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Virtue and Vice: Male characterisation in the Novels of Kavery Nambisan

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Abstract: Considering the cultural setup of any community in the society, it is interpreted that the differing ideas of personal thinking are usually influenced by universal thinking. The balance and the connectivity between the subjective opinions and the objective decisions lead to a complete understanding of one's self. The first proposal of the present study is to analyse the life and behavioural patterns of men in the novels of Kavery Nambisan, the South Indian novelist-surgeon. Though most of her novels have women as protagonists, the second aim is to portray that her characterisation of men are evidently influenced by external situations and internal conflicts leading to identity crisis, prejudiced attitudes, tragic flaws, progressive virtues, manipulated deeds and recollected memories through narrative techniques. The paper focuses on underlying interpretations and desires which complicate the relationship of male characters through their virtues or vices.

Keywords: Attitude, identity, Kavery Nambisan, memories, men characterization, relationships.

1. Introduction

Kavery Nambisan is a South Indian writer known for her realistic novels. In the ever changing mode of literature, she has achieved a great impression for her challenging plots. Though Nambisan's protagonists are mostly women, the men of her novels also pose different traits. The male characters in the novels of Kavery Nambisan are interpreted for their individualities and personality traits.

Character is a recognisable fictional being which acquires the ability to think and act. Characters can be described as fictional personalities or imaginary counterparts to human beings. "Most importantly, characters themselves can be signs in a number of ways: they can be instances of exemplary behaviour, they can be symbols or in other ways representative of feelings, attitudes, problems and the like. In addition to that, characters are an important part of the emotional structure of literary texts, films, etc. They influence the feelings, moods and emotions of the audience to a considerable degree" (Eder et al 15).

The present study is the analysis of unique disposition of male characters in the seven novels of Nambisan. This shows the versatility of the author in constructing varied personalities influenced by external conditions and inner psyche. She delves deep in to their mind to depict their anguish, pain and morality. It is decoded that Nambisan's male characters possess both virtues and vices. They are usually affected by the past memories, character flaws, manipulative behaviour, ideal virtues, identity crisis and prejudices.

2. Men with haunted past

The past of one's life has serious impact in the future. The people wounded in their first phase of life can either be optimistic to confront life or shattered completely pushing to the levels of depression. The past makes the people lodged in the crucial pain encapsulated in the form of flashing memories. Simon of *The Story That Must Not Be Told*, Bharat of *The Truth Almost about Bharat* and Sampath of *The Town like Ours* suffer thinking of their past incidents. Simon is affected with guilt as his conscience has instructed his developed hatred in the long phase of his subservient married life. Bharat tries to escape his haunted past of attacking Shaffrudin with a stone. Being suspended, he is on his bike rides just to forget the guilt of hurting someone physically. He even dreams that he would be arrested for his death. Sampathu, a noble man who walked out of the house with his dead sister's daughter lives as a lovable father to Rukmini.

Jean Paul Bedard, the writer and runner says, "Our story is our past, and our past is our story. Much of the hurt we carry around with us is a stowaway from our past— our inability to let go of what once was in order to grasp hold of what now is" (Bubany). Simon carries his little secret of losing his wife's manuscript and his deep hidden hatred for his wife before her death. Though it was a love marriage, Simon gradually develops a mixed kind of

anger and hatred for Harini. He even wished Harini to be dead and unfortunately she met with a fatal accident on the same day. He holds this guilt in his inner mind and at the same time he realised that he actually experienced a sense of freedom in her absence. His personal life was always conditioned according to Harini's thinking pattern. When his desires were rejected out of no reason, he could not take it easily. Their couple goals never worked out and the saddest part was that Harini never realized that she has been the reason of rift in Simon's life.

Bharat never thought his involvement in strike would lead to a person to Intensive Care Unit. He is worried whether Shaffrudin knows the truth that the stone was hit by him. He could not share this with anyone and guards this little secret like Simon's intolerance towards Harini. Sampathu witnessed the cruel murder of her sister by her husband for begetting the girl child again. With the blood trails left, he gets away with his sister's daughter. He was genuinely compassionate to save the life of the new born, which is neglected for its gender. He reaches Pingakshipura with her and later forms a family with abandoned Saroja and Gundu. Simon, Bharat and Sampathu are influenced by the incidents of the past leading them to the sense of guilt, sorrow, fear and depression.

The author presents the focus of these characters after the tragic incidents in their life. Simon involves himself in helping the slum and thus exercises his choices without any forced limitation. Though he is a loner, he is a happy widower spending time with Thangu, the cat. Initially, Bharat travels to various places just to escape from the haunting incident but later he grows strong enough to confront the bitter reality. Hiding the sorrowful incident, Sampathu looks after Rukmini with great concern and never had he tried to disclose the truth to her.

3. Men with character flaws

Nambisan employs the heroic flaw which ranges like alcohol addiction, inferiority complex and personality disorders. The flaws of these characters not only affect them but also their relationships. Every father, husband or son is afflicted with imperfection which sometimes distorts the happy life. Manohar of *A Town like Ours* is an English professor but with a serious personality disorder. He longs for children and his sterility pushes him to be shameful. "I am seedless" (TLO 21). He has never shared this with his wife Kripa and gradually this longing turns him to be a kidnapper. He ends up in imprisonment for his confinement of Rukmini and other children.

His emotional stressor blinds his moral instincts. He is insensible to the social ethics and is depressed of his childlessness. "All I want to do is care for children. I want to see them eat, play and quarrel. I want to see them laugh" (TLO 216). His pain is deep with the anguish to possess children calling him father. He works out this fantasy by kidnapping five children and the recent addition Rukmini assists him to look after the younger ones. Filled with tears, he nervously shares his inability to have children with Kripa. He very much wants to keep the children with him justifying that he spends three hours playing with them. He is content with the parenthood delights and at the same time he realises his unnatural behaviour.

Shari of *Mango-coloured Fish* adores Paru Uncle, the husband of Parvathi Aunty as her second father. Paru uncle is a dreamer and a drunkard which is later known to Shari. He resigned his job setting up an own factory and creates home gadgets. Shari is revealed of his serious addiction to alcohol only later. She is shocked to find that his uncle is actually drinking inside the factory. The uncle is depressed saying, "I am a fool and an idiot and very wicked" (MCF 185). His liver is rotting and he is under medication taking only ginger tea, curds and milk. He could never come out of his addiction which leads to serious fights and this prevailing weakness reels out him of the home and he never returned.

Rao Bahadur and Baliyanna of *The Scent of Pepper* are the victims of mental depression. Out of no reason, Rao Bahadur segregated himself from the social circle. He lost his massive weight and confined to the study room. He refused to eat and bathe. The family strove hard to maintain the dignity but he committed suicide by swallowing his diamond ring. The same depression was contagiously passed on to his son Baliyanna, the veterinary doctor after the departure of Clara, the British born. Nanji, his wife understood the sadness of his eyes portraying his restlessness, annoying silence and gloomy nature.

Baliyanna failed to find his inner peace in the embrace of his wife. His melancholy and displeasure with the visits to gypsy women grew day by day. He very much missed Clara and sought his solace in alcohol. "He felt the passive contentment of partial living and he did not fight it" (SOP 98). As he loved Nanji deeply he just wanted to pass on, leaving least trouble to her. Eventually, he waited for his mother's death to perform the last rites. After that happened, he shot with his always loaded gun kept beneath his pillow. He was glowing as he knew his death would be the only solution to his unknown depression. Like his father, he took his life with meticulous planning of writing wills for children. He left his last breath on the bed where his wife has given birth to all the thirteen children.

Chellam of *The Story That Must Not Be Told* is more handsome than his friend Ponnuraj. With the great dream of becoming a film star, Chellam reached Chennai but he ended up becoming a menial in construction work. He accommodated himself a home in Sitara, the slum and a happy marriage with not-so-pretty Valli. Growing jealous, Ponnuraj tried many situations to arouse fight between the couple. He was not attracted to Valli as he wondered, "...how Chellam could remain faithful to this simple woman with her horse face and big teeth"

(STM 70). He even tempted Chellam to visit brothels and lied about a fictitious affair between the tailor boy and Valli but their bonding was strong to be shaken. At last, he avenged Chellam by seducing Senthamarai, the teenage daughter of Chellam.

4. Men of Manipulation

Machiavelli says, "Men are so simple of mind, and so much dominated by their immediate needs, that a deceitful man will always find plenty who are ready to be deceived" (Carver 121). Manipulating someone exhibits one's power or influence on the other. The manipulators are superior in their status or wealth so that the ordinary people with needs become victims. These feeble sufferers are laid in trap and are sometimes exploited or persuaded to fulfil the needs of the dominant. They are convinced to be subjugated by force, by relationship or by obtaining something in return. The few motivating factors behind the psychological manipulation in the novels of Kavery Nambisan are lust and power.

Saroja, the wife of Sampathu in *A Town like Ours* allows herself to be seduced by Devarayya, the vice president of the Panchayat owing to her desperate ambition to possess a home with a door and bolt. Living inside a car, she became the prey of Devarayya's lust and thus ruining her chastity. At present, this vice president aimed at the post of Panchayat President utilising the popularity of his wife in politics. "He is a frustrated man, an angry and jealous man who must watch helplessly while his wife rises to giddy heights" (TLO 166). His neglect and delay made his younger daughter to be paralysed and bedridden. He finds chances to deceive his wife for power; uses Saroja for his physical pleasure and spends money lavishly to hide the shameful mistake of his daughter's sickness.

Ghulambhai, the handsome guy was attracted to the dark, hardworking Saroja. Though he had many women in life, he could not bear her rejection of him in spite of his indirect approaches to become intimate. Neither the offer of bike rides nor the gifts to children moved Saroja's will power. She held her head high and remained true to Sampathu and her two children. His rage increased when he found her secret affair with Devarayya and he attempted to disclose this to Sampathu.

Periyavar and Dhaya are Machiavellian politicians in *The Story That Must Not Be Told*. To instigate a blackmark against the existing government, this opposite party plans to create a revolt in the slum Sitara by reducing the time of water supply. They attempted to kindle the public in order to obtain many votes in the forthcoming election. They are least bothered that the thirty thousand people of three acres suffer due to less water. His idea was to indict people in to a revolt against the government and later his opposite party would bring the solution. He says, "After the water scam, we will quietly readjust everything back to normal and take the credit" (SMT 251).

Patrick of *The Scent of Pepper* is the son of Appachu and Marjorie, the British lady. His cunning attitude incited him to safeguard his future. He was irritated of his father's foolishness of marrying a British woman discarding the rich fortune of rich Kodavas. He was jealous of Subbu, the other grandson enjoying the royalty and instigated his smoking habit. He was also angry on the Kodava mob that refused to accept his father's marriage to a white woman. In spite of Appachu's effort to attach himself to the native, none welcomed it except Nanji. "Patrick, who had his mother's cunning and his father's brains, has decided never to make such mistakes" (SOP 148).

5. Men of Idealism

Ideal principles make a person respectful and Nambisan has constructed strong supreme characters exhibiting their morality through their gentle and humane behaviour. Subbu of *The Scent of Pepper* is the faithful son of Nanji never touching alcohol in his life just for his mother. Though he had been in to the military, he quits the job and the city life. He returns to his native to spend the rest of the days with his aging mother. Nanji, his mother is always the idol of strength, empathy and humanity. Krishna of *Mango-coloured Fish* is the intellectual brother of Shari helping her to decide about her marriage fixed with Gautam. He frankly discloses that Gautam resembles more like the mother with a domineering attitude. It is Krishna who revealed her to live her life without any inhibitions. It is the mother who controlled Shari and her love for Naren. Unlike the mother and the elder sister, Krishna respected Shari and wished a happy life for her.

Stanley of *Hills of Angheri* is an ambulance driver and a gentle friend of Nalli in London. Though they were fond of each other, he was genuine in his relationship respecting the feelings of Nalli. He was more a like a stress buster to whom Nalli shared her low moods in spite of the rumour about their affair. Hiten Pushpa Chand, the husband of Pushpa in *On Wings of Butterflies* is the embodiment of ideal husband who lives with the principles of equality. He shares all the household chores and even encourages Pushpa to be a part of WOW, the new political movement. This husband holds a huge respect for his wife and stands for her in all situations.

Jai of *Hills of Angheri* decides to be a doctor to alter his lifestyle. His poor childhood and abusive father drives him to Mumbai. He was diligent, responsible and successful as he knew he has to set his future comfortable which is the contrary of his past life. Swamy of *The Story That Must Not Be Told* is the teacher and a butcher. Belonging to Sitara, the world of slum, Swamy thinks education would definitely change the society. Dadiwala

Gaffur offered him a job saving him from beggary. This meatseller taught him the lesson of honesty when Swamy cheated the customers in order to impress Gaffur. Gaffur educated him and his hardwork for many days in library paid him with a teacher's job. He balanced both the jobs with ease and forever he was grateful to Gaffur, "defender of values" (SMT 62).

Chandran was a physically challenged potter fell in love with Senthamarai, the daughter of Chellam. He gifted her a pot but doubted how she would convince her parents about their marriage. "He was lame and beautiful; she ugly and agile" (SMT 236-237). He volunteered to bail her father out of prison even when her mother refused his proposal. Though the humble shack and tarpaulin became the home after the demolition of slum, Chandran survived with the job of sign painting.

George of *Mango-coloured Fish* is one of the friends whom Shari encountered in University hostel after the engagement with Gautam. This oldman from Goa visits Delhi in the memory of his dead wife. In solitude, he celebrated his thirtieth anniversary ordering a special cake. His love story was with a honest purpose. He feels their love was unique and only death tore them apart. "I sing her name, touch her with my mind" (MCF 64).

Tejus, the doctor in *Hills of Angheri* criticised that the medical profession is slowly turning in to swindling business. More money was spent on purchase of equipments than the vast degree of malnourishment. He showed his disgust of how food is wasted at big parties while the other section of the society thrived on poverty. He changed religions every five to six years. He was Gonzales before embracing Hinduism as Dharma Tejus. He had plans to convert himself to a Muslim and has reserved Buddhism for oldage. Clinging to a particular faith hurts him. He voiced out that humans are the ones who defend as well as violate animal rights. He was straightforward pointing out Nalli's physical weakness to reset bones.

6. Men with Identity Crisis

Erik Erikson, the psychological theorist says, "that a crisis of a self-identity is a normal part of development and can be a growth experience that leads to the formation of clear and consistent beliefs and direction in life or life role" (Nevid 208). Acquiring and sustaining an identity makes the life of a person more meaningful. Few of Nambisan's characters have shattered identities with a haunting past and blurred future.

Subbu of *The Scent of Pepper* was depressed when he found he could not walk like others. When his mother's efforts healed him, he pushed all his strength to tread his feet. He became the favourite child of Nanji and he retained his identity to hold the trust she had on him. Though he moved to city to please the delights of his wife Mallige, he returned to the native to be with his old mother. Thatkan of *The Story That Must Not Be Told* has an ambition of becoming a police officer living in the world of Sitara. Being the son of sewage cleaner, he was forced to clean with his father and later had a fatal death falling in to the sewage. All he wanted was a decent life for survival but it never happened.

Gundumani in his teens remained a confused son of Saroja, as he could recall the past life of his old home. He was sure that Sampathu was not his father and Rukma was not his sister. This mystery of past creates a miserable identity crisis, which pushes Gundu to dream a lot. He calls himself as "fatherless, rootless" (TLO 110). Affected by the unlocked secrets, Gundu was frustrated over his inability to interpret his blurred identity. His other worry was that his love for Rukmini, his almost-sister was a taboo in the eyes of the society. The author explicates the adversities of life by pointing out its consequences in a person's life. The right relationships are built on the meanings and experiences shared through interactions and interpretations. "The only stable state of being is instability— openness to change, revolutionary transformation and catastrophic discontinuity" (Frosh 6).

7. Men with Prejudices

Brown says, "Because prejudice involves judgement of some groups made by others, and because it can be shown to be affected by the objective relationships between these groups, prejudice is appropriately regarded as a phenomenon originating in group processes"(12). Gautam, the fiancé of Shari in *Mango-coloured Fish* is a selfish controlling spouse. To the dismay of Shari, he justifies his deliberate intentions of authority in seeking a flexible partner. He boasts of his intelligence and falls for flattery. He is self-centered and expects Shari to mould her attitude. Naren, the visually challenged lover of Shari is happy with his compelled voluntary solitude. Having been insulted by others throughout his life, he never expects others to please him. He exposes his balanced personality even when Shari's mother criticised his blindness.

Madhavan of *The Story That Must Not Be Told*, the president of Vaibhav Apartments influences the residents to act against the people of the slum. He instigates the elite class not to believe the slum workers. Feeling superior, he framed them menacing and violent. Judith Light, the American activist quotes, "Bigotry or prejudice in any form is more than a problem; it is a deep seated evil within our society" (Wise old sayings). Thus this kind of prejudiced community mistreats the downtrodden just because of their birth and status. It is a pity that the empathy of human behaviour differs person to person. With complications and unresolved conflicts, they lack privilege.

8. Conclusion

The research paper brings out the significant inclination towards the construction of male characters in the novels of Kavery Nambisan. The life of the male protagonists echo the varied experiences, haunting memories and engrossed observations. The author is very particular in showcasing the truth she has been witnessing since her childhood. She never pressurises herself to satisfy the demands of the society but puts her conscious mind in to writing. Bringing out high awareness of the struggle between the person and the mind, the characters of Nambisan communicate the challenging dimensions of emotional dilemmas.

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