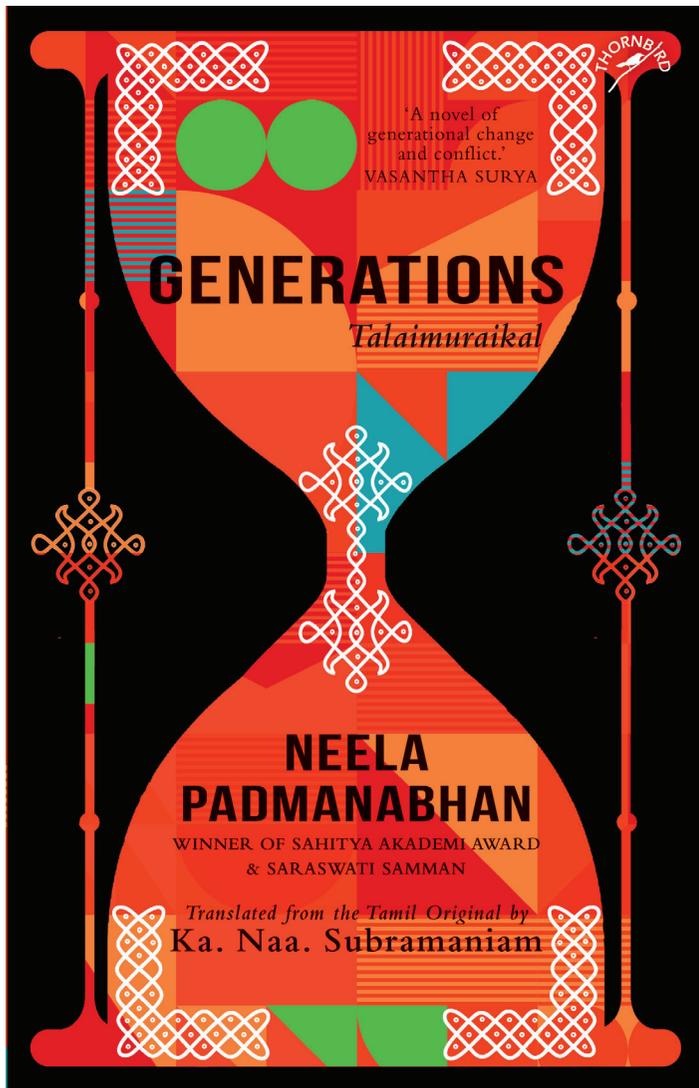


Feminist men do exist, and they often offer to be the unsung heroes in the lives of those women who do not have the courage to speak for themselves. This is who Diravi is, the protagonist and the champion in his sister Nagu's life.

Social injustice—against women and lower castes, 'unchanging India', migratory traditions, and cultural baggage are some of the themes that this realistic novel, told with great imaginative power, deals with.

*It touches upon sensitive subjects—of gender and sexuality, and the role they play in a society where marriage and familial relationships shape the history and politics of the 'generations' of the past, present, and future. The Tamil original was made into a film titled *Magizhchi* (Happiness).*



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Generations

Talaimuraikal

Neela Padmanabhan & Ka. Naa. Subramanyam

Social change in 'unchanging' India—is it a question or an answer to the dilemmas of a feminist man in India?

Generations is an intricate tale, simply told, by a master of fiction about a community of Tamil speakers who live on the borders of modern-day Kerala. Set in the 1940s, it is a novel of generational change and conflict, and how the boy Diravi grows up to take charge of his family, which embodies a distinct culture.

Diravi's sister, Nagu's marriage to Perumal is wrecked when the latter, enraged at his own failings, rejects his young wife. Unacceptable in her own family, Nagu continues to endure Perumal's cruelty till her brother, Diravi, decides on an alternative course of action, slashing through outdated social customs that discourage any constructive solutions.

Amidst the background of language, myth, and ethnic consciousness, we are offered a sensitively drawn profile of the passing of a traditional way of life into modernity and the nostalgia that comes with change.

Neela Padmanabhan was born in Kanyakumari. He has written 20 novels, 10 short story collections, 4 volumes of poetry, and 7 essay collections in Tamil. In Malayalam, he has published a novel, 4 short story collections, and a single essay collection. Besides Tamil and Malayalam, he also has a few English works to his credit. During 1985–89, he was the Tamil editor at Sahitya Akademi.

In 2007, he was awarded with the Sahitya Akademi Award for Tamil for his novel *Ilai uthir kaalam* (Autumn). He had earlier won the Sahitya Akademi Translation award in 2003 for his translation of Ayyappa Paniker's works into Tamil. In 2010, his debut work, *Talaimuraikal*, was made into a Tamil film, titled *Magizhchi* (Happiness).

Ka. Naa. Subramaniam (31 January 1912–18 December 1988) was a Tamil writer and critic from Tamil Nadu, India. He is also popularly known by his Tamil initials as Ka. Naa. Su. He also wrote poems using the pseudonym Mayan. He published many literary journals like *Ilakkiyavattam*, *Sooravali*, and *Chandraodayam*. In 1986, he was awarded with the Sahitya Akademi Award for Tamil for his literary criticism *Ilakkiyathukku oru Iyakkam* (A Movement for Literature).



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Extract from the book

The morning sun was low in the east. Men hurried to the fields, women with brass pots were going to the river to fetch water, and people, after bathing, were on their way to the temple—the street was filling up with all kinds of people.

The house opposite hers was not awake to all this wealth of activity, as Unnamalai Achi noted with great distaste. She could hear her brother bawling. Her brother was Koonangani Pillai. To Diravi, Koonangani Pillai Paatta.

“What women of misfortune fill this house! Not one of them has the sense of sensitivity to get up before dawn and sweep the street in front of the house, sprinkle cowdung-water on it, and draw the auspicious kolam before the man of the house gets up and leaves... My throat is dry talking to you all. How will our family prosper?”

The old man cleared his throat and spat. The sound reached Achi in her house.

A little later, from Koonangani Paatta's house emerged his first wife, Ponamu Achi, armed with a broom and bucket, muttering something to herself sleepily.

Ponamu Achi looked older than Father, thought Diravi. An old woman—she was 50 years of age. Unlike Unnamalai Achi, she wore coloured clothes or the kind of clothes that did not emphasize her age. Otherwise, with her big earrings, and bare chest, she was like Achi.

As soon as she saw Unnamalai Achi, without betraying anything about her husband's shouts, she said, “You have already finished, sister-in-law? So soon? At least one morning, I want to get up before you and finish all this before you...bet it will never happen!”

For Diravi, to hear her talk like that was in itself irritating. She not only slept till sunrise, which was unbecoming in a woman, but was not even ashamed of it. Her tongue was seven cubits long.

“Who is it? Ponamu? Why don't you get up before me and sweep the street before I do; nobody prevents you. Isn't Ananji Pillai up yet? Why is Brother shouting so early in the morning?”

“It isn't yet time for Ananji to get up. And no one has to instruct your brother, my husband, to bawl me out and find fault with me. If he opens his mouth to Ananji, she will break him open and salt him... It is I and I alone who is going to walk away with all this as his heir...”

Diravi noticed Ponamu Achi's tone and smiled mischievously in a knowing manner at his grandmother, who said, “You quarrel among yourselves. Why should I buy into the trouble?” She picked up the broom and bucket and went in. She washed the bucket, upended it in its corner, and left the broom leaning against the wall of the corner. Then, she went to the well.