

## **D. Gnanasekaran's *Are You My Dad? and Other Stories: A Critical Estimate***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The story collection *Are You Dad? and Other Stories* consists of twenty well-written short stories packed with human emotions of different hues. Each story is neatly packaged in a flawless narration leavened with spontaneous humour and authentic poignancy. A complex human drama unfolds before the reading hands. The characters and incidents portrayed linger in the minds even after we put down the collection. Most of the stories are down-to-earth and readers could see that they are actually moving amongst those characters. His stories are full of significant messages and convey the readers' morals. The necessary tools of story writing are wonderfully displayed throughout the twenty stories. Flow of language and vocabulary are throughout the collection consistent but continuous.

**Keywords:** *Gnanasekaran, dad, Ekadesi, Lucy Gray, Isakkiamman.*

D. Gnanasekaran who hails from Pondicherry is an eminent story writer, linguist and critic. He was formerly a Professor of English. He has forty years of teaching and research experience. Basically, he is a bilingual writer, poet, translator, broadcaster, reviewer, and Communication Skills Consultant. He has published books to his credit. The story collection *Are You Dad? and other stories* consists of twenty well-written short stories packed with human emotions of different hues. Each story is neatly packaged in a flawless narration leavened with spontaneous humour and authentic poignancy. A complex human drama unfolds before the reading hands. The characters and incidents portrayed linger in the minds even after we put down the collection. Most of the stories are down-to-earth and readers could see that they are actually moving amongst those characters. Gnanasekaran writes in the Preface that people see, hear of and experience many happy moments and vicissitudes of life. He has shared those joys and sorrows with his readers. The human drama unfolds itself with all its complexities ranging from the personal to the universal. The twenty stories are 1) Mother 2) A Damsel in Distress 3) Cuckoo and Crow 4) A Death- Blow 5) Father 6) Face to Face with a Fox 7) Urshitha, Our Lucy Gray 8) Duty 9) Are You My Dad 10) In the Eye of a Love Storm 11) Fate 12) The Will of Heaven 13) In the Hands of Isakkiamman 14) Com(e)motion 15) Sometime Partner 16) First look 17) In Quest of a Wife 18) Issue 19) Rain, Rain, Come Again 20) Mosquito Raid.

The first story “Mother” focuses strictly on family matters and ends on tragic developments. He devotes this story in memory of his mother’s sacrifices, sufferings, and tragedy in the end. It is further a story of nostalgic experiences for the writer. A sense of belonging occupies his mind. At times, he went into emotional turmoil. In life, it is more of a memory than what one records them in story books. This experience becomes at once strikingly painful as everyone shares or experiences them. Gnanasekaran demonstrates his prowess as a story writer in portraying the life that he had experienced upon the visit of his beloved mother. It is a story of many reflections in life that shattered them at the end. If it was his mother who first made her appearance in the story with striking blows, it was his younger sister who left this world at a very young age and her death left them in the whirlpool of tears. He emphasizes that attachment with siblings is always stronger than attachment with others. It has been proved in Indian family relations from mother to children and then siblings to siblings. That attachment is connected by a blood – relation. He recalls how his beloved mother named, Sayadevi used to visit him on and off just when she had an emergency work in the city. She visited them like an occasional customer. “She avoided coming from our village to my house in town. To my wife, her visit was an added burden as both of us were employed” (Stories 3). Her visit was unexpected this time. This visit had more to do with family matters. It was about property partition over which his father hit her mother. She was hit in the eye. That became aggravated and the vision of her right eye was dimming. In the Indian context, property disputes are most commonly seen. “It seems that my father was unduly biased towards my elder brother since my brother totally depended on the agricultural income. When my mother questioned his unreasonable partiality, my father became tense. It is difficult to be natural when one is tense –hence the damage to the eye” (Stories 3). She was uncared for. The doctor suggested her to undergo a surgery after the pain had subsided. Such incidents would last longer in one’s life. It is not just the partiality for property; it is equally the partiality of children that Indians are known for. Naturally, parents are divided between their choices and become biased when it comes to settling the property. This left him nostalgic when his mother had narrated the occasion of his birth. All his three brothers who were born before him had died one by one because of the unscientific methods of safe child-birth. Normal delivery was the order of the day as against today’s fashion for caesarean surgeries. Yet, his birth was not welcomed as his father went sentimental by certain disbeliefs. The fifth child of the family, it was believed, would put the father in danger. Such blind beliefs still hold the people in the era of technology. His father didn’t see him for about six months. Even birth time is associated with good fortune and bad misfortune in life. His

grandfather, on the other hand, welcomed his birth and became land owners. Some people consider the birth of child the most fortunate development. A sort of sentimental longing either ruins the parents or makes them richer when driven by such thoughts. It is just a belief. Then his mother refers to a nostalgic but painful incident about his youngest sister Bhuvaneshwari, the tenth child. Her sudden death following a heavy temperature brought disaster to the family. Mother carried the child on her shoulder is indicative of poor transport facilities in those days. There were hardly medical facilities and advanced mechanism to treat emergency cases. The baby had the stroke of brain fever and there was no medication. They were none to help them medically. They were saddened altogether. They were returning by bus. As the bus was crowded, they were standing. When they were half way, his mother hinted at her death. “My loving sister was gone forever” (Stories 8). He cried out in pain and emotion. He describes his mother as, “My mother was a woman of great poise and it is this virtue that sustained her through her seventy –five years of married life” (Stories 9). People in the olden days lived beyond seventy years as compared to modern-day people who could just live up to fifty years. Lifestyles and living conditions become the parameters of life span. So, his youngest sister was nipped in the bud. “It was a pity to see a mother who had given birth to ten children grieving over the loss of her tenth child” speaks of how much pain she must have experienced. Life at times, is the cruelest one. The author fell into silence –the silent state that was caused by her sister’s death on Ekadesi day as people believe that the dead people go to heaven. As such, the story “Mother” is rooted in nostalgic experiences controlled by adversities in life and fortunes and misfortunes on the other. Gnanasekaran succinctly portrays a life of inevitable doom conditioned by certain situations and occasions. In the second story, “Damsel in Distress,” Gnanasekaran presents the agonies and endless searches of a woman on the streets for her pet dog, which eventually betrayed her to prove that any domestic animal, however it is tamed, would revolt one day. This exactly happened to the woman in distress. The sights on the street arouse human interest for something that somebody might have lost the way. Human drama unfolded before the streets to those who were watching the action – packed calls. Life usually takes a straight path but in the given circumstances it takes abnormal routes that utterly shock the onlookers. The author and his neighbor were witnesses to this dramatic scene full of gossips and chats between them.

Raghav, Raghav. She is repeatedly making the call. She is running up and down the street. My friend Nagarajan and I are standing near our building gate inside behind the compound in a building. I live on the ground floor and he lives on the first floor” (Stories 11).

They thought that she would be looking for her son. Her yelling tone conveys a sense of despair and urgency. However, they tried to inquire her, they hesitated to do so. Still, she was running about here and there. They were curious to find out if Raghav was her only son. All those passing through the street took a glance and became puzzled. There were so many passing remarks and comments by the people. Finally her husband joined her much to the relief of the author and his friend. They were ready to extend the help.” Her voice, rather, a mournful cry fades away only to register its presence around us again and again” (Stories 14). The hullabaloo continued when the others joined them. Her agonizing tone gets louder than before, “:Raghav, Raghav, Raghav”. At last, Raghjav was their pet dog. She was spotted when they moved out the gate. It rings cheerful that time. “A stout white dog goes running past us towards wagging its tail very actively like a white arrow shot from Ekalavya’s bow, as if it had played a hide and seek successfully. It is followed by another dog, a female one” (Stories 16). The woman who had been hunting for her pet dog chased away another dog. It is damsel in distress. The female dog was looking for mating with Raghav. As the woman tries to hold her pet between her arms thinking that the other dog is going to harm her pet. Raghav jumps out of her firm grip and begins to bark at the woman. She was surprised to find its behavior. “Raghav, behave properly. What is wrong with you? Come on. It is getting late” Let’s go home. (Stories 16) Raghav is ferocious and barks loudly. It starts chasing her. The woman starts running away. The story is deeply constructed on themes of humor, hullaballo and laughter. If humor constitutes the chief element of the story, it is commonplace occurrences on Indian streets that create joy and entertainment apart from an element of confused state. This unnecessary state of confusion and chaos is viewed at humorous level when people witness such dramatic incidents. Though people don’t take part, they enjoy the sights of human drama. The domestic animal turns into a wild animal fuelling its animal cruelty on its owner. Overall, the story is full of humor and unreasoned emotions. Gnansekaran has this knack of twisting a story on most common Indian situations. The subtleties are explored through a brilliant theme. The third story “Cuckoo and Crow” focuses on the efforts of a childless couple like Sampath and Shanthi who had no children after six years of marriage, Their, sufferings dreams, anticipations and hopes of a kid are highlighted through the story. They approached many doctors and finally they preferred to go for surrogacy. They picked up Meena for this on contract.

The fertilized egg of Shanthi was placed in the borrowed nest of Meena’s womb in a clinically supported atmosphere. Day rolled into weeks and weeks into months. Meena was nurtured well so that the foetus in her should get the necessary nutrients. (Stories 23)

Meanwhile, Shanthi and Sampath were eagerly waiting for the new arrival. Her excitement multiplied, and she indulged in the luxury of dreams about rearing the expected new arrival. If it was a girl, she would name her Sujitha. If it were a boy, she would name him Sundar. These names Sampath and Shanthi had chosen even when the pregnancy was three months old.” (Stories 23) They were dreaming about their kid through Meena. Soon the time of delivery has come about. But all that reasoning and courage had melted when she looked at the face of the newborn. She became so painfully distressed that she felt as if her heart had been shattered into a thousand pieces. There was a brief silence as Gnanasekaran writes that Meena took refuge in silence. Sometimes silence speaks louder than words. He rightly describes the intensity using the symbols like Cuckoo and Crow as, “The cuckoo leaves its eggs in a crow’s nest and forgets about it. The crow hatches its eggs and the young ones come into this world. The crow can’t own up the cuckoo’s young ones”. (Stories 25) Both cuckoo and crow are birds. But Meena, a human being, asks herself whether she was a cuckoo or a crow”. (Stories 26) The emotional turmoil had ended silently when the foetus broke into pieces. The world, as the author, shows was the most complex one that is human mind. But the world that left Sampath and Shanthi in complete emotional breakdown is one of significant developments that human mind mostly designs and maligns. Even the childless couple had tried at surrogacy and that too did not yield them a baby that they dreamt for a long time in greater anticipation. All their waiting ended in despair and disappointment. All became disappointed in the end. Gnanasekaran brings out the sensibilities and sensitivities of surrogacy and how it would medically impact the aspirant – parents. A natural pregnancy is the most preferred one. The advantages of surrogacy have to be weighed against the possible disadvantages. “A Death-Blow” is a story of many blows that the couple named Dr. Mala and Diwakar had undergone both physically and mentally in the journey of life. It was a death blow by his wife Dr. Mala inflicted on her husband in the end. Life took an unexpected turn when Dr. Mala, a renowned physician with extraordinary caliber, put her negligible and utterly careless about her health. She was suffering from breast-cancer. She was reluctant to see a doctor though Diwakar persuaded her like anything. Her daughter, a doctor by profession, took her to a specialist whose diagnosis confirmed her. “The fateful day dawned when the tumor was diagnosed not as benign. The whole family crashed emotionally. They were all engulfed in indescribable agony”. (Stories 28) When everybody learnt that Dr. Mala was on death-bed, the mutual blame game started between the couple. Each blamed the other for the negligence. Issues like children and their well-being and property became the subjects of heated discussion. Dr. Mala blamed Diwakar for his carelessness about her health.

She told them all lies. All the earnings go to her credit. “Her daughter knew well that her daughter was telling lies but she was sentimentally silenced as she did not wish to hurt her mother who was terminally ill. She preferred to intrigue with the three well-wishers against her father”. (Stories 33) Thus it took an ugly turn of events. Taking care of her children was the most important part of her subject. Dr. Mala had two sisters. They would take care of children following her death. All their married relationship of twenty seven years came to an abrupt exit. They exchanged verbal war in the hospital. “Her words scorched his entire being and there was an active volcano inside him emitting a stream of lava of disillusionment and despondency”. (Stories 35) Diwakar felt her words quite unexpected and disastrous like molten lead forced down his throat to silence his lungs. He was in a state of shock and utter disbelief. “His individual conscience was left in confrontation with the eternal problems of existence.” (Stories 36) His wife had really dealt a death-blow to his life and he looked dead to all outward appearances even before she stepped across the boundary into eternity. It could be seen as a life of sheer opportunist family politics just when Dr. Mala was on the death bed and caused the death blow to her husband. She sided with her children instead of her husband thus betraying him and the relations in the end. It is a story of betrayal, loss of conjugal loyalty, breach of trust and severing of relations of more than twenty seven years of married life. This exposes that any relationship however it is rooted in good faith is eventually taking ugly turns. “Father” is the story of a father’s strong urge and lobbying in order to get his son admitted to a school. He appeals to the Father of school for admission. “Dhandapani grew more desperate and prostrated before Reverend Father Gnanpragasam”. (Stories 39) Further, he says, “Father, please admit my son in your school. I won’t get up till you say ‘Yes’”. (Stories 39) These utterances by the father to the Father of the school invite our attention as to how much a father is concerned with his education. When Father insisted on punctuality, he said he didn’t compromise. The school was much sought after in the town. It had a rush of parents for admissions. It speaks of a father’s relentless pursuit to convince the Father of school for admission. In other words, it reflects a father’s sacrifice and dedication towards education of his child. Many parents sacrificed even luxuries to give good education. The author presents the plight of education in rural India, where there are hardly any schools and transport facilities. Even now, there are no buses to bring the school kids to the town. There were many exchanges, and many previous experiences as shared in the story. If Father of the school insists on the necessities of school code in strict conformity, it is equally father’s genuine concerns that have been highlighted in the story. Towards the end, the boy recounts that “It did not strike me then



that he was sacrificing a lot, even risking his own health for my education. Moreover, he always remembered his promise made to the Father. He hated my lapse in punctuality and absenteeism at school. Who is the father now? Biological father or School Father who shaped him into what he is today. “That was the beginning of my long educational journey. Years later he once told me that he was very happy when people around mentioned my name and pointed to him that he was my father. This is due recognition. People known to him started treating him with respect.” (Stories 46) If the biological father had given him a birth, it was his school Father who nurtured him in social values. Gnanasekaran rightly brings to the attention of the readers that any child should have access to good education. That imparts values to the kids. That shapes the future of Nation. In another story known for childish outburst and enthusiasm, “Face to Face with a Fox”, the author narrates how he did those mischievous things in his childhood days. The story is also rooted in beliefs that Indians hold for ages. The sighting of a fox, as the author hoped, would bring him a good fortune. His encounters at the sighting of a cobra in his farmhouse and subsequent alerts put him in agony and fear. Yet, the temptation in him brought out the curiosity and interest to catch a fox and bring it home.

Suddenly, an idea struck me. “Why can’t I try to put into practice what others say as a casual axiom – wake up to see a fox and be lucky for a whole day? Let me experiment with the idea and know the truth that lies behind the axiom. I can tell everyone about the upshot of my experiment. (Stories 50)

According to his plan, he brought home the cub much to the resentment and anger of his father. He was defiant though his father cautioned him to leave it with its mother. “Moreover, it is a sin to separate the cub from its mother”. (Stories 50) He wanted to keep it for a night and see the cub in the early morning for the first time. He is full of sentiments just as his father was about sentimental in leaving the cub to the care of its mother. At any cost, he wanted to see that cub as the first thing in the morning. “Tomorrow is going to be a very lucky day for me”. (Stories 51) Though the cub had a bad night, he was desperate to see that in the morning, “The very happening thrilled me,” Luck, luck, I am in luck today. Let me see how lucky I am today. Today is going to be a very memorable day for me in my whole life. The fox’s face will bring me all the luck of the world. Hurrah for the fortunes!!!” (Stories 51) What he expected to do in the morning was suddenly reversed when he fell off the cycle after it had skidded. Both the cycle and he had bruises. The neighbors lifted him after a first aid. The presence of cub added fuel to the flames. Soon, his father turned up and reprimanded, “I told you to take the cub back and leave it where you found it. Did you do what I told you? You kept it for the night and starve. Nowadays, your pranks have no limits. Let me put a full stop to this nonsense” (Stories

53). Later, his father thrashed him like anything. His mother, as usual, intervened not to beat him. “The day did not augur well as I willed. I had to obey the instructions of my father without delay. With all the pain and dragging my legs slightly, I took the cub and started going towards the sugar cane field. To me, the look seemed to convey a mischievous message that it was the most unlucky day for me” (Stories 54). His desire to see the fox, face to face, ended in unfortunate developments. Mischievous things ended in disappointments and unexpected blows. If man proposes, God disposes is strongly reflected in the story. The next story, “Urshitha, Our Lucy Gray” is a very tragic story of Urshitha, a school-going kid who had to die unexpectedly of an unknown health disorder following a few days of admission in the ICU wing of the hospital. The mental agony, pain and frustration and finally long waits to hear from the hospital, whether it was good, or bad, put them crushed in shock and pain to see the dead body. That must be shocking for the parents. But we notice that life of infants or kids is not guaranteed until they cross a deadline of certain age-limit. They are treated as God’s own children. The story bears references to this concept of life and death. Just as what William Wordsworth, in his poem ‘Lucy Gray’ portrays, Gnanasekaran shows the helpless condition of both the child, Urshitha and her parents. Further, it demonstrates the futility of man’s ceaseless warring against nature and the dominance of forces. Philosophically, the story has much to learn regarding unexpected turns and twists that a man faces in life. Pleasures and sorrows are to be treated alike. “To say that she was extraordinarily brilliant is to underestimate her intelligence. In terms of all aspects – be it studies, etiquette, extra-curricular activities and intelligent quotient – she was superb. I used to tell her parents that she was a wonder child, a child prodigy” (Stories 56). Such a lovely kid died a premature death. Fate is sometimes cruel. Urshitha was admitted in the hospital and treated in the ICU and her blood samples were sent for examination to Bombay. At 11.00’o clock, the news of her death crashed all of them. It came as a hammer-blow to us. Her parents cried and their cries rent the air. Their hopes were shattered in no time. The dead body was kept in the hospital for hours shows the greediness of the doctors for money. The doctors lose their professional ethics. It has been a common occurrence and recurrence too in India. The dead body was brought home amidst inconsolable crying. The funeral rites were completed. Gnanasekaran rightly describes the episode as, “There was Wordsworth for unknown Lucy Gray. Is there one for our known Lucy Gray, Urshitha” (Stories 61). It moves us into tears when we are reminded of such pre-mature deaths especially of young children. The grief goes on haunting us until we live. “Duty” is a story of ruminations and obligations for the parents when they are gifted with twins. The author begins



the story with a doubt as, “Sir, I am blessed with twins, twin sons” I opened the sweet box before my boss in the Department. Congratulations. But do you think it’s a blessing? No, it’s a curse” said he taking a sweet” (Stories 65). He sensed some problems in bringing up twins in one go. He felt that there must be some truth in it. There was a tumult with rumbles inside the stomach. “But many of my friends jovially teased me that I had had a double luck at one go. That became a source of consolation amidst anxiety about the things in store for him and his wife too. The sufferings following health issues in their upbringing struck him quite often. As a father, he was at a loss what to do next. Even the school Father had a tough time dealing with the twins. He told the father, “The boys are smart and it is really difficult to outsmart them” (Stories 71). It happened as expected for that the twins neglected and insulted the father very much. He was worried and was looking for the final whistle to blow for him. The twins had no regard for the father though the mother had died some time ago. The father wondered whether he was an anonymous father. His moments of frustration showcased in his observations as, “In this day and age, anonymous fathers are possible through semen bank and in the case of children orphaned by heartless mothers, both wed and unwed. But am I an anonymous father?” (Stories 72) The children become wretched and their wretchedness is evident in their reckless behavior. The story reveals that the children of modern generation are thankless. Duty by parents fulfills its obligation but it, at later stage, loses its grandeur by children. “Are You My Dad?” is a story of peculiarities that Rajasekar, as a father, received from his daughter, Maya. He was startled by that question. “What didn’t I do for my daughter as a father”? It was really a question that puzzled every father in the world. Rajasekar goes down the memory lane. “Much water has flowed down the bridge.” (Stories 73) He gave her the best education in the world. Her admission, as Rajasekar recollected, was a big problem.

The parents did not mind the pain and struggle to lay a good foundation for their daughters. At times, they cursed the authorities for excessive procedure as against a simpler one. He waited in the long queues to get the admission for his daughter. His mind was in turmoil. “Is it the irony of fate? Or is it a reversal of fortune in my life.” (Stories 76)

She completed Engineering and earned a good job as software engineer. She was into a love affair that triggered off a scuffle between her and the parents. One can well observe how parents had to bow down to their children. This is one such case in point. Rajasekar was richer and enjoyed a higher social standing than the boy’s parents. Caste considerations, social status, symbol and financial angles – all determine the arrangement of an alliance. Still Rajasekar compromised his prestige and respect. What else could he do? Each side argued in its own way.

The boy's side left with threatening messages like killing Maya if she sent another whatsapp message. Maya showed the message to her father and asked him, "That boy has threatened to kill me. You are standing like a stone. Don't you have any shame? Don't you think your honor is at stake? Go and kill him. Are you My Dad?" (Stories 79) Rajasekar was confused between her questions like "Go and kill him. And Are You My dad?. That was really a trying time for him to respond to her. Should he take the boy's life? Or should he live in humiliation? It presents the paradox of human life at its starkest. He could hardly find an answer to those questions. If one goes by philosophy, it sums up that if we are able to find answers to all our questions about the mysteries of life, then you cannot certainly be a mortal. Rajasekar, as Gnanasekaran concludes, is a mortal and his questions remain unanswered. He became speechless and motionless. Having looked at the story, one feels that children take certain decisions against the parents' wishes. If they go by modern mindsets where fast-beat culture is holding them, it is ultimately spelling doom for them. Children should live by social codes and family ethics. Maya's questions look like childish though she works as a software engineer. That she loves him very much and asks her father to kill the boy makes no sense at all. Children of this generation behave in an abnormal way and get trapped thus inviting unnecessary troubles for the parents. A compromise against all those imposed on family restrictions has however carried no value for Maya. "In the Eye of a Love Storm" is basically about a single protagonist by name Veena who was caught up in a dilemma similar to that of William Shakespeare's Hamlet's soliloquy 'To be or not to be'. Veena's condition runs in parallel to that like 'To love or not to Love' that is the question. She is gifted with all the features of a young girl that make her fell into love with a man of her choice. This story written in ten pages is fairly longer and projects the contemporary adolescents who fall into love-trap as victims and that episode becomes one of long standing stories.

Veena is 19 years old. She has all the passions of adolescence. She watches movies and maintains Facebook contacts. She goes to beauty parlours and feels proud of her complexion and curves. She adorns herself of after the fashion of certain heroines." (Stories 81)

Love turns the adolescent world upside down. Adolescence is the most awkward phase in one's life. Gnanasekaran rightly describes it as, "The girls in her teens is pulled between her instinctive compulsions and intellectual reasoning at the moment. The dilemma of Veena further dragged into 'Yes' or 'No' for love. This is rightly portrayed and an important phase like teenage must be properly under strict scrutiny. Confusion and indecisiveness are the special trademarks of this age group. Both Veena and Monica are sisters who play, share and

enjoy everything. Her parents are really proud of two daughters. A sort of voluntary seclusion is forcing her to nowhere. Further, she feels guilty of doing something against her convictions. Innumerable questions haunted her mind. Professor's teaching of soliloquy from Hamlet is different from the real life love- drama. Drama is enacted on the stage whereas love is fulfilled in real life against all odds. Soon she drifted herself into imagination and is caught in a whirlpool of excitement. Questions she had experienced had no answers in life. She wanted to open the Pandora's Box. It was emotional breakdown. She gets into introspection and realizes that, "Yes. I am not in love and don't want to be in love now. I want to be- away from such thoughts till I reach my goal." (Stories 90) Veena has rediscovered herself from the thoughts of love and avoids getting into those traps. It was a sort of awakening. A great sense of relief has flooded over her. Realization of mistake is great and self-realization is still greater. Though conditioned by adolescent age, Veena is unnerved and undeterred. Teenage is thirteen to nineteen and all adolescent girls have to be carefully monitored by parents. At last, Veena has come out of a dilemma and realized the importance of being 'awakened'. Gnanasekaran has dealt with the contemporary theme in a greater detail highlighting all the pros and cons of adolescent girls. Another story, "Fate", as it is defined, consists of the developments outside a person's control, regarded as predetermined by a supernatural power. It is usually of an adverse outcome. Fate is an unfavorable outcome in life; doom or death. Gnanasekaran exposes the tragedy of a family caught up in the fate of life. The setting is as usual rural India and the characters become the victims of fate in the end. If husband is the sinner, the whole family will be on the road. Saroja and Devan are couple in the story. Devan had left his legal wife, Saroja and two children and was having an illicit affair with another woman. Saroja is a domestic maid whose work goes throughout the day from dawn to dusk. She ekes out her livelihood. Her husband, Devan is a mason and a drunkard too. Usually, anyone who is a drunkard tends to eye on illegal activities. She has a son who is mentally retarded. He is Arumugam. Saroja has to take care of her daily work as a maid besides Arumugam. She works in four houses. A doctor's family helped her son secure admission in a school. "In between she goes home twice to cook for herself or monitor her son and feed him" speaks of a working woman's burdens. Yet, she does that to perfection. She often gets reprimanded by an orthodox lady. Saroja feels that it is her 'fate'. A sensible Saroja has her apprehensions about her sister's readiness to keep her daughter Priya. She lives some forty miles away from her place. Her future would be at stake if she is allowed. There are goons who may do her any harm. There is no safety for her daughter. Fate can be understood from another dimension in that Saroja has carried all the responsibilities

that a man should do. “Circumstances can trap her emotionally however cautious she knows hormones can play havoc with an adolescent girl anytime.” (Stories 93) This has burdened Saroja more in addition to those existing worries. One can see ‘Fate’ turning its hands from husband in Devan to wife in Saroja. When Saroja challenged Devan about his illicit relationship with a married woman, Devan shook himself like a lion. “I am not just Devan. I am Mahadevan.” (Stories 94) Saroja lodged a complaint with the police under Domestic Violence Act. Devan was called to the police station and warned him not to repeat the feat in future. “Saroja is poor but honest. She is a woman of principles and has a bit of stoicism.” (Stories 97) In the Indian context, I see that if a woman makes a good wife, man makes a bad husband and vice versa. This story just proves it in action and practice. A disturbed mind puts everyone in mental trauma. Saroja suffers from diabetes and hypertension.

After sometime, she would wipe off her tears and accept her fate silently to go ahead in her existential journey. Then Devan turned up with unshaven beard and looked at Saroja who almost deserted him. Devan is no more a lion but a helpless man. Saroja looks at Devan with nonchalant ease and then goes in with resolve. Gnanasekaran concludes the story with a significant image of deity as “She lights the traditional Kamatchiamman lamp. Now her face brightens by the lamplight and she seems to enlighten herself as to the quirks of fate.” (Stories 97)

Light illuminates life against darker world. Though ‘fate’ is pre-destined at times, Devan’s case is self-destructive in nature. Saroja’s plight is one prompted by conditions. Fate settled it for them in the end. “The Will of Heaven” is a story of man’s selfish goals versus God’s will that settle things in the end. Gnanasekaran rightly exposes the thinking of parents in a biting manner. They just expect everything to go their way. If not, they go to any extent and indulge themselves in committing sins. One such case is that of a friend that the author unexpectedly visited him in the hospital premises. His friend is Mr. Prakash who is his well-wisher. When he told him that he brought his wife to the hospital for abortion, the author persuaded him not to go for it. Having cited medical risks of procedure and emergence of health issues, he cautioned them against the unexpected developments for his wife. It is a story of recollection that Gnanasekaran met his friend, Prakash after twenty six years ago on the occasion of his friend’s marriage reception. His son Vugnesh was married and it was this boy that the couple of Prakash wanted to undergo abortion expecting a baby girl again. They had already a girl of two years old in the first birth. People go by certain beliefs in the case of child birth. A girl child is usually not wanted whereas a son is welcomed happily. “Sekar, the first born is a daughter. Many of my relatives say that the second will also be the same sex. I personally have seen it in my family lineage. Suppose it is a girl child, I need not tell you more about this. To

this, the author replied, “Why can’t we hope for the best? If it happens to be a girl child again, what will happen? The Heavens won’t fall. If it is the will of Heaven, we can’t change it. Don’t allow some obscure prejudice to color your judgment.” (Stories 102) In this way, the author convinced Prakash not to abort the foetus. He told him that it was going to be a son. His prediction came true. God willed it for them. The couple was gifted with a son. He is Vignesh whose marriage reception the author attended amidst the excitement. Nobody can ever change the Will of Heaven. Though people live in the age of science and technology, they prefer to abort if it is a baby girl. It is inhuman to kill the foetus. “In the Hands of Isakkiamman” is a story that moves around Isakkiamman who is revered with utmost devotion, premonition and power. She is one of chief rural deities in Tamilnadu associated with Sakthi. Isakkiamman has been a powerful deity and the protective Goddess of Sundarpani’s lineage for many generations. Once his son, Rajan and his wife Preeti met with an accident when they were going in a car. Subha and Sudhan were his grandchildren who were in the car. They cried agonizingly and stopped every passing vehicle. “It must be the same spot. It is an accident-prone area. In the past no one survived in the accidents that took place there.” (Stories 108). Luckily, they escaped from the accident though they had bruises. Passers-by made a few comments that the accident victims in the past were dead. They were lucky to have survived. The survival was attributed to the Deity Isakkiamman, one of the chief rural deities in Tamilnadu who became the family deity for generations of Sundarpani. The deity protects her followers against any mishap or health problem. The family of Sundarpani strongly believed that Isakkiamman saved her children from a possible death. As premonition had it, his relative Perumal had a dream that Rajan along with members would meet with an accident. They would be saved by Isakkiamman. Sundarpani believes in his words and he longed to see his son and other members. He was briefed about that they were out of danger. The power of the deity saved her children.” Everyone was in tears first for the victims in sympathy and later for Isakkiamman in gratitude.” (Stories 115) Later, Sundarpani vowed to visit the deity and prostrate before Isakkiamman a hundred times with a special puja. The author concludes that his intuition quickened the feeling that omens and premonitions still reigned supreme even in the digital world.” Sometime Partner” is a story of whims, fancies, pomp and show that ultimately resulted in the divorce between Bala and Sahdhana. It was a marriage that lasted for a year. The author recounts that the marriage was a grand carnival. A huge expenditure went into it. Modernity fashioned it throughout the celebration. The arrangements planned were nicely executed in the end. The couple had a nightmarish experience as the author writes that,”

So it was not Bala who divorced Sadhana but it was she who did it.” (Stories 127) This reminds me of modern day girls working mostly as Software Engineers in Bangalore filing for divorce in courts. I read the news in the newspapers. Their conjugal life doesn’t last for more than a year. People of this generation have no reconciliation as observed in the story. Married life is full of adjustment and compromise. Without this, it is what we see happened in the case of Bala and Sadhana. Gnansekaran sums up the story quite justifiably as:

An argument ensued. The argument evolved into an ugly scene and gradually there appeared hairline cracks on their relationship edifice. Cracks widened into deep fissures. There were people all ever ready to blow everything out of proportion. Things rapidly approached the flashpoint. Arguments received counter-arguments. They hurled abuses at each other. Estrangement followed and finally preparations for separation began. Bala’s parents tried to patch up their differences despite the humiliations heaped on them by their daughter-in-law and her haughty parents. Sadhana rushed to knock at the Family Court’s door. On legal compulsion burst open to her. (Stories 136)

To Bala, the memories of his former wife (sometimes partner) flooded his mind. Grief suppressed him into modern-day life patterns. Arrogance and haughtiness left them divorced for a petty argument. Good understanding between the couple is emphasized. All pomp and show go in vain.

“First Look” is the story of author’s own experiences, rather first –hand experiences when he went to see the girl. It was his first look as a prospective young boy since he had just completed MA in English Literature. He gained experiences that looked to him initially funny, serious, and introspective. Marriage is a significant development. First Look gives him so many hues and blues. As a young and eligible bachelor, his encounters at first with Duraiswamy, the mediator, and later with his father in matters of horoscope compatibility, and later when they went to see the bride by lorry – all made him dream about the girl whom he had seen her photos several times. Such experiences usually land the person in a memorable album. First look put him in an album of many experiences first with job trials and later by parents at 23. Complexion and character go together in the selection of an alliance. This is modern day mindset. The time when he was about to see the bride was really pressing. Dress code and manners and mannerisms held him throughout the ‘First Look’. At first, it was bride’s father who insisted on a government job. With Duraiswamy having asked for bride’s photograph, the boy had one last look at her photograph. First look became his last look. When he learnt from Duraiswamy that the bride inveigled into marrying her elder sister’s husband and she is not happy with her married life as a second wife, his heart missed a beat. His frequent glances into her photographs left him in mere dreaming. I am reminded of the quote, “Marriages are made in heaven”. Stories



like “Issue”, In Quest of a Wife”, Mosquito Raid”, and “Rain, Rain, Come Again” move around delightful but humorous fabrics of society. Gnanasekaran is at his best in terms of humour, wit, satire and pungent sarcasm. In conclusion, the stories are replete with social awakening, patterns, stigmas, dogmas, spiritually oriented beliefs and codes of conduct especially for people of this generation. They leave a lasting message for the readers to decide upon something that sustains their society. Since they make up the society in large numbers, their contribution to the society should be free from ego, pride, arrogance, haughtiness and above all pomp and show. They inevitably ruin their lives if they are trapped into vices. His stories are full of important messages and convey the readers' morals. The necessary tools of story writing are wonderfully displayed throughout the twenty stories. Flow of language and vocabulary are throughout the collection consistent but continuous. Social, psychological, spiritual, and emotional stories form most of the stories. Gnanasekaran will be remembered in the annals of Indian Short Story writers.

**Works Cited:**

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