

**Female Empowerment in the Plays of N. Krishna Pillai**

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Drama is familiar to all, as an art form which influences human beings much. It also can be described as the most popular art because it entertains and attracts the populace than anything else. Drama developed not only as a medium to represent social issues but also a medium to exhibit individual affairs. In addition to that the writers and the spectators made out a firm concept that drama is the perfect medium to analyze the dominant issues and demands of the society and to convey them powerfully and effortlessly among the people. It is during this period, N Krishna Pillai the eminent playwright, who had developed a new conscience on Dramatic art by reading and learning European Literature, started writing plays.

N. Krishna Pillai can be identified as the unique voice in the genre of Malayalam drama theatre as he began a new tradition in the art of drama. He is a noted writer who brought out changes in Malayalam drama upon his own concepts and modifies the older concept of drama based on his point of view. Being influenced by the modern dramatic vision of the Norwegian playwright, Henric Ibsen, who had constructed timely changes in the world theatre, N. Krishna Pillai framed out his own plays. Without completely imitating Ibsen, he presented individual as well as family issues on his own account.

Krishna Pillai penned his plays with an aim to “dramatize a conflict in life, which must be severe and fundamental, should be examined minutely and to utilize particular characters, place, time and plot that are convinced to be unexceptional for the complete representation of the theme and to create the play by organizing all those components depending upon the light of the chosen conflict”<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, he is aptly denominated as ‘Perunthachan’ (The master craftsman) of Malayalam drama for his excellence in acquiring sublime dramatic creation. Krishna Pillai could easily imprint his individuality in representing the deepest conflicts in human mind logically.

It is his European dramatic concepts, which inspired him to fabricate his female characters. When attempts know about woman’s liberation, primary concern should be given to know about the source of inspiration behind her emanation. And it is nothing but education which empowered her. Being identified her individuality through

education; she began to behold her independence and rights with the newly acquired point of view. In the early plays it is evident that how a woman tries to get out of the confinements and tries to establish her existence. For instance the diverse faces of the nature of woman, is presented in the first community play, 'Mariyamma'. The plot of the play is the dispute between the conformist old generation and the educated modern generation, in which both the generations are represented by characters like, the mother-in-law, who subdues the in-laws; the reserved and stoic daughter-in-law; and Saramma, who is responding against faults but finally learns not to spend her life for the sake of others. Here Saramma is being portrayed as the symbol of modern femininity.

N. Krishna Pillai can be distinguished from other playwrights as he was able to interpret the conflicts in human life on his own views, within the boundaries of family bondage. He had penned the subtle plays such as 'Bhagnabhavanam', 'Kanyaka', 'Balabalam', 'Mudakkumuthal', and 'Anuranjanam' etc. The writer could elucidate the mentality of characters who get tormented due to the internal struggles in the family, with all the emotional aspects. N. Krishna Pillai becomes the most favorite playwright of people of Kerala as he was capable of bringing out the inner furies, concealed under human consciousness by sinking in the fathoms of life and represents them before the spectators marvelously.

The first play of Krishna Pillai entitled as 'Bhagnabhavanam', presents the character Madhavan Nair, who brings up his children based on his will power, helplessly witnesses the ruins in their life, when the play progresses. While condemning God as, "the God is blind to destroy his hut made out of mud"<sup>2</sup> and fails to recall that everything is the result of his deeds. The author reminds through this play that every father should try to realize the concepts of the daughter, before sending her with the suitor. Here the father is not ready to approve his elder daughter Radha's Marriage with her lover Harindran, a government employee because of his ego. He doubts whether Harindran would consider the marriage as a remittance for educating him. The author points out that this adamancy destroys the life of Radha and she becomes a lunatic.

It was really unbearable for Radha to live with her old and dubious husband. At the same time, his second daughter Sumati, returns from her husband's house as she could not concur with her in-laws for their conventional ideas. In order to preserve the pride of the father Sumati was even ready to go back to her scoundrel and incapable husband, but Madhavan Nair out of the love towards his daughter is not allowing her to go. But on the contrary Sumati commits suicide as she finds herself in a dilemma whether to obey her father or husband. His third daughter Leela is also a tragic heroine as she gets depressed out of love failure. Though the playwright could succeed in portraying the inner conflicts of human life, his three women characters became fragile as are not able to take decisions upon their own life. The fact behind their

tragedy is the unconventional care of the father and wrong concepts of life, more over either the father or the daughters are not capable of having apt decisions, rather he condemns God here.

‘Kanyaka’ is a play which questions the prevailed laws and it provides space for deep psycho analysis. Through the character Devaki, the author depicts the natural theory that, the blending of femininity and motherhood completes the life cycle of a woman. Devaki spoils her life for the wrong concepts of her parents. Being considered their daughter as an implement to attain highest positions in the society through getting subtle designations and moreover, rather thinking about her future, they are paying attention to her higher income and their higher reputation. When the play progresses, Devaki gets irritated by observing the marital life of her younger sister, and when her father reminds her to have masculinity to proceed her positions, she replies that, “I am trying to get manly but god proclaims that you are a woman.”<sup>3</sup> Her words reflect the frustration of not getting married even at the age of thirty five. The systems of values are responsible for the troubles of an unmarried woman spread toward the society through the family. The words of her sister that, “a woman attains femininity and deserves to exist only after becoming herself a wife and a mother”<sup>4</sup> influenced her to think and respond. She is ready to violate the social law by marrying a peon of her office without the permission of her parents. This revolution is not only by expecting a happy life, but also to attain the completion of womanhood. This is also a sort of liberation, and if such a Devaki among us would be ready for a rebellion like this, that would be the triumph of the playwright.

The play ‘KudathileVilakku’ centers on the sacrificing life of a woman, who possesses incomparable will power and endurance. The plot reveals the life of GovindaPillai who marries LekshmiAmmam out of the completion of his parents. On the contrary his wife dies with diseases caused by the ignorance and carelessness of her husband soon after the death of his GovindaPillai decides to marry his beloved ParvatiAmmam, on the otherhand,ttt she decides to bring up his children rather than her own son. She wants to live independently when those children ignored her. Here GovindaPillai becomes helpless as he could never live with ParvatiAmmam, who is the central character of this play, which shows the acceptance and rejection between the members lead to the ruin of the family. Not being faded with that destruction ParvatiAmmam symbolizes the liberated woman with her will power.

While examining the individual conflicts of man and represents them in the psychological point of view, Krishna Pillai always acquires the story of a single family. His play ‘Balabalam’ is created by focusing on the age old issue of the domination of mother-in-law carries out from generation to generation. The play exhibits the tug of war between the greed for power rather than the combat between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The plot argues whether the mother or the wife having more influence upon the man. The conflict begins when Lakshmi Ammam, who

rules her husband and two sons, wanted to rule her in-laws also. Unable to react against the suppression of mother-in-law, the younger son's wife dies out of various diseases meanwhile the elder son's wife, Pankajam tried to fight with the mother-in-law but ends in futile. She was considered as disobedient and a rebel, when she tried to distract her husband from the control of the mother. The words of Adler, that it is the common human nature to expose power on the other, which is expressed through the characters of Lakshmi Amma and Pankajam. In majority of plays, the liberation is exhibited either via death or via departing from family.

Here, freedom from dependence got completed through abandoning the family, that is the unmarried women went away with their lovers and whereas, a woman can go with a man on her own will is the culture of the west. At the same time Pankajam, Sukumari, and Sarojam, the married women acquire their independence from their troublesome domestic life, with the presence of their husbands. These instances prove that the women characters of N. Krishna Pillai are no doubt desired self-governance. He manifests Devaki and Pankajam as self-reliant and determined, who continue their paces to destination without uncertainties. The social situations in the Nair families like 'Marumakkathayam' (matrilineal inheritance) and joint family system checked the power of the husbands from governing their wives, is perfectly reflected in the plays of Krishna Pillai. Hence the known women characters from the Nair families become presented independent and self-reliant.

The people who progress in life by observing the internal troubles and disharmonies of domestic life would possess a view of life based on the family background. Here the playwright has attempted to dispense the profound and extended miseries of man through that concept.

Through his plays, N. Krishna Pillai portrays the diverse faces of women folk. A woman must have her duties, responsibilities, moralities as well as dreams and she gets fulminated when all these merits are denied. The plays of Krishna Pillai are adorned with plenty of women characters and he has paid attention to do justice with these characters and moreover the prominence given to wife over husband paved way for controversies. The chief women characters of his early plays such as Radha from 'Bhagnabhavanam'; Devakikkutty from 'Kanyaka' and Gomati from 'Anuranjanam' believed that the supreme responsibility of a wife is to always provide happiness to the husband. The position, wealth, prosperity and even redemption of a woman are considered to be merged with her marriage. Devakikkutty follows her belief in her entire life, that a woman attains femininity and deserved to exist only after her marriage. This drama is undoubtedly a challenge to the society which defines women as resources.

Women were given respectable positions in the family as well as in the society during the ancient time. Not only that, women are the partners and helpers of men. Dr. P K Narayana Pillai opines that, "woman was assumed to have esteemed position in

the society during the time of Rig Veda. Moreover marriage and the conjugal life were included among the systems and ideology of marital rituals".<sup>5</sup>

\*'Manusmriti' indicates that women were provided with dignified and respectable places in society, such as "where a woman gets respects there Gods get delighted and where a woman is not gets respected there all the rituals and performances would become futile."

It is a matter to be discussed that how women who got prominence during the ancient times become fragile, suppressed and dependent human beings in the present. Basic nature of a woman is that she would like to get loved and cared, and whenever the care is denied she would transform to be emotional and arrogant. The domestic situations might create patriarchy and the adamant mentality of man may be the reason for her slavery.

N. Krishna Pillai is the well distinguished playwright, who was absorbed the innate nature of woman's conscience, who is not ready to spoil her life by becoming the shadow of man for the sake of marital life. Most of the women characters express the desire to attain their liberty and dreams. The women characters of N. Krishna Pillai are seemed to be breathless by being confined within dependence and the mental depressions and facts of life dispensed by these characters persuade the spectators to think over.

### **Notes**

1. N. Krishna Pillai, "KairaliyudeKadha", page 352, 2002.
2. N. Krishna Pillai, "Bhagnabhavanam", SahityaPravarthakaSahakaranaSangham, National Book Stall, page 72, 1942.
3. "N. Krishna PillaiyudeNadakamSampoornam", page 156, D C Books, 2008.
4. ---, page 187.
5. Dr. P. K. Narayana Pillai, "GadyaKairali, VaidikaKalatheVanitaSamskaram", page 72, 73.
6. "Manusmriti", chapter 3 sloka 56.

### **References**

1. KairaliyudeKadha – N. Krishna Pillai
2. N. Krishna PillaiPadanaSahityam – Dr. EzhumaturRajarajaVarma
3. N. Krishna PillayumPrasnaNadakangalum – Dr. B. R. Rajalakshmi
4. N. Krishna PillayumMalayalaNadakangalum – G. Sankara Pillai
5. Nadakadarsanam – G. Sankara Pillai
6. NaveenaNadakaChinthakal – T. M. Abraham

