

EXPLORING MATERNAL REPRESENTATION IN SCION

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ABSTRACT

Scion (2023), is written by S. L Bhyrappa who is a master raconteur, translated from the Kannada original text *Vamshavriksha* by R. Ranganath Prasad. This novel is exploring the complexities web of love and loss, tragedy and triumph which is set in a traditionally and culturally rich milieu of the Indian way of life. This article tries to shows the complex web of motherhood in this novel. By analysing the difference experiences and identities of each females' characters, the novel examines the various dimension of motherhood including material sacrifice, guilty, love and societal pressure on the women in the name of patriarchal norms.

KEYWORDS: Motherhood, Feminism, Identity, Dharma, Gender

It is universally accepted that the role of the mother is to construct and shape the character and behaviour of individuals which is greater than any other roles in human society. Moreover, it is a fact that the various dimensions of motherhood are expressed in diverse forms of women's representations, sometimes subtly or at other times consciously. This article is an attempt to explore how such roles of mothers blossomed in Bhyrappa's work *Scion*.

“The ideology of motherhood has been put forward as the natural and primary destination and responsibility of women. Women's mothering has continued to be basic to women's lives and the organisation of the family and fundamental to the genesis of ideology about woman” (Dutta 1).

The female characters in *Scion* are Bhageerathamma, her daughter-in-law Katyayani, Lakshmi, the housemaid, Acchamma specify their relations, Nagalakshmi and Karunaratne. Srinivasa Srostri's wife Bhageerathamma gives birth to a son through surgery at the age of twenty years. Because the child has grown bigger than the normal babies in her womb. So, the doctor advised her to not get pregnant again as the operation was done to deliver the first baby. In this way, she had to be deprived of marital happiness. Her son Nanjunda Srostri is getting married to Katyayani. Soon, the newlywed couple become parents to a baby boy. When their child was six months of age, Nanjunda Srostri drowned in the floods of Kapila. This circumstance had a profound impact on the character of Bhageerathamma as she grappled with the shock. Afterwards, she acts as both grand-mother and mother for the baby until her death. Besides, she also becomes a motherly figure to her daughter-in-law Katyayani. When Katyayani fell in love with someone else and left her family and her child, Bhageerathamma was not distressed. In fact, she raised her grandson with love and affection. Bhageerathamma, who followed the dharma of wife and mother, saw that her husband was declining due to forced celibacy upon him due to the medical advice against having copulation, and decided to offer Lakshmi to her husband who was still staying with them. Her husband Srinivasa Srostri follows the celibacy even though he is married to her and it has weakened him so badly. So, she is ready to surrender Lakshmi who worked in her household

to break his celibacy getting the child. Through this act of her, Bhageerathamma showcases the pinnacle of womanly sacrifice which is regarded highly but which is also a questionable gesture from her viewed from the feminist point of view. Because, as an individual she is invested only in satiating and gratifying the sexual needs of her husband whereas she is completely careless about her own sexual wants. Bhageerathamma is so excited that her grandson Cheeni would become a high school student after completing his secondary school exams. Meanwhile, she dies because of a fever. Even at the time of death, Bhageerathamma is worried about her grandson. In this way, the character of Bhageerathamma emerges as a well-balanced character who is committed to her role as wife, as mother and as grandmother.

Acchamma, a mother to Srinivasa Srostri, is opposite to the character of Bhageerathamma, as Acchamma is "Greedy, selfish, scheming, fraudulent and variously vile, but she was devoted to her husband" (Scion 451). Nanjunda Srostri, husband of Acchamma, was a very greedy person by nature. Achamma's womb did not sprout. Once when there was a fight between the ladies of the house, Kittappa's wife told off her sister-in-law, "God gives progeny according to the sins and virtue of people" (447). Nanjunda Srostri cheats his own brother in the matter of the inherited properties and makes all the properties in his name. Out of an evil desire that his brother's children should not inherit the property, he was ready to adopt an heir, and made enquiries with his neighbours. But nobody has consented to giving their children to him. Later He tries to entrust his wife to have a child with Shyamadas, a legend- raconteur. At first, she would not give her consent. She burned from desire to beget a child ever since her marriage, coming to know that her husband has an infertility problem aggrandised her apprehension. Even though she is disdainful of her husband's plans, she is jealous that her property should not go to her brother-in-law's children, once again that the desire to become a mother sprang up and she agreed to an inappropriate act and got a good son Srinivasa Srostri.

The novel indirectly suggests that Acchamma and Srostri who erudition and scholarship stand by them to maintain their mental balance in this difficult condition to make a strong decision without guilt. Even after becoming a mother, she faithfully follows her mother's dharma and takes care of him until her death bed. Achamma passed away when her son was fifteen years old. A question arises in the mind of the reader whether Bhageerathamma would agree to such a suggestion if she was in Acchamma's situation. It is difficult to predict in what way the longing for motherhood motivates whom to do what. In the same way, we can see that during the period of Mahabharata, Niyoga- a practice to beget a child from others to continue the family lineage- which had religious approval and later lost its social and religious validity.

Nagalakshmi not only looked after her husband Sadashiva Rao with the love of a wife, but also gave him the love of a mother. Because he is deprived of his mother's love. Even after the birth of their son Prithvi, her love towards her husband has not decreased even slightly. Also, she is like a mother to the motherless brother-in-law, Raju. Katyayani came to home as Raja's wife and gave her motherly support when she was suffering from miscarriages and was deprived of motherhood. It is a misfortune that Nagalakshmi, who along with her son Prithvi gave motherly love to all members of the family, should be deprived of marital bliss. She endures the shock of her husband's relationship with Karunaratne and she agrees to keep Karunaratne at home though Karunaratne does not agree to stay with her. Later, when the three decide to live together, when Sadashiva Rao, who thought he could be happy with her wife Nagalakshmi. But he suffers a heart attack, unable to bear the exceedingly joyous moment. Although, after her husband's death, Nagalakshmi wears a red sari and she doesn't listen to anyone's request and remains a mother to all.

Karunaratne, who comes from Sri Lanka as a research assistant to Sadashiva Rao. She has a relationship with her research guide. Initially, she thinks that the research itself is the children for them. But later in her life, she wishes to become a mother. As the work on the fourth volume comes to an end, she wishes to become a mother. But it does not happen in her life. Karunaratne, who followed Patni Dharma as a wife, as an intellectual companion, took care of the delicate and sensitive Sadashiva Rao with motherly affection. Although she was not actually a mother to any one, she also has the dimension of motherhood along with other dimensions of a good housewife. Her desire to yearn for a child of her life is evoked in a very subtle and psychotic way. She is always thinking about the child and her relationship with the child in many ways. Because of her difficult delivery as she is old, her mind also feels the pain and frustration. She always feels that life without the pleasure of motherhood is more pitiable than death. However, due to Sadashiva Rao's sudden illness, she puts aside her ardent longing of motherhood, and decided to fulfil the research work with him. Even though she gives her motherly love to Prithvi, the son of Raya and Nagalakshmi, and lays his head on her lap saying, 'Don't be shy, I am your mother'. But Prithvi is already a grown-up young man who doesn't respond to her motherly love. Later she returns to Sinhala with an empty heart with no regrets. Even though the outstanding research that has been produced through their intellectual collaboration which is considered to be their child, this act does not fulfil her desire for biological children.

Katyayani is a tragic and agonising character among the mother characters of *Scion*. She is married to Nanjunda Srostri and gives birth to a son when her husband dies in the river Kapila. Thus, Katyayani's life turned upside down. Katyayani loses her husband at the tender age of twenty. However, to continue her studies, she takes permission from her father-in-law and joins a college in Mysore. But her Chenni started crying, "Don't go Amma, take me also with you". He tugged at her sari and went to college for B.A. Passes the exam, meanwhile falls in love with her professor Raja. Both of them get married with the permission of Srinivasa Srostri. The words in the play *The Primordial*,

“ Is nature a widow?

It is anti-dharmic to impose contrived dharma on Nature that is evergreen and ever-zest” (167)

These words have greater influences on her to get a new life with Raju. But she cannot forget Cheeni, who was born from her first husband. She has come to Nanjanagudu to take the baby with her to her new husband's house in Mysore. But on that day some ritual is held at Srostri house which is related to her first husband. Even Her father-in-law Srinivasa has given permission to take the child from him, he states that the child belongs to the family. Thus, without her child Cheeni, her new marriage life has given more pain than happiness. Today the courts give precedence to a woman's right to a son in divorce proceedings. But the view of Srinivasa Srostri is very different from today's laws. When Katyayani comes to the Srostri's house to pick up her son after her remarriage, he tells her this.

You have no belief, that's okay. When this kid grows up, he shall inherit all the estate of the Srostri family. Would it be just on his part to receive the estate of a lineage whose faith, beliefs, practices and dharmic obligations he spurns? I am not speaking all economics. I am debating very seriously. What we derive from our parents is not just our body, but also their mental and cultural make-up. It would be shortsightedness to reckon just the physique to the exclusion of the rest. (270).

Katyayani is muted after listening to the words of Srostri. She could think of nothing to counter him. Srostri continued,

“It is for the reason of perpetuating the seed of one lineage that another lineage donates its habitat. The habitat attains its emancipation on receiving that seed and tending it into a plant. Once a mother always a mother. How may it be said that she can revert to her maiden state and attain new motherhood? For empiricism to revert to a previous phase in the process of evolution is against the very dictum of creation. It would be sinful to aspire for a phase that has forever elapsed in the path of evolution. (270)

According to Srinivas Srostri, marriage is providing the 'kshetra' by one clan to another clan in the form of a female for procreation. A married man has sowed the seed in the Kshetra and developed his lineage. This kind of theory is correct from the point of view of Sanatana Dharma. This kind of argument leaves unanswered some of the crucial questions regarding the roles of females raising their lineage and how scientifically correct is it that 'offspring' only belongs to the male lineage? These questions are not answered in the novel. Five decades after the publication of this novel, many new and acceptable arguments and literature on women and their status in society have emerged. In that light, the tragedy of Katyayani is unacceptable.

Katyayani gets pregnant with Raju for the first time after her remarriage and remembers her child Cheeni who constantly comes to her mind during her pregnancy. During the time of pregnancy, she is very healthy. Once when her child Cheeni's memory constantly comes to her mind, she suddenly starts to feel stomach pain. She was taken to the hospital and had a miscarriage. After this Katyayani has had consecutive miscarriage. During the pregnancy she is very healthy, but some problems bother her mental health. Along with that she cannot find an answer to questions that bother her and this is the cause of her distress. Cheeni, the love fruit of the first husband, is hitting the present pregnancy in the name of guilt throughout the novel. Because of her constant memory of Cheeni, she has a miscarriage. Because of that memory of her son, she gets a miscarriage consecutively. We cannot see this kind of tragic figure of suffering from guilt and crying because of miscarriages in Bhyrappa's novels.

Thus, In Bhyrappa's *Scion*, the author craftily tries to show the multifaceted role of motherhood through multiple female characters, each grappling with their distinct identities as mothers. Bhageerathamma embodies the epitome of maternal sacrifice and showing motherly love to all member of the family, while the tragic life journey of Katyayani illustrates the intensifies psychological conflicts of motherhood, love, and guilt. Achamma's portrayal reflects the intense societal and personal pressures surrounding motherhood, revealing its often morally ambiguous nature. By contrasting, Nagalakshmi and Karunaratne showcase different love of motherly affection, extending it beyond biological ties. Ultimately, the novel questions traditional views on motherhood, illustrating both its sanctity and the burden it imposes on women.

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