



The Concept Of 'Survival Of The Fittest' In Kavery Nambisan's "The Scent Of Pepper"

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Citation, G.Vijay et al. (2024), The Concept Of 'Survival Of The Fittest' In Kavery Nambisan's "The Scent Of Pepper" *Educational Administration: Theory And Practice*, 30(4), 1651-1653

Doi:10.53555/kuey.v30i4.1727

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The idea of 'survival of the fittest' is about the living organisms that possess special or advantageous qualities in the environment in order to survive and reproduce. At the same time, it refers to the changes that take place within the species in connection with the environment. The same issue of establishing one's identity in order to survive is quite common among the women characters of Nambisan. They are in the process of establishing their identity because they have lost their identity in the family and in the society. Both the family and the society fail to acknowledge their contributions. However, they have been accepting the prescriptions from the society in the name of culture and tradition for a long time since they need to survive. As they do not have better options to survive, they accept without complaints. This paper tries to bring out the attitude of the protagonist, who adapts to all circumstances with the single objective of 'survival'.

Key words: survival, fittest, identity, culture, tradition

Introduction

The concept of 'survival of the fittest', which is the term that became popular from Charles Darwin's 'Origin of species' reveals that the organisms that possess advantageous or adaptive qualities in the environment will survive and reproduce. Organisms that have advantageous qualities transmit them to the following generation and ensure their comfortable living despite the potential challenges they may face in the future. Similarly, human beings also make alterations in their customs, practices, and behaviors to ensure a better life for themselves and for the following generation. The prime objective of their behavioural pattern is to survive. In order to survive, they may sometimes go away from the problems or sometimes stand against the problems. They need to create an identity for themselves. By being submissive, they get an identity for themselves as 'timid and meek', and by being repulsive, they get an identity as 'rational or revolutionary'.

Kavery Nambisan's women characters also exhibit such responses in their decisions, as they feel safer in their comfort zone. They are very particular that they should not face any negative experiences in their own lives and so they are very careful to avoid the actions that they view as harmful. They prefer to accept whatever happens in their lives or they prefer to avoid certain things that would hinder their peaceful living. Nanji from "The Scent of Pepper" is the two prominent character who is taken into consideration for this study in order to reveal their intuition in preferring avoidant behaviours to becoming revolutionary figures. The researcher attempts to find the real psychological reasons behind Nanji's adaptive behavior in spite of her physical and mental dilemma at her husband's house.

Nanji is a type of a woman who struggles to create an identity. Earlier, she was married to a drunkard and his death pushed her back to her home. It has been a tragic situation for a woman in India who returns to her mother's home when something unusual happens in her husband's house. Nanji's first husband's death draws her back because she is not able to live her life on her own accord. She has to be under the protection of her husband or her father. This is where Nanji loses her identity. She doesn't know who she is. Her nature of being dependent makes her lose her real ground. When Baliyanna sees her, he is impressed and decides to marry her. Nanji's father immediately accepts the proposal. "Rao Bahadur, asking for Nanji's hand in marriage for his son. Nanji's father accepted without bothering to ask the girl" (TSP 6). Again, the identity is shattered. Since a widow cannot live alone, her father accepts the second marriage. Nanji needs to accept the decisions of her father since

she doesn't have any other option. She has to get accustomed to the different colours of Baliyanna's family now. Her decisions and feelings are neither considered nor respected here. Nambisan reiterates the condition of women as "Daughters did not say such things to their fathers" (TSP 180). Simone de Beauvoir says that women are autonomous and free however men compel them to assume the status of others (29) Savio reiterates that woman's obedience to man is a result of necessity for maintaining respect for family and society. (114). Beauvoir says that "An ideal woman is perfectly stupid and perfectly submissive; she is always ready to accept the male and never makes any demands upon him" (234). Women accept and play such a timid role, by enduring their pain and difficulties silently in order to survive.

Nanji takes care of the house round the clock with the fullest dedication and responsibility. When a person is forbidden an identity, and suddenly becomes superior in a short period of time, they may misuse the power and privileges. However, Nanji is not that type. She does everything with the utmost sincerity and dedication. "In the house, she organized the chores and reduced the number of servants from five to two. She supervised the workers and never lost the chance to show the solidity of her knowledge. (TSOP 23). She manages her house's acute economic crisis and protects the family from losing its status. These lines will reflect Nanji's efforts in managing things during critical times. "She patched their clothes, reworked seams, shared out everything, wasted nothing; she taught her children to make do with essentials, which excluded luxuries like shoes, slippers and ornaments. (TSOP 110-11)

Baliyanna withdraws from familial commitments, and so Nanji is pushed to take care of everything. Though she gains an identity, it is painful for her to manage everything on her own. Along with the household work, and farm work, she needs to take care of thirteen children, her father-in-law, and mother-in-law and relatives. She also attends public functions as a representative of her family. In the search for identity, Nanji has dumped herself with loads of responsibilities that consume her freedom, as well as her likes and dislikes. Nambisan talks about the irresponsibility of Baliyanna, who is least bothered about the family, with these lines "Baliyanna hadn't the time to focus clearly on his children but the family kept growing, given his ardour and Nanji's fertility. (TSOP 42). This is the common attitude of men, who prefer to be free from common chores in the household and expect women to take care of all in the family.

Nanji undergoes repeated mental agony. Numerous deaths in her family are one of the reasons for her mental agony. Machu, one of the brothers of Baliyanna, is drowned to death. Boju, another brother of Baliyanna, develops a relationship with Chinni, who is Nanji's half-sister. Soon after their marriage, Chinni dies in an accident, and following her, Boju also dies. Adding fuel to the fire, Nanji's two sons who are studying in Bangalore, die of typhoid, and one of her two daughters falls into a stream accidentally and loses her life. Rao Bahadur dies by committing suicide, and finally Baliyanna dies of depression. Amidst all such heartbreaking events, Nanji remains composed, though it is painful. She performs her regular activities with the objective of redeeming the family with the same spirit she had before. Chatterjee, S.A states that family is a structure with a group of individuals in a relationship for a longer term. Most of the people find it difficult to live alone, hence they join another person as a family member. (12) She accepts her old age. Her son, Subbu, marries Mallige. Subbu takes care of his mother well since there have been many losses in the family and he does not want to lose his mother too. This brings solace to Nanji in the last days of her life. Nambisan expresses the final condition of Nanji as "...her varicose veins, which had grown worse with each of her pregnancies and which she had stoically ignored till now, began to bother her...the ankles swelled; the blood pooled into the veins, ..she became increasingly breathless....This was the most undignified way for her to die...." (TSOP 267).

Nanji is an uneducated tribal woman and so she is not confident enough to stand alone in the society for her living. In addition, education is also forbidden, which makes them less confident about themselves. However, when education is made available for women, voices against oppression become quite common. Nambisan's Nalli from "The Hills of Angheri", Shari from "Mango- coloured Fish", Evita and Lividia from "On wings of Butterflies" are the major women characters who are educated, and so they are able to think with clarity and voice against the odd conditions in the society. Whatever the decisions they take, whether it be an avoidant style of decision or a revolutionary decision, the main agenda behind it is their survival and establishing their identity.

When a girl is newly married, she is taken to her in-law's family, where the rules and values are quite different from her parents' house. She is shuttled between these two houses. The question 'Which is her own house?' is a clear example of an identity crisis. She has to be selflessly serving at her husband's house. If her deeds are not respected or valued, there is a question popping out in her mind asking 'who is she' that leads to an identity crisis. With the advent of feminist movements, the quests for identity and identity crises have become common themes in literature. Smitha states that identity crisis has become a fashionable term that is widely used in literary works, especially by women writers. Modern feminist writer Taslima Nasrin exposes the lifestyle of women in India that leads to the quest for identity. She says women will be taught how to be women, and they will be trapped in four walls and fed like pet animals.(9) Such revolutionary arguments by the women writers instill the demand for the quest of identity.

An identity crisis is the result of a conflict between one's inner feelings and external prescriptions, i.e., one's individuality and the society. Erikson's theory of personality describes how identity crises exist in one's life. Totally, it is a psychological process that exists mainly during the adolescent period of an individual due to the emerging confusion in one's privileges and roles in the family and in the society which leads to anxiety and tension. In the pursuit of establishing one's identity, one may attain a negative identity if he or she is not able to ascertain her expected identity. He or she may be involved in committing crimes or get addicted to drugs, and he or she may sometimes become anti-social. Identity crises are more common in women than in men. In countries like India, the identity crisis for men may be created in the context of religion and caste; however they get the identity of being 'men'. However, it is not case with women; they need to struggle to establish themselves as living beings. Society wants them to be as they expect, but modern women deny those expectations and pledge to live according to their own desires. This creates a crisis in their identity.

Summing up

Thus, Nanji has ventured her entire life, just as she does not have an identity. If society has allowed her to live on her own accord, she will have lived another way of life that she wanted. Since society has created insecurity for her, she needs to be dependent on somebody for her survival. After the failure of her first marriage, she accepts the second marriage as it may give her an identity. She has gained an identity only because of her costly labour. She has not done anything for her personal welfare and has completely donated herself only for the welfare of her family. Her last part of her life is painful. It is tragic to see the life of Nanji, who has not lived her life in the wake of searching for an identity. The ultimate reason for her struggle is the society and its prescriptions. She accepts the laborious life mainly because she does not have any hold in her life apart from living her laborious life. If she had been educated and had been in a job, her life would have been better. There are many women who have been suffering while still bearing the responsibilities of the family and not bothering about themselves, similar to Nalli, because of the invisible bond that society has created for them and forced them to live accordingly. Thus, Nanji has struggled in her life mainly to confirm her survival. She has chosen adaptive decision-making to ensure her survival in a society that fails to acknowledge women as living beings.

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