



COMMITMENT: THE CORE OF MOTHERHOOD

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ABSTRACT:

Every living thing plays different roles at different stages of life. The roles change as per the responsibilities of the stage in life. The responsibilities occur naturally and are shouldered naturally. However, when it comes to human beings, the stages and responsibilities are more cultural, social, religious and political and less natural. Naturally, motherhood is the responsibility of the female of the species. It doesn't simply mean giving birth; it is completely devoted to the protection and welfare of the offspring. And almost all the mother animals undertake this responsibility naturally. How can human mother be an exception? However, besides performing the natural responsibilities, a human mother has to shoulder the other motherly responsibilities. She has to do her duty with commitment. Every mother does this. But sometimes it is the test of the very motherly commitment. A mother has to put her life at the risk for her offspring. She is ready to go to any extent to save her child. The present paper attempts to study the commitment of motherhood with reference to the short stories entitled, 'A Leaf in the Storm' (1948) by Lalithambika Antharjanam and 'The Final Solution' (2003) by Manik Bandopadhyay.

Keywords: mother, responsibilities, commitment, offspring, protection, welfare

It is well said that the owner of the three worlds is a beggar without mother. Lifecycle is incredible without mother. It is this role that raises woman to the level of God. What motherhood gives to woman is nothing but responsibilities and challenges. Mother has to strive for the betterment of her child. After being a mother, a woman devotes her whole life for her children. She

leaves no stone unturned for her children's life and better future. Motherly instincts are natural. And commitment to the child becomes the core of motherhood. A mother is ready to do anything, even to die, for the child. There is famous story of Hirkani who climbed down the Raigarh fort all alone during night to feed her child. When it comes to comfort or survival of her child, a woman is ready to risk even her life. The present paper is a humble attempt to study the commitment of mother as it is portrayed in the short stories entitled, 'A Leaf in the Storm' by Lalithambika Antharjanam and 'The Final Solution' by Manik Bandopadhyay.

'A Leaf in the Storm' is a short story. It is written by Lalithambika Antharjanam. It is a Malayalam short story based on the partition of India and Pakistan. The story presents the miseries of the partition-stricken refugees, men, women and children. The focus of the story is the effect of the partition on women. Jyotirmoyi Devpal is the central character of the story. In fact, the story presents the tragic tale of Jyoti.

Jyotirmoyi Devpal is a village girl. She is born in a well-to-do family from a rich village in the Punjab. She is very dear to her relatives and neighbours. She grows up in a very happy, carefree and safe surrounding. No one finds faults with her for anything. Jyotirmoyi's thoughts are modern. She understands the importance of education in the conventional society. She takes college education by convincing her parents. She is aware of the status of woman in the traditional society. She is very clever as well as revolutionary. She knows the principles of equality and freedom. She does not wear purdah. She loves freedom. She refuses to marry.

Jyoti is a tough social reformer. She understands that the traditions make woman a helpless slave. She is selfless and works for the bonded and enslaved women. She fights to free other women from cruel inhuman social conventions. She dedicates herself to the empowerment of women. Jyoti fights against the conventions that make woman a slave. Her dream is to make women happy and comfortable. She wishes to unite all the women and fight against the injustice. She protests for the cause of woman. She observes fasting. She is imprisoned for her activities. She suffers police brutality in the prison. Others try to dissuade

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her from her work. But she keeps up her work saying, "I trust my brothers". (Antharjanam,1948) But the partition ruins all her dreams. In the partition riots her family members are killed.

The partition of India and Pakistan does not spare a budding social reformer like Jyotirmoyi Devpal. During the riots fifteen Hindu and Sikh women are given shelter by Ayesha. Jyoti is among them. Ayesha is Jyoti's bosom friend. Ayesha's father, Qasim Sahib is a friend of Jyoti's father. Ayesha hides these women in a room in the lady's wing in her house carefully. Her brother Ali hates the Hindus and Sikhs and wants to kill them. Ayesha keeps the women safe from Ali. She plans to send the fifteen women across the border in her father's bullock cart. Her father makes regular trips across the border. They hope that no one would suspect that the cart carried women. So one night Qasim Sahib carries the women in his cart. Unfortunately, the rioters stop the cart and violate the fifteen women. There Jyoti is raped and put in the prison where she is raped by many. She used to suppose that the men are like brothers. But she experiences how they become inhuman monsters during the partition. At the time of recovery of women from both the sides, Jyoti is brought from the prison to the camp.

During the riots a delicate girl like Jyoti is tortured and harassed. This discourages her. As a result of the rapes she becomes pregnant. In the refugee camp she finds that she is pregnant. She stops eating food. She is angry and confused. She has a puzzle. She thinks that the child will bring her more miseries. So she does not want to give birth to the child. In the course of time she calms down. She observes others in the camp. But she eats nothing. A doctor, a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, convinces her to drink milk:

He begged her, "Won't you drink this milk, for me sister? Why don't you realize that this life is also valuable for our beloved country?"

"One life...one life!" She broke into tears and said, "Why one life? How many lives have we lost now? Look at me! I am damned too...You want me to love on still, and sow the seed of damnation?"

She continued sobbing, "My life... doctor....may I ask you something? Tell me, are you able to destroy something which must be destroyed, just as much as you can preserve something you think must be

preserved? Now this life bred of damnation – conceived in consequence of inhuman rape and ignorance ---tell me doctor, can you destroy this, save another life...? Can you do that?” (Antharjanam,1948)

This shows that she knows that her motherhood would bring her a hoard of problems and disgrace. She has been made pregnant by force and feeling of vengeance. She refers to her would-be-child as ‘the seed of damnation’.But when the doctor assures her that India will accept her with her child, she drinks milk. Still Jyoti does not want the child. In the refugee camp-

Jyoti listened to everything. She moved about slowly, trying hard to contain her swollen belly within the folds of her sari. Only a few people knew her secret; that she was pregnant and unmarried, and had been ‘reclaimed’ by the camp. Her burden grew heavier as the days passed. Those first imperceptible pulsations grew into swollen coils within her, threatening a revolt that might stifle her. What moved within her was challenge to every cell of her being. It symbolized everything womanhood and humanity found despicable in nature. And that it should grow within her, drawing on her life-blood! It moved and drew breath from her life-breath. One day, it will emerge – this “cosmic shape”- biding no one’s time, seeking no one’s permission. Come out it must, willy-nilly.

Pressing her belly her big belly hard against the floor, she bore her pain. What else could she do?(Antharjanam,1948)

She is not willing to keep the child alive even after listening to the speech of a famous guest. The guest tells that the children born of the abducted women are the first citizens of India. When she delivers the child, in the beginning she wishes to choke it to death. She wishes to end her miseries. She plans to bury it under the tree. But she cannot do so. Then she decides to run away leaving the child in the open grass.

At last Jyotirmoyi is transformed. She gives birth to the child. Like other unwed women in the camp she neither kills nor abandons the child. Her motherly feelings change her mind and she picks up the child and goes into the camp. She is a mother. Mother is a creator, next to God. She cannot kill or trouble her own child. She solves the puzzle by accepting child. Her motherly

love wins the war against humanity. The riots in the partition are inhuman, cruel and barbaric. In the riots the women are targeted. They are violated, raped and killed. But even after so much suffering Jyotirmoyi does not surrender. She is a revolutionary and a tough fighter. She accepts the child with commitment.

Manik Bandopadhyay, a prolific Bangali writer portrays a different mother in the short story, 'The Final Solution'. The story is about life of the refugees after the partition of India and Pakistan. It shows how the partition made people helpless and hapless. Mallika is the central character of this story. Her family is at its centre.

Mallika's is a refugee family. They are the Hindus migrated from Pakistan. They stay at a railway station in a city in India with other refugee families. Mallika's family gets the place of the length of a spread out mattress at the station. In her family, there is her husband, Bhushan, their two-and-half-year-old son, Khokan and her widowed sister-in-law, Asha. They have nothing except tin suitcases, beddings, bundles, pots and pans. Besides, they have nothing to eat. Bhushan has been suffering from Malaria. Khokan has become very weak. He wants milk. Mallika is helpless. She wants some work so that she can at least get some milk for Khokan. She has the question of survival of her child. She needs some solution.

Mallika is a beautiful woman. Her beauty attracts Pramatha. No doubt her clothes are grimy. Her hair is unkempt. She is thin. But in her eyes and postures Pramatha sees a restless tigress ready to attack. He wants to tame and control her. But Mallika is truly a tigress. She kills Pramatha in his own house.

Mallika is needy and helpless. But she is very clever. Her husband is ill and her son is starving. She wants help at any cost. She is ready to do anything. Pramatha takes advantage of her helplessness. She learns about his evil background. The student volunteers tell her about Pramatha. She does not fully trust Pramatha. Still she takes the risk. She accepts the help from him as the need of time.

Mallika is a true mother. She wants her son, Khokan to stay alive. He is reduced to a skeleton. She becomes restless. She wants her sister-in-law, Asha to get into the shameful business of flesh trade and bring some relief to the family.

But Asha denies that. Mallika is very worried about her son. She is not concerned about her husband. She lives only for her son. She is ready to do anything to keep her son alive. So she requests Pramatha to give her a job and accepts his offer saying, "Okay, I'll do whatever you ask: dance naked if you so wish. But you'll find a room for us first, won't you? An enclosed space and a drop of milk for the child, otherwise he'll die" (Bandopadhyay, 2003). This clearly show her commitment to motherhood. She lives for her son. She is ready to put herself in the hell of flesh trade to keep her son alive. And in this way, Mallika is trapped in the evil noose of Pramatha.

Mallika is a realist. She wants Asha to get in the business of prostitution. She thinks that Asha is a widow. There is nothing wrong to earn bread by selling body during the time of need. Mallika keeps persuading Asha all the time. When Pramatha's servant, Ramlochan comes to take Mallika to Pramatha, Mallika request Asha to go in her place. At this time Asha is ready to go. But Ramlochan tells that Pramatha wants Mallika and not Asha. At this time Mallika accepts the reality and goes with Ramlochan.

Mallika is bold and courageous. She is not timid and shy. She has the heart of a tigress. She looks straight into the eyes of Pramatha and talks with him. In the beginning she is not ready to take a bath and put on fresh clothes. But her helplessness makes her follow his suggestions. She is caught in a noose. Still she always looks for a chance to get out of it. Pramatha wants to have sex with her. He takes whiskey. That makes him drunk. Mallika takes this opportunity and hits Pramatha with a bottle. When he becomes unconscious, she keeps her head cool and strangles him to death with the saree he had given to her. She takes all the money from his pocket. She leaves Pramatha's house coolly. She has control over her emotions. Calmly and quietly she gets the final solution to her problem.

No doubt, when Mallika returns to her family, she becomes emotional. She tells Asha, "He (Pramatha) thought he had got me to carry on his clandestine trade. What did he take me for? Am I weak just because I'm a woman?" (Antharjanam, 1948) This shows the energy in her. She protests against the inhuman attitude of men like Pramatha towards helpless women of their

own religion and community. She kills Pramatha in self-defence and is ready to face such rascals by carrying a knife. This shows that she is out-going. This is Mallika's, a mother's final solution to save her child.

In a nutshell, there is no doubt that Jyoti and Mallika represent millions of partition-stricken women. They are victims of partition. In connection with Jyoti it can be observed that mother-child relationship is like tree-leaf relationship. Jyoti is like a tree. She does not allow her tender leaf die in the storm of the partition. The feelings of motherhood keep her away from murdering the child that would bring her a life of disgrace. That is the magical commitment of motherhood. Mallika, on the other hand, is not torn between the feelings of honour and dishonour. Her only target is to save her son. Her helplessness attracts an evil man like Pramatha. But she bravely and cleverly ends inhuman Pramatha and gets the final solution to her problems. This solution sustains her honour and keeps her son alive.

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