

**Communicative Analysis of the Archetypes of Nomenclature in
Neela Padmanabhan's *Ilai Uthir Kaalam***

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Abstract

Though people say “Don’t judge a book by its cover” often, research says that most people buy books if and only if the title is appealing. Nowadays, titles and names of the characters are like the faces of actors starring in a movie. The audience gets impressed by these elements. The author is well aware of this fact and has given an apt title to this novel. The novel deals with the issues of old age, and how human psyche is designed to face it. The characters are named after certain myths, mythological characters and references. The text possesses values of contemporary literature. The names of characters feed the minds of the readers and enhance the process of communication between the text and the reader. The archetypal myths reveal the true nature of the characters and help the readers for the better understanding of the text. This paper deals with how effectively the author and the text communicate to the reader with the help of the names of the characters in the text.

Keywords: Neela Padmanabhan, *Ilai Uthir Kaalam*, archetype, myth, nomenclature, characters, communication.

Geriatric Studies is a genre which has been evolving recently. The topic deals with old people and their issues in literature which also has strong connotations with medical humanities. India is currently a nation with the largest youth population. Thus, it will be the nation with largest number of old people in a few decades. This is a frightening fact which worries the minds of the people. Literature has the responsibility of reflecting the society. Nowadays, the recent trends show the increased number of old age homes, which represents the attitude of today’s youngsters to abandon their parents in their old age. The modern society thinks of old age people as a burden during their final phases of life. They do not consider the worries of the old people and are not even ready to hear their pleas. Their opinion is that the old people will always lament and criticize the young by advising and restricting them. The novel vividly portrays the struggles of the old people in every aspect of life.

Naming the characters after mythological ones is being followed from the times of Shakespeare. His characters such as Titania, Ariel and Dionysus are named after mythological characters. Here in this novel, almost all the characters are named after mythical references. Such

naming gives familiarity over the characters in the text. Using this technique to enhance communication is a new and unique method adopted by the author. The origin of Archetypal cores can be dated around 1930s with the onset of Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*.

The usage of archetypal nomenclature to enhance communication is a novel idea to be utilized in a literary work of art. Such novel issues have to be studied elaborately. The objective of the study is to establish that the use of archetypal nomenclature in the aspect of communication has helped the readers to understand the text in a better way and to ingress the nuances of the connection between characters and their names in the text.

Andy Sundaresan who translated the work into English as *Autumn Reveries* says, "Abandoned and neglected by their loved ones, they gradually learn to accept this place as their home. In this Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel, the author handles the characters with a deep understanding and rare poignancy and compassion". The author himself talks about the reason behind the writing of this novel as, "A writer has been moulded by his surroundings and the circumstances he faces. This is reflected in his writings and so I deliberately avoid imitating myself in each of my books. Though the world around me hurts sometimes, I must keep writing so that it passes down the generations" in an interview.

Neela Padmanabhan has established his mastery over Tamil fiction by his definitive choice of hitherto uncharted realms of life, a vibrant and realistic language close to the everyday speech of the people and a racy style. His novels and short stories are close and realistic documentations of life with a mature vision and an artistic depth. Padmanabhan's works reveal his full awareness of the political, social and economic upheavals and transformations taking place around him and of their impact on all classes of people. They also express his anxiety about the growing spiritual poverty of the modern man. Translation of his works into many Indian and foreign languages testifies to the universal acceptance of their literary merit.

Ilai Uthir Kaalam addresses the difficulties encountered by the old aged people of our land. The novel with its overwhelming wealth of details, its proverbs, sayings, diplomacies, philosophies and folksongs is not easy to comprehend. It is as much "a fruit of painstaking study as of artistic intuition and inspiration" and "an important and highly interesting novel, chiefly in the creation of a number of lively figures, in the development of intricate narrative structure and above all in the skilful dealing with the setting".

The names of the characters in the novel feed some cognitive disclaimers into the minds of the readers and make them presume some pre-conceived notions about the text. The archetypes behind the names are not universal. The archetypes are bound to cultural, ethical and regional restrictions. The dialects of native tongues and the Tamil language are used appropriately in the novel which helps in the free flow of the plot. The characters speak and behave according to the moral distinctions outlined by their names. A single story creates stereotypes and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete; they make one story become the only story.

The name Radhakrishnan itself is a combination of two names, Radha and Krishna. Both are regarded as the symbols of soulful love. The myths and stories about Krishna and Radha are very rare; theirs is an unsung love of martyrdom. People have heard many versions of the stories about Krishna's actions with the Gopikasthris. Radha has never complained about it to Krishna. This is because she knows who Krishna is and she understands his divinity and therefore never gets rid of the Paramathma. Such was their love. Similarly, the character Radhakrishnan understands his life perfectly and throughout the novel he is the only character who does not lament or complain about his life. The irony is that his wife is not like Radha but, she is like Sathyabama who is also said to be one of Krishna's wives. Rukmani and Bama have certain restrictions and responsibilities as wives but being a lover, Radha's only concern is to take care and love Krishna and she does it exceptionally well.

Every wife loves her husband, but the problem starts when they become mothers. Though they share their lives with their husband, their children are dearer than their lives. Hence, they do not want to share their children, not even with their husbands. This is beautifully dealt in the chapter that deals with the family life of Radhakrishna. It resembles D.H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers* in its way of dealing the issue in an indirect manner. The mother cooks with utmost care and affection and brings only the things that her child loves to the table. The husband, on the other hand, does not receive such a treatment. Here, the mother Shenbagam wishes to take her son's side when there is a situation where she has to choose one over the other. The husband feels desolate, leaves home and goes to an old age home.

The pair replicates typical Tamil families in the 1990s. The younger generations do not want their parents to influence their choices regarding their career and marriage. On the other hand, the old generation feels that they have ultimate control over their children's lives especially their career and marriage. The younger generation wants to pursue their passions with perseverance and become self-sufficient rather than serving others. The old people complain about salary patterns and job security. The womenfolk of the era, whom Shenbagam represents, are likely to escape or retire from the age-old customs of doing all the household chores. "We try to avoid living separately as islands and live for helping others possibly and that is not only for others but also for every one of us."

The character that occupies a very large portion of the novel is Piravi Perumal, who is fondly known as 'PP Sir'. The name Piravi Perumal has many myths surrounding it and the interesting point is that Mr. PP stands up to all the assumptions and beliefs. PP refers to the God who helps us cross the ocean of our life and reach moksha. His name is a symbol that refers to Lord Rama, who has lived the life of an ideal man despite the various difficulties in his life. This is what makes Rama stand apart from the other deities. He is close to the human folks as he has lived his entire life as a human but adheres to all the ways of dharma. He reads *Thirumurai* (Prayer book of the Saivaites) and *Thaththuva Bodham* (Logical Philosophy). He lives his entire life for the welfare and benefit of the others. He has once been a very well-known politician. Even after his retirement, he often receives calls from certain important people of the ruling party. This is

because he has been a really good politician. He gives advice to the other elders in the old age homes; he resolves the issues that arise within the elders as well as between the elders and their children. He is constantly sought by the people, but he does not show even a little amount of irritation which makes everyone love and respect him.

In the latter part of the novel, after the undeniable request of a person whom PP respects a lot, he re-enters politics and become a part of the ministry. He starts a scheme for the welfare of the beggars and the abandoned known as Snehasalam, which literally means a friendly company. The ministry sanctions a huge sum of money for his project. It proves the fact that people do not like being forced to do things. Charity is no exception. The beggars complain that the government forces them to go to a prison (snehasalam) because they are starving. He does all this because he wants to leave his traces on the earth and wants to be remembered for doing something good and meaningful for the betterment of people's lives.

Kaveriammal, a widowed mother, is admitted to the old age home by her own son. This is because she is not comfortable with the bond he shares with his wife. She has the name of a famous river that runs across Tamilnadu and Karnataka, over which the two state governments are fighting. There is a reason behind how the river Cauvery got her name. She was river Ponni once. One day she talks disrespectfully to a great sage, Agasthiyar, who curses her to be inside his Kamandala (small water carrier). The river disappears. In order to bring natural balance, sage Naradha goes to Lord Ganesh and rescues her. Ganesh comes in the form of a crow and drops the kamandala of the rishi thereby letting the river flow out of it. After this, the sage names her 'Kaviri' which means 'let flow by crow'. This represents that a river originates in a place and ends in some other place. Likewise, a woman is born in some place, ends up marrying someone and goes to the husband's home leaving behind her home.

Being a single parent, Kaveriammal struggles to bring up her children. Years later when her son comes to know about her death in the old home, he does not bother to even visit her. He says that he will join them in the rituals if time permits as he is busy in his house warming ceremony. Finally, Kaveriammal meets the end she feared the most. "The people at home never think or care about this jenma (life), which lies here dying." She expects her son to visit her in her death bed, but he does not visit her or even give her a proper burial.

Here was a son who was heartless enough to pass off his father as a destitute in order to admit him in an old-age home. Now the same son had come to claim the money. In India, we have the worst of both worlds. Children neglect aged parents, and parents routinely leave their property to their children. (HTE. 102)

The character Ramasubramaniam is named after two lords namely Rama and Subramanya. Both of them contrast in the quality of keeping the words of their fathers. Rama obeys his father King Dasaratha, renounces his crown and goes to the woods for 14 years. Subramanya is born without the intermediation of any woman and is made out of Lord Shiva. He disagrees with his father over the biased judgment of a competition, whose winner will get a fruit from the sage,

Naradha. The ironical combination of two names in the character is handled well in the chapters, eventually the readers find him showing the characteristics of Rama.

The character Vaaheesvarayyar is a synonym for the great Saint Thiunavukkarasar of Tamil Saivaite Philosophy. He always speaks the truth. Therefore, God blesses him and everything that he says becomes true. He is named after his trait. Here, the character Vaaheesar is shown as the uncle of Hari who comes to know about his conjugal rights over the widow he marries. He wants his uncle to get the consent of his father for him. Uncle Vaahee tends to be a very knowledgeable person and a voracious reader even in his seventies. Currently, he is reading a book about the German poet, Goethe and speaks about the failed love of Goethe, which was reflected by him in his works *The Man of Fifty* and *The Morien Bad Elegy*. Thus, Vaahee seems to be a man of letters. As he is named after the great saint, he remains a bachelor throughout his life.

The story of Nachiketas is retold in the thoughts of Piravi Perumal. In the beginning, Nachiketas appears to be just one of the thoughts of Mr. PP but as the novel progresses, Nachiketas speaks to the readers as well as to Mr. PP. They converse among themselves and also with the readers. The story of Nachiketas is the beginning of his part in the novel. He is the son of Vajashavas, who performs a great yagna and at the end he has to offer all his precious possession, but he cunningly donates the old and worn out cows saying that cows are his most precious possessions. Nachiketas asks, “Am I not your precious possession. To whom are you offering me?” His father gets irritated by the question and says, “I am offering you to Yama, the Lord of Death”. As soon the words leave his mouth, he realizes that his words cannot be taken back. Nachiketas reaches the place of Yama and waits there for three days. When Yama arrives, he gives him three boons for his patience. He asks for the goodness of his father, the insights of the Vedic Literature about Yagnas and finally, the secret of death. Yama begs him to take back his questions but Nachiketa pesters Yama to offer him the third boon, which is the wisdom of death and what happens after death.

“Nachiketas, when all kinds of desires borne out and end up inside the human hearts, the mortal becomes the immortal and then the Brahmam blossoms”, says Yama. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says that stories matter; many stories matter; stories have been used to dispossess and to malign but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of people, but stories can also repair broken dignity. When people reject a single story and realize that there is never a single story about any place, they regain peace.

The story gives insights to PP on whether he has to fall as a prey to the political positions and the illusions of the world. The next characters are Hari and Sumithra. The readers do not know the way Hari’s mind works. In order to show himself as a very rational person, he marries a widow who is a mother of two children. In the latter part of the story, he worries that he has done a foolish mistake and wishes for his own child. The irony of the events is revealed in this situation. From the myths, the readers know that Hari is Lord Krishna and Sumithra is the mother of Lakshmana and Sathrukana. They live their lives for others. They fake their own emotions amidst internal chaos.

Finally, the novel gives the readers a pair to cherish, Kailasam Pillai and Parvati ammal. They live their lives as an ideal couple; they have a life filled with joy, compassion, happiness and relations. They speak about their married life in a contemplative manner that there are no silly fights between them; they share the same bed till date. This is a remarkable thing that the author wants to convey. The authors let the readers know that it is the wife's condition to sleep in the same bed till death. There are numerous characters in the novel that can be projected in a different light with the help of the myths. They are Prof. Vidyaharan, Dr. Narasimha Moorthy, Dr. Gokula Das, Mrs. Ramalakshmi, Mr. Sridhar and Mrs. Srimathi, Nelson, Jeyims, Rohini and Sarangabani.

From the above examples, one can understand that through the nomenclature of the characters in a novel the author can create a favourable atmosphere to communicate his story effectively, a condition in which the reader does not find any opportunity to dissociate himself from the flow of the story. The readers can feel the importance of the myths behind the names of the characters as they help the readers get a clear idea of the characters and relate to them. The additional function of the myths is to aggravate the emotions connected with the characters. The reader feels bad about the death of the old lady, but it intensifies when they come to know about the murder of innocent Ramalakshmi Ammal.

There is only one story, I believe that there is one story in the world; we have only one story and only one. . . Humans are caught in their lives, in their thoughts, in their hungers and ambitions, in their avarice and cruelty, and in their kindness and generosity too in a net of good and evil. . . . There is no other story. A man, after he has brushed off the dust and chips of his life will have left only the hard, clean questions: Was it good or was it evil? Have I done well or ill? All novels, all poetry, are built on the never-ending contest in ourselves of good and evil. And it occurs to me that evil must constantly re-spawn, while good, while virtue is immortal. (EOE. 34)

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