

Psychosocial Study of the play *Mangalam*

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It is believed that the development of a human mind and body takes place in a series of predetermined stages. However, the social experiences of an individual throughout one's life leave an impact on the development of the individual. According to Erikson, this stage of psychosocial development is known as the Trust versus Mistrust stage, which starts at the birth and lasts until one year of age. This stage is considered to be the most fundamental stage in an individual's life. At this point of development, the child is entirely dependent on the caregiver. If the caregiver fails to provide security, love and is emotionally unavailable for the child, then the child develops a feeling of mistrust.

In the play *Mangalam*, it can be said that Dorai must not have received proper care and nurturing during this stage that is why he has developed a sense of openness to the wariness that some danger may be present in every situation. He doubts everything and

everyone, including his wife, Mangalam. In the first act of the play, he doubts his wife for being a conspirator in Chitra's act of eloping to get married.

Dorai: ... *You are all like her. Like your mother, she has even given her wedding sari to her wretched daughter. She planned it, can't you see?*

Kamala: *Anna, it would not have been like that. She must have given the sari simply, just to ...*

Dorai: *She planned it. To humiliate me. For thirty-one years she has been planning it. One by one she will take the children away from me, one by one ...* (Sengupta 24)

Dorai even doubted Mangalam for having killed herself deliberately for taking revenge from him. When Revathy was describing the night of Mangalam's death, the following happened:

Revathy: *How clever she was. She got fever, ordinary viral fever. Every house had somebody or the other down with it those days, but made it worse for herself. She took no tablets to control the fever, she just let it go higher and higher. And that night, she must have swallowed the pills, when you were phoning the doctor.*

Dorai: (to himself) *She had arranged everything, planned everything.* (32-33)

The second stage of the psychosocial development theory, Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt takes place in early childhood. A little independence of the child marks this stage. The child begins to perform necessary actions and take simple decisions. By allowing the child to make decisions, parents help the child in developing a sense of autonomy. Controlling their bodily functions makes the child independent. Dorai in his childhood must have experienced a balanced approach from his parent's end. That is the reason why he is an independent man who believes his decisions from than anyone else. He has a developed sense of autonomy.

Thangam: ... *Brother-in-law, are you going to take your bath now or will you wait till Kannan comes back?*

Dorai: *I don't want anyone's help. (Gets up and moves towards the inner door and exits weighed down with self-pity. The day I ask for my children's help, I will die. (25-26)*

The next stage is the Initiative versus Guilt stage, which takes place during the preschool years. At this point in psychosocial development, children begin to assert their authority and control over the world through directing the play and other social exchanges. Children who complete this stage successfully feel accomplished and able to lead others. Those who fail to acquire these skills develop a sense of guilt, self-doubt, and lack of initiative. When an idyllic balance of individual initiative and a willingness to work with others is achieved, the ego quality known as purpose emerges. It seems that Dorai completed this stage successfully as he has full control over things which surround him. It is quite visible in the first act of the play:

Mani: *I think Periamma should stay here for some time.*

Dorai: *Mani, do you know what you are saying? This is my house. (9)*

The following stage is that of industry versus inferiority, which takes place during the school days. It can be said that Dorai in his school days could not successfully cope with the social and academic demands. Had he been appreciated by his teachers, parents and companions, he would have developed a sense of competence. However, unable to complete this stage successfully made Dorai to develop a sense of inferiority. His inferiority complex can be seen in the following dialogue:

Dorai: *I am not mad. It is you have made me mad. You and your sister. She was always the superior one. So superior. Nothing she did could ever be wrong. But she*

had to marry me, isn't it? She had to marry a poor priest's son because nobody else would have touched her, not one decent man would have touched her. (Sengupta 20)

The next stage is the Identity versus Role Confusion stage, which starts during the often-turbulent adolescence years. The fifth psychosocial stage plays an essential role in developing a sense of personal identity, which will continue to influence behaviour and development for the rest of an individual's life. During adolescence, children explore their individuality and develop a sense of identity. Those who receive proper encouragement and support through personal exploration will arise from this fifth stage with a solid sense of self and feelings of independence, individuality and control. Individuals who remain doubtful of their beliefs and desires will feel insecure and confused about themselves and the future. When psychologists talk about identity, they are denoting to all of the beliefs, idea, and ethics that help shape and guide an individual's behaviour. Successful completion of this stage leads to loyalty, which Erikson described as a capability to live by the standards and expectations of the society. While Erikson alleged that each stage of psychosocial development was required, he placed specific importance on the formation of ego identity. Ego identity is the conscious sense of self-identity, which develops through the human interactions and turns into a central focus during the identity versus confusion stage of psychosocial development. According to Erikson, the Ego identity continually varieties due to new experiences and information we attain in our day to day interactions with others. As we have new experiences, we also take on challenges that can aid or hinder the development of identity. Our identity gives each of us a consistent and cohesive sense of self that bears throughout our lives. Our social experiences and interactions shape our sense of personal identity, and it is this identity that helps guide our actions, beliefs, and behaviours as we age.

When talking about Dorai, it is quite evident that Dorai had completed this stage. He knew precisely what he wanted to do in life. The following lines prove that Dorai wanted financial assistance from Mr. Ramachandra Iyer, so he decided not to leave his daughter even after having doubts about her fidelity:

Dorai: So what should I call her? A Devi? A virgin goddess? She came to me after being used; she was somebody else's leavings.

Thangam: You could have left her. She would have lived a happier life.

Dorai: How could I have left her? Her father was in complete control of my life, he got me a job, he paid for my sister's marriage, he looked after my father in his last days. I did not even have to pay the doctor's fees. (Sengupta 34)

The next stage is known as the Intimacy versus Isolation stage. This stage starts from the period of early adulthood when people are exploring intimate relationships. Erikson believed it was important that people develop close, committed and long-lasting relationships with each other. Individuals who are successful at this stage will form relationships that are enduring and secure. It is important to note that each step builds on skills learned in previous steps. Erikson believed that a strong sense of self or individuality was necessary for developing intimate relationships. Studies have demonstrated that those with a low sense of self do tend to have less committed relations with people and are more likely to suffer emotional isolation, loneliness, and despair. Successful completion of this stage marks the birth of the virtue known as love. It is manifested by the ability to form lasting, meaningful relationships with other people.

In the case of Dorai, he did complete his previous stage, but the intimacy versus isolation stage got a different approach because Dorai was married to a woman whose fidelity was continuously being questioned by Dorai. He did form a relation with his wife, Mangalam

but he was continuously questioning it because he doubted that his wife, Mangalam, is promiscuous. His wife and children completed his family but Dorai's fixation with the first and the second stage of psychosocial development was a hindrance in the completion of this stage. Despite having a family, Dorai remained emotionally isolated and disconnected from them. The virtue of love was missing from his life, and this can be seen in the first act of the play when we come to know that Dorai resorted to violence in order to punish his wife for not naming the man with whom she had relations.

Dorai: She would not tell me who the father was. First, I used to ask her softly, sweetly. She would not tell me. Then I beat her. She stayed quiet. She would not even cry out in pain. She was so obstinate that ... that. ... Then it became a game to see how I could take it out of her. (Sengupta 34)

The seventh psychosocial development stage is the Generativity versus Stagnation stage. During adulthood, individuals continuously aim to build their lives, focusing on their career and familial relations. Those who are successful during this stage develop a feeling that they are paying back to the world by being active in the community and society as a whole. Those who fail to attain this skill continue to feel unproductive and uninvolved in this world. Individuals who completed this stage successfully are blessed with a virtue known as care. Being proud of one's accomplishments, watching one's children grow into adults, and developing a sense of unity with one's life partner are essential accomplishments of this stage.

Poile Sengupta's play, *Mangalam* shows that Dorai was stuck in this stage of psychosocial development because despite having children and wife, he was only concerned about his gains and did not have any concern for his wife when she was alive. He was only interested in materialistic gains. He was not even concerned about the happiness of his

children. Dorai wanted to kill his child, Sriram because he suspected him of being someone else's son. However, he started praising him once Sriram brought laurels to the family by securing a scholarship in the first standard.

Dorai: ... *I had to feed that son, that bastard. I wanted to kill him, I wanted to drown him but she would not let him out of her sight.*

Thangam: *And then when he got a scholarship from class 1 and people praised him to you as a worthy son, you became flattered. And now, of course, he will take you to the States.* (25)

Dorai led a life which was profoundly influenced by the social interactions and his complexes, which were the result of his social standing.

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