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Rhythm of the Rattling Rootless with Reference to Neela Padmanabhan's *Generations*

Preetha. C., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. (Scholar)



Neela Padmanabhan

www.neelapadmanabhan.com

Neela Padmanabhan's Novel

The paper discusses Neela Padmanabhan's *Generations*. Neela Padmanabhan is a distinguished Tamil novelist. The discussion here is based on the translation of the original in Tamil, *Thalaimuraigal*. The translator Ka.Naa.Subramaniam is a celebrated writer of Tamil novels, short stories and

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literary criticism. The theme of the novel is to make one's way independent of the tradition and yet the impact and influence of tradition will always be there. Changed circumstances may dislodge tradition and may set us free as a wind might loosen a seed stuck in a dry spot.

The Central Character

Diravi is the central character in this novel. He was shocked (and individually awakened from within) when his older sister Nagu Akka who was married six months back to Sevantha Perumal was sent back home calling her unfit for marital life. He felt that it was Nagu Akka's singular misfortune that all this had happened to her. Some made fatalistic remarks such as "She was fated to live like that, what we can do? The sins of the past life". (64) When Nagu Akka lay on her stomach, most of the time weeping either in the dark inner room or in the passage, Diravi's anger turned towards his brother-in-law who has not considered his sister's feelings. Nagu Akka is an example of some women in our society, who suppress their emotions within themselves, to maintain their family bonds.

The Tradition of Suppression of Sad Feelings

When Diravi and his family tried to forget what had happened, others enquired of them, expressing sorrow, but some were just curious which portrays the intention of the people living in our society. Even when their nightmares came to dire reality, when his brother-in-law Sevantha Perumal secretly married, each one in the house tried to hide their feelings including Nagu as they felt that their burden must not make the other persons' heart feel heavier.

Brother's Burden

Diravi was aware of the situation at home. The sentimental attachments and enmities he had felt were now taking shape as real problems and challenging him to fight to a finish. Watching Nagu Diravi's heart ached. It was a problem, a challenge to him. Sometimes he would see Sevantha Perumal in the town. He no longer thought of him as brother-in-law. He used to avoid him but these days he sought to hold that fellow's eye with his own and tried not to give way to him. He thanked Kuttalam for giving him this courage. Kuttalam was older than Nagu and he was very much concerned about Nagu.

Second Marriage Ends as an Unhappy Wedlock

In due course they came to know that Sevantha Perumal is not happy with his second wife and that they were now reaping the harvest of their wrong doing. It pleased Diravi but did not profit Nagu in any way. Sevantha Perumal had charged Nagu Akka with not being a female. "But it was more than two years since he married Vadivu and no sign of a child yet...did it not prove that it was Sevantha Perumal who lacked manhood... (10). But will the society answer to this?

To Prove to the World Around

Diravi wanted to prove to the town that his Nagu Akka was not what her husband had accused her of being. There was gossip about Sevantha Perumal's manly prowess, rather lack of it. But would he be right in putting Nagu akka in the public eye again, thought Diravi. He wanted to do it but was afraid of the psychological burden he would be placing on himself and on his sister.

Now, A School Teacher

Diravi managed to get appointed in Karingal Government School. The guidance of Moses at this point of time to take his sister to a doctor seemed very much impossible for Diravi as Nagu Akka has not come out of the house all these years after she got separated from Sevantha Perumal.

Nagu Akka

Nagu Akka hardly spoke with anyone. Diravi was old enough to guess for himself what was going on in her mind. Shortly after puberty she had been married to Sevantha Perumal, not knowing anything about marriage except that it was a change of dwelling. Within six months, she had been sent back home. She was a year or two older than Diravi and like him, not mature enough to understand her own plight.

Nagu Akka's ill health was the right time when Diravi decided to take her to the hospital with the permission of the elders, where he was confirmed that there was nothing wrong with his sister. Perumal had wronged Diravi's family immensely but Nagu Akka was not progressive enough to say that she would not consent to live with him. Even so, he could not afford to think only of his feelings and his self-respect when it was a matter which affected his family and his sister Nagu. He was sure that he could defend himself competently now. But only when he spoke to Sevantha Perumal regarding this matter, did he realize that his brother-in-law was fully aware of the mistakes on his side and was never ready to accept the true self of Nagu.

A Revolutionary Idea – Against Tradition

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It was here where Diravi decides that he should bring a change in his sister's life by getting her married to Kuttalam. He knew that it is not an easy task but he was ready to overcome any number of obstacles for the sake of his sister. He knew that Nagu was silently thankful to him. But things did not go well as Diravi expected. Sevantha Perumal and his wife decided to kill Kuttalam and succeeded in their plan. Everything was like a bad dream. Nagu Akka, Father and Mother and of course Diravi himself left the house and decided to go to another place where Diravi was working. They were more dead than alive.

The Texture of Years, Events, Characters and Situations

The texture of years, events, characters and situations connecting the dying Unnamalai Aachi and her youthful grandson Diravi emerge as a tapestry of truth. The awakening of the individual's consciousness - to the limits his community will permit is a theme of the novel. Though Diravi has no pretensions to become a crusader or a social reformer, he does become his sister's defender. Brotherly chivalry, a common theme in Indian fiction and cinema is handled convincingly here, without a trace of sentimentalism.

But in the whole novel Nagu remains a mute sufferer whose life was rattling from the beginning till the end. She is, indeed, rootless. Though there are one or two people like Sevantha Perumal, there are many like Diravi who, in spite of their own burdens, understand and help to uplift the female sufferers in our society. Now we can see that there is a generational change and both the males and females have taken a different approach towards life and are trying to understand their companions' feelings. Everything lies in the eyes of the beholder.

Reference

Neela Padmanabhan. *Generations*. Chennai: Orient Paperbacks, 1997.

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