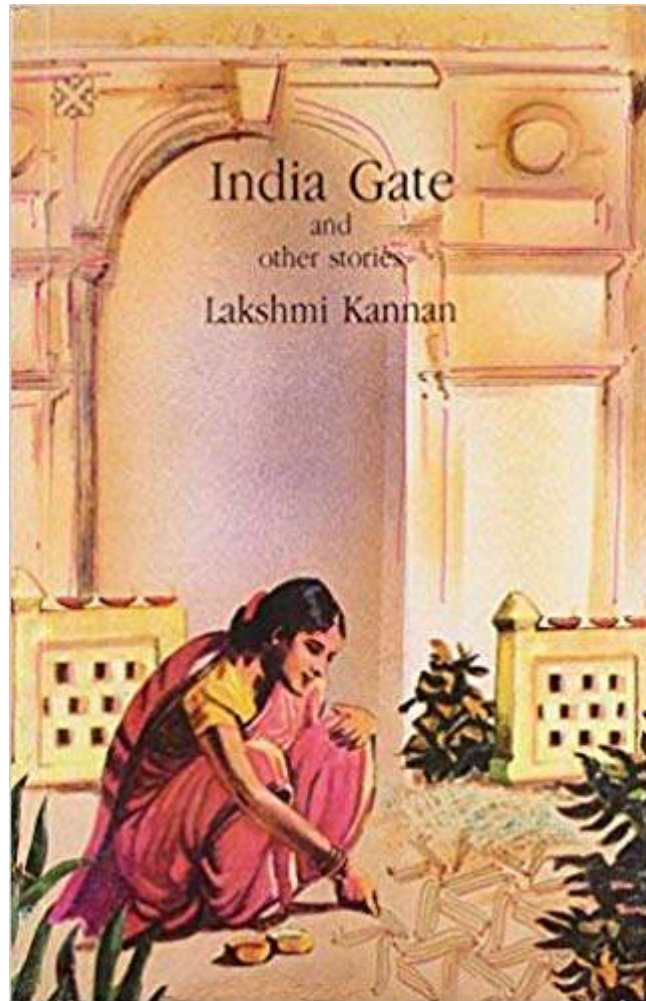


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Search for Self-Identity: A Study of Lakshmi Kannan's Short Story "Muniyakka"

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Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/India-Gate-Other-Stories-Kannan/dp/0863113451>

Abstract

Lakshmi Kannan is an eminent Indian scholar, a bilingual writer who writes under the pseudonym 'Kaveri'. She also writes poetry in English. In this story Muniyakka, Lakshmi Kannan shows the inner psyche of Muniyakka and the struggles faced by her from all the men connected to

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her life namely her husband and sons. Lakshmi Kannan has portrayed the protagonist Muniyakka in such a way, that it kindles the reader to think about the condition of women.

Keywords: Lakshmi Kannan, *Muniakka*, alienation, feminine, search for identity.

Muniyakka

The short story entitled “Muniyakka” pictures the life of a woman, who had been battered and torn by her husband, sons and destiny. The author Lakshmi Kannan enters into the inner psyche of womanhood and tells a captivating story. Muniyakka’s mastered art of soliloquy during her work shows her inner turmoil. Her routine duties of mopping, sweeping and cleaning, to sustain herself in her old age is really touching. Muniyakka has a very strange behaviour. She would keep muttering to herself while working. Children call her a walkie-talkie. Most of her mutterings are against her dead husband Bairappa and their three careless sons. Sometimes, Muniyakka used to scold all the devotees who stain the stones of the temple with kumkum, sandalwood paste, and the smudgy sprinkling of withered flowers. It would be a free curse for everyone from the mouth of this old lady. She wonders why all these married young women were praying for a son. She had three sons herself and what worthless creatures they turned out to be. Her husband Bairappa drank, gambled, squandered all her hard-earned money and finally died, leading a wasted life.

Feminist Lakshmi Kannan and *Muniakka*

Lakshmi Kannan, a feminist and a social reformer tries to visualize a picture of a widow Muniyakka, who has been battered and torn by her husband, sons and destiny. In this story Muniyakka, the protagonist Muniyakka, a widow abandoned by her three son’s lives in a hut with a sense of solitude in her heart. The alienation of her children has made her psychologically muted. She mutters always without any hesitation in order to pour out her emotions. In other words, Muniyakka does not exist to her sons, they are happy with their family without Muniyakka. When she visits them, she is treated no better than a beggar. Muniyakka is not given even a small bowl of broth during her visit. In this story Muniyakka, Lakshmi Kannan shows the inner psyche of Muniyakka and the struggles faced by her from all the men connected to her life namely her husband and sons. Muniyakka just like any other women might have dreams about her marriage but all her dreams are shattered when she marries Bairappa. She is stunned once; she comes to know about Bairappa’s habits of drinking, smoking and gambling. Before the marriage, her parents are least bothered about her wish towards her marriage with Bairappa.

Complications in Life

In the life of Muniyakka complications arise when her husband Bairappa stops going to work. The family condition becomes so bad that, she has to work hard in order to look after her family. Muniyakka then starts doing menial works like sweeping, mopping, washing vessels and clothes, cleaning the courtyard from house to house in the neighbourhood. Lakshmi Kannan’s portrayal of the events in the story is realistic. Muniyakka loves her children to a great extent, though she leads a harsh life because of her irresponsible husband. Lakshmi Kannan describes the loving nature and feminine aspect of Muniyakka. Muniyakka craves for true love from her husband but in vain. Bairappa leads a worthless life and finally dies. Muniyakka is consoled thinking that her children will take care of her in future and will love her.

Muniyakka’s Sons

Muniyakka’s sons never have any love towards their mother, like their father, they too utilize her to the most and needed her support until they have been married. But once, they are independent

and married their abandon her just like crushing a piece of paper and throwing it in the garbage bin. Muniyakka has three sons and has raised them well. But in her old age, she has no one to take care of her. Muniyakka's sacrifice are in vain, she is treated her like a rug. She is worn out, they forget her love and leave her to rot and fend for herself. Muniyakka is a pious woman and a faithful wife. After the death of her husband, Muniyakka is a devoted wife which is evident when she conducts the sraddha every year in remembrance of her husband and to appease his departed soul. She prepares fish curry, tenderly cooked cabbage, sweet buns made with jaggery, spiced rice, a small bottle of toddy and a packet of his favourite brand of bidis. The rites of Bairappa's sraddha has to be performed by Muniyakka's sons but they are least bothered, Muniyakka does all the rites instead of her sons.

Sumangali Muniakka

Muniyakka has a beautiful glow on her face due to the round kumkum on her forehead, flowers on her hair, a clean cotton saree wrapped around her body, a contrasting picture to her usual haggard self. Only on this day, she is allowed to wear all this stuff of a "sumangali" or a traditional married woman. Muniyakka lives alone in a hut like a human being in an isolated place without anyone to interact with her, she is surrounded with trees and flower gardens. Muniyakka is always busy doing her work from early morning till evening; she gets some time to rest in the afternoon instead she uses this time to help the gardener in watering the plants. She used to water the entire garden, which caused her body to ache. Through the story Muniyakka, Lakshmi Kannan has portrayed the protagonist Muniyakka in such a way, that it kindles the reader to think about the condition women face, especially the treatment of widows in the contemporary society, how they are discriminated by their own family and in the society. Muniyakka is lost within the dense greenery of Raja Rao's backyard. Her life will forever remain, encased within the backyard of another house, toiling for daily bread.

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