


ISSN NO. : 0970-4175 (Print)

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Critiquing Entrenched Social Institutions

Review Details

BOOK NAME: THE SOLITARY SPROUT: SELECTED
STORIES OF R. CHUDAMANI

AUTHOR NAME: C. T. Indra and T. Sriraman

BOOK YEAR: 2019

BOOK PRICE: Rs.445.00

REVIEWER NAME: Meera Rajagopalan

VOLUME NO: 44

PUBLISHER NAME: Orient BlackSwan

BOOK PAGES: 216

Current Issue

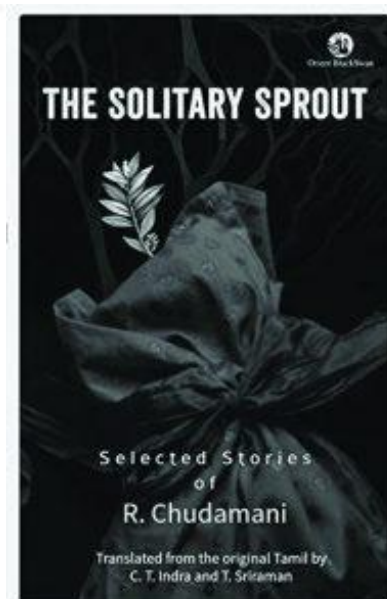
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The Solitary Sprout is a treat to read. This will come as no surprise to those familiar with Chudamani's books. Like the others, this book contains no violence or sex, preaches no



doctrine, upholds no morals.....just twenty simple tales of the everyday life of mostly TAMILIAN families.

That being so, readers would be justified in expecting a certain amount of repetition in the stories; but it is not so. Each and every one of the twenty tales is different, dealing with various but familiar aspects of life as it

is lived—a microcosm; a cross-section of life as it exists. There is the absolutely selfless cook who cheerfully supports her ungrateful sons fully aware there will be no return; the selfish artist who, after deserting his family, discovers that he is no Gauguin; the adolescent, in love with his teacher; the stepmother who forces herself to overcome her dislike of her husband's son; the philandering husband who mourns his wife's death in his mistress's arms even as he anguishes over his loss; two tales of patriarchy, of unmitigated male chauvinism, repulsed in very different ways by seemingly docile, subservient wives; and more. All are well crafted, psychologically true and believable.

Chudamani was one of our earlier feminists, though never a strident one. The women who appear in *The Solitary Sprout* testify to her understanding and sympathy. Mature self-confident women living the lives they want with dignity and assurance. Many women, mostly middle aged, following the dictates of their heart, not conforming to any rule of societal behaviour, comfortable in their own skin. Acceptance, consideration and strength influence their lives.

The dying, pain-stricken mother, in 'Death be not Proud' does not complain about her agony, does not curse her fate ... nothing negative, only the joy of living and enjoying things in whatever time there is left! Three mothers unite like the Furies to wreak vengeance on an inhuman, sadistic teacher. A

mother gracefully but firmly overrules her son's pleading not to go to a hostel. In 'Herself' Senthiru steps out of herself to become Herself! Many more examples of brave, self aware women happy and contented. Credible women, grandmothers, mothers, aunts who love and cherish their family and are loved and wanted by them in return. None of the harpies ferrying across our television screen!

One unusual story. In 'Litany' God explains His existence. He is not an entity; He only lives in the good deeds of His creations. Sethu's selflessness in the story is an embodiment of God! Refreshing!

The scholarly introduction by the translators CT Indra and T Sriraman is impressive and helps the reader appreciate the nuances of Chudamani's free flowing writing, thin as gossamer and strong as iron. The translation is effective and makes for easy reading. Nothing contrived about it, though occasionally, a simpler word would have been more effective.

Meera Rajagopalan has a PhD in English Literature from the University of Bombay. She is a freelance editor and translator.

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