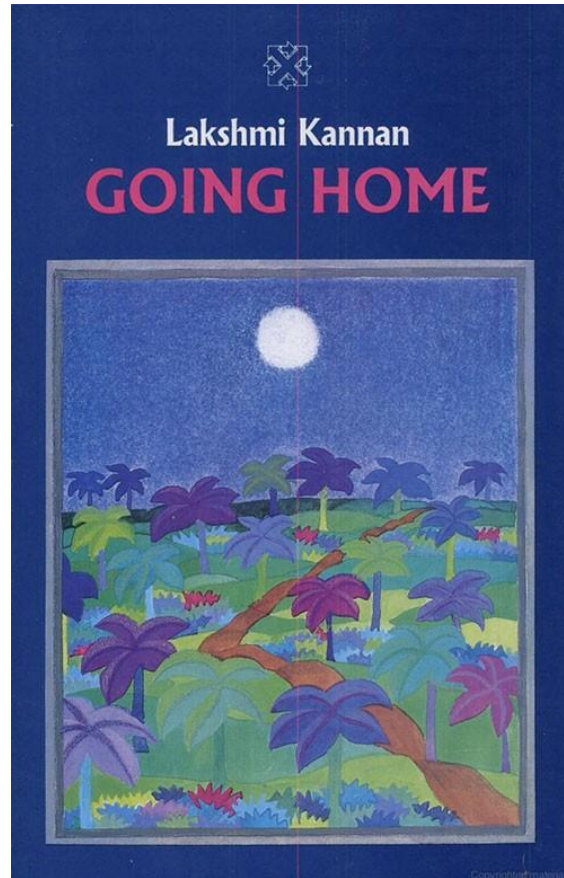


**Lakshmi Kannan as a Feminist:
A Reading of Her Novel *Going Home***

K. Mugeshpillai and Dr. M. Soundhararajan



Abstract

Lakshmi Kannan is an internationally known bilingual writer, who has written and published long and short fiction in Tamil and in English translation. This story deals the novel entitled *Going Home*. According to Kannan, Home and identity of a woman are related to each other. A girl's home always plays a vital role in determining the real identity of her. The identity is at stake if home does not carry the meaning and merely remains a word with four walls and a ceiling in a society to her. Sometimes, the people who are around her become hurdle in her path of achieving. What she desires though she is well secured at her parents' house. The question often arises as to where lay the actual home of a girl. It may be often the institution of the

marriage that puts her into the dilemma to remain faithful to either of the house. Freedom and identity are the two facets of a woman's home. Woman is grappling to find her own self as women novelists like Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandya, and Anita Desai project in their novels. Their writings are constantly trying to unveil and argue firmly the values like freedom of thought and expression, liberation from oppression and importance of home.

Keywords: Identity, Development, woman's workhouse, and Freedom.

Going Home

Lakshmi Kannan's novel, *Going Home*, is originally written in Tamil in the year 1986 and later translated into English in 1999 by Disha Books. It depicts the loneliness, ennui, existential dilemmas and the feelings of angst, that prevail among urban Indian women. It revolves around the lives of two central women characters Gayatri and Rama. Kannan in her book seems to have raised a very significant social issue related to the denial of property rights to girl children and has even narrated some very poignant and troublesome instances in the Preface to the novel. Through the citation of several real personalities, she has highlighted how such a denial makes the women dependent, vulnerable to servility and patriarchal dominance at the hands of their own kin. The interesting aspect that, she has also mentioned about this novel is that it received bitter reviews from women as their somewhat hidden and unconscious feelings of discrimination had been brought to surface through this work. It made them aware of this stark reality and coerced them to do some loud thinking, which as the author has pointed out also resulted in lot of bitterness. Although the novel reflects the issue through Gayatri, who is unable to forgive her mother, Meenakshi, for letting go of her share in her father's home, "RETREAT", yet it also explores many other women centric themes, which find expression through Rama's character.

Plight of Working Women

Theme is a plight of working women like Gayatri and Rama who had to continue working to meet the economic needs of their families. While Gayatri has a loving and understanding husband, who values and appreciates her, Rama suffers from devaluation at the hands of her husband, in-laws and parents. Working women like Rama and Usha have been projected as beasts of burden by their families. They are expected to shoulder all family related as well as economic responsibilities. Through this novel, Kannan has created strong women characters, who exhibit positive coping. Gayatri copes with the stresses and strains of everyday life and career through yoga and aerobics, Rama copes with her marital strain by immersing herself in work and writing. She finds emotional solace in her relationship with Damodaran. In this work, Kannan has also touched upon the theme of sexual exploitation and harassment faced by working women and the various compromises made by them for their promotion.

Transition from Youth to Old Age

The novel depicts the transition from youth to old age very beautifully. Gayatri's initial desire to possess a huge mansion, like that of her grandfather and her complaints about lack of adequate physical space, gradually paves way for an attitudinal change in her. She thinks about making room for the younger generation, that is her son, daughter-in-law and grandson. Theme

is a progression in her character from a desire to possess things to a gradual renunciation and ultimately a desire to embrace death.

Depiction of All Women

The novel named *Going Home* by Lakshmi Kannan very nicely depicts all kind of women far and wide, cutting across class and caste. It deals with issues of freedom and identity of women within the Indian household. It finds the meaning of home by the portrayals of various women characters. This novel is based on Tamil novel “Aathukku Poganam” and the immediate concern of the novel is the tradition, which desires women a fair share of property and the brilliant exploration of themes of home, exile, and home making at various levels.

Protagonist Gayatri

Gayatri is protagonist of the novel *Going Home* and her friend Rama throws a light on the plight of middle class Indian women burdened with responsibilities and domesticity. The question rises to the readers that does woman happy in the home of parents in her second home (husbands). But both the friends’ narratives reveal their efforts to get freedom from mediocrity that binds them restricts them and become speed breakers in their path of fulfilling their dreams, their duties as a wife, daughter –in – law mother hardly permit them to maintain an equilibrium between all those factors, this vicious circle and leave them frustrated and their angst is seen in their actions. Women are seen as wooden show pieces subjected to male hegemony to quote from Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House* Nora wanted to be something worthier than doll in the *A Doll’s house*.

Gayatri, the protagonist always becomes nostalgic and takes pleasures in the found of memories of her maternal grandfather house in Mysore. As a child, she often tells her friend “I am going home.” It becomes one of the recurring themes of the novel. She describes minutely every nook and corner of maternal grandfathers’ home in contrast to the flat in Delhi, where she lives with her husband Shankar and Son. According to her that place is not a place to be called a house and compares her flat to a rat hole, which is crowded with things like Sofa – set, few beds, a dining table, chairs, a television and there is lack of space, not only physical space but space becomes a metaphor for her freedom that, she craves to build her identity. The flat in Delhi for Gayatri is not comfortable as her dream. It does not fulfill the definition of home that provides her solace, space to develop her skill of dance and this issue of freedom to give vent to their desires besides their workplace is common and frequently seen in lives of salaried middle-class women in India.

Rama

For Rama, Gayatri’s friend, home remains an elusive dream for her talent. Rama is a writer and socialist, but she finds herself locked in a loveless marriage with a husband who is envious of her fame. The sense of achievement remains partially attained if people who surrounds the life of a career-oriented woman, especially if her life partner himself becomes the biggest enemy and remains indifferent to her as in case of Rama who often feels humiliated in social and literary circles in absence of Dorai Swami a man with false ego. He is the person who is responsible for void in her life in spite of her being successful. Even her writings reflect what she feels within herself. Rama’s novel titled *Driftwood* eventually became a pointer to how she

herself floated on life, not unlike drift –wood. So, writing becomes an outlet for Rama from her frustration. She herself confesses if there is something one cannot speak aloud; if it chokes the throat one can unload her thoughts on paper by means of writing. Rama is the victim of discrimination where she was only the third daughter for her parents whereas Ravi only son was their favorite.

Random Accident of Birth

The status of a woman was governed by the random accident of her birth .The stereotype notion of Indian mothers regarding home is very true, in Gayatri’s case her husband Shankar is very supportive and convincing .Where as Durai, husband of Rama is extremely dominating man is indifferent to emotional need of her.

Home – Physical and Mental

Through eyes of Gayatri, home is a space, both physical and mental, that would help her to develop her skills. One more burning issue of singlehood of a girl, who does not get the match for her at right age she becomes an eye shore in Indian Society for example spinster Sheela. Gayatri in comparison to Rama is well treated by the husband yet craves for space. Therefore, it is significant that women should keep a balance between demands of domesticity, their personal aspirations and highly demanding workplace-Today men should stand by their side so that not only their dignity is maintained but they should become their mascot and they actually get a real home where their personality is enhanced not deteriorated.

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K. Mugeshpillai
Ph.D. Research Scholar
Department of English
Annamalai University
Annamalainagar
Tamilnadu
India

mugeshpillaimphil89@gmail.com

Dr. M. Soundhararajan
Assistant Professor
Department of English
Annamalai University