



# Kumudini: The Laughing Rebel

○ Prema Nandakumar

Tears of unhappiness; tears of anger; tears of frustration; revelations of being unwanted; of being victimised; recordings of a million frustrations in the appropriate diction of hunger, pain, abandonment, murder, suicide. This is what strikes one while going through books by those rebellious women of Tamil Nadu (should I call them all feminists?), who wrote in Tamil, in the twentieth century. Sombre writings, often overflowing with self-pity and pathos.

There seems to be one exception to this rule: Kumudini. Not that her life was roses all the way. She was certainly a soul that was racked by innumerable worries, disappointments, and tragedies. Physical illness was always stalking her; anger suppressed within from having to remain a silent spectator, bound by the unseen shackles of a joint family, to the harsh treatment meted out to women around her. Perhaps, if she had chosen the tragic mode, she might have become a best seller. Or, if she had preferred to use the instrument of angry denunciation, again, she would have made waves in the feminist discourse that opened its accounts after India became independent in 1947. But Kumudini preferred the rebellion of laughter and wrested a place for herself alongside brilliant male humorists of her time like

Devan and S.V.V. She certainly had no sympathy for the women of her time who insisted on wallowing in ignorance even when someone placed the tiny lamp of literacy in their hands.

Kumudini (1905-1986) was born in 1905 to S.G Srinivasa Acharya and Lakshmi Ammal in Srirangam. Her real name is Ranganayaki Thatham. Sand he came from a distinguished family. Her paternal grandfather had been a Dewan of Travancore, her maternal uncle, Dr. S. Rangachari, an eminent Congressman. In those days, literacy for women was not encouraged. However, Kumudini was born at a time when the message of women's emancipation was drifting into these households. A certain amount of liberalism of thought in the family circle allowed her to learn to read and write Tamil and Sanskrit before she was married at the age of ten. Her bridegroom was the sixteen-year-old Srinivasan, scion of the well-known and extremely traditional Thathachariar family of Srirangam.

She was the eldest daughter-in-law. Srinivasan's three younger brothers and two sisters apart, there were indigent relations or innumerable cousins who had come to Tiruchi, and were staying with the family for their higher studies. The Thathachariar brothers were educated in the local College, but not the sisters. They were married off at a very early age. As Kumudini once told me: "I can remember that time only as years rolling by when there were at least four or five cradles being simultaneously

rocked in the room at the back of the house."

Kumudini's mother-in-law presided over this daunting population aided by an army of servants. Preparing food and feeding the family and its dependents was the only "occupation" the women knew. It never occurred to anyone that the women of the household could also spend a little time reading or writing. That was the men's arena!

Kumudini became a teenage mother in 1921. Giving birth to the first grandson of the family elevated her status but also meant more responsibilities at home. Her sisters-in-law were happy enough with their lot—the same old chores performed repeatedly, sandwiched by tradition and family, keeping busy with the routine and the mundane. She joined their conversations, but felt chagrined by their readiness to submit all the time to the pressures of tradition and to being ruled by their stern mother-in-law. Ranga, Another daughter-in-law of the house once told me:

*Manni*<sup>1</sup> was very daring (*Mannikku dhairiyam jaasthi*). Once we were rolling *appalams* in this room as usual. We were five or six women on the job and were quite tired. Just when we were softly telling one another with relief that the work would be finished in ten minutes, our mother-in-law turned up with another big vessel full of dough to make *appalams*. 'Is this enough?' she asked, meaning, was the dough adequate for another two hundred

*appalams*. None of us dared to answer. *Manni*, who was bending over her board rolling *appalams*, said quietly, 'It is enough if it is to be consumed in this household. But not enough to send to other cities.' I tell you, we were terrified of the consequences of her insubordination, for "other cities" meant Madras and Kumbakonam, where our sisters-in-law lived. Surely mother-in-law was going to burst out at us or ask our husbands to reprimand us for insinuating that she was partial to her daughters. But, nothing like that happened. Mother-in-law looked unsmilingly at us (she never smiled anyway) and walked out of the room with the vessel. From that day onwards, no more *appalams* were rolled in the house."

Indeed, it was a time when even such a minor statement could be seen as a major rebellion. The strong-minded Kumudini decided that she would pursue her love of literature. Her father kept up a steady correspondence with her and sent books for her. It is quite possible that he felt guilty that he had provided his sons with higher education (one of them joined the I.C.S. and later became the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India) but had been unable to help his very bright daughter acquire a proper education. Her husband Srinivasan got her the voluminous novels of Dickens and Scott from his college, which she read through carefully. She would then tell the stories to the brood of children at home. Kumudini told me that Jerome K. Jerome was Srinivasan's favourite writer and every other day, he would borrow, from the St. Joseph's College Library, the same *Three Men in a Boat!*

To Kumudini, the self-pity of the three men, George, Harris and Montmorency must have been reflective of her own condition. These three men were not unlike the women

in her household! Could one laugh with such nonchalance about one's own family and friends? Was Jerome describing the condition of her household? She once told me of the absurdities of family control to which she submitted herself. Srinivasan wanted his young bride to wear sandals like the ones worn by a lady in an English magazine. He bought her a pair but Kumudini did not dare wear them, as his mother would have become angry. So she would only wear them in her bedroom and walk up and down the length of the room (25 feet), imagining herself as walking in an open space!

Fortunately, she had a sunny disposition and as she read, observed and told stories to children, she prepared herself to take a flight into the realms of literature. Her father was himself a writer of short stories. When he happened to read some of her stories, he knew she had struck a rich vein. But would Srinivasan and his parents allow their publication? Fortunately Srinivasan was happy to do so, and the two men planned a strategy. All her letters to and from magazines would be routed through her father's address. 'Brahmavin Pakshapatham', published in 1932 was, perhaps, her earliest published work. By the time Kumudini was twenty-two years old, she was a mother of two, well versed in Tamil, Sanskrit and English Literature. By the nineteen-twenties, the campaigns of social reformers like Subramania Bharati and G. Subramania Iyer were getting results. In the meantime sister Subbulakshmi Ammal, herself a child widow, had founded a home for young widows and was advocating education as the only means of emancipation open to women.

Gathering knowledge at this time meant imbibing a lot of Gandhian thoughts from magazines and family friends who brought news from outside. The air was now vibrant with

the Gandhian Movement. Kumudini's uncle, R.V. Rangaswamy Iyengar was a Congressman. A distant relative and friend of the family was the famous T. S. S. Rajan, who had studied in England and drawn close to the nationalists. He was also the family doctor and Kumudini watched his bold stance against societal prudery. In contrast to the stultified atmosphere in her home, the electrifying freedom with which the Nationalists acted left a deep impression on the young lady's mind. Kumudini was twenty-five when Mahatma Gandhi started his Salt *Satyagraha* on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1930. This was the time when Kumudini was also undergoing an acute personal crisis. She was becoming deaf. By nature, she was not given to depression. And ever ready to face new challenges she met this too with a heroic heart. Meanwhile, she had become a great favourite with the children of the household as a storyteller.

In Tiruchirapalli, the marchers moved towards Vedaranyam under the leadership of C. Rajagopalachari. The movement generated unprecedented enthusiasm and was the subject of all domestic conversations. In the Thathachariar household the move must have had an interesting impact since it had to come to terms with the new breed of revolutionary *Brahmins* like Rajaji and Rajan. While the head of the family, Raghunatha Thathachariar, was a Rao Bahadur, a loyal British subject whose house blazoned the lion and the unicorn on its parapet (it still does!), the eldest son and daughter-in-law of Raghunatha Thathachariar had, by now, sworn to wear only *khaddar*! This seems to have led to at least a few storms in the domestic teacup, and Kumudini has brilliantly brought out the struggle and victory of the younger generation in her story, 'Father Learns a Lesson'.

One can say that Kumudini was 'discovered' by Kalki Krishnamurthy who was then piloting the weekly, *Ananda Vikatan* with tremendous success. This was the time when the Gandhian Movement was encouraging women to come out, educate themselves and make a mark in social work. With her background, Kumudini could rise to the targets set by her editor. He was delighted with her easy handling of conversational Tamil that could be pitted against the punditry-ridden, "pure Tamil" advocated by a few, and score high in readership.

Kalki Krishnamurti found in her a Gandhian writer perfect for his purpose. He was himself imbued with a deep sense of humour when trying to sell serious subjects and Kumudini too could do this very well. Her commitment to Gandhian idealism was palpable. She began writing essays and stories full of humour, to open the eyes of her readers to the truth about themselves. Are they going to choose the Gandhian path of simplicity, idealism and trusteeship or would they prefer to wallow in ignorance, luxury and self-defeating consumerism? Her essays and stories gained much through her first-hand experience of Gandhi's ways as she visited Sabarmati Ashram quite a few times, in the thirties and early forties. Aided by her husband she began wearing *khaddar*, learnt Hindi, experimented with hand-pounded rice and set up a *charkha* for herself. Braving family opposition, she spent several weeks in Wardha Ashram and corresponded with Gandhi.

By the time her parents-in-law came to know of her success as an author, Kumudini was already a well-known writer, and was even on the prestigious committee of *Ananda Vikatan* that chose the Bharati Gold Medal winner for 1938. In the photograph published in *Ananda Vikatan* (April, 24th 1938) Kumudini



**Kumudini with her sisters**

is seen seated next to the celebrated savant, U.V. Swaminatha Iyer along with C. Rajagopalachari, surely an unprecedented achievement for a lady from the Thathachariar family!

Her prodigious output resulted in her using several pseudonyms. Of these, 'Kumudini' became the most beloved. She must have felt very close to the heroine of Tagore's *Yoga-yog*, which she read in a Hindi translation. She empathised with the novel's heroine and many of the situations in the novel appeared to have deeply affected Kumudini's psyche. As a sincere Congresswoman, she was learning Hindi, and the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha of Tiruchirapalli gave the needed incentive. Her Tamil translation of Tagore's novel that appeared in the weekly *Ananda Vikatan* (beginning with the June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1934 issue) became an instant hit.

In the last years of her life when we used to speak of relatives and friends (the usual domestic talk), I found her sympathies always on the side of the rebels, even when one or two had gone to the extent of walking out of their marriages. Once when I expressed my horror, she pulled me

up sharply: "What do you know of what she went through? We were all helpless spectators and she such a fine musician!" Parental avarice in getting beautiful and bright girls married to rich widowers, overlooking age differences, was quite common among *Brahmins*, and this led to her writing the novel, *Dewan Magal* (Dewan's Daughter) in which a *Brahmin* girl revolts against her father and marries a *Kshatriya* boy. Though none of this sounds shocking to a reader today, in the early forties when there was a regular court battle going on about the validity of a *Brahmin-Vaisya* wedding, which was reported in the newspapers, the novel must have sounded alarm bells in traditional families. It was well that Kumudini was already in the Gandhian battle; her writing of the novel was an offering of love to the Gandhian women who had shown such grit in moving out of the straightjacket of caste like Rajaji's daughter Lakshmi and Sundaram Iyengar's daughter Soundaram. Incidentally Kumudini knew these ladies personally as well.

It is true Kumudini was blessed with an understanding husband but there were limits to his help as he was

the spiritual head of a Sriviahnava sect with a large following in North India. This is why she went alone to Wardha Ashram with Ambujammal and became an ardent Gandhian. She lived in a hut and watched Gandhi serve Hariharnath Parachure Sastri who was afflicted with leprosy. She ate the rough *chapatti*, neem chutney and garlic served by the Japanese cook and visited the basic school run by the Gandhian workers, Ashadevi and Ariyanayakam. These Wardha experiences were welcomed by the *Ananda Vikatan* readers with great enthusiasm.

There was no looking back now. Were they going to choose the Gandhian path of simplicity, idealism and trusteeship or would they prefer to wallow in ignorance, luxury and self-defeating consumerism? She wrote on women's emancipation, interviewed Madame Montessori and translated the Bengali short story writer Parshuram. At home, aided by her husband she began wearing *khaddar*, learnt Hindi, experimented with hand-pounded rice and set up a *charkha* for herself. Incidentally, no one else in her immediate family was in favour of *khaddar*. All the women wore silks (the ones smuggled from Pondicherry were particularly favoured). While this sartorial problem may not have affected the boys, Kumudini's only daughter, Devaki told me about how much she resented her mother for not allowing her to wear nice skirts. Devaki was married when she was a teenager and so "escaped" the "torture" soon enough!

A few letters from Kumudini's correspondence with Mahatma Gandhi have survived. The subjects included in their correspondence ranged from the *Mahabharata* to naturopathy. Gandhi was happy that far away in the south, there was a housewife who preferred to get back to the older methods of food and

medical habits with deep sincerity. A letter written in April 1941 is an instance of his anxiety to help her with advice even about common ailments:

Yes, you may add bran to your meal. Indeed you may take bran in the place of rice. Rice itself is constipating when polished partly or wholly. You should take prunes soaked one night in cold water. But probably the best thing would be mango juice and milk. Obstinate constipation has been cured here with mango and milk. Mahadev has gone to Ahmedabad. Love Bapu.

This closeness with Gandhi's way of life naturally made Kumudini read widely the writings of Gandhi and his associates. She was drawn to the works of J.C. Kumarappa and later translated Kumarappa's classics on village upliftment and the sayings of Jesus Christ. She also translated Bharatan Kumarappa's essays on travel. After her father-in-law passed away in 1940, Kumudini had to accompany Srinivasan to North India on tours to meet disciples. While accompanying him, she adhered to tradition with total involvement, helping and taking part in the religious ritualism of the *Sampradaya*. Since both Srinivasan and Kumudini were fond of travel they visited many places in the course of their journeys. She wrote of her peregrinations with wit, a fine sense of history and an enviable attention to detail. Some of the finest travelogues in Tamil of the last century were written by her and published in *Ananda Vikatan* and *Kalaimagal*.

Kumudini also travelled abroad. She visited Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, the United States of America, England and France at various times in her life. These were brief visits with her husband. Her keen eyes missed nothing while her lack of hearing only made her observations acute and accurate. The most charming facet of her travelogues is

her multifaceted humour, which distantly echoed a pointed criticism. Once she accompanied a group of friends and relatives to Sri Lanka, then called Ceylon. There were seven young women and three elderly ones who had invited themselves, prepared to be led by her into the unknown:

The thoughts of the young girls were on only one thing: shopping. Things are very cheap in Ceylon and they should be able to do lots and lots of shopping. Auntie (*Chithi*) and another old lady had the holy desire of seeing the island in which Sitahad been imprisoned by Ravana. My sole worry was how to get them all back to India safe and sound.<sup>2</sup>

The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1948 came as a shattering blow to Kumudini. She went to Wardha immediately to offer *pranams* to the departed soul. Years later, she told me how she had vowed to herself in Wardha that she would be more active than ever in following Gandhi's ideals. As soon as she returned home, she set about organising the Tiruchi Seva Sangam which has now grown to be one of the premier institutions of Tiruchi, bringing light into the lives of thousands of abandoned children, wives and widows.

There were many domestic tragedies but Kumudini continued with her writing unwaveringly. When she had to nurse a close relative who was suffering from psychological problems, she began to study a vast amount of literature on the subject and wrote a series on psychology for the monthly, *Kalaimagal* that was popular, informative and educative. However, the loss of her dear son-in-law Parthasarathi in 1957 in an accident silenced her pen for many years. She returned to writing only in the mid-seventies. Now it was almost totally spiritual. She made an intense study of Sri Ramanuja's commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*. Valmiki's

*Ramayana* became a constant companion. In the closing decade of her life, she made a pellucid English translation of the one hundred verses of Nammalwar. She remained a wonderful correspondent and never allowed the shadows of her personal sorrows to fall upon her conversation and her writings. She bore the grief with stoical fortitude when her husband and dear companion of seven decades passed away in 1983. She herself withdrew from the physical world, quietly, surrounded by her children and relatives on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1986.

In this centenary year of her birth, as one who had known Kumudini from childhood and later as her daughter-in-law and as one who was inspired in many ways by her and is now living in the same house, I was wondering what is it that strikes me most about her character?

Her gleaming eyes and brilliant saffron streak on her forehead attracted me to this frail lady when I was but a child. She invariably responded to my letters — they were little more than scribbles then, with understanding, humour and love. She would send me Tamil magazines and an occasional Tamil book and thus created in me a lasting love for Tamil language and literature.

I have preserved the scrapbook that she made for me fifty years ago in a “Lion Exercise Book” of eighty pages and sent by post to me from Srirangam to distant Vishakhapatnam where I was living at that time. In these fifty years, I have never received a richer and more precious gift than this notebook with the title-page inscription also in her beloved handwriting: “BEDSIDE BOOK: Scraps Gathered During Years, Specially copied for Prema for her Birthday, March 1954, With Love, Ranganayaki Mami”.

This book is among the most precious of my possessions and I



**Kumudini with her family in Kuala Lumpur**

have enjoyed reading the entire book at least once a year. Analysing her choice for a fifteen-year old girl, I can imagine her approach that mingled smiles with seriousness. The notebook opens with Max Beerbohm’s parody, ‘Chesterton on Love’:

Adoration involves a glorious obliquity of vision. It involves more than that. We do not say of love that he is shortsighted. We do not say of love that he is myopic. We do not say of love that he is astigmatic. We say quite simply: ‘Love is blind’. We might go further and say love is deaf. That would be a profound and obvious truth. We might go further still and say that love is dumb. But that would be a perfect and obvious lie. For love is always an extraordinarily fluent talker. Love is a wind bag filled with a gusty wind from heaven.

By choosing such a passage for the opening page, was Kumudini trying to instill a silent lesson into the mind of an adolescent girl? She was a feminist calling for woman’s independence, but Kumudini had no sympathy for sentimental distractions

in a girls’ life. At the same time, her lessons were never schoolmarmish. Then there are pages and pages of a hilarious passage from “Real Chesterton” where he speaks of “our sublapsarian friends”. This brief exercise book contains light quotes that have a way of drawing the young mind to choice and serious works in different languages. A verse from the 12<sup>th</sup> century Tamil classic *Kalingathu Parani*; a verse from ancient Sangam anthology, *kalithokai* (with word-to-word meanings in modern Tamil); a verse from the old Tamil poem *Nalavenpa*; four verses from *Tirukkural*; three verses from *Nalayira Divya Prabhandam*; Doha from Hindi; Arthur Symmons on the art of poetry; poems by Walter de la Mare and J.K. Stephen, Rabindranath Tagore, Guru Nanak and Bertrand Russell. It is quite amazing to go through these names (there are actually many more in the book where not a page is wasted) and anonymous writings as well.

My admiration for the author has been total and unwavering ever since my Kannada translation of her story,

'Nandu's Brother' was published in *Jaya Karnataka*, Dharwar (February 1942). I have not come across anywhere else in Tamil Literature, such a light touch in dealing with the most obscure and irascible subjects as in Kumudini's essays, short stories, translations, interviews and travelogues. Her style has an impish sparkle that refuses to be translated into English. Her sense of humour never deserted her, not even in her last days. Once I asked her

when she was obviously in great pain: "Is the tumour hurting you very much?" She looked at me, touched the place and smiled: "I was praying to the Lord to show me a way to come to Him. He has opened the door here." There was an angelic serenity about her face when she said this with a glint in her eye. I understood then Shakespeare's exclamation: "Ripeness is all!"

I have admired her for her severe self-discipline and sheer hard work. Yes, she was a great manager, be it a festival or wedding! And a great conversationalist too. She charmed the old and the young alike by speaking to them of their interests, aspirations, hopes, and disappointments.

I have also admired her for having been an activist. She did not merely speak of women's emancipation, but set about working selflessly to help unfortunate women. Whatever she had she would spend on others who needed help. In all my life I never saw her getting a new piece of jewelry for herself, and I found her quite at home in her rough *khaddar* sarees. If she asked for self-discipline, simplicity and discernment from women if they wished to be emancipated from their present ills, she herself was a role model for the New Woman. She was



**Kumudini after receiving the Bharati Award**

quite astonished by Tagore's accurate description of the women of her times who were caught in obscurantist ritualism when he created his heroine Kumudini in *Yoga-Yog*:

Kumudini learnt to read and write at home. She had no idea of the outside world. The light and darkness of tradition and modernity had coalesced in her and gave her mind an individuality of its own. Her world was not clear. She had a superstitious fear of minor deities. She would gaze at the moon on special days and sound the conch to get relief from the untouchable state entered by mankind during times of eclipse. She believed that if one went without food in the waning half of the moon in the Ashada month, snakes would not harm her. When she made a vow to a deity she bound some money in a cloth dipped in turmeric and often vowed that she would break a coconut and wave camphor if her wish came true. She believed in auspicious and inauspicious omens of everyday life. Though she had seen that works begun in an auspicious hour had ended tragically, she could not get over her faith in ancient beliefs.

While Kumudini could be chillingly critical of patriarchy that

kept women in such darkness, she was equally angry with educated women who wasted their talents and opportunities and refused to be helped to escape the morass. Her pungent criticism was subsumed as sparkling humour in stories like 'Made for Each Other'. Kumudini's *Sita's Letters* is a classic which criticises women for spending their time discussing and worrying about sarees!

She describes the way women talked of nothing but food, either cooking or feeding others or devouring it themselves, or how they went on and on about caste exclusiveness and marriage proposals, or endlessly talked about real and imagined ailments. Kumudini in her book creates a grandmother for Hidimbi. This grandmother Sammarjanakesi's letters are real sparklers; here is a passage in a missive to her friend Pisachavadani:

Because of this cold weather, my feet are very painful. Am unable to digest anything. I ate only one goat the other day, and my stomach churned all night. I was very uncomfortable. Hidimbi wants only a *swayamvara*. All because of modern education. Who listens to what we say? If you have any, send me a couple of barrels of chukku-thippili medicine.

All the same, since Kumudini herself encouraged discernment as an important instrument to be cultivated by the New Woman, I had no hesitation in watching her critically as well and clashing with her at times. Kumudini could be frustratingly self-willed and could marshal arguments with great speed. When she became angry, her words were few but they could administer a very painful jab. This surprised me in my early days as

a daughter-in-law but I realised soon enough that this was due to her impatience with educated girls not pressing forward at her speed.

Though she had dared the traditional household with her reserves of will-power, I do not think that she herself was quite free of what the tradition had injected into her psyche. One such incident was when I refused to have the *seemantham*<sup>3</sup> ceremony when I was expecting my first child. She was first amused and patiently explained to me that there was a science behind the *Vedic* injunction. I thought it was a criminal waste of money. As we exchanged letters, she became positively annoyed. What would her sisters-in-law think of her? Would they not consider her as not willing to spend money on a daughter-in-law? She wanted to purchase sarees, make me a pair of ruby-encrusted bangles. “If you refuse the ceremony, you will not get the bangles”. I agreed for the ceremony, but then I said no gifts; no sarees; no feasts. It would have to be simply the ritual and no more. She gave up at that and we dispensed with the function.

But when our baby daughter was born, Kumudini came with a cradle made of plastic netting woven by herself (which I have carefully preserved) and other gifts. When my second daughter was born, she came with choice presents. She assured me that I should not be worried that it was a girl again, for who knows, she may be a brilliant Indira Gandhi! She said this with her mischievous smile, for she was aware of my articles criticising the Prime Minister and the policies of her Congress Government at that time. When my son was born three years later, she came as usual, bringing gifts and then, during the *punyahavachan*<sup>4</sup> ceremony, clasped a couple of brilliant and expensive ruby bracelets on my wrists. I was taken aback and asked her whether this means she too belongs to the

“girls are good, boys are better” category? Again the same smile, what else?

Such easy banter was possible with her. I enjoyed a wonderful relationship with my mother-in-law. She never missed reading any of my articles, reviews and essays and if she found something which she thought very good, I would receive a telegram congratulating me. She was delighted when I became a Tamil writer. Each one of my anxieties conveyed to her in a letter would be promptly attended to by her. She would advise me on how to keep the *Maa Vilakku*<sup>5</sup> during *Navaratri*, for she wanted me to continue the tradition, as she had “received the tradition” from her mother-in-law. She also taught me how to look after the household deity, how to perform the special *pujas* required during festive days, the special dishes to be cooked and so on. At the same time, when her eldest grandson (through her elder son,

Venkatesa Thatham) told her he was marrying a Christian girl, she blessed them both and bought gifts for the new bride. For, though Kumudini belonged to an orthodox Srivaishnava family, she had translated J.C. Kumarappa’s *Precepts of Jesus* many years ago. Kumudini was indeed a remarkable synthesis of tradition and modernity and saluting her in this centenary year, I can only say, “All in her pointed to a nobler kind.”

### Footnotes

- 1 Tamil term for elder brother’s wife
- 2 Translations from Kumudini’s works and letters in this article are by Ahana Lakshmi
- 3 A *Vedic* ceremony where gods are propitiated with a series of rituals to bless the couple and the baby in the womb. The ceremony is performed in the husband’s house.
- 4 Ritual purification on the eleventh day after the birth of a child.
- 5 Lamp made of rice flour and lit on the altar on a Saturday of the *purattasi* month, after following the rules regarding ritual purity. □

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