

# Living Spaces: A Chronotopic Analysis of Rani Manicka's "The Rice Mother"

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## Abstract

This paper is an exploration of "The Rice Mother" text using the notion of the Chronotope as a method of analysis to show how Bakhtin's Chronotope can be applied to an Asian text so as to analyse the properties of actual historical characters and events in colonial times and space in Malaysia, and to introduce new and improved applications of the Chronotope notion to the reading of "The Rice Mother".

## Introduction

### *Author*

Rani Manicka, a Malaysian with a Sri Lankan origin is the author of "The Rice Mother". "The Rice Mother", which was published in 2002, was her first novel, followed by "Touching Earth" (2004) and the "Japanese Lover" (2010).

### *Synopsis*

Rani Manicka's "The Rice Mother" is a cross generational saga, about a Hindu Ceylonese family, spanned through a period of 85 years over 4 generations. The beginning of story is set in Sri Lanka while the rest of it takes place in Malaya; from the 1930's and continues up until the 1990s. The story starts of with accounts of Lakshmi, a young child bride from Sri Lanka who migrates to Malaya immediately after marrying a 37 year old widower who has two children of his own. She describes her ritualistic and emotional journey as a daughter, wife, a mother, a friend, mother in law, and a grandmother in Malaya with a husband whom she doesn't love through the concept of a dream trail whereby her story is first told by herself and then re-told and added perspective by the other characters who surround her,

creating an opportunity for them to tell readers on their parts, versions and portions of events from their standpoint, thus allowing readers to decide for themselves the accurate version to the narrative. The narrative, which has multiple story tellers, continues expanding and moving from one stage to another, with different conflicts to resolve, over the years, even after the death of Lakshmi, finally ending with accounts told from Nisha's perspective, Lakshmi's great granddaughter.

### **Background of the Study**

This paper is divided into two parts.

- i. Part one of the paper attempts to explore the text utilizing Narratology criticism.
- ii. Part two of the paper attempts to discuss Bakhtin's theory of Chronotope and probes on how the notion of Chronotope can be applied to the reading of the text.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- i. To explore text forms – plot, fabula, events, structure and characterization through a close reading using Narratology criticism (Narrative versus Story) in order to identify and discuss the dualistic characteristic of "The Rice Mother".
- ii. To expand on the notion of the Chronotope where spatial and temporal frame of the text plays a key role in the production of making meaning of the actual historical and cultural events, roles and functions of the analysed individual(s).

### **Conceptual Framework & Method of Analysis**

The notion of Chronotope was first introduced by Bakhtin as a tool for literary analysis. This notion was broadened to express the notion of dialogical semiotics where actual representational chronotopes (constructed in temporal settings) co-evolved with embodied chronotopes (the real concrete historical times, places and events) in human life.

Thus, Chronotopic analysis of a text is important as it not only determines and classifies a literary text into a particular literary genre based on the semantic structure of the text, created by the author but it also addresses the

relations and changing conceptions of time and space in the text, through the materialisation the temporal and spatial aspects of reality and history portrayed by the character(s).

An exploratory examination of “The Rice Mother” text using this method of analysis serves to show how Bakhtin’s Chronotope can be applied on an Asian text to analyze the properties of actual historical characters and events in colonial times and space in Malaya, and to introduce new and improved applications of the Chronotope notion to the reading of “The Rice Mother”.

In order to so, it is important for the researcher to distinguish (story and plot) between the way in which an event is told chronologically (fabula) and the way the same event is told but with a reversed manipulation of the chronology to achieve a particular effect (syuzhet) in order to reveal the basic discrepancy between literature and lived experience through the notion of Chronotope (Marija Brala Vukanovic and Lovorka Gruic Grmusa, (2009:10).

This is accomplished through the close reading of the text, using the Narratology as a tool to first, dissect the semiotics of the text where the representational chronotopes (constructed in temporal settings) are recognized and second, to determine the genre of the analyzed text.

Apart from that, in order to expend on the notion of the Chronotope in the production of making meaning of the actual historical and cultural events, roles and functions of the analysed individual(s), the researcher will look at the language and cultural subtleties found in the text .

## **Analysis, findings & discussion**

### **Part One: Narratology**

Narratology is the study of narrative and story structure, which enables readers to understand, analyze and evaluate narratives through the temporal ordering of human speech and action (Barry, 2002:221).

Accordingly to Aristotle (Barry, 2002: 224), “a second story relevant to Narratology is the story of the Narratology itself”. To Aristotle, a character and an action are essential elements in a narrative or story. A character must

be revealed through action and the three aspects of a plot- the hamartia, anagnorisis and the peripeteia. The hamartia in essence means the protagonist's tragic fault or defect, whether physical or moral, thus resulting in miserable occurrence that he or she has to undergo. Anagnorisis means the protagonist's recognition and the realization of the truthfulness and veracity of the situation or event in which he is in. Peripeteia means the turn around stage whereby the protagonist experiences the consequence, often negative, of the defect that he or she have.

In the text, for example, the character of Mohini is born as a fair, beautiful, green eyed girl. She is admired and envied by all for her good looks. She is the prized pride of the whole family (page 68). Her beauty becomes her curse as she had to die because of her good looks at a very young age for it attracted unwanted, harmful attention. Another obvious example would be Dimple, Laksman's daughter, another beauty in the family who was just as beautiful as Mohini was, and had intelligence as well, but she too suffered a horrible death, a death that was self inflicted, despite the admonition she received from her well wishers.

This notion of Narratology had been further developed by Vladimir Propp (Barry, 2002:226-231) who identified that certain underlying narrative structures remain constant, despite the diversity of story forms and content. He discovered that all stories or narratives consist of seven spheres of action and 31 elements of functions that serve as the basic building blocks to the creation of the fabula or syuzhet of a narrative or story. These 7 spheres are seen as roles rather than characters. For example in the text, the hero is Lakshmi (the rice mother herself), the provider is Ayah who looks into her financial and domestic needs, the helpers are Lakshmi's five children who provided her with assistance in domestic chores, Lakshmi's mother, a figure whom she gains her emotional strength from and whom she often thinks of, the hero , Ayah himself, whom she deeply had affections for and loved although she was in denial of her actual feelings for years until his death, the false hero, her son Lakshman whom she had high hopes of, but eventually turned out to be a gambler in life, and finally the dispatcher, Mui Tsai, a friend whom she confided in.

Gerard Genette (Barry, 2002:231-241) also identified a newer way to look at the creation of narratives or stories with regard to the element of time and space in narration, where the distinction between a narrative and a story

evolves. This notion was based on Bakhtin's concept of Dialogism and Chronotope.

### *Narrative versus Story*

Accordingly to Bakhtin, narratives are often enclosed in a solid unshakeable monological framework, where narration is often from a mono perspective on a mono plot discussion.

According to Jonathan Culler (1981: 170-172) a narrative discourse has a *syuzhet* where by the narrated events are depicted and reshaped into a plot dominating the *fabula*, where the raw order of describing the occurrence of these events is restructured, causing the text to be predictive to readers, complete with notions of systematicity (complexity), and explicit in terms of telling. In short, a narrative aims to be a theory, which has a complete control of the plot, context, characters and traits, and ending, thus categorising texts into genre archetypes.

A story on the other hand is concerned with the content of the narrative, which consists of events, characters and characterization, time and location. This is also known as the *fabula*. It is the mimetic of orality, often enacted through social events, in which the different characters in a text, are given a voice where their thoughts, actions, feelings has a possibility of occurring simultaneously at the same time. According to John Shotter (1993:113) a story is often multi-plotted, told from unmerged multi voices (polyphonic) and perspectives (polylogical), not finalised in terms of inconsistent occurrences (chronotopes) and consequences, and most often recited in the present time of being, but yet sense making to readers. In a story, readers are presented with the opportunity of making their own interpretation on the course of action and events.

### *The dualistic nature of "The Rice Mother"*

The beginning of "The Rice Mother" is circular, because the beginning is a discursal beginning where the birth of the protagonist in 1916 (page 3) is in fact a response- dialog, to a series of events that had taken place earlier, namely the idea or belief that there were spirits who lived side by side with the humans before the invention electricity and modernization, and the past events- domestic, cultural and marital, that had been experienced by the narrator's immediate family members. All this gives an insight to the

protagonist's views and course of actions later in her journey as the central character in the text.

The beginning of the narrative also builds the plot- exposition of the story. It provides an explanation of the protagonist's social cultural background, origin, and nature of character both physical and personality- "I was born in Ceylon in 1916" (page 3), "mother said that her sister was lured off and possessed by just such a spirit" (page 3), "my mother was descended from such a family of such wealth and influence that in her heyday, her English grandmother, Mrs. Armstrong..." (page 4), "my mother was born partially deaf... Proposals of marriage came from far and wide...but she fell in love with the scent of danger...one night she climbed out of her window... the lovers were married at day break." (Page 4-5). "Unlike boys, girls didn't have to go to school in our day except for the two hours of every evening when mother taught reading, writing and arithmetic, I was left mostly to run wild" (page 9). "Until, that is, at the age of fourteen when the first drop of the menstrual blood proclaimed me suddenly and distressingly into a grown woman" (page 9). "Unlike her I was no Indian beauty but in the land of coffee colored people, I was a cup of a very milky tea" (page 10). "Outside the wind rustled in the lime tree and a playful breeze blew into my room...I knew him well, that breeze...He was blue as the baby god Krishna and as cheeky..." (page 11). "Lakshmi, I have accepted a marriage proposal for you...he is of a better caste than we are and he lives in that rich land called Malaya" (page 13). "Your new husband is a widower and has two children..." (page 14). "Fear coursed through my child's body at the thought of that man being my husband...love for me became the worm in the apple" (page 17). "I turned around and kissed my mother...that we would never meet again for the rest of our lives" (page 22). In "The Rice Mother", the introduction established the setting in the text in terms of place - Ceylon and Malaya and provided readers with the basis of the situation where characters were introduced and the conditions of their physical and psychological state was also revealed - internal and psychological setting. The introduction also provided readers the reasoning for the way the cause events were the way they were and a hint of insight and possibilities on the development of the plot, relationship between the characters and characterization, and change in setting. Apart from that, the notion of time is also expressed in the introduction through the use of tenses, and voice that indicates movement, both on a physical state and emotional state (Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen McLaughlin, David Pellauer, and 185:5) to project the world in the text. For example in the narrative voice, Lakshmi narrated the fine factitive time line

when she was still a young infant, suckling her mother's milk (1916-1922), to the times, she was free to run wild and play(1922-1929), to the times when she experienced puberty and discovered the distress of becoming a grown woman, to the times she was married off to a man much older than she was (1930), and to the times where she was burden with marital responsibilities as a wife and a mother herself, in a far from home land. These time lines, shows an obvious dynamic movements that describe physical activities as well as emotional movements where characters reach a certain degree of understanding or maturity of people, events, location and emotions.

The rising action also contributes significantly to the plot and fabula of the story. This is the fraction of the text where characters are faced with conflicts (that lead to the climax of the text in the narrative). According to Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch (2008), a literary critic, characters often face conflict with other characters, with society, with him or herself, with nature and with fate, thus further aids in the development of the flow of the narrative, contributing to the change of events and actions, thus voluntarily become the driving force, along with the character's traits and behavior to the development of the plot. For example, Lakshmi's character faces countenance with all five conflicts and these conflicts, which represent the succession of events, all at a different time period, are the determining blocks to the completeness of the plot and the ending of the narrative.

1. With other characters when she went marketing in Malaya (early 1930s): "Blood begin to pour from the boy/s mouth... he picked up another broken piece from the dirty ground and stuffed it into his mouth...I felt disturbed and upset and physically ill... I avoided contact with the snake charmer's family (page 36).
2. With society, when her Chinese friend told her about the sexual favors that she had to give to her master (1930s): "I couldn't believe that what was happening with Mui Tsai was legal and I was determined to report the matter...I told ayah about it... but he shook his head...the law could not do nothing as long as the domestic slave was not abused...and Mr. Soong himself – he is our landlord" (page 53).
3. With self, when Ayah met with an accident and lay unconscious on the hospital bed (1930s): "I was sick with fear. The thought of bringing them up on my own without a breadwinner stretched like an enormous black hole in front of me..." (page 83).

4. With nature, when she was determined to not extend her stay at her uncle's place in Negeri Sembilan because her Aunt's unkind comments about a sum of money that she had borrowed from her uncle some years back: "I resolved to leave that day, even if meant walking back all the way to Kuantan, carrying my children on my back...but I was very proud in those days...when my uncle returned... he reluctantly made arrangements for us to travel by boat...it was not the romantic place-the jungle, I had pictured it to be...the man enjoyed our jerk into terror, our hiss of horror..." (page 99-100).
5. With fate, when an astrologer warned her about future events that were destined to occur: "You will have many children but never happiness. Beware of your eldest son. He is your enemy from another life returned to punish you. You will know the pain of burying a child. You will attract an ancestral object of great value into your hands..." (page 59-60)

Ayah, Lakshmi's husband also faced countenance with all five conflicts, at different time periods and stages in his life. Examples:

1. With other characters in the first few years of his married life with his wife Lakshmi (early 1930s): "for a while I stood looking at her unyielding figure and her cold, tense face and then I turned away and went back to bed. She didn't want my love or me. Both she considered abhorrent." (page 266)
2. With society, as working, but not progressive father of five (late 1930s): "as the years went by, I found it easy to bear the supercilious looks of my juniors as they passed their exams and became my seniors. One by one they passed me, unvarying in their slightly contemptuous, slightly pitying look..." (page 268).
3. With self, on the day of his marriage (1929-30): "suddenly having something so precious in your hands that your pathetic life changes forever. Not with happiness but with fear. The fear of losing it, and because I knew that I was undeserving...those wings have been gained through deceit. Soon even the gold watch...would be no more... in my guilty heart I loved her already" (page 264)

4. With nature, where he escaped death from the Japanese soldiers (early 1940s): “my father returned home nearly two weeks after he had been taken...the skin on his body was covered in festering sores and bites...he had been crawling in the jungle in circles...and all the while feeding his blood to the swarms of giant mosquitoes, leeches, flies, fleas, winged ants, and heaven knows what other creatures God had seen fit to put into the blackest nights imaginable” (page 139-140).
5. With fate (early 1940s): “ he was ready... all his screams of terror he held deep in his locked throat... he knew the value of silence...he waited until the twitching stopped for he couldn't have stepped over a suffering body...the other bodies were heavy with the sleep of death...he was still alive” (page 139).

In “The Rice Mother”, the climax which is the peak point where conflicts are culminated and revealed is not the most important part of the narrative. Each character who narrates his or her perspectives has his or her own set of climax points. For example, Lakshmi, Ayah and Lakshman shares similar climax a peak, which is when all three were devastated and plunged into despair and pain when the pride and the gem of the family, Mohini is taken away but the Japanese during the Japanese Occupation, and suffers her death. Her end causes a change in Ayah, who loved her unconditionally, turning him into a dreary, lifeless man who had nothing to look forward to in life. He withdrew from life and suffered a life long pain of losing a loved one—“my shredded heart has done this for twenty five years And every evening when she doesn't rush through the doors, the sunset sill seem a little bit duller, the house that a little bit stranger, the children that a little bit further away, And Lakshmi a little bit angrier” (page 272-273). Lakshmi too became an angry, temperamental woman – “...that was me, beloved mother, but after the monster took over, said and did the things that I could never had said or done. I stood silently by and watched everything that the monster's cold fury did” (page 278), determined not to allow anyone to hurt her anymore, emotionally. Lakshman, Mohini's twin brother blamed himself for what had happened to Mohini. He became distant and remote towards all in the family, nursing his guilt, but at the same time moving towards his downfall. Dimple, Lakshman's daughter, on the other hand, experienced her own climax, years after the death of Mohini, where she embarked on a self destructing journey after discovering that her half Chinese and half Japanese husband, Luke; a multimillionaire is having an

affair- "...he asked into the phone and I knew instantly. He has a lover" (page 439). In reaction to her realisation, she then attempts to use the supernatural powers to help her bring him back to her- "My husband has someone else. Can you help me get him back?" (page 465), before staging an act where she has sex with another man, a waiter, consciously aware that she was being watched by Luke in her adulterous act- " God, let him be so disgusted that he divorces me" (page 483) . But when all attempts fail, she allows herself to be destroyed by Luke- "I examined a small plastic bag of opium, speculating from where Luke might have got the aromatic brown stuff from. I understood the gift. He wanted me to destroy myself slowly" (page 486).

The characters, setting and the proceeding of the events once again, changes, an immediate effect as the result of the climaxes, leading towards the ending of the text, where characters are at peace with themselves, emotionally and spiritually and with the events that they encountered, thus enabling their selves to move on. For example, after Ratna's climax- "...it was the wedding day. It was a disaster. ...all those tears and nobody asked me what was wrong. ...if they had I would have said it. Stopped the marriage" (page 535), she experienced the self realization, and was immediately at peace with herself, others and the course of events, although it did take her years and some help from Dimple to reach that point of realization " as soon as I poured all my smothered cramped thoughts into Dimple's whirling machine, they suddenly became unimportant. Layer upon layer of hate on what? ...who have I hurt with my hate but my poor blameless children and myself? ...I let the hate slide away. The hate for my husband, his mother, Lakshmanan 's wife and my dreadful cynical contempt for everybody". (page 543)

## **Part Two: Chronotopic Dialogism of " The Rice Mother"**

### *Mikhail Mikhailovici Bakhtin*

Mikhail Bakhtin founded the theory of Dialogism where every single communicative event, is a characterized as a dialog, as opposed to monologism which is associated with individualism.

According to Bakhtin, textual Dialogism, involves inter-textuality (linguistic level), where the author creates a textual space with a variety of valid voices and consciousness, styles and plots across time and space. According to him

again, in short, any written piece of literature is alleged to carry on a repetitive interaction (dialogue) with other works of literature and other authors simply because each written text exists as a response to previous works and it informs and influences present or future works, meaning that, any spoken or written utterance carries traces of other utterances that may have preceded it and that might have come after it in response. (M. Keith Booker, 1996:104).

For instance, the dialogism in “The Rice Mother” is visible and can be seen in the following examples:

- i. *Author versus Sri Lanka:* The author has a dialogic interaction with her own cultural and biological heritage. The author herself is a diasporic with a Sri Lankan heritage, just like her main heroine, Lakshmi. Although Rani Manicka is born and raised in Malaya, her roots are Sri Lankan and this might have influenced her choice of words when describing the Sri Lankan scenery, surrounding and its people – “an innocent time when the dusty dirt roads were surrounded by slanting coconut trees and dotted by simple village folk on rickety bicycles, they reddened teeth and gums stretched inside uncontrollable laughter” (page 8) through the appeal in the imaginative plot.
- ii. *Author versus Title:* According to the Balinese culture, the Rice Mother is a term used by the local farmers to address Dewi Sri, who is believed to be a rice deity. Her shrine is often found in the midst of paddy fields, where farmers are able to thank her for their good crops and offer offerings for good harvest for the next coming harvesting seasons.
- iii. *Author versus Style:* “The Rice Mother” is the author’s first novel. The second novel, titled “Touching Earth” was published in 2004, demonstrates a similar writing style where characters are each given a space to inform readers of their state of past and present circumstances.
- iv. *Author versus Character:* Each character is an individual, with their own sets of ideologies and views. These (polyphonic) multiple voices, is in control of their own end and fate. The author succeeds in exploring the interior life of the characters in unison with the actual colonial times in Malaya without an intruding authorial voice

forcing readers to accept the contested truth, a stage where characters repeats the words or actions of other characters(dialogism) but with a different orientation of the actual event.

Dialogism which is an inter-textual knit of coherence and incoherence has been theoritized into four types: polyphonic, stylistics, chronotopic and architectonic. This part will look at the chronotopic dialogism.

### *The notion of Chronotopic Dialogism*

Bakhtin's notion of Chronotope describes the manner on how time and space is represented and signified in written texts through the use of temporal and spatial features to express differing of world views (Marija Brala Vukanovic and Lovorka Gruic Grmusa, 2009:9). "The Chronotope functions on two levels. On the first level, the text represents history and on the second level, it materialises history where temporal relationships are made literal by the objects, spaces or persons with which they intersect" (Paula.J. Massod, 2005: 192-193).

In each Chronotope, a different image of a person, contextualized in a different sense of history, society, and culture, is presented." (Hong Yu Wang, 2009). These dialogic viewpoints functions as interpretative lens that provides an understanding to the larger piece of the text.

### *The relationship between time and space in "The Rice Mother"*

The notion of Chronotope appears in "The Rice Mother" when the author, Rani Manicka created varied imaginative worlds through the plot, in such an artistic manner where these worlds are related in one way or another to the actual historical events that occurred in Malaya.

This interdependent intersection happened through means of the following Chronotopic incidences; geographic features (space), historical features (time) and, religious features (space) and cultural features (time and space).

- i. Geographical features
  - a. Country: Sri Lanka versus Malaya

Example one: "the sky was clear cerulean and the surface of the sea a thick piece of sparkling glass in the bright sunlight. Concealed at the bottom of its green depths were, I knew,

mysterious, wondrous cities studded with fine palaces, dazzling minarets and exquisite sea flowers, home to powerful demigods of mother's stories" (page 23). "The streets weren't paved with gold but thick with dust and dirt" (page 25). This example illustrates Lakshmi's shift in space from Sri Lanka, a place where there are not much opportunities to prosper in terms of finances to Malaya compared to Malaya that has economic stabilization where everyone is rich and leads a luxurious life. (page 13). Lakshmi's notion of an ideal 'home' is limited and the space belongs to Sri Lanka, where everything is familiar and recognised.

Example two: "To my young eyes that had learned only to appreciate the sharply accentuated features and the large soulful eyes of my native land, their moon faced flatness appeared the epitome of deformity" (page 24)

This example shows that, in Sri Lanka, the people were of the same race, and shared similar physical attributes despite belonging different castes or practicing different religious practices. In Malaya on the other hand, due to the British's economic rule, the Malays shared the nation with other migrating communities from Britain, India and China, thus creating a colorful environment of culture and practices, until today, decades after gaining independence from the British.

b. Living space

Example one: "My neighbourhood was a circle of five homes. The splendid house that i had coveted on my arrival in fact had belonged to the third wife of a very rich Chinese man called Old Soong. Next to her, in a house similar to mine, lived a Malay lorry driver and his wife....next to her house was a confusingly plentiful Chinese household....to the right of us lived a hermit,...next to him lived a snake charmer. (Page 34-35). All five houses belonged to Old Soong and the people apart from Old Soong's own family were paying tenants. This example represents history as it truthfully reflects the contemporary society in the imperial

days where the Chinese were awarded economic power by the British compared to other races in Malaya.

Example two: "I had 39,346 ringgit in the bank, 100 ringgit under the mattress, 50 ringgit in an envelope tied together with mother's letters and 15 ringgit and perhaps 80 or 90 cents in my purse" (page 227). However, years later, even after the Japanese Occupation, Lakshmi and Ayah showed no desire to leave their immediate surroundings in Kuantan and move to better environment even when they can afford to. This creates many interpretive possibilities. One possibility is that they do not vision an alternative existence simply because they could not bring themselves to separate from the space that holds memories of Mohini and their loss.

Example three: "Grandma's dead. I still couldn't really believe it...Grandma's new neighbors had had it (the huge rambutan tree) cut down when they first saw the cracks in the cement drains around their homes..." (page 487). Lakshmi, who first came to Malaya with dreams and visions of a good life at the age of 14, passes her last breath, as an old lady in the house that witnessed her journey as a young child bride, a friend to Mui Tsai, a protective mother, an understanding mother in law and finally loving grandmother. The house also witnessed her feelings of first remorse, from the day she had first laid her eyes on Ayah, which was on her wedding day, and then love – "all those years she had loved him and not even known it...perhaps she had known but she had been too proud to tell him..." (page 372) until the day he died on 11 November 1975 (page 390) and then love towards Ayah.

ii. Historical features

a. English imperialism

Example one: "First to disembark were the Europeans. While segregated in the first class, they had apparently dined so well that they had swelled into larger than life proportions. Tall, haughty and elaborate of dress they strode

forward with sunlight in their hair like gods....The men were unusually solicitous to the women, who high nosed, tightly corseted and carrying tiny frilled parasols pathetically incapable of the job at hand stepped, straight backed, into fine cars and fancy carriages” (page 24-25). This example shows Lakshmi’s observation that represents the actual historical time line of British imperialism in Malaya, immediately after she lands in Malaya which was in year 1930. Malaya was then recognised as British Malaya which comprised the Straits settlement, the Federated Malay States and the Un-federated Malay States.

Example two: “apparently the big, burly British soldiers we had imagined invincible had fled, leaving us to an uncertain fate” (page 96). This happened in year 1941 when the political situation was tense because of the Second World War. The Japanese had invaded Malaya, and the British had fled from Malaya because of two primary reasons; first being the outbreak of war in the Pacific in 1941 caught the British by surprise and second, the British had exhausted the use of war force, supplies and weapons because of the demands of the ongoing war in Europe, thus leading to the beginning of the Japanese Occupation period in Malaya.

b. Japanese Occupation

Example one: “I was twenty six years old and Lalita was six when a card arrived from my uncle the mango dealer...his daughter was getting married and we were all invited. (Page 90)...it was 13 December 1941....In a shocked voice he (uncle) told me that the Japanese had invaded Malaya” (page 96)

Example two: “most of all I equate the Japanese Occupation with fear. The type of acute fear that has a taste and a smell all of its own...I saw our first decapitated head on our way to the market. The head was spiked on a stick by the road side...instantly I feared for my father’s life even though my brother assured me that they only beheaded Chinese men who they suspected to be Communist” (page 122)...the Japanese it seems had special hatred for the Chinese that

went beyond the war." (page 122). In this example, history is re narrated by the character.

Example three: "realising that her money was useless, she...the advent of the Japanese made mother an entrepreneur and she had quite a knack for it too...she noted that condensed milk was no more and the coffee stall on the way to father's workplace sold sugarless, black coffee" (page 120). "My husband had lost his job as soon as the Japanese regime, so we lost our entitlement to the precious rations cards." (page 205). " The Japanese Army reserved almost all medicines and hospital supplies for its own use and we were left to traditional medicine" (page 207). This is another reference to the actual times faced by the Malaysians during the Japanese Occupation. There was a decline in the Malayan economy, shortage of food, domestic and medical supplies and the lack of value of the paper money.

Example four: "Mui Tsai lifted the mosquito screen ..... 'Anyway how can I keep it? What if it is the son of the one who urinates inside me after he has finished planting his seed?'" (page 212-213). This example illustrates the common war practices practiced by the Japanese soldiers. Young girls and women were forced for sex and endured multiple rapes by the Japanese soldiers.

Apart from that, Mui Tsai's character, which was only given a voice through Lakshmi's character, had grown throughout the text and this 'growing up' is calculated by the number of the pregnancies that she had gone through as the number of pregnancies indicates a fine time period from when she was just a young girl who was forced to sleep with her Master (Old Soong)(1930), became pregnant with her first born along with Lakshmi who had twins in her womb to the day she was pregnant with the child that she had intentions of aborting, while Lakshmi had six children of her own by May 1945 (page 215)

Example five: "She's Indian. She is not Chinese. Japanese soldiers only take Chinese girls. Please, please don't take

her...” (page 220). Non Chinese girls in Malaya were also reportedly abducted from their homes and forced for sex. This example reflects the turbulent times of war crimes and horrors that civilians had to endure regardless of their socio-cultural backgrounds, in reality.

### iii. Cultural features

#### a. Marriage

Example one: “tears ran down Mother’s face. She knew she had made a mess of everything. She had inspired the children to despise hi, taught them to ignore him, and ridiculed his gentle nature as dumb acceptance and sheer sluggishness.” (page 373). This example shows that in a typical conservative Indian society, a marriage, by the Dharma Vedas is considered sacred and spiritual where the husband is viewed to be the wife’s god and refuge. She has to respect, love and devote herself to him. However, in this text, Lakhsmi, although remained faithful in the marriage and tried to keep her family intact, had in fact not accepted her husband for who he was and instead for years, conspired against him. The example’s spatiotemporal parameters are in dialogue with the traces of another space through the motif marriage and commitments whereby Lakhsmi fails to deliver what is expected by the society from her.

Apart from that, the time space Chronotope can also be seen through the symbolism of ‘motherhood/ maternity’ – a mother is supposed to be loving and responsible. In order to raise a family, she should not poison the children’s mind against another parent.

#### b. Education

Example one: “Unlike boys, girls didn’t have to go to school in our day except for the two hours of every evening when mother taught reading, writing and arithmetic, I was left mostly to run wild” (page 9).

Example two: "The first day at school. For me, too. I have never been to school and was so happy to give my children what I never had. (Page 90)

Example three: "Lakhsman studies like fiend. ...he wanted long cars and big houses...if education was the tasteless bread that he must eat for exchange for his shiny cold dream then eat it fiercely he would." (page 285)

Example four: " a degree in social science that overqualified me for the job of a secretary and left me under qualified for everything else" ( page 517)

In the beginning of the text, characters were not educated and importance on the value of education was not emphasized. However, as the plot of the text developed, Lakhsmi's children were privileged to gain access to schools. They even attended school (except for Mohini) during the Japanese occupation, and continued their education until long after Malaya's independence. These entire examples mirror the reality that education aids in developing and improving the quality of life through career advancement and higher pay cheques, thus allowing space for individuals to contribute significantly to the desired social political change in the society.

c. A women's position in society

Example one: "Unlike boys, girls didn't have to go to school in our day except for the two hours of every evening when mother taught reading, writing and arithmetic, I was left mostly to run wild" (page 9)

Example two: "I(Anna) had attained grade three and my head master offered me a teaching post . Mother was pleased and I became a teacher. (page 288)

The feminist conditions are made obvious through the Chronotope of space and time in these two examples, where the problematics of gender are deduced to a stage where women are in absolute control of her fate and destiny, deciding for themselves on issues related to education, career and marriage. Women are no longer regarded as commodities that can be traded from one family to another

through the institution of marriage. They now have a right and space to be heard.

## **Conclusion**

In view of the above analysis, it can be concluded that the Chronotope of space in the text becomes meaningful and consequential as the Chronotope of time is endowed in the advancement of the plot. This unity between time and space in the text gravitates towards the materialization of subjective and abstract ideas of societal norms and practices practiced and performed by the characters in the text.

The Chronotope through the principle of spatial and temporal contexts allows readers to read and understand the author's intended meaning of the text through the interaction (dialogism) between actual occurring events (in history and society) with the created ones (by the author in the text), thus revealing societal norms, ideologies, principles, views, dreams and rules through the characters' course of physical actions and emotional being.

## **Limitations of the Study**

### Theory of Chronotope

The theory of Chronotope is Mikhail Bakhtin's most difficult conceptions simply because the definition, the classification and the examples of the available and reliable data on the notion of Chronotope is not adequate and can be loosely interpreted.

Apart from that, there is limited number of recent researches in the literary area by current scholars, although the theory is applied to other areas of research namely related to computers and classroom pedagogy.

Other than that, the theory of Chronotope is also not a popular choice of literary approach by researchers when studying or scrutinizing texts written by South East Asian writers about colonialism.

### Text

Due to the time constraint, the study was only limited to the dialogic and chronotopic occurrences in only one text- "The Rice Mother". If the

researcher was not pressed for time, she would have furthered expended the study, using the other two books ("Touching Earth and the Japanese Lover" written by the same author to trace elements of dialogism in terms of postcolonial and gender aspects.

## Suggestions for Further Studies

The researcher intends to develop this research by using the notion of the Chronotope to analyze feminist and masculine issues within the Diasporic Indian culture in postcolonial Malaya. Apart from that, the researcher also intends to delve more into the author's socio-economic background to measure how her background influenced the manner and content of her writing.

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