

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

One way to study and understand human life is through works of literature such as short stories, novels and poems. As Steve R. Hake, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English Literature from Patrick Henry College asserts, literature reflects life and its subject is nothing less than human life and human experience, every poem, play or story deals with some aspect of human life and experience (www.phc.edu/academics/liberlarts/literature/Eassay04.pdf). Many other suggestions can be given as how literature works for us. One notable suggestion given by John Lye, Department of English, Brock University (<http://www.brocku.ca/English/jlye/uses.html>), is that literature, like any art form, is useful because it engages the reader in a complex set of emotional, symbolic, moral, intellectual, and social considerations. Since literature explores the texture and meaning of human experience in a complex way, it leads us to insight and rich reflection concerning our lives and the nature of human experience, hence enriching us with “wisdom.”

On the notion of “national literature” in his lecture at the 5th International Conference on Thai Studies-SOAS, London, 1993, Chetana Nagavajara states that critics and scholars who are inclined to evaluate the intellectual and cultural strength of a nation on the basis of its literature were inclined to belittle other literatures. Nagavajara has

reservations about the image of Thai literature being in “a pristine state of delightful naivety, devoid of intellectual and philosophic ramifications (and sophistication).” He thinks that problems presented in traditional Thai literature are perhaps more implicit than explicit. He cites Duangmon Chitchamnong’s work, *Literary Values and Characteristics of Early Ratanakosin Literature* (1991), which demonstrates that there is a progressive deepening of a philosophic thinking from the Ayutthaya to the Ratanakosin period. Nagavajara indeed presents a debatable point about the importance and value of Thai literature, both classical and modern.

Suwannee Sukhonta, a well-known Thai humanistic writer (1932-1984), produces her works through her real life experiences. Her stories focus mostly on the relationships among family members in both positive and negative aspects. “*Soi Saeng Dang*” (1997) (The story of a rooster) is a story of a compassionate family and their dearest domestic pet, “Soi Saeng Dang”. It describes how the family bonds together and enjoys the quality time through their love of nature. This story illustrates clearly the love, warmth and understanding of a family.

By contrast, “The Story of Nam Phu” (1974) is a short biography of Sukhonta’s son, which was distributed on Nam Phu’s cremation day. Inspired by her painful loss of her drug- addict son, she composed the story to serve as a reminder to parents of teenagers to be more attentive and concerned with their children’s well being. The story was made into a film in 1984 and was a box office hit. In the movie, the main character was ‘Nam Phu’ who was heavily involved with drugs and died at the end. In 2004 “The Story of Nam Phu” was also made into a television drama series shown on Channel Seven. Most importantly, “The Story of Nam Phu” has been used in Thai secondary schools as a supplementary reading, aiming not only to inform young students about the destructive impact of taking

drugs but also to instill in them a strong sense of self-esteem and positive influence on their peer group. “The Story of Nam Phu” is undoubtedly an invaluable piece of Thai literature in that it reminds the readers of the importance of family life, alerts them to be more aware of drugs and other youth problems, and encourages them to be strong in overcoming these problems.

The novel, “*Prajan Seenamngeon*” (1975) (Blue Moon), a full version of “Nam Phu”, in which the main character is named “Rom”, has been chosen to be among the 100 most recommended Thai novels for Thai youth by The Thailand Research Fund Office. It is considered to be Sukhonta’s most outstanding piece of work portraying a family life in different aspects including separation and divorce of parents as well as the struggle of a single mothers and child rearing.

This proposed study aims to illustrate that Thai literature is an interpretive presentation of human experience and does offer moral intent to its readers. In the proposed study, “*Prajan Seenamngoem*” (Blue Moon) will be chosen for its main theme: single mother and child rearing. It would, indeed, be interesting and worthwhile to illustrate in details the main characters, the mother and the son, their relationships in good and bad times, the social environments in which their lives and experiences occur, and the choices that are made throughout the story. The researcher believes that the loss of Sukhonta’s drug- addict son is not only due to her child rearing failure, but also due to other factors such as his individual choices and social background of his life. It is hoped that such an interpretative study will instill a keen sense of family values among family members as well as provide a great source of inspiration for single mothers and the children of single mothers.

Purpose of the Study

To examine Sukhontha's portrayal of the single-mother family life and child rearing in her novel *Prajan Seenamngeon (Blue Moon)* in order to illustrate in details the problems of a single mother and her child which is not only from her child rearing failure, but also from other factors in society; his individual choices and the social background of his life. Even though her story was one tragic case of a lost addict son in the past, it would be worthwhile to parents, teenagers and the authorities to be more concerned about family problems which are behind nearly every social problem.

Educational advantages

- 1) To serve as an inspiration for society to be more concerned with teenagers and drug problems.
- 2) To serve as a source of inspiration for single mothers and the children of single mothers to overcome their problems in life.
- 3) To urge people in society and the authorities to be more aware of family problems.