confidence she pulls herself through and battles with all hardships of life with courage. Grace and Vidya, both evince amazing fortitude in times of acute distress and mental tension. Though the circumstances differ, both display tremendous patience and toil for the harmony of the family. Again this proves that the feelings of individuals and their capacities to withstand trying experiences are similar. Cronin and Lakshmi, both alike have tried to extol such virtues in their heroines. Some of the wives suffer endless cruelty under heatless men who harass them. The notion that women are comparatively confident and free in the European countries is not to be accepted blindly. For there, women had suffered more in the past. The very fact that feminist movements are very vigorous there proves that women had been suppressed in the earlier stage. The novels of Cronin also confirm and strengthen this view. The portrayal of Mrs. Brodie in Cronin's *Hatter's Castle* brings out the agonies of women. She is never treated as a human being capable of feeling and thinking. When a letter reaches her from her son, her eagerness and enthusiasm to open the letter immediately to devour the content of it, is frozen by the bitter words of her domineering husband:

“If you've waited ten weeks, another ten
minutes I'll not burst you. Away and
bring me the rest of my breakfast”
(Haffer's Castle 91)

When her daughter Nessie announces that she stood first in the memory test, she says: “that's the kind of daughter I prefer” “Authorial observation of the situation is projected in the lines:

“Actually she was not in the least exultant at the scholastic success. What delighted her was that she had in this achievement a tangible asset to put the Lord and the master of the house in complacent frame of mind” (P 124) The happiness of women both in England and India, to a large extent is rooted in the structure of marriage. Some in both the places quit the structure when it fails to provide the happiness and fulfillment but some stick on to it despite the struggles and challenges that have to be faced and overcome. May be this is so because of the wives’ financial dependence on their husbands. Economic independence implants courage in a wife when she has to face trials. Mrs. Brodie’s prolonged suffering reaches the culminating point with her illness. Even there, she endures the bitter barbs of slashing comments hurled at her by her husband. Even at times when she writhes in excruciating pain, she says:

“I tried hard to get up but it was just beyond me.
I’m really sorry you’ve been so upset.
Did you get a decent breakfast?” (P 296)

Her fear of her husband cripples all her spontaneous feelings. Realising that she is afflicted by cancer he wonders whether: “the scourge has been passed to him. Knowing nothing of the laws of contagion or infection still he wondered if he himself might be contaminated and immediately the recollection of her previous nearness to him, of past contacts rushed over him, making him feel unclean” (P296).

Further unmindful of her agony and pain, he injects the final venom in his heartless accusation:

“Do ye hear! The business is gone
I tell ye were ruined. You that’s been
Such a help to me, that’s what ye’ve brought
me to. We’re finished, finished, finished” (P 312).

The effect of his words upon her is immediate and she breathes her last:

“With arms outstretched upon the bad, upturned palms. She lay in stillness, as if she had been crucified – she was dead” (313).

Such forcible words reveal the poignancy of the situation. Her life was a long drawn battle wherein she never had a support and finally her chapter was closed after a life of humanity and contempt. She was first trampled like dust, her feelings were ignored and her earthly existence was just a bizarre nightmare unrelieved by any single ray of happiness. She allows herself to be crushed and pounded by the adverse forces and never for a moment contemplates flight from the dreary reality. But Suriah, the strong minded heroine of *Mankuthirai* (Mud Horse) displays another facet of an Indian woman. Lakshmi portrays a wife through whom a message is reached – the message of courage. Every woman is entitled to live with all happiness and freedom. If a marriage does not offer opportunities for the free growth of an individual, no consideration must be powerful enough to pin a woman in that state of slavish endurance of pain and indifference. This is the message embedded in the novel. A joint family is presented where Suriah faces varied oppressive situations. The first admonishment of her mother-in-law keeps on ringing in her mind:

“Do not plan to separate your husband from this joint family. He has responsibilities. So we cannot survive with what we get if you try to establish a separate family” (Mankuthirai 11). Even an ordinary outing with her husband is denied to her, while free conversation always remains a remote hope. In the beginning at the time of marriage, everyone looked innocent: “But now she realised that behind the innocent smile of her brother-in-law, turned out to be venomous thorn, bent upon creating a rift between her and her husband” (PP 20-21). Even her husband was indifferent to her happiness. In this male-dominated society, there is no consideration for the woman as a person who can feel. The concept that a woman has to please her husband is prevalent in the conservative orthodox families. The idea that a woman also must have equal opportunities is of recent origin. It is found that Suriah’s feelings are completely ignored:

“Vikram [the husband] was handsome, but there was no love in his words. They were tinged with cruelty. There was a sense of male domination – no regard for his wife” (P 30).

The authorial observation is seen in the following passage: “Is it fair that a woman – an educated individual – should slog as a slave for a family. We say that we are living in a civilized world. Even in this era of progress, such disgrace exists. A wife gets lost in the quicksand of marriage” (P 31)

When she is sent to her mother’s place to get a scooter for her husband, her mother observes:

“Do not leave your husband’s place on any account. Be patient. A Woman will be respected only if she remains in her husband’s place” (P 48).

Similar warnings from numerous mothers crush the desire of many a hapless daughter who seeks refuge in her mother’s place. Her brother advises thus: “Even if your husband tries to drive you out, do not ever quite the place. He does not have any right to send you out” (P 55). This is the situation that drives many ladies to desperate ends in India. Economic dependence also is another dimension in the tragic scene but Lakshmi’s heroine who resolves to face the future boldly brushes aside the idea of suicide and makes up her mind to live independently. She quits her house and seeks refuge in ‘Kanchana Magalir Illam’ – a Home for the handicapped. Lateron, Vikram realizes his follies and accepts her. The warden of the Home says that the purpose of the Home. “is to give a fresh start in life to those handicapped ladies. It is not physical disability alone that handicaps people. When the feelings of the ladies are hurt; they become handicapped. But some day even such people see deliverance and fresh life” (PP91-92). Through this story, Lakshmi preaches the idea of moral courage. The callous indifferent nature of Vikram that drives Suriah out is the force that tortures many weak women. Another instance of a victim of unfortunate marriage is seen in *Oonrukoul*. Where Kowsalya is dazzled by her sophisticated husband. Like Christine in *Citadel* and Meera in *Meendum Vasantham*, she scorns the parties:

“Is this a party – a party where glasses are emptied endlessly – man and woman behave in a flippant way – talk ridiculously” (Oonrukoul, 77)

She is dismayed to see Jananth [her husband] speaking so intimately with another woman. Her husband’s angry words,

“you have made me lose my face before my friends. I regret my hasty marriage with you” (P 85) kill her feelings and emotions. Thus, A.J. Cronin and Lakshmi have portrayed effectively different types of wives, who with their varying degrees of loyalty and love have shaped the lives of others who have come into contact with them. While a few of these hapless victims of marriage have breathed their last after a nightmarish span of earthly existence, others have been able to change the structure of gloom. Women caught in trouble and tribulation evince courage to transcend the temporary handicap and the enormous amount of fortitude displayed by women in these critical situations generate respect and reverence for the weaker sex. Cronin’s vast canvas is impressive and offers many areas for exploration of the psychic complexity of the humanity whereas Lakshmi’s limited scope enables a concentrated probe into the constraints and fetters of the soaring human mind, especially that of a woman whose feelings are ignored very often. Lakshmi’s novels, no doubt, throw light on the conflicts of marriage and the resulting agonies.

Thus, both the writers A.J.Cronin and Lakshmi have been able to portray feelings and situations with superb skill and excellent understanding.

REFERENCES

- Cronin, A.J. *The Citadel*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1939.
 Cronin, A.J. *A Song of Six Pence*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1985.
 Geetha, K.V. *Tamil Novels: An Introduction*. Madras: Anikam, 1979.
 Lakshmi. *Meendum Vasantham*. Mylapore: Poonkodi, 1979.
 Lakshmi. *Mankuthirai*. Mylapore: Poonkodi Publication, 1981.
 Lakshmi. *Oonrukoul*. Mylapore : Poonkodi Publication, 1981.
 Lakshmi. In an Interview with Vajjeyanthi Krishnaswamy. *The Indian Express*, January 28, 1985.
 Wolfgang, Bernard. *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the Twentieth Century*, Vol.2. New York: Frederic Ungar Publishing Co., 1969.
