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**Portraying Mahalakshmi as an Awe-inspiring Mistress: An  
Exploration of *M. Kumaran S/o Mahalakshmi***

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**Abstract**

Maria Shriver, an American journalist and activist has expressed that having kids - the responsibility of rearing good, kind, ethical, responsible human beings - is the biggest job anyone can embark on, which is a widely accepted truth, notwithstanding to the boundaries of time, culture and nativity. The research paper aims at exploring the episodes of the movie, *M.Kumaran S/o Mahalakshmi* that assist in substantiating the proclamation of Maria Shriver. The research paper attempts to scrutinize and reiterate the determination of the single-handed Mahalakshmi who plays a successful and inspiring role in all her capacities. Mahalakshmi is a prominent and inspiring woman character of the 2004 Tamil family-drama film, *M.Kumaran S/o Mahalakshmi* that was directed by M. Raja. Being a woman character, she has influenced millions of souls of different backgrounds remarkably. Having deserted by her lovely husband Eshwar, Mahalakshmi moves to a strange city with her sole boy child wherein she strives to become a college Lecturer, thereby constructing her and her son, Kumaran's life.

**Keywords-** *Tenacious, Mistress, Culture, Premises, Backgrounds, Prominent*

Mahalakshmi is the most liked and prominent woman character of the 2004 Tamil family-drama that was directed by M. Raja. The story revolves around Mahalakshmi and her family. *M.Kumaran S/o Mahalakshmi* is a remade version of the Telugu super hit movie, *Amma*

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*Nanna, Oka Tamila Ammayi* which was released in 2003. The movie is about Mahalakshmi, who is being separated peacefully from her husband, Eshwar due the conflicts in prioritising things. She bids a peaceful farewell to her husband and decides to bring up her son as a disciplined successful hero. The boy grows up to be passionate about Kick-boxing as his father is. His mother conceals the secret about the drift that has taken place between her and her husband. As a single child, Kumaran gets an unshared affection and caring of her mother and so, his mother becomes anything and everything for him on the earth. Mother is his best friend, guide and heroine. Moreover, in real life she is a true heroine as Evan Bayh has recorded “Mothers - especially single mothers - are heroic in their efforts to raise our nation's children”.

Kumaran happens to meet Malabar Mythile, a Keralite girl, and falls in love and discloses it to his mother. Thereafter, Mahalakshmi happens to have a quite unexpected meet with Mythile and thereon their new relationship develops. And as a responsible mother, she hands over her son to her daughter in-law without her son's knowledge. Before the unexpected death of Mahalakshmi, she reveals the identity of her husband and then, at her death's door she insists him to join with his father who is in Malaysia. Respecting his mother's word, Kumaran flies to Malaysia and gets shocked to find her father being married to another woman and having a daughter. Although their initial acquaintance seems to that of a cat and rat's, later their relationships is being mended and Kumaran starts loving and caring for the new family. Eventually, by the guidance of his father, Kumaran becomes an international Kick-boxer which had been his dream since his boyhood days.

The tenacious journey of Mahalakshmi elucidates the connotation of Charlize Theron, a South African actress and film producer: “You know, I don't think any mother aims to be a single mom. I didn't wish for that, but it happened”. The quote perfectly matches for Mahalakshmi, in addition, it expresses a paradoxical idea which compares and contrasts the similarities. Life is quite challenging, and for the woman like Mahalakshmi, it is for sure a dare challenging and tenacious journey. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines tenacious as “determined and having influence for longer than one might expect”. Influencing society is not as easy as pie and usually it happens out of volunteer actions. In *M. Kumaran S/o Mahalakshmi*, Mahalakshmi takes the role of an inspiring woman and she influences millions of female souls. Her role in the movie is pretty challenging as Charisma Carpenter, an American actress, has proclaimed: “I am a single mom and I'm the breadwinner and I have to work and I have to do these things and that's the way it is. I don't think my son even knows any different”. As a single parent, she endeavours to develop herself and construct her son in all the aspects.

Mahalakshmi projects to be a determined and iron woman of Tamil background. Although she is reformed to adjust with the twenty first century, her well-disciplined life figures her as a typical South Indian woman. The movie begins with the entry of the single-

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handed mother and her son into a strange city named Madras. Finding out a reputed educational institution to impart an excellent knowledge to her lovely son; is the first task of Mahalakshmi in the new city. As a single parent of the boy Kumaran, she strives to admit him in a reputed educational institution by withstanding and disregarding the serious and discouraging interrogations of the management concerning her ability to remit her son's school fees. This seems to be Mahalakshmi's greatest task, standing as a single earning member of the family. She tackles the critical situation by uttering her prudent opinion, wise interrogation and trustable promise which convinced the management and gave an opportunity for her son to be admitted. Her startling reply sounds to be a daring and motivational statement to today's single-handed mothers.

At the time of their separation, she connoted that she would give a standard education thereby constructing his life. She faces all sorts of hardships and works so hard that a common woman finds it too difficult to achieve. The mistress has strived with her uttermost capabilities; it is clear through her efforts in promoting herself from a school teacher to a college Lecturer. The fruit of her ceaseless hard work is utilized for their survival and to educate her lovely son. The movie adds multiple credits to her character as a working-class woman.

Being a lovely mother, she has never been a hurdle for her son's wish and desire, which is explicit through the scene wherein Kumaran watches boxing TV show and switches off the TV as soon as recognising that his mother has noticed him. Noticing her son's pretentious behaviour, she takes a friendly approach and advises him, telling, he can do anything tenaciously that his heart desires provided, they don't hurt his conscience. This demonstrates Mahalakshmi as an amiable and loving mother.

Mahalakshmi plays several roles as a single woman: affectionate mother, amiable colleague, passionate wife, and as a lecturer with integrity. In all her capacities she proves herself as a tenacious and righteous woman. As an affectionate mother, her bond with her son is quite common as every mother and son has. Kumaran cares much for his single-handed mother, and in return, she encourages him in all the life-building prospects. Kumaran gets an offer of visiting Singapore as a reward for his excellence in Kick-boxing, but simply he denies it, telling, his mother is sick.

For Kumaran, Mahalakshmi is a mother of morality, willpower, abundant affection and empathy. She has been a postmodern mother, destructing all the stigmas and bondages of a typical mother. According to the custom of South India, a child is always known by his or her father name and his or her name takes the father's name as an initial, but this custom is broken-down and the postmodern culture is introduced in the film through Mahalakshmi and Kumaran. Kumaran is always known by his mother, which is vivid through his initial that his name takes. Such postmodern idea is appreciated and welcomed by the educated women society of 21st century India. In addition, being an abandoned woman, she inspires the

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woman of present scenario through her attitude. She has a lot of willpower and always stood for discipline irrespective of the situation, thereupon, she proves herself in many ways. Firstly, she proves her purity by remaining single after her separation with Eshwar. Secondly, as a responsible woman, she teaches good values to his son and leads him in the path that takes him towards a disciplined and successful life. Thirdly, being an intelligent professor, she seeks order and courtesy in life. Adding to this, she is a determined woman who voices against the cruelty and vulgarity.

There are a few scenes which depicts the daring voice of Mahalakshmi against cruelty and vulgarity. Particularly, two such incidents take place in the college premises. On a fine day, Mahalakshmi joins with her colleagues in the canteen, wherein a few undisciplined and arrogant boys sat behind her, among which one started passing sexy comments on her. Thus, she is propelled to beat the boy and pulled him out clutching his shirt collar and pushed him to the ground and warned him. This shows, she is unlike other women who bear and tolerate the cruelty caused by the male society over them. As J. K. Rowling says, "It takes a great deal of courage to stand up to your enemies", Mahalakshmi stands against the enemies courageously not withstanding to their physical appearance and strength. She does not compromise discipline at any cost for anything and therefore, she stands as a valiant woman of the twenty first century and is being appreciated by the entire woman society.

There is another scene which illustrates Mahalakshmi's integrity and discipline. Kumaran comes to her college to pick her up, wherein he happens to encounter a thrilling and violent experience. As he enters the college, an arrogant guy passes a dirty and disgracing comment on him which makes him to fly into rage of anger and thus starts beating him very badly. When Mahalakshmi comes to the bloody spot, first she scolds her son for behaving so brutish and then, abuses the boy who fought with Kumaran; this very well delineates her integrity and impartiality. Although she is very sure that her son would not have been the root cause for the problem, she scolded him first for behaving so unkind and proves her integrity in chiding. Then, moves to the arrogant boy and tells him daringly that her boy has born out of love and not as his birth; born out of lust. This episode too portrays Mahalakshmi as a bold natured woman of the 21st century male dominant society. It reveals that she is afraid of nothing and she is dare enough to challenge against any sort of rough and difficult circumstances, because she is a tenacious woman.

There is an incident to substantiate Mahalakshmi as a determined woman, and it proves her to be an epitome of twenty first century woman society. She goes to attend the betrothal of the daughter of the canteen Bai, wherein she explodes into rage of fire and blasts at the rowdies those were staying in the first floor of the home for rent. A gang of seven to ten boys try disturbing the betrothal ceremony by throwing liquor bottle in the occasion spot, which disturbs Mahalakshmi very badly and she challenges that she will throw them out of the home with the help of his valiant son. It is apparent here that though she is physically less

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strong than the boys, she is psychologically strong enough to caution the gang of young men in wild tone. As she decided and challenged, she keeps her words by getting her son's support to beat the rowdies and throw them out from the top of the building. She sets herself as an epitome for the contemporary woman society. It teaches the moral that evil must be punished and thrown out of the society for the peaceful living of good people. Until the stay of the thugs at Iyyer's home, he could not lead a peaceful life. Moreover, he is being threatened and disturbed by the arrogant gang. Delving into the incident reveals the fact that Mahalakshmi is psychologically stronger than the male society; even the Iyyer is not bold enough to challenge and chase the rowdies out of his home, but in a single day the valiant lady achieves it.

Having such a strong mind, she tolerates and manages the tough situations and her sickness with smile. She is a heart patient and physically not strong as the other women in her society. Even after experiencing mild heart attack for twice, she strives to survive as a valiant lady and this she easily achieves because of her psychological strength. Unlike the common woman of the first decade of twenty first century, Mahalakshmi takes the additional responsibility as a working woman to bring up her son, and challenges the difficulties and dares to face problems, which is highly appreciated by the woman society of the present scenario. In spite of the troubles and toils, as a working-class woman, she is respected which makes her feel privileged in the society. It can be said that Mahalakshmi gains the daring spirit by overcoming difficulties in her life. Her experience validates the statement of the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Late. Dr. J. Jayalithaa; she shares in an interview with Simi Garewal that "Experiences shape you, and life moulds you as you go along".

Although the director portrays Mahalakshmi as a typical woman character emerging from a typical culture and society, she is not as typical as every man and woman preserve. She is a woman of daring innate, challenging potential and love for responsibilities. Her daring and determined mind is explicit in the scene where her husband and she end up their family relationship through a smooth compromise. Unlike the common and ordinary Tamil woman, Mahalakshmi is not completely disintegrated when her husband utters that the love he has for family stays as a hurdle for his achievement, instead she reacts in the ways that the relationship is separated peacefully. For her, living together for namesake is meaningless, because so far they were in fervent love bond, and she has no patience and mind to lead a pretentious life. Although she is separated from her husband, she lives an independent life and serves as an epitome, which shows her as a woman of determination. Her resilience is well apparent and it figures her as an inspiring single-handed woman character in the movie.

There is a correlation between the connotation of Clare Boothe Luce and the life of Mistress of the movie. Clare Boothe Luce has penned, "Because I am a woman, I must make unusual efforts to succeed". Mahalakshmi too reacts in an unusual manner towards the problem and she puts extra efforts to succeed. As she has articulated her wish to her husband: "If becoming the champion of kick boxing is your ambition, then I too have mine own of

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bringing up my son as a successful personality in the society”, she achieves her goal through her constant effort and struggle by discarding the toils and problem and thereby, she stands tall among the women society. It cannot be simply said that Mahalakshmi has no feeling for their separation, like the common woman she too has experienced it, but she differs from the common woman by reacting differently, it is all because of her uncommon perception of the problem. She does not sit in a corner and cry for the separation, instead acts actively and positively to construct her life and hone her son’s future. It is clear that she dislikes and avoids projecting herself as an emotional woman rather than a sentimental woman. Through this, she teaches the female society to be sentimental and strong rather than emotional and weak.

The challenges that she makes against the male society have always ended up in success and there is no space for any further question and enquiry. This is all because of her determination to success, arrogance towards cruelty and awful-inspiring nature. She projects herself as a role model for millions of women who are timid and feeble to challenge the problems of everyday life. Throughout the movie it is clearly projected that she never compromises for evil at any cost, and this shows her as an epitome of tenacious woman.

The primary idea of the story is that she is not portrayed as a feminist instead as a typical woman with common problems and difficulties, but she differs herself from others through her response to social evils and causes. She never wished to be away from men society like feminist rather, she loved and treated male society equally. As an unflinching woman, she has no tolerance and compromise for any sort of immoral activities, which in addition projects her as a mother and woman of morality. She thought and proved that her love is more than enough for her son until her last breath. She proves herself as a responsible and caring mother even at her death’s door by insisting her son to be with his father after her death.

The movie, *M. Kumaran S/o Mahalakshmi* projects Mahalakshmi as a working-class woman and a single-handed woman; this has added feathers to her hat. She stands high many a times as a pride among the woman society. Analysing her role, it can be simply said that her struggles have shaped her into a successful woman personality and the pains have transformed her into a tenacious woman. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton has proclamation, “the best protection any woman can have ... is courage”. Mahalakshmi protects herself from all evil causes and effects through her courage. However, the movie reiterates the truth, Mahalakshmi has played a successful and inspiring role in all her capacities: as a passionate wife, affectionate mother and an audacious lecturer. Thus she proves herself to be an awe-inspiring mistress of *M. Kumaran S/o Mahalakshmi*.

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