

Patriarchal and Matriarchal Perspectives in Rani Manicka's the Rice Mother

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ABSTRACT

Rani Manicka's The Rice Mother was analysed by employing feminist literary criticism that dwells on the patriarchal and matriarchal aspects presented in the novel. This is to fill the research gap on feminist literary criticism in this respect, focusing on Malaysian English novels. To do so, two objectives are set as (1) to examine the representations of the female characters in the patriarchal society by employing Simone De Beauvoir's The Second Sex theory and (2) to identify the levels of modern matriarchal society manifested through the protagonist in the novel by employing Goettner-Abendroth's Levels of Modern Matriarchal Society. A qualitative content analysis (QCA) was used. Using an integrated view of text, the social reality is explored. The results indicate that the female characters in the selected novel vary in the patriarchal context where most females are the victims of the patriarchal society. It was also found that the protagonist proved to be a formidable matriarch through her behaviour in all four levels identified. This study contributes to the analysis of feminist literary criticism in the Malaysian context. It is also deemed beneficial in a broader context as it can provide a voice for women who are still considered as the marginalised other in the society. The study highlights the lack of female representation in popular culture. This study is also deemed crucial to empower women as it can provide a voice for women who are still being considered as the other for the balance of power in society and a strong family as a small social institution.

Keywords: Matriarchy; patriarchy; Rani Manicka; reduced inequalities; strong family institution

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INTRODUCTION

This study deals with two important aspects of patriarchy and matriarchy in the Malaysian context concerning women exemplified in the Malaysian Indian culture as a case study. Ugwanyi (2017) posited feminist ideology as an advocate for women's equality in social, political, and economic domains to have equal rights as men. It involves the combination of the doctrine of equality rights along with social transformation to create a platform for women (Mahmudah, 2019). Feminist literary criticism derived from feminism is mainly based on the basic feminist theories and the politics of feminism (Ugwanyi, 2017, p.49; Guo, 2019, p.49). Recently, feminist literary criticism has developed into a movement in which women are to have their own stance (Rana & Rashid, 2020). Dugaje (2019) believed that women should represent their community because the male representation of women is believed to be "biased, inauthentic and unacceptable" (p.788). The current study scrutinizes *The Rice Mother* by Rani Manicka from a feminist literary criticism perspective in terms of patriarchal and matriarchal aspects focusing on the female protagonist, the heroin as the other female characters are revolving around her. This study adopts feminist literary criticism in the Malaysian context. It highlights the lack of women's representation in popular culture as demonstrated by Ibrahim (2007) who emphasised that every woman's experience is unique, depending on their background. Rich (1980) argued that there should be an understanding of each woman's experience individually rather than through a universal framework induced by the Western concept of woman which may lead to void outcomes. Many female-centric literary works present female characters as suppressed and depict them as fighting against a patriarchal society (Dugaje, 2019; Sankar, Prabhavati & Sankarakumar, 2019). To challenge these stereotypes, it is essential to present strong female characters who demonstrate that women can be powerful, competent, and decisive individuals (Teh, 2003). Bamane (2014) claimed there is a lack of research on matriarchal systems in which women are at the lead because male writers define the matriarchal system as a sub-system of the patriarchal ideology rather than an ideology on its own. Hence, the first objective of this research is to examine the representation of the female characters in the novel, *The Rice Mother* in terms of self-identity and resilience in the patriarchal society by employing Simone De Beauvoir's *The Others*. The second objective is to identify the levels of matriarchal society depicted by Goettner-Abendroth (2009; 2018) through the portrayal of the heroin Lakshmi in the novel. This research is intended to add to the body of knowledge concerning feminist literary criticism in the Malaysian context to fill the gap.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S 'THE OTHER'

Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* presented women from the biological, psychoanalytical, and historical materialism perspectives. She discoursed women as the 'Other'. She explained the consequences of confining women to that status. From a woman's point of view, Beauvoir investigated how women live in the world. She delved into the various challenges a woman faces only for being a woman (i.e. in her quest for a full membership in humanity). It is interesting to look at two studies presented by male and female authors in the analysis. The analysis was conducted through feminist literary criticism in light of De Beauvoir's theory of the *Other*. The first study by Bozorgimoghaddam and Moeen (2014) highlighted the representation of women as the second sex in *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. It examined the representation of the three main female characters in the novel as inferior. The other study is by Ugwanyi (2017) on Amma Dharko's novels on the portrayal of feminist issues that are prevalent in the African

literacy discourse. In this study, De Beauvoir's theory was supported where women were depicted as readers; and consumers of male-produced literature, and thus, were presented as submissive, passive, and oppressed by their male counterparts. Nevertheless, the same theory was refuted as it was about women being writers. Ugwanyi's (2017) study was on the novel written by a female author who refutes all the traditional patriarchal rules and urges the need for solidarity amongst women and their means to achieve their goal against patriarchy. In her attempt to formulate the *Other*, Simone De Beauvoir (1997) argued that each consciousness holds hostility toward others. According to her, a man defines himself as essential contrary to a non-essential woman. In her book, *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir delved into the concept of women being relegated to the status of *object* and *other*.

Sankar, Prabhavati, and Sankarakumar (2019) have analysed cross-cultural values and divulgements of the female protagonists in the novels of two Indian novelists, Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni, and Bharati Mukherje. The writings revolve around major problems faced by Indian women such as abusive husbands' ill-treatment and the loss of self-identity and individuality. These researchers revealed that the female character's identity in these two novels can emancipate women from their traditional bonding and abusive relationships. The female characters are analyzed in terms of their self-identity and resilience to discuss the findings against Sankar, Prabhavati, and Sankarakumar's (2019) findings on female characters in their study. Hence, this article attempts to understand Rani Manicka's development of the female characters in her novel which lies between the lines of the male tradition or stepping over the line to empower the female characters through their self-identity and independence.

PATRIARCHAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN NOVELS

In a patriarchal world, Beauvoir explicates in *The Second Sex* how the social construction of gender degraded women to a less-than-human status life. Beauvoir indicated that religion and social institutions serve to confirm that "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as autonomous being" (xxi). Thus, as presented by Beauvoir, in patriarchy man defines a woman's role which denies her any chance of free choice. As such, within a patriarchal setting, man dictates boundaries for woman because woman "is defined and differentiated concerning man ...; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (xxi). Hence, a woman's existence in this respect, is restricted to 'otherness'. All that comes of a woman and/or produced by her is measured by and against the essential man. She is merely a relative being whose fate man has doomed to the status of the 'Other'. Dugaje (2019) focused on the representation of female characters in V.S Naipaul's early novels such as *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *Miguel Street* (1959), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), and *A Bend in the River* (1979) in which the female characters coming from Indian background are depicted by Naipaul as hardly having an independent existence from men. They are portrayed as vulnerable wives exploited to perform hard work with no freedom or respect. Dugaje (2019) stated that Naipaul's portrayal of women is affected by the traditional male bias resulting in the projection of a negative stereotype of female characters.

MATRIARCHAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN NOVELS

Besides patriarchy, matriarchy is another aspect employed in the current to analyse female characters. While patriarchy is seen as the absolute power of man and control over women and

other family members, matriarchy is the power from within. Matriarchy is the relative power to that of man that supports a relative status. H. Goettner-Abendroth explicated matriarchy in *Matriarchal societies: Studies on indigenous cultures across the globe* which is elaborated in the theoretical part of this paper. To analyze the matriarchal aspects of novels, this research discusses two studies for their relevance. For example, Bamane (2014) examined women's ever-changing roles and status in the patriarchal system in Indian society. She concluded that matriarchy is not the reversal of patriarchy; however, it is a system that should stand on its own. Her research on the changing roles of matriarchal figures in the patriarchal ethos is depicted in Despande's selected novels (*Dark Holds No Terrors, That Long Silence, Root Shadows, and Binding Vine*). These four novels present a "women-centric narrative through interdicting the possibility of co-existence of mothers and daughters [which] shows their irresistible yearning for maternal home" (p. 39). In the other study, Doci (2017) focused on the role of matriarchy in *The Door* which is presented through a relationship between Magdushka and her servant by utilizing the views of Simone De Beauvoir's theory. The main female, Emerenc while expected to adopt the role of the "Other" being a maid, she embodies the traits of both a matron and an independent woman. By challenging Simone De Beauvoir's ideology, Emerenc emerges as a strong matriarch who does not conform to patriarchal norms, thus demonstrating strength in being a provider, protector, and powerful woman. Both Bamane (2014) and Doci (2017) focused on the changing roles of women.

In light of the above, this study, examines Lakshmi, the protagonist in *The Rice Mother* to explore whether she asserted herself as a formidable matriarch, similar to the characters represented by other novelists. Thus, the characters in *The Rice Mother* by Rani Manicka were examined in depth to investigate their representation in Malaysian society and their self-identities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework is based on *The Second Sex* (1997) by De Beauvoir which presents the notion of perceiving woman as *The Other* in the patriarchal society. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir discussed how women are relegated to the status of the "object" and the "other". H. M. Parshley in the "Translator's Note" to *The Second Sex*, the translator of *The Second Sex* to English; indicated:

The central thesis of Mlle de Beauvoir's book is that since patriarchal times women have in general been forced to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men, a position comparable in many respects with that racial minorities even though women constitute numerically at least half of the human race, and further that this secondary standing is not imposed of necessity by natural 'feminine' characteristics but rather by strong environmental forces of educational and social tradition under the purposeful control of men. (xxxix)

This makes it clear that a woman's inferiority is not an inherited matter but rather socially and culturally constructed in service of the patriarchal dominance of man. Such a notion implies that women's concept of self-identity is defined as occupying a secondary place where their powers are limited and often dominated by the men around them. In other words, female identities are contextualized within the larger social and symbolic structure of a family and society. As for self-resilience, it is seen in the women characters who are shaped by their roles and experiences as mothers in a patriarchal setup. The children also remember their mother's tireless efforts to keep the family afloat. They describe her efforts as "to her credit, she took the disaster in her stride....

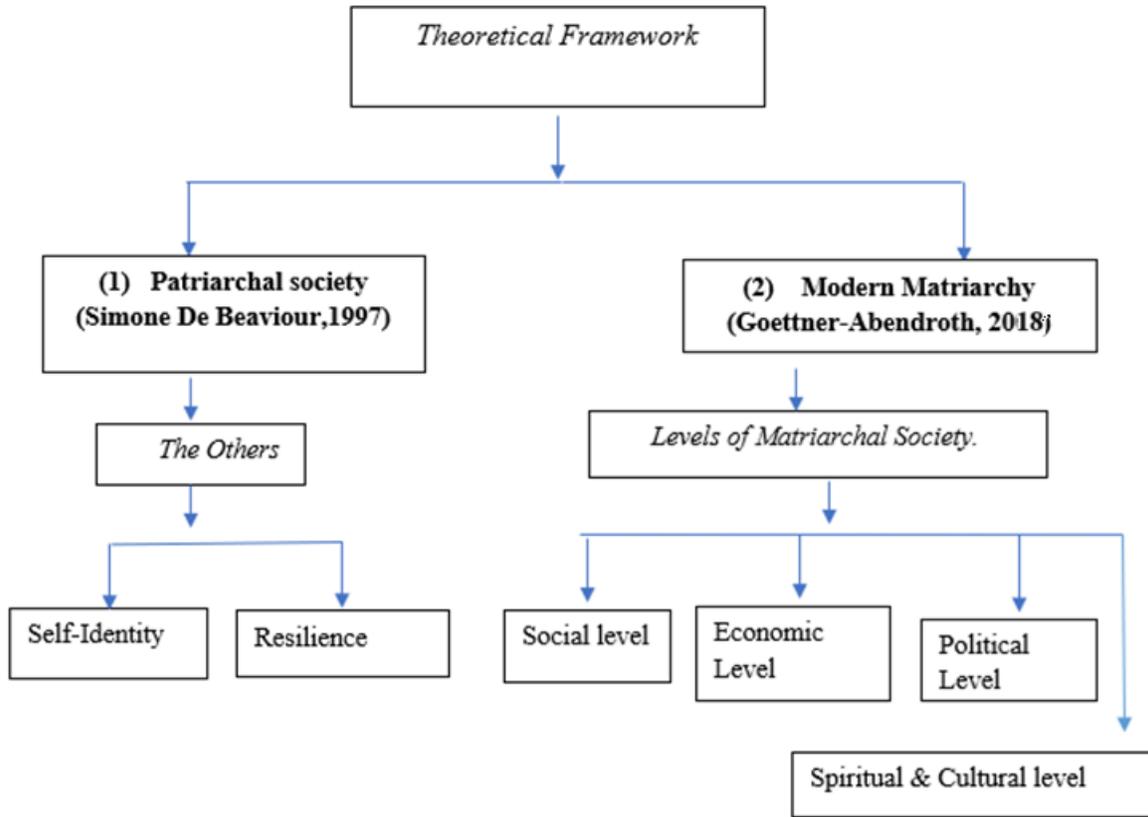
The Japanese made us all very resourceful, but mother was an undefeatable force.... The advent of the Japanese made Mother an entrepreneur, and she had quite a knack for it too” (Manicka 2002, p. 89).

Another aspect of the theoretical framework is based on Goettner-Abendroth’s (2018) notion of matriarchy in indigenous societies where women are found to have power within the limited local societies. Goettner-Abendroth’s (2018) notion of matriarchy forms women's identity through the roles they play and their self-perception where the power of women is prioritized that they are empowered to define themselves through familial and societal relationships, agency, and cultural heritage. Matriarchy may be an equal and a substitute to patriarchy and maybe a supportive complementary system to patriarchy. The implementation of the concept of matriarchy in its four levels in the analysis of this paper is not only meant to investigate women's identity, but also resilience which manifests itself in the women’s ability to adapt, persevere, and prosper when facing challenges. Through emphasizing the importance and role of relationships, collaboration, and shared experiences, matriarchy empowers women to overcome distress and maintain their identity and well-being. The four levels of matriarchal society are (1) the social level which is the maternal values by mothers to run the society, (2) the economic level in which the matriarch of the family has the responsibility to all family members by being fair and equal, (3) the political level in which the matriarch accommodates all the community affairs by overcoming the conflict and being the decision maker (Setri & Setiawaan, 2020), and lastly (4) the spiritual and cultural level which is defined as the *sacred societies and cultures of the Divine feminine or goddess* (Goettner-Abendroth, 2018).

Figure 1 below outlines the theoretical framework of the study combining two main aspects of both (i) patriarchal society by Simone De Beauvoir and (ii) modern matriarchy by Goettner-Abendroth to analyse the novel qualitatively.

Figure 1

The Proposed Theoretical Framework based on Simone De Beaviour (1997) and Goettner-Abendroth (2018) to analyse the novel, The Rice Mother



METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach to collect the data. Patton (2002) defined Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) as “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings”. In the view of Hsieh and Shannon (2005), QCA is, “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”. In the context of this research, it is the subjective interpretation of the content through systematic coding and analysis tabulated in the data analysis file by identifying the themes related to the concepts outlined in Figure 1 and patterns manifested in the text. As Shanton (2004) posited, transferability is the “provision of background data to establish the context of the study and detailed description of phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made” (p. 73).

SAMPLE

The sample for this research was chosen using a purposive sampling technique. According to Etikan et al. (2016), the purposive sampling technique is also known as judgment sampling, as the sample is deliberately chosen due to its relevant content that fits the objectives of this study. Rani Manicka has written four novels: *The Rice Mother* (2003), *Touching Earth* (2005), *The Japanese Lover* (2009), and *Black Jack* (2013). For this research, *The Rice Mother* was selected because it strives to break the silence and taboos that are developed regarding the female body and sexuality in Malaysia (Singh, 2015). It is about gender equality, feminism, patriarchal society, and discussion about women's experiences of their bodies (Singh, 2015). *The Rice Mother*, which implies the meaning of rice as the source of survival in this context, was selected as it fits into the Malaysian context as Indians are one of the three main races in Malaysia. In this research, the sample size is one novel that consists of 432 pages written by Rani Manicka, an award-winning feminist novelist with the prestigious Commonwealth Writer's Prize in 2003. The sample size may seem small for generalization of the findings, but this will add to the existing literature (Sandelowski, 1995). Therefore, the researchers do not generalize the findings.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

In the light of the theoretical framework outlined in Figure 1, the female characters in the novel are analyzed. For the first aspect, the lexical items/expressions that are used by the novelist to describe the female characters in terms of their portrayal of self-identity and their resilience in a patriarchal society are analysed. The various structures of patriarchal society, cultural and religious aspects that exert power and control over the self-identity, and the resilience of women are also analysed highlighting the status of the inferior 'other' that woman occupies in a patriarchal society. The representation of women is scrutinised by investigating the extent to which they fall under the category of the Second Sex under patriarchy or the powerful decision-maker of matriarchy. The aspect of a woman's life as a wife in the marital life which embodies the patriarchal power relations that result in male domination and female subordination was also analysed as it portrays patriarchy (Singh, 2015).

SELF-IDENTITY AND RESILIENCE IN THE FEMALE CHARACTERS

The first research objective is to examine the representations of female characters in *The Rice Mother* in relation to self-identity and resilience in a patriarchal society based on De Beauvoir's *The Other*. The main female character analysed is Lakshmi, the protagonist. However, there is a limited investigation of Mohini, Anna, and Lalitha who are Lakshmi's daughters, Ratha and Rani the daughters-in-law, and Dimple, the granddaughter while discussing the character of Lakshmi as these female characters interact with and relate to Lakshmi reflecting social construct of both patriarchal and matriarchal notions.

LAKSHMI (THE PROTAGONIST)

Lakshmi is the protagonist in the novel, *The Rice Mother* which revolves around her journey where she, as a character, is inspired by the author's grandmother – "Expect Lakshmi, who is the fierce spirit of my dear grandmother" (Manicka, 2002). Lakshmi is introduced through a detailed description of her appearance, body language, and acts throughout the novel. Contrary to the other female characters as being to some good degree a shadow of her character seen through her lenses, Lakshmi is the optimal character representing matriarchy in the novel.

Lakshmi's development of self-identity and her resilience can be seen in three stages of her life- (i) from birth to getting married to Ayah (ii) her journey as a wife and a mother, and (iii) a grandmother. In every life stage, Lakshmi faces struggles in her daily life to retain her self-identity.

(i) At this first stage, Lakshmi was born in a time when daughters were considered a burden, and at times their parents would despise them, and so did Lakshmi's parents.

Excerpt 1: "My mother said that when I was born, she cried to see that I was only a girl and my disgusted father disappeared" (p.6).

Lakshmi's self-identity began to change when she attained puberty and since then, she has been directed toward the conception of her self-identity (Devasahayam, 2005). Ever since Lakshmi attained puberty, her mother started to seek alliances even though Lakshmi was only fourteen years old as echoed in Sheela's (2018), a girl has to depend on a man at every stage of life. Sheela (2018) also stated that Indian women are married off without their consent, and this eventually leads to more problems such as *child marriages*, *marital rape*, and *dowry burden* as expressed by the character in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 2: "I stared mutely at her. Her mind was made up. I was doomed" (p. 11)

The lexical choice of the past participle adjective *doomed* indicates how devastated Lakshmi was to leave her self-identity to be a stranger's significant other at a very young age. Lakshmi as an individual, is depicted to be codified in relation to men, never as an individual or in terms of her strengths and values (Singh, 2015).

(ii) The second stage of Lakshmi's life was in her various stages of womanhood, at the age of fourteen to a stranger in a foreign land. In the extract below, the usage of the adverb *forever* indicates that after the marriage function is over, she will no longer be a child, but she cannot do anything about it.

Excerpt 3: "When time stood still and my childhood fled forever, screaming in horror" (p.13).

According to Guo (2019), patriarchal ideology destroys a woman's consciousness about her potential power. Contrary, Lakshmi was strong enough, to defeat the ideology of young Indian brides who were seen as timid.

Marital rape and child marriages were some issues addressed, as Lakshmi was married off at a very young age which had the potential to break and destroy the self-identity and the ability to love fully to freely display emotions (Singh, 2015). She did not consent to the sexual act that had taken place, making it a marital rape. The sexual experiment on Lakshmi was a disturbing, confusing, and painful experience. (Singh, 2015). In this situation, Lakshmi was regarded as *the other sex* in the beginning because her consent and her willingness were not considered. Ayah, Lakshmi's husband, destroyed her self-identity as she is quoted to be "a bruised child" (p.14). It was rape and sexual abuse because women were deemed as nothing under the patriarchal system (De Beauvoir, 1997). There are two important metaphors used by the novelist to describe Lakshmi as a mother. She was first known as the *ocean* due to her beautiful, mysterious, and

resilient nature. Due to her resilience, courage, and personal strength, she was also known as the *tiger*; this shows how the novelist is building up Lakshmi's self-identity positively to be loving, perfect, and furious at the same time.

(iii) The third stage of Lakshmi's life was as a grandmother and a great-grandmother. Throughout the novel, she makes her entire family complete and strong like an *oak tree*. This indicates that Lakshmi did not conform to De Beauvoir's framework as she was portrayed to increasingly developing an independent self-identity in her attempts to build a strong, resilient family.

RANI (THE FIRST DAUGHTER IN LAW)

Rani is Lakshmi's first daughter-in-law, the wife of her first-born, Lakshman who insisted to marry her when he first laid eyes on her, but Lakshmi was not so keen because Rani did not match Lakshmi's beauty standards.

Excerpt 4: "Their daughter was no beauty, she thought the girl was hideous, with rashes that disappeared into sleeves of her saree blouse and ended God knew where" (p.222)

Rani did not make a good impression on Lakshmi as she was not quiet regarding the marriage alliances, and she wrote a letter to Lakshman luring him with the amount of dowry to be offered. Nevertheless, as the novel goes on, readers learn that Rani was forced into it because her brother was keen on marrying Anna. Throughout Rani's marriage, she was unhappy, and this supported De Beauvoir's statement on married women being pushed towards a life filled with passiveness; rather than sinking in her despair, she asserted power within herself.

Excerpt 5: "If he imaged that I was going to play the shy, foolish bride, he is much mistaken. I was born and bred in a tough city and brought up to be bold" (p. 234)

Rani throughout the novel, is shown as the epitome of De Beauvoir's *The Other Sex* because as she is married, she develops a dependence that she wants to be referred to as a *rich wife* who is provided for. Unlike the uneducated Lakshmi, who struggled to make a living, Rani was described as *greedy* many times in the novel as she would do anything to get her way.

MOHINI (THE FIRST DAUGHTER)

At a young age, Mohini was already attracting adults. A mother she is, Lakshmi knew the moment Mohini attained puberty that she needed to be wedded to give herself a *male guardian* before something bad happened to her (Singh, 2015). Mohini was presented only as a girl with extraordinary beauty, selflessness, and resilience as she sacrificed herself to save her brother from the Japanese troops. According to De Beauvoir (1997), any woman who is daring, intelligent, and very strong is seen as a threat to men's authority.

ANNA (THIRD DAUGHTER IN ORDER)

Anna is Lakshmi's third child after Mohini and poses insecurity. Anna did not have bottle-green eyes or magnolia skin like Mohini. During the Japanese occupation, most girls were dressed up as boys to school. Anna was a victim of this. Her long hair was cut short to make her look like a

boy. However, Mohini did not go through this, instead, she was hidden away in a hole under her house because Lakshmi decided that her beauty shall not be touched or seen. When Lakshman and Lakshmi find a prospective suitor for Anna, she knows she will “not be nervous about that day” (p. 217) like other girls because she trusts her mother’s judgment implicitly. Though Anna stated that she was brave, she must go through the traditions set by Indian society for a *proper unmarried girl*. The adjective *proper* was used to indicate that to attain some respect from people around her, she must follow the rules. Sheela (2018) stated that any Indian woman who denies the practice of rituals and the customs constituted by the Indian patriarchal society will be treated as a sinner that Lakshmi would not allow for her Anna. Hence, Anna’s salient self-identity is bravery and obedience.

RATHA

Ratha, Lakshmi’s daughter-in-law, was an orphan brought up by a kind spinster who had set aside a dowry of 5,000 Malaysian Ringgit (equivalent to around \$1,500 at that time). Lakshmi was very pleased with Ratha and her determination to ask for Ratha’s hand for Jeyan is as follows:

Excerpt 6: “It was a very paltry sum to negotiate with, but Mother was so determined to have the girl for Jeyan that she would have agreed even if there was no dowry on the table.”

Beauvoir (1997) stated that married women suffer from awareness of their submission to their men and although aware of their suffering they dare not revolt, and submit unwillingly to the male domination. Ratha’s personality is strong as she declares her unhappiness leading to *chasing away* her husband and raising her children on her own.

Excerpt 7: “She made it perfectly clear that she wanted nothing at all to do with her husband. She begun divorce proceedings” (p. 267)

Ratha who started building her own self-identity was not *the Other Sex* and never wanted to be dependent. Despite living in a patriarchal society, Ratha seeks individualism away from Jeyan to be independent through an awakened subjectivity. Her resilience made her set herself free from her unhappiness to present a new empowered image of her (Singh, 2015).

LALITHA (THE YOUNGEST DAUGHTER)

Lalitha is Lakshmi’s youngest child and the epitome of all Lakshmi’s fears. Lalitha was “extraordinarily ugly with the colour and texture of bitter chocolate.” In this novel, Lalitha is shown as a victim of the patriarchal system for she does not fit the beauty standards.

Excerpt 8: “If mother had sat down and made a list of the things she didn’t want in a daughter-father’s wide hips, flat bottom, chicken legs ... a pair of wide-set small eyes a fleshy nose- that is a picture of Lalitha.” (p. 218)

As such, most likely Lalitha will not get married nor get any proposals based on the traditions of Indian culture. Feminine beauty is not only considered in Indian culture as envisaged in the novel but rather universal.

DIMPLE (LAKSHMI'S GRANDDAUGHTER)

Dimple is Rani and Lakshman's daughter, believed to be the reincarnation of Mohini, with the same green eyes and fair skin. Dimple is the closest grandchild to Lakshmi and Ayah as she often visited them and made their house "seem brighter, bigger and better" (p. 252). Dimple is subjugated through her husband's sadomasochism. Sadomasochism is a practice that exploits and oppresses women for men's sexual excitement and satisfaction. It reinforces the imbalance of power and the heterosexual patriarchal social pattern of male dominance over females enforcing subjugation, oppression, and exploitation of women (Singh, 2015). Dimple finds her marital life dominated by her husband whom she chose to stay with either because of the lavish lifestyle offered as she has never worked even a single day in her life or because of her daughter, Nisha, who deserves a father and a mother. This is claimed by De Beauvoir (1997) where she stated that married life teaches women resiliency and passiveness towards men.

LEVELS OF MATRIARCHY MANIFESTED THROUGH LAKSHMI

SOCIAL LEVEL

In this section of the second phase of analysis, the focus is restricted to the character of Lakshmi because matriarchy is intended to be a positive aspect of power use that is caring rather than controlling. As such, other dominant characters in the novel as Rani, do not fit into the category for they meld into a false feminist figure to obtain their desires. The social level focused on maternal values such as caring, protecting, motherliness, and ensuring the future of the family members as a priority to run a strong family. Lakshmi's love and compassion were shown throughout the novel though the novelist did not depict her as a loving and soft mother or wife, but rather as a strong and hard-headed character. In some instances, Lakshmi was shown with a sense of motherliness as in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 9: "I realized that in her strong hands were love, laughter, fine clothes, praise, food, money and the power to make the sunshine brightly into all our lives. (p. 79)

The underlined noun phrase, *strong hands*, shows the extent Lakshmi was an unconventional mother. Nevertheless, Lakshmi's characteristics demonstrate the basic elements of matriarchy which are caring, protecting, and motherliness (Setri & Setiawan, 2020). According to Goettner-Abendroth (2018), the imposition of patriarchy against Lakshmi and her daughters made Lakshmi a matriarch struggling towards self-emancipation.

ECONOMIC LEVEL

According to Setri and Setiawan (2020), the economic level of matriarchal society is defined by a condition when members of a family share a deep trust. Lakshmi manages her money, goods, and services in the toughest times equally among her children and her husband and she astonishes her husband with her knowledge of managing money.

Excerpt 10: “Finally taking a deep breath and looking him directly in his eyes, I told him that from now on I would be the one paying the bills. He would receive a small allowance... he could borrow no more money ... financial health.” (p. 35)

POLITICAL LEVEL

Even though Ayah was the breadwinner of the family, it was evident that Lakshmi was the main decision maker in the household with home management skills bearing in mind justice and equity at home as a small institution.

Excerpt 11: “All of us- dad, Lakshman, Mohini, Sevens, Jeyan, Lalitha and me. All the decisions big and small were out into a large platter and placed at her feet and that incredibly quick, ... on what she felt was best for us.” (p. 79)

Lakshmi took personal responsibilities for every decision in the household which embodies her as the household leader and a matriarch at the political level (Setri & Setiawan, 2020). Furthermore, Boehmer (2009) posited that there is an absence of women’s narratives in politics which is problematised further in the context of diasporic communities where migration, exile, and yearning for the homeland dominate the understanding of the community. These women with their lack of decision-making power, and their absence from the political, and social landscape remain as an invisible shadow in the political sphere of the nation.

SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL LEVEL

Lakshmi was an orthodox Hindu, portrayed to be religious and spiritual. For every obstacle, she would pray to her favourite deity, Lord Ganesh. She would always pray for the goodness and well-being of her children.

Excerpt 12: “That evening I took the children to the temple. I laid baby Sevens on the cold floor and stood my children in a row in front of me, together we prayed. “Please Ganesh, do not forsake us now...Please give them back their father.” (p.63)

Though Lakshmi is strong and not a conventional wife, she is still very much inclined with her spiritual and cultural side. That is to say that mothers play a pertinent role in sustaining and transmitting the homeland culture. The protagonist Lakshmi passes her values of thrift and pragmatism and thus the mother figure becomes a conduit for the cultural values to preserve their identity. This is further illustrated in Connerton’s (1989) study of the transmission of memories in societies. Connerton highlighted the significance of the *act of transfer* whereby cultural memory is transmitted through the performance of practices and the roles played by the women in the family. Thus, the mother becomes the primary source of such representation where the transmission of the cultural past constitutes a matrilineal legacy.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While the first objective of the current study investigates the concept of the other by De Beauvoir where women are seen as subordinate sex to the primary sex of men, the characters examined

for this study such as Lakshmi and Ratha were victims at some stages, but the ambivalence of their self-identity made them evolve their self-identity to resist patriarchy by becoming a force of resilience in facing the challenges in life. Both female characters became an undefeatable force independent from their husbands and eventually refuted De Beauvoir's *The Other Sex*. According to Ugwanyi (2017), the two characters stepped over the patriarchal line. The novelist has empowered the female characters through their self-identity and independence. Sankar, Prabhavati, and Sankarakumar (2019) argued that women from traditional societies like Lakshmi and Ratha often faced difficulties that oblige them to transform their identities to suit modern society. Lakshmi and Ratha were raised in a very traditional setting, they had to break out of their moulds and evolve with a strong self-identity. In the novels examined by Sankar, Prabhavati, and Sankarakumar (2019), women were ill-treated by abusive husbands, such as Lakshmi, who was forced into a child marriage and consequently raped by her husband out of will. Similarly, Lakshmi rose from the patriarchal society and struggled to find her identity with resilience to be independent. In conclusion, Lakshmi and Ratha's character development is in line with Sankar, Prabhavati, and Sankarakumar's (2019) findings on the resilience of female characters. The other three characters – Mohini, Lalitha, and Anna are shown as victims of the patriarchal society. Mohini, on the other hand, was tragically taken away by the Japanese troops during the Japanese invasion which exerted power against this beautiful woman. Lalitha remained unmarried because she was considered *extraordinarily ugly*, and Anna was force-married to Ganesh. These three examples showcase the negative self-identity of these female characters as a result of the dominance of the patriarchal society. Similar findings were reported by Bozorgimoghaddam and Moeen (2014) who analysed the representations of the three main female characters in *The Great Gatsby* whom they found to be inferior and submissive to the authoritative men in the novel as theorised by De Beauvoir (1997).

The second objective outlines four levels of matriarchal ideology namely the social, economic, political, and spiritual. Lakshmi exhibits strong matriarchal traits, particularly economically, by achieving financial independence where she equally distributes resources among her family. This parallels Doci's (2017) findings on dominant female characters in *The Door*. Lakshmi shares similarities with Emerenc as a formidable matriarch in this respect.

In conclusion, this study highlights the patriarchal control faced by the protagonist and other female characters. It also examines literary texts' perspectives on themes such as freedom, woman empowerment, and matriarchal rights in an attempt to contribute to feminist literary criticism. Furthermore, building a stronger family structure requires an establishment of power balance and power use in the institution through fairness and justice.

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