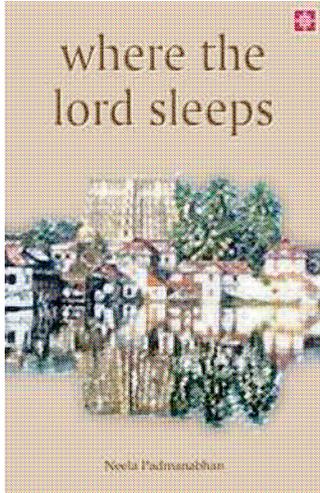


Soul of Thiruvananthapuram Where The Lord Sleeps

Author: Neela Padmanabhan



Neela Padmanabhan is a prolific writer in both Tamil and Malayalam. He has no less than eleven novels, six short story collections, a volume of poems and a collection of essays to his credit.

Through the life of Anantan Nair—the humble hero of this novel—we experience the tragedy of the ancient regime of princely India and traditional Kerala society, caught in a whirl of vulgar modernisation. As the rigid hierarchical social order of the Nairs, with the easy virtues of their matriarchal tribalism and the slow pace of an ambitionless life crumbles, Anantan Nair finds himself questioning his life's worth as a husband, father and man.

In this beautiful novel, Neela Padmanabhan has captured the soul of Trivandrum and laid it bare for us to see.

Where The Lord Sleeps

K. KUNHIKRISHNAN

The translation fails to capture the nuances of the original.

Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala, gets its name from the imposing and impressive Anantha Padmanabhaswamy Temple. The rulers of erstwhile Travancore ruled as servants of the deity, Pallikonda Perumaal, calling themselves Padmanabha dasa. Life in the city centred on the palace and the temple. Neela Padmanabhan has beautifully captured the spirit of those days, through the life of a clerk, Ananthan Nair, who was retrenched from the services of the Maharaja. The novel was published in Tamil in 1970 as Pallikondapuram and highly lauded. However, it took several years for such a highly acclaimed work to be published in English!

Philosophical questions

This period novel raises many philosophical and ethical questions through the vicissitudes in the life of Ananthan Nair, the central character. His life is marked by intrigues, immorality, feuds, corruption, pathos, hope and pompousness. He seeks solace in philosophy, but failure in life haunts him and he constantly introspects over his failed life as a husband who could not satisfy his wife economically, socially or physically.

Written in a simple and direct style, the novel sensitively portrays the soul and spirit of the town and brings out the conflicts of modernity and tradition. The

early days of protests and shouting against the ruling class are also indicated in the novel portending the over-politicisation, which is now crippling the very soul of the city. Like Ananthan Nair, the city, with its dejected soul, is in incessant nostalgia. Gone are the days of the regal splendour, festivities and pageants of the royal days. Those feudal luxuries are replaced by modern spectacles, and the novel indicates the imminent transformation.

The novelist is thorough with the topography of Pallikondapuram, (he does not use the word Thiruvananthapuram), its streets, temples, landmarks and major buildings in the nooks and corners symbolically setting the mood of the main character.

Ananthan Nair marries the stunningly beautiful Kartyayani but contracts tuberculosis. Despite regaining his health after treatment, he cannot lead a life of conjugal bliss. He has two children and living is tough for a lower division clerk. During the festive Aarattu procession, the gorgeous Kartyayani catches the eye of Vikraman Tampi, the Tahsildar. He frequents Ananthan Nair's house with lavish gifts and gives him an out-of-turn promotion, leading him to doubt his wife. Kartyayani, ill treated and abused by her husband, runs away with the highly-placed Tahsildar.

Crestfallen Ananthan Nair rejects help from his brother (a film actor) and sister and brings up his daughter and son.

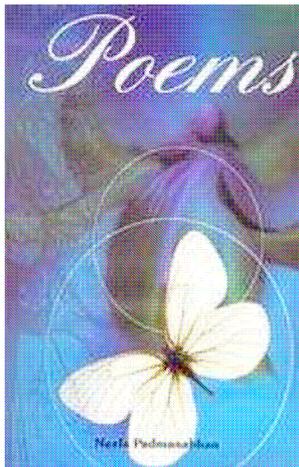
The meaninglessness of caste dawned on Ananthan Nair and the confrontation with the son and the devotion of the daughter puts an end to all his miseries.

The translation fails to capture the nuances of the original expressions and leaves a lot to be desired.

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Poems

Author: Neela Padmanabhan

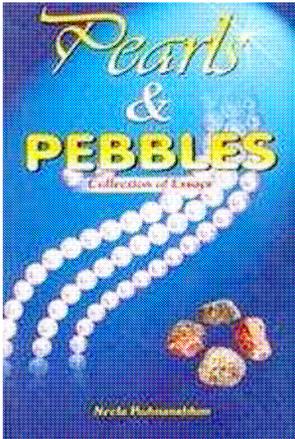


Neela Padmanabhan is well known as a leading short story writer and novelist in Tamil. Very few people, however, know him as a poet. A select band of people know show he uses poetry to present the pains that the vast majority of the populace endures, to reflect his own anguish at society's imbalances, injustices and iniquities. He laments the fragile structure of modern society, racked by the

politics of power that pervades even the field of literature. He derides the double talk that elite indulges in, sneers at the dubious deals that people strike and their vulgar display of wealth and power. His poems, most of them short, carry the decocted wisdom of a poet whose heart is lacerated by the steady erosion of the old value system built on the essence of Indian culture and tradition. The poems, translated from Tamil, secure for Neela Padmanabhan a place of honour amongst the finest poets of our times.

Essays of a fiction writer

PEARLS & PEBBLES — A Collection of Essays: Neela Padmanabhan; Reliance Publishing House, 3026/7H, Ranjit Nagar, New Delhi-110008. Rs. 175.



NEELA PADMANABHAN is one of the senior-most fiction writers in Tamil today. Beginning with the much-acclaimed first novel "Thalaimuraigal" in 1967, he has been regularly offering Tamil readers a number of short stories and novels.

One of his novels "Pallikondapuram" has been on the Aadan Pradan programme of the National Book Trust and the novel has been translated into a number of Indian languages. Way back in 1972, a person no less than the veteran man of letters Ka. Naa. Subramanyam translated "Thalaimuraigal" into English and it was published as "Generations" by the Orient Pocket Books of New Delhi. Padmanabhan has a novel each in Russian and German translation.

Perhaps it was the now defunct Tamil periodical *Subhamangala*, which coerced fictionists and poets to grant interviews and write essays on a regular basis, and here you have a confirmed fictionist Padmanabhan bringing out a collection of essays in English.

The essays touch a number of subjects but they do not fail to give a feeling that they are preliminary attempts at writing larger essays. Two of the pieces are brief reviews of the Tamil novels "Thyaga Bhoomi" by Kalki R. Krishnamurthy and "Oru Kadalorathu Gramathin Kathai" by Thopil Muhamed Meeran. Padmanabhan's bibliography of Tamil poets and poems is limited but interesting. There are two interviews of Padmanabhan, one by the senior writer and journalist of New Delhi, R. K. Murthi and the other by the elder Tamil writer Nakulan. Murthi's is an excellent introduction to the different facets of the mind of the writer while Nakulan's is a kind of one-line prodders to lengthy reflection.

The book also contains a comprehensive bibliographic account of Padmanabhan's writings in the four decades of his literary career. One essay, which stands out, is the

one on modern Tamil writing. Incidentally, it is also the longest. The book is a must for the writer's aficionados.

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Relations

by Neela Padmanabhan



A classic in Tamil, this novel touches author's own life and the life of the people around and away at several points, lending it the semblance of an actual story marked by reminiscences and remorse's, rumours and rivalries, tensions, traumas and treacheries, and furores and fulminations.

The central scene of activities is a medical college hospital ward, where Rajagopalan, the protagonist, is attending on his father lying there as a heart patient. All his dear and near ones come and go after making inquiries, but none expect his mother and some of his brothers stay there round the clock. Thus Rajagopalan is often left to shuttle between his home and the hospital, ruminating over the relations between man and man in general and between son and father in particular and recalling his bitter and sweet and bitter-sweet experiences in the past.

The curtain calls on the scene with the death of the patient. But Rajagopalan's ruminations and recollections combined with his occasional nostalgic references to his father's admirable qualities, his emphasis on filial duties, his incidental remarks on the vagaries of engineers, doctors and politicians etc. directly or indirectly point to the rottenness of present day society and strike a rather pessimistic note about the future of the human race itself. In this respect, the novel transcends the limits of time and space.