



Muniyakka: A Portrait of Dialogical Soliloquy

Mr. A. Diwakar

Assistant Professor of English

Ururu Dhanalakshmi College, Kattur, Trichy



Open Access

Manuscript ID:

BIJ-SPL4-Mar26-ES-039

Subject: English Studies

Received: 20.12.2025

Accepted: 08 .01.2026

Published: 17.03.2026

DOI: 10.64938/bjisi.v10si4.26.Mar039

Copy Right:



This work is licensed under
a Creative Commons Attribution-
ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Abstract

This research paper attempts to trace the concept of Soliloquy in the short story "Muniyakka" written by the Indian writer Lakshmi Kannan. She is the central figure in the story who is an old deprived woman, does all menial jobs in some rich people's houses as maid. She is turned away by her three sons and lost her husband. On doing these works, she always speaks to herself not bothering about others. It shows her inner thoughts and feelings. Soliloquy is the act of talking to oneself. Muniyakka is one sort of character in terms of soliloquy.

Keywords: soliloquy, womanhood, psyche, bravery, feelings and emotion

Introduction

Lakshmi Kannan is an Indian poet, novelist, translator and short story writer. She is an eminent diglot author who writes both in English as well as Tamil. She was born two days earlier of Indian Independence on 13 August 1947 in Mysore, Karnataka. She utilises her Pen-name 'Kaaveri' while writing literary works in Tamil language. She was a student of English language and literature at the University of Delhi. She is a PhD holder from Calcutta's Jadavpur University in 1977. Apart from her writing career, she was a teacher of English for nearly fifteen years. Her works are originally written in Tamil, and later translated by herself into English. "Muniyakka" is one such work which

focuses on the internal psyche of womanhood that is filtered through the human consciousness of Muniyakka. Lakshmi Kannan projects the tradition and culture of our Country in her works. She clearly portrays the customs and superstitious beliefs of the south Indian people. Her works are human-centred. Moreover, she has published three poetry collections and short story collection in English each. She has also published a novel in 1998 titled "Going Home". She published a collection of short stories labelled *Guilt Trip and Other Stories* in 2023, a latest literary production of Kannan. It contains thirteen stories which reflect themes such as experiences of human and existentialism. The short story "Muniyakka" by Lakshmi Kannan forms a part in the collection of



short stories *India Gate and Other Stories*, published in 1993.

The short story is a popular literary form of the modern era. According to M.H. Abrams, "A "short story" is a brief work of prose fiction, and most of the terms for analyzing the component elements, the types, and the narrative techniques of the *novel* are applicable to the short story as well" (Abrams 364). It is a short prose fiction which combines the thought, action, responses and reactions of its characters into an artistic whole called plot. He says, it has a beginning and develops through a middle to some sort of denouement at the end. A short story may be comic or tragic, romantic or Satiric. The presentation of the story may be from any one of the points of view and it may have any mode namely that of realism, naturalism or fantasy. Edgar Allan Poe calls "it the prose tale, as a narrative that can be read at one sitting from one and half hours to two hours".

In the field of Indian English Literature, the Indian English short story is now a specific and established literary form which is fast developing with justifiable confidence and pride. The short story writers like Mulkraj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Kushwant Singh, Raja Rao, Ruskin Bond, Manojdas, Anita Desai, Jai Nimbkar, Arun Joshi, Nergis Dalal, Keki N. Daruwalla have attained noteworthy triumph. Similarly, Lakshmi Kannan has also found a standard place in the same line of authors. "Muniyakka" is one of her popular literary pieces discussed in the research paper in terms of the literary technique called 'soliloquy'.

Attributes of the central character of the story

"Muniyakka" is the story of an underprivileged elderly woman who does all odd jobs in some elite people's houses as a servant maid. She has lost her husband then, and now turned away by her three sons. Her jobs include sweeping, mopping, washing vessels and clothes, cleaning the courtyard in front of the houses, sweeping the front yards and decorating them with Kolam patterned skillfully with finely powdered rice. The final job of the day for her is to clean the temple floor. She leads a life of her own doing service to the others with all superstitious

belief of a normal village woman. She is always indifferent to all the commands of the village people. Eventhough she is rejected by her loved ones, she never loses her hope and spirit and continues her work as always.

Despite of no happy memories in the past, she leads a spirited life in her present. She finds comfort in doing service to others. She receives twenty rupees at Anjaneyulu's house for her work, thirty rupees at Vasudev Chetty's house and from temple fifteen rupees. Among these people, Mr. Rama Rao's house has genial relationship with Muniyakka. As a result of this, Muniyakka is allowed to build a small hut in a corner of their garden for herself. She feels comfortable of this offer for their generosity. Specifically, Mr. Rama Rao's wife Mrs. Ratna Rao is friendly with the old woman and she becomes one of the family members. The family won't conduct any festivities in the house without the elderly woman.

Muniyakka is weird in certain ways that she always mutters something to herself as if she is engaged in a conversation. This eccentric behaviour has brought her the nick name 'Walkie-talkie', given by the children playing in in the street. "There goes Muniyakka, the Walkie-talkie!" (Kannan 104). At the same time, she will be calm, cool and sustained. This makes her unique in the short Story. This teaches everyone that life will shoot us with challenges, for which we should be resilient.

After completing all the works of the day, she rests in her hut at the violet hour. Then she begins to prepare her supper such as ragi and broth. After the preparation of her supper, she starts eating lump after lump, scolding her dead husband and her sons. Meanwhile, she feels delighted of eating the food earned by her own industrious effort. The following is one of the evidences of her soliloquy.

Each Worthless son, lusting after his own wife. They don't need a mother anymore. Shameless bastards. Naturally! For they were after all fathered by an equally worthless man, Bairappa. That husband of mine, dying after leading a life of waste-smoking, drinking, gambling --- Squandering my hard-earned money... Bairappa be damned! (Kannan 108).



Description of the term soliloquy in view of Muniyakka

Soliloquy is a literary term or technique used in literary works especially in drama. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, soliloquy is "a speech in a play in which a character, who is alone on the stage, speaks his or her thoughts" (OALD 1487). One can witness this concept in the plays of Shakespeare, especially in his play *Hamlet* where Hamlet's famous soliloquy runs as "To be or not to be..." (Act 3, Scene 1). This dialogue is uttered by the character **Hamlet Junior** in **Act III, Scene 1** of the play. In this speech, Hamlet envisions the nature of life and death, fundamentally probing whether it is better to stay living and suffering or to end his life. It reveals the inner thoughts, feelings and emotions aloud to the audience. It is a dramatic device in drama for characters to project their personal thoughts. During the course, the speaker is normally isolated. It gives direct insight into a character's emotions, motivations, feelings, or plans. In other words, Soliloquy is an act of speaking one's thoughts aloud by oneself or regardless of any hearers, especially by a character in a play. It is also called a monologue.

When two or more characters in a play talk to each other, it is known as dialogue. When one character talks for a while, it is called a monologue. Soliloquy is the word, one conventionally uses to refer to a monologue that is delivered when the character is alone. Soliloquies tend to have the effect of making one feels like one is getting access to the character's true inner state. One assumes that they are being honest because they are talking to themselves.

The term 'Soliloquy' is derived from two Latin words namely 'solus' means alone and 'loqui' means to speak. In Latin, it is actually labelled *soliloquium*. Hence, it is the act of talking to oneself. It is a kind of monologue in which a single character who is usually alone on stage, addresses himself or herself or the audience directly.

The purpose of Soliloquy in a literary work allows the reader or audience to know what a character thinks and what the rising action of the story. Everyone might watch television shows or

serials where one can find anyone of the characters revealing some plans and secrets. Similarly, in literature, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* serves as an instance, where Juliet utters "O Romeo, O Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?" (Act II Scene 2). She expresses the soliloquy when she comes to know that Romeo is the son of her family's enemy.

On the account of Shakespearean framework, there are four kinds of soliloquy such as Plain soliloquy, Attended soliloquy, Soliloquy with props and Dialogical soliloquy. To explain in brief the types; Plain soliloquy is the common one in which a single character reveals his or her inner thoughts. In Attended soliloquy, a character speaks his or her mind while another character is on stage, but acts to be indifferent or unaware. The character in Soliloquy with Props, directly addresses an object which represents symbolically the conflict like dagger or skull. Finally, Dialogical soliloquy deals with a speech modelled like a conversation with imaginary speakers or an internal debate but delivered by one person, which reveals the internal conflict. The character Muniyakka in Lakshmi Kannan's story belongs to the last category of the soliloquy who delivers her speeches like conversation and discloses her inner emotions and feelings. Thus Lakshmi Kannan describes Muniyakka in the debut line of the story as "Muniyakka had mastered the art of Soliloquy. She would keep muttering to herself as she walked, mutter to herself fluently, without any hesitation" (Kannan 104).

She is portrayed as a bold, brave character who manifests her internal conflict. She does not bother about other's views on her. She is thin with spindly legs that look more like a pair of drumsticks. Even though she is thin, she is active in her elderly age and does her everyday work, shivering in the cold winter of Bangalore. The story takes place at 'Kokkina Halli' village which is a few miles away from Bangalore. Kannan moves on with the description of the nature of the village where the central character of the story resides. This story has been written in third person narrative style except the direct speech of the main character. In the name of soliloquy, Kannan forcefully hits on the superstitious beliefs of the villagers, through the main character. One of her works is to clean the temple at the end of



the day, where the village women worship frozen stone Cobra in a corner of a temple under a black-berry tree. They apply *kumkum*, *haldi* and *sandalwood paste* on the Stone Snake and dash their foreheads on the curved stone entreating favours to be fulfilled. They offer flowers, break coconuts and make the water of tender-coconut bathe the stone snake and devout fasting etc...They mutter their prayers by going round and round the stone snake and the black-berry tree. They make the place grubby, smashing rich pulp of ripe berries dropped from the tree against the stone. If a snake appears in green or brown, people would smash and beat it till it suffers in agony. If it is Cobra they worship and offer pooja.

It is the duty of Muniyakka to wash the place cleanly of all the stains with buckets of water and coir brush. On doing this, she curses the women who have made the place untidy at the temple. With regard to the context, she delivers a soliloquy as follows

Foolish women... banging their brows on stone begging for favours --- Give me a son, Lord of Snakes, great Nagaraj! Please give me a son.... Idiots! I was like you when I was a young woman, bruising my brow on this stone and praying for sons. The result? Today I have three useless sons in whom I once had a deep, implicit faith. I visited their homes so eagerly, but not one of them would even give me a single, tepid bowl of broth. (Kannan 108)

The above passage exposes the internal mind of the main character. Though she is tortured by her husband and neglected by sons, as a typical village woman she does every year the *sraddha* or ceremonial ritual to her dead husband. On this day she becomes young as she would have large round *Kumkum* on her forehead, flowers on her hair and a clean cotton saree wrapped around her old body.

Conclusion

Muniyakka: A Portrait of Dialogical Soliloquy discloses Lakshmi Kannan's great narrative plan of converting silence into speech and solitude into

dialogue. Through Muniyakka's internal monologue, the story dismantles the supposition that communication needs an external listener; instead, it proves how repressed voices, particularly those of sidelined women find expression within the self. The dialogical soliloquy becomes a literary device through which Muniyakka transfers pain, memory, and identity, resistance, turning personal reflection into an act of quiet insolence. Lakshmi Kannan's depiction of Muniyakka forefronts the connections of gender, caste, and socio-economic marginalization, presenting the central character not simply as a target but as a mindful individual proficient of self-articulation. The soliloquy serves as both a psychological refuge and a mode of resistance, consenting Muniyakka to retrieve agency in a world that rejects her voice. By engaging in an internal dialogue, she challenges the structures that limit her, asserting her presence in a society that extracts her invisible. Lakshmi Kannan's Muniyakka is a woman of Soliloquy who speaks to herself in the story. Through the literary device soliloquy, she condemns the condition of the society and advocates the inner psyche of womanhood. She searches for identity and purifies her emotions in Nature. Thus the author depicts a real picture of the old deserted widow in India through simple and lucid style. Therefore, Lakshmi Kannan's Muniyakka, the central figure of the story is a woman of soliloquy.

Works Cited

1. Abrams, M.H. and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms. Eleventh Edition.* Cengage Learning India Private Limited, 2016.
2. Hornby, A S. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English.* Tenth edition. Oxford University Press, 2020.
3. Kannan, Lakshmi. "Muniyakka". *India Gate and Other Stories.* Disha Books, 1993.
4. Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet.* Peacock Books. 2024.
5. Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet.* Maple Press. 2010.