

**Geriatric Analysis of Sexual Behaviour in *Ilai Uthir Kaalam* by
Neela Padmanabhan**

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Abstract

When you are old and grey and full of sleep
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep.

– W.B. Yeats

Geriatric literature deals with the issues faced by old men and women in their final stages of life. The role played by sex at this age and vice versa is a huge question which this paper attempts to answer. Old age is also a part of life which every human on this earth is destined to go through. It has its own pros and cons which lie in the way people look at it during old age. People say that old is gold, but they do not give the old people the same attention that they give to gold. Nothing changes in old age, except for the physical transformations. Sex plays a very diplomatic role in this novel. This paper tries to juxtapose and bring out the relation between sex and old age and how one influences the other either positively or negatively.

Keywords: Neela Padmanabhan, *Ilai Uthir Kaalam*, Geriatric Analysis, Sex, old age, loneliness, company, life, time and youth.

Everything has its stages of existence just like a flower has seven stages of development, women have nine stages in their lifetime, and a baby takes nine months to form completely in the mother's womb. Neela Padmanabhan deals with the stages of human old-age, desires and longings. Right from childhood to adulthood our desires cannot be controlled. People say that old people do not long for anything, because they have already enjoyed all the pleasures and desires in their youth, and nothing is in reserve for them in future but death.

No one understands that they are also capable of having desires that cannot be ignored just because they have reached the final stage of their life. Having wishes and longing for certain things are not affected by the age and it differs from human to human. Old age does not simmer down the sexual needs of a person. They want someone to satiate their needs in all aspects. In the ancient times, men had lots of spouses even after the age of seventy and eighty. It depends on the psyche of the individual and not all people long for this. There are some exceptional cases too. “I don’t know the question, but sex is definitely the answer”, said Woody Allen.

There is a belief that as the hair sprouts turn intense black, the sexual desires also grow intense. If that is the case, then when the hair turns grey the sexual desires should be less and more controlled. Sexual desires normally surface at the age of seventeen and continue through old age till the death bed. Research says that the intensity of sexual desire is more in the old-age for a person who has had active sex in the early stages of life. When they are unable to satiate their sexual needs, they think of forcing themselves on any possible victim. The aged people wish to fulfil the desires which they did not enjoy in their youth. “Sex is the consolation you have when you can’t have love”, says Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Old people have reached the stage of their life where they are unable to control anything. They develop the characteristics of a kid and are ready to go to any extent to get what they want without thinking of the consequences. In this novel, an eighty-year-old dentist rapes a small girl of seven, who turns out to be the granddaughter of his close friend. An action done for momentary sexual pleasure inevitably spoils his friendship, the reputation of his profession and family. The thirst for sexual pleasure is like drinking the Roman sea water; the more you drink the thirstier you become. The more they are carried away by the need to quench their carnal desires, the more madly they are driven by their hormones to go in search of sexual gratification.

Oedipus complex and Electra complex serve as testimonies for this in literature. It has been prevalent among the primitives and thus, gets reflected in the Greek and Roman literature, which are considered as primitive literatures. “It’s a dreadful thing to yield... but resist now? Lay my pride bare to the blows of ruin? That’s dreadful too.” says Sophocles. In the Indian context, especially from a Tamilian’s point of view, old people are meant to live in seclusion, spending their time going on pilgrimages and helping their children in the meticulous art of parenting their grandchildren and so on. “Even the desires will come at the age of fifty and it’ll come with mature love; there are no secrecies here and as days go by, this will get intensified and give pleasure” says a lyricist. “Everything in the world is about sex except sex. Sex is about power”, said Oscar Wilde.

Most people forget to take care of the needs of the aged people. This results in them voluntarily secluding themselves from others and they start doing things, even illegal activities,

without the knowledge of the others. The film *Lens* warns the people about the number of old people involved in cyber-pornography which is increasing alarmingly. Despite the attempt made by a few movies, there are no signs of people turning their attention towards this issue. Hence, the author, in his 80's, has written this novel with these themes interwoven into the main plot of the novel. One cannot speak of these issues openly as sex is still considered a taboo in the Indian society. The author names the preface "Ruthukkallin Oode" in Tamil which can be transliterated as "going through the process of adolescence". The essence of the novel continues to haunt the reader even after finishing the book. Modesty forbids questions. Similarly, old age ignores discriminating factors such as caste, creed, sex and religion. "Sex is more exciting on the screen and between the pages than between the sheets" said Andy Warhol.

The need for a companion is felt with higher intensity as the years pass by. The increase in the feeling of insecurity is directly proportional to the age. The importance of a spouse is understood and realized only in the old age. The character Chellappan, a caretaker of the people in the old age home, speaks his heart out to Radhakrishnan. He states that he does not want to get married as he has grown up in a dysfunctional family with quarrels everyday as his father had two wives. Here, Radhakrishnan asks if there is anything important in a married life apart from sex. Chellappan gives an epic reply, "The biological need is not a problem. I am the son of a man who has two wives. I was subjected to it all in my life. But I never restrict the passions of my heart as well as its desires".

Keeping the instincts of sex in control is not a great deal as there are many other things in this world which act as diversions. There are also a number of things that can flare up the spark and make men fall prey to their instincts and seek momentary pleasure. A person does not have to keep himself away from sex; it is more than enough if he keeps away from the things which tempt him. Most of the men fall into this mess because they become the victims of their momentary sexual instincts. One has to admit that all men cannot keep off distractions and avoid temptations because it is natural for a man to get married and beget children. They are unable to control their emotions and the urge to satiate their hunger for sexual satisfaction.

Radhakrishnan thinks that he has lost his wife on account of his ego as she separates the beds. He does not give up. When his wife, the only person who cares about him, does not take interest in his activities anymore, he feels like an orphan in his own house. There is no one to ask him about his day or if he is of good health. Some psychologists say that most men remarry after the death of the wife because they miss these little things that women do for them. It is compared to the flies getting attracted to the light and eventually meeting its end by falling into the lamp. This is compared to a man's quest for sexual satisfaction. Once he experiences sexual gratification, it becomes hard for him to stop and his quest continues.

Sex in the old age is influenced by creativity, especially if one's partner belongs to the same sex, says Daniel Honan in his article "Who slept in Shakespeare's bed and Why does it matter?" Anne Hathaway was given his 'second best bed' in his will; who he gave his best bed to is still a mystery. A Shakespearean scholar, Don Paterson argues that Shakespeare was unequivocally gay and this has had some influence on the works produced by Shakespeare in his final years. The novel possesses an interesting element regarding a foreign girl. Muthusamy's son has married a foreign girl and brought her home to take care of his old and ill father. He makes the mistake of leaving her behind to take care of his father and leaving India. The girl, being young, gets lonely and desperately wants a man to save her from her loneliness.

The readers are not given any information on what happens after that and it is left to the readers' imagination and assumption. Soon, the daughter-in-law spreads rumour that her father-in-law is trying to misbehave with her. The author makes it clear that this is a rumour which she spreads in the hopes that her husband will come and take her away with him. Unfortunately, this results in an unexpected tragedy; the father-in-law commits suicide, and this makes the villagers believe that the rumours are true as a woman would never lie about things which involve her chastity, morality and dignity. The true is that she did not like her life in the village and spreads the rumour to bring back her husband and enjoy life with him. She uses her father-in-law as a scapegoat. Unable to stand this shame, he commits suicide as there is nothing left for to live for without his dignity which has been spoiled by his daughter-in-law's false accusations.

Another incident in the novel involves the story of a son with an aged widower father. He brings his widowed mother-in-law to assist his wife. When the son and his wife are not present at home, the old man tries to misbehave with his son's widowed mother-in-law. This issue is taken to the notice of a doctor who is an expert in dealing with such cases. He advises that it is not advisable to take immediate action, prescribes hormone tablets which will reduce his sexual drive and advices them to not leave the old man alone at home. A very orthodox Brahmin man, now in his sixties has done this heinous deed which is hardly believable. This proves the age old saying "Even good Homer sometimes nods".

The novel also speaks about Goethe, the famous German, who loves a girl of seventeen at the age of seventy. He even goes to the extent of going to a doctor to check if he was sexually fit at the age of seventy so he could marry her but the girl refuses. This is acknowledged by Goethe in his works *A Man of Fifty* and *The Morien Bad Elegy*. It is hard to understand why the poet falls in love with a young girl at the age of seventy and if age really does play a role in love and sex. "Forty is the old age of Youth; fifty the youth of old age", said Victor Hugo.

The book beautifully unfolds the mysterious experiences of sex in the old age as encountered by different characters. One can easily understand how much old people struggle

and suffer to maintain their physical and psychological standards in their daily life. By the end of the novel, one might not retain this opinion, as the book drags to a point where one can find that the old are reaping the harvest of the seeds which they planted in their youth. Hence, no sense of pity is evoked in the readers on the event of their struggles and pain.

The Little Boy and the Old Man

Said the little boy, "Sometimes I drop my spoon"

He whispered, "I wet my pants & often cry"

The old man nodded and said, "So do I"

But worst of all," said the boy, "it seems

Grown-ups don't pay attention to me"

And he felt the warmth of a wrinkled old hand.

"I know what you mean," said the little old man"

- Shel Silverstein

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