

Self-Estrangement in Ambai's Selected Short Stories

Dr. P. Subapradha, M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed. PGDELT, Ph.D.
Senior Assistant Professor/ENGLISH
Chettinad College of Engineering & Technology, Karur, Tamilnadu
psubapradha@rediffmail.com

Abstract

C.S. Lakshmi pen-named as Ambai is one of the prominent feminist short story writer from Tamilnadu, India and she comes on the forefront of modern Indian writers who has made a remarkable mark in World Literature as a whole. Ambai is considered as a greatest short story writer in feministic perspective. Though she declares herself not as a feminist, her writing style reveals her passion for feminism and feministic issues. Her works are characterized by her passionate espousal of the cause of women with a lucid and profound style and the touch of realism. Her short stories "*Isolation in Darkness*" and "*The Forest*" portray the self estrangement of the heroines.

In the recent years, alienation and estrangement have gained much significance in all walks of life. The term alienation is synonymous to self estrangement, isolation, exile, distance etc. In literary discourse the term alienation has gained much popularity especially in feminist writings. The concept of alienation is to describe the impact of patriarchal domination on women. Self-estrangement is the idea conceived by Karl Marx in Marx's theory of alienation. He defines self-estrangement as,

"the alienation of man's essence, man's loss of objectivity and his loss of realness as self-discovery, manifestation of his nature, objectification and realization".

Self-estrangement may also be defined as a feeling of depersonalization and detachment from one's natural self, especially as a result of immersion in complex culture. Lakshmi's short stories give the essence of self-estrangement in women characters and the find solace and solution for their own problems they face in their lives.

Lakshmi's short story *Isolation in Darkness (Thanimai yenum IrUttu)* is a unique story. The protagonist Aruna loves to be alone in darkness. She seeks dark room and darkness for her loneliness as escapism from her loneliness and imaginary world. Aruna, the protagonist even

loved to be called a “dark imp”. Here darkness is used as a mask to conceal her hidden and secret wishes and to enjoy herself in her own imaginary world. Her imagination allows her to escape from loneliness. Throughout the story Aruna feels comfortable in an isolated world and her loneliness becomes her sole-companion. But she feels happy when her mother announces her marriage,

You need not sit alone, Aruna. You can't sit alone. If you're asked to sit, you won't sit. You are getting a company. [TI 40]

Aruna also had the hope that she will be back to the realistic world with her new husband, hoping that her imaginary world will be shared by a new person. Though she loves to be alone sometimes the loneliness which she loved once seems to be a frightful monster. But unfortunately, her hopes are shattered by her husband Ranganathan's question:

Hereafter, I'll be in tour for twenty days. Can you stay alone? [TI 42]

Once again Aruna is dragged to the same dark world of “loneliness”. ‘Loneliness’ not only alienates her from the realistic world but also from her husband and from herself. Her urge for friendship remains a dream and she could not identify a single friend. Her alienated self prevents her from mingling with other humans. She could not be at ease with her house maid; she even avoids conversation with her maid and find faults in every work.

She walked lonely, drawing a circle around her, without attachment. [TI 49]
At the same time, she loves to watch her neighbour's child through the window. She painfully reveals the truth that,

Being alone, speaking to me, acting, and the meaningful silences are quite interesting to me. [TI 49]

Surrendering to her solitary nature, she rejects any human intervention and sends the house maid out of work. She seeks solace in darkness and sleeping pills which keeps her happy in her own imaginary world. Throughout the story, the protagonist Aruna remained locked in the darkness of isolation. Towards the end of the story, she surrenders and liberates herself away from her usual husband and realistic world.

Lakshmi's, *Adavi [The Forest]* is a sketch of Chenthiru's self-estrangement from her husband, family, business and home. Chenthiru's odyssey towards forest is a new concept in Indian history. Usually women accompany their husbands to forest. Like mythological Sita, Draupadi and other saint's wives help their husbands', Chenthiru too helped her husband in his

business. She seeks refuge in a forest when her abilities and business acumen are neglected by her business minded husband.

A forest far away, leaving behind the noise of traffic, the sounds of conversation, of people walking about, of electrical gadgets in the house. [Adavi 145]

All of a sudden, she sheds her responsibilities and peeps into the forest. As a saying, peeping into the 'Forest' is a 'punishment for correcting oneself, the protagonist of Adavi goes deep into the forest to punish and correct herself. Chenthiru being an ordinary woman starts her journey towards forest all alone in search of her own identity. The protagonist is discouraged and criticised by many and even questioned,

Is it right to leave the existing and enter into a new world? [Adavi 426]

Her self-estrangement is not only for her search of self, she was obsessed by the way she was treated by her husband. Chenthiru developed her husband's business to international standard, but she was denied of good position and a share in the family business despite all the hard work and efforts that she had put in for its expansion. She decides to distance herself from her husband and practise renunciation. She perceives her odyssey to the forest as a place of self-discovery and self-expansion and seeks refuge there.

Time has come to change the epic of women. [Adavi 56]

Her alienation is towards self identity. Even after reaching the forest Chenthiru is unable to identify what she seeks. She walked towards north in search of truth. Her inner monologue reveals her state of depressed mind. Her solitary walk leads to a new person, who helped her to differentiate between 'Sur' and 'Asur'. Sur meaning solitary life and Asur meaning wedded life. Her alienation ends with identifying herself and her mind becomes light. Chenthiru's journey from self-estrangement to self- identity is narrated along with the mythological tale of Sita's vanavas to underscore Chenthiru's unique search for self-identity.

Both the heroines estrange themselves from worldly pleasures and physical world without any reason to be outspoken. Their estrangement is due to their inner urge in search for something unknown. In the process of alienation, they sometimes hurt themselves for perfection and identify what they want and understand themselves and arrive with a solution for their unknown problem and reconcile themselves.

Works Cited

- ❖ Ambai's Collection of short stories
 - ❖ Fromm, Erich. *The Sane Society*, New York, Fawcett. 1966.
 - ❖ Indra. T. Ambai, *Two Novellas and a story*, Uma Publishers, Katha Narayanan Delhi. 2003
 - ❖ Marx, Karl (1844). *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. (PDF).
 - ❖ Powell, William. "The relationship between feelings of alienation and burnout in social work". *Families in society*. 75 (4). ISSN 1044-3894.
 - ❖ Seeman, Melvin (1959-01-01). "On The Meaning of Alienation". *American Sociological Review*. 24 (6): 783–791. JSTOR 208856
-