

## Shifts in child psyche: a psychoanalytic interpretation in r. Chudamani's "that fragile world"

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### ABSTRACT

Chudamani is a Tamil writer who has penned numerous literary pieces in different genres of literature. She reveals the suffering of men, women & children in her short fiction. The short story "That Fragile World" is taken up for the study. Chudamani has portrayed a child as the protagonist in this story and has depicted its suffering. The present study is an attempt to examine the short fiction "That Fragile world" from a psychoanalytic aspect. It also aims to analyse the major characters in the narrative. The plot moves around two core characters: Leela and Devaki. This study is based on the basic tenets of Psychoanalysis which has been observed in the protagonist's psyche. It also traces the changes in the protagonist's psyche according to the situations which occurred in her past and her present life

### Keywords

Narrative, Psyche, Past & Present Experience, Shifts

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### Introduction

R. Chudamani is a Tamil writer who indited more than five hundred short stories, several plays, and novels. Chudamani's works have been translated by many translators in the present era to give universal appeal to her literary works. Chudamani's few short stories are made into plays and are staged in the present era. Most of her short stories focus on the psychology of her characters. M.H Abrams states that "Stories of character focus instead on of the state of mind and motivation, or on the psychological and moral qualities, of the protagonists." (364) In the same way, Chudamani portrays her short fiction with psychological and moral aspects to reform society.

### Chudamani and Children

"That Fragile World" is a short fiction which scrutinizes the minds of the characters. Human emotion, especially the pathos is commonly found in the writings of Chudamani. According to Chris Baldick Pathos is "the emotionally moving quality or power of a literary work or of particular passages within it, appealing especially to our feelings of sorrow, pity, and compassionate sympathy." (251) Chudamani uncovers the pathetic conditions of children in this story. She has given a vivid picture of the child's needs. Chudamani's stories fascinates its readers with a message for the society. Initially she gave much importance to women and children and it was explicated by Prema Nandakumar as "women and children are predominant in...fictional structures" (Chudamani 2015, xix). Children are the protagonists in many of chudamani's stories where she reveals the child's psyche. She has well construed the children in this short story as Prema Nandakumar defines that

Chudamani had a special connect with children. She had watched them closely and also imagined the currents of thoughts that swirled within them, seeking clues from their external reactions to adult behaviour. By sheer application, she had mastered the distinctive and convoluted child psychology which could be predictable and unpredictable. There is only one term that rules the world of children and that is love. (Chudamani 2015, xxvi)

### Narrative and Psychoanalysis

"That Fragile World" is the story taken from the collections of short stories entitled Seeing in the Dark. The story depicts the picture of a child, named Leela who is the protagonist and the major character Devaki. Leela is too affectionate to her neighbour sister Devaki. Through the actions, and thoughts of the child, it can be observed how she is too close to Devaki. In the midst of all this, the child recalls her turbulent experience which she had in her past. This study is based on the theory of Psychoanalysis and the basic tenets of the same. Psychological literary criticism evolved from the practice of Psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is a scientific theory constituted by Sigmund Freud. According to Freud, there are three important tenets of Psyche: The Unconscious, The Preconscious & The Conscious which lie in three psychic zones: Id, Ego & Superego. This short story 'That Fragile World' deals with these principles. This study also aims to analyze the child's psyche through the treatment of psychoanalytic perspectives

The setting of the narrative, "That Fragile World" starts with the conversation in the form of request and it reveals a binding between the core characters, Leela and Devaki. The binding between these two characters expresses a kind of love and affection between them. The child spends abundant time with her. Meanwhile the behaviour of the child can be observed through the lines:

'Akka, I love you.' The child thought a bit, and corrected herself, 'I love you very, very much!'  
'I love Leela Kutti too!'  
'I love you more than you love me. I love you thiiiiiiis much.' The child stretched her arms without her arms without stirring from embrace in which the two were locked. (Chudamani, 8)

### Connecting the Psyche

Expressions are the most significant elements of the characters. This child's behaviour shows what it seeks? Leela is aware of her needs love and affection from her neighbour sister and she asks "Akka I like you so much. Will you come and stay with me, or shall I stay here?" (9) The psyche of a child is longing for love and care from anyone. While observing the conversation between Leela and Devaki, the psyche of Leela gradually reveals the past experience which she had with her aunt "Athai" as "Athai used to be there, but not now" (10). Generally, some of the children have the habit of asking questions to know about anything that comes their way. The child, Leela raises a few questions to understand what is in the picture? drawn by Devaki. She inquires as "Who is this, Akka", "Why is she lying down?" and "Is it night in the picture?" (10). Chudamani also traces the psyche of a young woman Devaki who is of marriageable age. She thinks of her bridegroom and it can be understood through the behaviour of Devaki when she draws the second picture and answers Leela as "He is the Prince.... And see how smartly he stands!" (11). At certain point, the child understands the words of Devaki when she connects the first picture ("Sleeping Beauty") and the second picture ("Prince Charming") with imagination and express that they both are going to be married. The inner feelings of Devaki made are knit into a story by her and she asks Leela "Isn't the story nice?" (11)

### Present and Past Experience

The past experiences of the child is still in her psyche in the unconscious level, when Devaki asks whether the story is nice? The physical and mental response of the child entirely changes which can be traced in the following lines:

Leela's face suddenly turned fierce, her eyes reddened with rage. 'I don't want this picture. I don't like it. I don't like the bridegroom. I don't want him!' The tiny fingers turned into tongues of flame and scored the second figure with venom. 'No bridegroom...no, no, no!' The tiny figure trembled with the intensity of rage. The pencil drawing was mutilated. How many stabs, punches. 'No bridegroom, I don't like him.' (Chudamani, 11)

From the reaction of the child, it can be understood that the child has some indelible grief in her mind. Devaki questions "Do you like Appa or Amma?" (12) Leela responds suddenly with an answer "Neither of them... I like Athai!" (12) because she was the one who was too close to Leela in her past. The relationship between Devaki and Leela is blended with love and care. When Athai gets married and moves to mother in law's house, the child felt

so depressed and screamed as "Athai... Athai... Athai" (13). The child couldn't tolerate the situation and "bursts into tears" (13). The child was heartbroken and left in a pensive mood. In spite of staying with her parents she felt like an orphan and searched for Athai with aching heart. The child expresses her vehemence through words with an interpretation in mind that "marriage meant bridegroom, and bridegroom meant separation" (13).

### Shifts

Through the lenses of psychoanalysis, the child's psyche transfers from one level to another through the phases of Conscious, Pre-conscious & Unconscious. The child was euphoric when she was with her Athai in the past she was aware and was in the stage of conscious level. The same child with Devaki is comfortable outside but her psyche lies in the region of the unconscious. It is a kind of repression in the child. Shalini Saxena Mital describes "Repression takes place because of a conflict between the conscious portions of the ego and the superego and the unconscious id." (28) The present state of the child is unconscious which carries many things of her past which are hidden. Ann B. Dobie elucidates on the unconscious as:

Freudian theory is the primacy of the unconscious. Hidden from the conscious mind, which Freud compared to that small portion of an iceberg that is visible above the surface of the water, the unconscious is like the powerful unseen mass below it. Because the conscious mind is not aware of its submerged counterpart, it may mistake the real causes of behavior. An individual may be unable to tell the difference between what is happening and what she thinks is happening. In short, our actions are the result of forces we do not recognize and therefore cannot control. (Dobie, 56)

The narrative shifts from the present to the past through the character of Leela. She got a change in her life with Devaki, who looks like her Athai. This made her come out of the turbulent past. She presently feels the same affection and care in Devaki. She gets the same "the infectious enthusiasm, and the comfort of friendship" with her. She forgets her melancholy with the help of Devaki's presence but when actions of Devaki start acting the same way as her Athai did she gets depressed here the psyche of the child is at the level of the preconscious. The relationship continues between the child and Devaki but the child is conscious and well aware that she shouldn't leave Devaki out of control. The child is in the world of joy, while Devaki writes the name of the child as "V. L-I-L-A" on the first page of the notebook. Suddenly she says "No, no." you should write as "L-E-E-L-A". (17). The old memories burst in her which she had with her Athai. The child's psyche reflects the strong relationship which she had with her Athai and she orders with a heavy heart as "You must write my name like that" (17). The love and affection which she had with her Athai were ineradicable in the mind of the child, and her face "blurred with pain" and her "moist lips trembled" (17). She weeps to Devaki as "Akka...Akka," the child's voice breaks gradually. The Psyche of the child urges that Devaki should not leave her alone like her Athai. So, she requests

“You... you too won't go away with a bridegroom will you?” (17)

### Conclusion

Chudamani's short stories are emotional and sentimental. She depicts the inner feelings of human beings. In this short story, “That Fragile World” Chudamani has represented the child as a protagonist and its emotional attachment towards two women. The analysis shows that the psyche of child undergoes a lot of changes. Through the lenses of Psychoanalysis, the psyche of the child Leela moves from one perspective to another perspective. In simple terms, the contexts of the child makes the child's psyche to shift from conscious level to preconscious to unconscious. Though it examines the psyche of a young woman and more focus is the protagonist Leela. It reveals how the child is emotionally connected to two women in her present and past and how she tries to safeguard the second woman Devaki through her behaviour. The story depicts that the child is longing for love and care which every child needs in society especially in the present scenario.

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