



# The Socio-Cultural Empowerment of Nanji in Kavery Nambisan's *The Scent of the Pepper*

Mrs.C.Vennila, Assistant Professor, Hindusthan College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore, India.

Dr.P.Prabavathi, Professor, Hindusthan College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore, India.

**Abstract:** In each family a woman should be empowered to handle different kinds of situations in and around the family as well as in the world. A society cannot develop without women. All women should be given an equal participation in the decision-making process within the family. When women are allowed to taking part of each and every discussion they become empowered at least to some extent to have control over the resources. Women empowerment is a concept that makes women to improve their status in their family as well as in the society which leads to help them to take an active participation in every sphere of social aspects. One such beautiful and diplomatic character created by the renowned Indian writer, Kavery Nambisan is Nanji from her second novel *The Scent of the Pepper*. Nambisan has portrayed Nanji as a central character and the main plot of the story is based on her life started after marrying Baliyanna. With the opinion of dignified and respectful of women and their identity, Baliyanna marries child widow Nanji to give her life. Baliyanna is the head of the Kaleyanda family and representing the traditional values and customs of his community Coorg. He is a perfect man who reflects this by his deliberate responsibilities, decisions and actions with the power of authority and the position. With his loyal leadership and management of the family estate influence the lives of all family members. He is motivating Nanji to be empowered by giving away the responsibilities of taking care of his family members as well as the estates. She has become very strong in her family and also in the society of Coorg.

**Key words:** empowerment, society, identity, responsibility, culture, traditional values.

Kavery Nambisan is a celebrated Indian author who was born in Kodagu district, the picturesque Coorg region of Karnataka, India. She started her writing in the 1990s and her works are often noted for the deep humanism, real characterization and the exploration of social issues. Many of her works reveal the theme of medical life as she is having the rich experiences as a surgeon. Since she was born and brought up from the natural background of abundant coffee plantations and rich cultural heritage of Coorg, she has been developed a kind of harmony towards nature and storytelling from an early age. She got her early education in Coorg and for higher studies she moved to Mumbai. She completed her medical studies at St.John's Medical College, Bangalore and continued her higher surgical studies in UK. After getting the fellowship of the Royal College College of Surgeons (FRCS) from London, She began to work in the rural parts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamilnadu and Karnataka. She registered her work in the Association of Rural Surgeons of Indis as a governing Council member. She has written seven novels which include *The Scent of the Pepper*

(1996), *The Hills of Angheri* (2002), *On Wings of Butterflies* (2006), *The Story That Must Not Be Told* (2010), *A Town Like Ours* etc. She also wrote several books for children. Nambisan's works are characterized by a deep empathy for her characters and an intense understanding of human suffering and resilience. Her background in medicine provides a unique lens through which she views the world, allowing her to address complex social and ethical issues with sensitivity and insight. In contemporary Indian Literature, Kavary Nambisan stands as one of the significant writers. Her skill as a surgeon as well as a novelist makes her to create stories that are not only compelling and emotionally resonant but also socially relevant. Through her work, she continues to shed light on the innumerable facets of Indian life, bridging the gap between the medical and literary works in the world.

The novel *The Scent of the pepper*, is about a journey of entering into the world of Kodavas' traditional culture and the values. This novel is set in Coorg and explores the history and culture of the region, exhibit themes of tradition, change, and family dynamics. It explains a beautiful picture about that region, the people, their proud martial race and the owners of vast coffee estates. The novel tells the story of the Kaleyanda clan, who is also one of the respectable families owning the vast expanses of the coffee estates in Coorg. The writer, Kavary Nambisan is a native speaker, who belongs to the same community Coorg (Kodagu), a district of Karnataka which is also known as the Scotland of India. In the novel, *The Scent of the Pepper*, Nanji has been played as an important role. Her character contributed significantly towards the theme of empowerment. She is portrayed as a person who is very strong resilient and determined woman right from the beginning to the end of the novel. She has been experienced and came across many struggles and challenges posed by the society and personal adversities.

Even though, she is in difficulties, her journey towards the empowerment is achieved only by her courage to dare traditional or conventional gender roles and expectations. She has been experienced the challenges of bounded patriarchal structures within her community and striving for independency and autonomy. Nanji's empowerment is also revealed in her quest of education and knowledge, which makes her to foresee her future for herself and her family. The author, Kavary Nambisan has depicted the character of Nanji to explore the complexities of gender dynamics and a transformative power of individual ability. The story of Nanji gives a powerful narrative of empowerment and illustrating how a personal strength and resilience lead to an intense personal growth as well as for a social reform. Nambisan has created both men

and women characters as very real with positive vibrations. She is a natural story teller who captures our mind and arouses an interest and imagination among us by her magical words with beautiful descriptions.

The novel opens with the marriage of Nanji with Baliyanna. Baliyanna belongs to Kaleyanda family is a wealthy man and England - educated Veterinary doctor. He is a practical man and away from all the constraints of his community beliefs. This could be seen from his attitude and behaviour towards all women and others. His education and the responsibility makes him to behave with humane and in touch with reality. He has a dignified respect towards women and their identity. This concept is revealed through his act of marrying a child widow Nanji in order to give her life. Nanj got married at the age of thirteen but she became a widow at fourteen. Baliyanna's marriage with Nanji shows that he is not bounded himself with his so called traditional values and customs of his community. Because of that sense, he gives freedom and responsibilities to his wife Nanji in the family as well as in the society. She is working hard inside the family by doing all the household works and taking care of her father in law and mother in law. She is the master of the house as she moves the fortunes of the Kaleyanda family into prosperity. Seeing and realizing the capabilities of Nanji as a good manager of home and family, Baliyanna relaxes himself into the role of an equal partner.

Though Nanji is a plain looking, uneducated and a woman from a very poor community, she is very strong and perfect in her judgement, smart in business and being practical in her approach to life and its problems. Among all the women characters Nanji is an outstanding woman with strength, character and dignity. Nanji exhibits an immense strength and resilience in the face of personal as well as in the social adversities. She has the ability to deal with the economic challenges or move with the family crisis and finding the way to tackle the situation and overcome all those hardships always remains herself as a powerful woman and has been an inspired example for other women.

Kavery Nambisan portrays the character Nanji as a powerful woman throughout the novel in different aspects and perspectives. She is portrayed as a remarkable resilient that she had come across in her adversity and also she is a woman who has very strong determination in her life. Though she is coming from a community which enriches with rational values and confines, in which women are restricted to come out and taking up the responsibilities in the society. But for Nanji, she breaks up all those boundaries and finally she stands as a strong lady who is a role model for her grand children. This achievement is not an easier one.

To come to this stage, she faces different kinds of hardships in the society but she never give up her determination. She continuously struggles hard for a better life personally as well as for the family. Traditionally, in her community, being a widow at the age of fourteen, no woman has courage to come out from her family to meet out the questionable society. But Nanji really wanted to showcase her talent to her community by thrown away her limitations and the boundaries. Instead of being at home, she wants to get education and independence. Nanji's courage to meet out the challenges in her patriarchal norms shows her as a powerful figure in the novel. She has a quest for education and gaining the knowledge. Education also becomes one of the significant reasons for the upliftment of the character Nanji in this novel. Her endeavors towards education symbolize her desire for the betterment of her life. Nanji's resilience is a central aspect of her characterization.

Despite the challenges and adversities she faces, including personal losses and socio-economic struggles, she remains strong-willed person. Her determination to sustain her family's honor and well-being is an evident throughout the novel. She has the quality of protective and nurturing as a mother and grandmother towards her for her family members, often placing their needs above her own. Her nurturing nature extends beyond her immediate family to the broader community, showcasing her as a figure of support and care. Nanji's connection to the land is both practical and emotional, representing her bond with her heritage and the agrarian lifestyle that sustains her family. Kavery Nambisan has portrayed Nanji as a person who carries over her Coorg's traditional values, at the same time, she is also ready to adopt and change herself for the modern life after marrying Baliyanna. Her ability and the readiness to move herself into the change highlights her dynamic nature.

Nanji's character plays a multifaceted role model for other women in the novel. Her hardships, resilience, dedication to family, cultural pride, adaptability, wisdom, leadership, and emotional intelligence together make her as an inspiring figure among us. Naturally Nanji has some qualities such as a good decision – maker and leadership when she was with her family and community who make other women to set Nanji as a role model for their life. She illustrates how women can lead with strength, compassion, and integrity. Through the character Nanji, the author showcases the potential of women to be the pillars of strength and powerful force of change in their communities. Nanji in *The Scent of the Pepper* is an important character whose journey in the novel reveals the ideological beliefs against the background of rich

culture and the profound society. Nanji's courage, resilient, determination and her quest for empowerment enable her as a remarkable and memorable protagonist of the novel.

### Works Cited

1. Nambisan, Kavery. *The Scent of Pepper*. Penguin Random House, 1996, India.
2. [www.questjournals.org/jrhss/papers/vol10-issue5/Ser-2/B10050407.pdf](http://www.questjournals.org/jrhss/papers/vol10-issue5/Ser-2/B10050407.pdf) Kavitha, K. Feminism and Women's Empowerment in Kavery Nambisan's Novels. 2020.
3. [www.jctjournal.com/gallery/84-mar2020](http://www.jctjournal.com/gallery/84-mar2020) Lakshmi, Sanjeev, and Thirunavukkarasu. Cultural conflict in KaveryNambisan's The Scent of Pepper. 2017.
4. [www.ijcns.com/pdf/ijrrasevol9no12017removed-4.pdf](http://www.ijcns.com/pdf/ijrrasevol9no12017removed-4.pdf) en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kavery\_Nambisan en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kodava\_people

