

PONNI'S BELOVED

Volume 1 : New Floods



An English Translation of Kalki Krishnamurthy's Ponnaiyan Selvan by

SUMEETHA MANIKANDAN

Ponni's Beloved

Volumes 1 to 5

**AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF
KALKI KRISHNAMURTHY'S PONNIYIN SELVAN**

by

Sumeetha Manikandan

Version 3.0

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[V. Sumeetha](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sumeetha Manikandan is a bestselling romance author whose novellas 'Perfect Groom' and 'These Lines of Mehendi' have been on the top of Amazon India charts ever since their publication. A bookaholic, thinker, feminist and a daydreamer, she reads across genres and is a crazy fan of history, romance and science fiction novels.

An avid reader of historical novels, she has been translating Kalki Krishnamurthy's classic Tamil novel Ponnaiyan Selvan for the past ten years and hopes to translate more of his novels into English.

Sumeetha is married to filmmaker K.S. Manikandan and lives with her daughter in Chennai.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge my father, S. Vijayaraghavan, who used to tell me the story of Ponniyin Selvan every evening during dinner and fuelled my interest to read the book.

My aunt, Ranganayaki, who lent me her Ponniyin Selvan books all those years ago when I was in school. I still treasure them to this day.

Navin and Vidya Sigamany for publishing the first drafts of Ponni's Beloved on their website Zine 5.com almost ten years ago and for editing the first two volumes of the book. I would like to thank Inderpreet Kaur Uppal for her stellar efforts in editing the first two volumes.

A very special thanks to my second editor, Dhivya Balaji, for editing the rest of the volumes, especially Volume 5. Her passion to retain the original essence of the novel matched mine and I was glad to find another kindred soul who loved these books as much as I do.

Eternal thanks to Author Venkatesh Ramakrishnan, who encouraged me to resume the translation again. Writer and Journalist, Dhivakar Venkataraman, for providing valuable historical guidance for the cover page artwork.

Meenakshi Devaraj, an avid fan of the Ponniyin Selvan series, who rendered great help in translating Poonguzhali's song and the Devaram poems in this volume.

Friends like Raja King, Fowzia Iqbal, Abirami Baskaran, Sastha Prakash, Ramanujam Jaganathan, Thirukambigai Devi and countless others, who followed the translation avidly and promoted it among numerous groups.

I would also like to dedicate this book to all those fans who have been asking me for years to publish my translation, and to my husband who claims to be the first among them.

A special dedication is due to Abirami Baskaran whose encouraging words were invaluable. She was one of many who left us all too soon. May her soul rest in peace.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Kalki Krishnamurthy's *Ponniyin Selvan* was the first Tamil novel that I read. To tell you the truth, I learnt to read Tamil using elementary school books, just so that I could read this story.

They say that good books and great authors can transform lives. I have found it to be true in my case. I started translating this book ten years ago, as a hobby and realized that I could write. Today, I am a freelance writer who makes a living out of writing, and I owe my profession to this novel!

Many authors have written phenomenal books in Tamil literature after Kalki Krishnamurthy, but *Ponniyin Selvan* still remains the most popular book, widely read by many. *Ponniyin Selvan* has the right mixture of all things that makes an epic – political intrigue, conspiracy, betrayal, huge dollops of romance, infidelity, seduction, passion, alluring women, unrequited love, sacrifice and pure love.

Ponni's Beloved is an English translation, and as many readers have pointed out, no translation can do justice to the original. I have tried to capture the essence and soul of Kalki's writing in my translation.

I recently visited all the places (in India) that are mentioned in this novel. We started on Aadi 18 (Aug 3, 2019) for this trail trip almost on the footsteps of Vandiya Devan and saw all the fascinating places that he mentions in the journey. I have included some of the photos in this volume. For those who wish to sign up for this tour trail, do contact Tour Bee (7299646588). The tour trail was well organized

and the curator had many interesting stories about each place that we visited.

Thank you,

Sumeetha Manikandan.

FOREWORD

Kalki Krishnamurthy's *Ponniyin Selvan* was serialized in the post-independence era and it ran for four long years. Talking about a golden era in Tamil history, it ensnared the imagination of huge swathe of the Tamil population with people queuing in railway stations long before dawn to lay their hands on that week's edition of the Kalki magazine.

An entire generation dwelt upon the freshness of the novel and surprisingly it was not condemned to the recesses of the mind as a childhood fancy but continued to entice readers of subsequent generations as they were born and introduced to the Tamil language. The novel still has a colossal following but bounded by the hedges of a language that is not easy to learn, it strictly remained out of the mainstream and well within the realms of the Tamil speaking world.

Tamil people have been habitual migrants and the diaspora is spread over numerous countries. In today's generation, though many of them can speak

fluent Tamil they lack the patience to read the Tamil script that is spread over 1000 pages of a novel. And that's when the need arises a need for a good translation.

When I read the novel late in my thirties, the social media was just picking up and I was introduced to the yahoo group of Ponniyin Selvan fans around the year 2001. For the first time, readers from different age groups, settled in different lands were congregating online.

It was there that I came across a translation of Ponniyin Selvan into English. (There had been one earlier in print but that left much to be desired for those who had read the original. In fact, at one point the earlier translator mentioned 'Maize' for the Tamil word Cholam. But it was pointed out in the group that Maize entered India 500 years after the storyline period.)

The online translation was a bold bid by a youngster. As much as the substance within, the attempt bedazzled a lot of us because for 40 years or more it was almost sacrilege to deal with kalki's works. The

one sequel in the market at that time had been mauled by the copyright owners!

Over the next decade many of the members of the Yahoo group became novelists, biographers, bloggers, heritage activists and a host of history and literature connected personalities. And I would like to list Sumeetha's translation of Kalki's work as a starting point for all this.

A translated work should remind us of the original and it should have the author's imprint on the words. I think Sumeetha comes out in flying colours on both fronts. I am sure her work would open up the genius of Kalki to many who were deprived of it all these days.

Biography of Venkatesh Ramakrishnan:

Author Venkatesh Ramakrishnan is a Chennai based bilingual novelist from India. South Indian historical fiction is his forte. He has published 3 novels in Tamil, 2 of them are sequels to the famous Kalki

Krishnamurthy novels Ponnin Selvan and Sivagamiyin Sabatham respectively, with the titles Kaviri Mainthan and Kanji Tharagai. One of his other fictional work in Tamil is Thillayil Oru Kollaikaran. Gods, Kings & Slaves. The Siege of Madurai is his first novel in English.

Character List

CHOLA ROYAL FAMILY

Paranthaka I – Grandfather of Sundara Chola, Paranthaka I ruled from 907 to 955 CE.

Rajadhithan – Eldest son and heir apparent of Paranthaka I. Prince Rajadhithan died in the Thakkolam War (950 CE), after which the crown was passed on to his younger brother Gandaraditha Chola.

Gandaradithan – Son of Paranthaka I. Sundara Chola's uncle. He was the Chola king from 950 to 957 CE. He was known for his great devotion to Lord Shiva.

Sembiyanmadevi – King Gandaradithan's queen, known for her piety and devotion to Lord Shiva. She belongs to the clan of Mazhavarayar and married the king despite his advanced age.

Aringzhan Chola – Son of Paranthaka I, and the father of Sundara Chola. He reigned for a very short period (from 956 to 957 CE).

Kalyani – Wife of Aringzhan Chola and the mother of Sundara Chola. She belongs to the Vaithumbarayar clan and is famous for her beauty.

Madhuranthakan – Son of King Gandaradithan and Sembiyanmadevi, and the first cousin of Sundara Chola.

Paranthaka II (Sundara Chola) – Emperor of the Chola and Pandya kingdoms from 957 to 970 CE, when this story happens. His handsomeness earned him the popular epithet of 'Sundara Chola,' meaning Handsome Chola.

Vanamadevi – Consort of Paranthaka II and the empress of the Cholas, she is the mother of Crown Prince Aditya Karikalan, Princess Kundavai, and Prince Arulmozhiarman. Her father is the noble chief Thirukkovalur Malayaman.

Aditya Karikalan – Eldest son of Sundara Chola and Vanamadevi, and crown prince to the Chola throne, Aditya Karikalan is a peerless warrior who defeated and killed the Pandya king and established Chola suzerainty over his kingdom.

Kundavai – Daughter of Sundara Chola and the younger sister of Aditya Karikalan. Kundavai is cherished throughout the kingdom for her wit, wisdom, grace, and intelligence. She lives in Pazhaiarai along with her companions and friends.

Arulmozhiarman – The youngest son of Sundara Chola and Vanamadevi, Arulmozhiarman is known throughout the kingdom as 'Ponniyin Selvan.' He later ascended the Chola throne as Raja Raja Cholan (985 - 1014 CE).

Noble Clans

PAZHUVUR CLAN

Periya Pazhuvetarayar – Lord Treasurer of the Chola kingdom and a peerless warrior who carried 64 battle scars on his body. He is the patriarch and the king of the powerful Pazhuvur clan and is an influential courtier and nobleman at the Chola court.

Nandini Devi – Queen and wife of Periya Pazhuvetarayar, Nandini is a young woman renowned for her beauty. Nandini's antecedents are a mystery and her past life is shrouded in secrecy.

Chinna Pazhuvetarayar – Also known as Kalanthaka Kanda, Chinna Pazhuvetarayar is the younger brother of Periya Pazhuvetarayar and is the commander of the Thanjavur fort. A powerful man with a strong physique, he is also the father-in-law of Prince Madhuranthakan.

KODUMBALUR CLAN

Budivikrama Kesari – The commander of troops in Elangai, he is also known as Kodumbalur Periya Vellar. He is the patriarch of the Kodumbalur Clan.

Vanathi – A Kodumbalur princess and the niece of Budivikrama Kesari, Vanathi is also the cherished companion and friend of Princess Kundavai, who hopes to wed her to Prince Arulmozhivarman.

Kodumbalur Siriya Vellar – Father of Vanathi and the younger brother of Budivikrama Kesari, he died valiantly in Elangai after leading a campaign across the sea.

SAMBUVARAYAR CLAN

Singannar Sambuvarayar – A powerful lord who ruled over Kadambur.

Kandanmaran – Son of Sambuvarayar who also fought along with Aditya Karikalan in many wars.

Manimegalai – Daughter of Sambuvarayar and the sister of Kandanmaran.

MALAYAMAN CLAN

Thirukkovalur Malayaman – Patriarch of the Malayaman clan and the father-in-law of Sundara Chola. He is close to his oldest grandson Aditya Karikalan.

VANAR CLAN

Vandiya Devan – Vallavareyan Vandiya Devan is Aditya Karikalan's bodyguard, friend, and confidante.

PANDYA KING'S BODYGUARDS

Ravidasan – The ringleader of the Pandya Abathuuthavigal who wish to avenge the death of their king. He is also known as 'Mandiravadi.'

Soman Sambavan – One of the conspirators and a member of Ravidasan's gang.

Edupankari – One of the Pandya conspirators who works in the Kadambur palace and overhears the noblemen's plots about the Chola succession.

Devaralan – Also known as Parameshwaran, he is one of the Pandya Abathuuthavigal who works in the Kadambur palace.

OTHER IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

Anirudha Brahmarayar – Prime Minister of the Chola Kingdom, and Sundara Cholar's trusted childhood friend and confidante.

Azhwarkadiyan Nambi – A Vaishnavite and a spy who is also known as Thirumalai or Thirumalaiappan. He also claims to be Nandini Devi's foster brother.

Parthibendra Pallavan – Close confidante and friend of Aditya Karikalan and a scion of the old Pallava dynasty.

Kudanthai Jodhidar – An astrologer in Kudanthai (present-day Kumbakonam) who is patronized by Kundavai.

KARAIYAR FAMILY

Thyagavidanga Karaiyar – Guardian of Kodi Karai lighthouse and father Poonguzhali and her brother Murugayyan.

Mandakini – Older sister of Thyagavidanga Karaiyar and Poonguzhali's aunt. She is also the woman who Sundara Cholar falls in love with while in Elangai. Many suspect her to be the mother of Nandini. Many also call her 'Oomai Rani' (translates to Mute Queen).

Vaani Ammai – Senthana Amuthan's deaf and mute mother, and the twin sister of Mandakini.

Senthana Amuthan – A devout Shaivite who provides flowers from his garden to Thallikullathar Temple; the son of Vaani Ammai.

Poonguzhali – Senthana Amuthan's cousin who lives in Kodi Karai; the boat girl who saves the life of Ponnaiyin Selvar.

Murugayyan – Poonguzhali's brother who is timid and under the control of his wife. He also plies his boat for his livelihood.

Rakkammal – Murugayyan's wife, who is also a Pandya rebel and a member of Ravidasan's gang.

Karuthiruman – A boatman who saves Mandakini and is in love with Vaani Ammai.

King Mahindan – King of Elangai who is presently hiding in Rohana mountains.

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A HISTORICAL NOTE

Centuries ago, the Cholas of South India rose to great heights when King Vijayalaya Chola (AD 846 - 871) conquered the Pallava Kingdom and established Thanjavur as the capital city of Cholas.

His son and successor King Aditya I (AD 871 - 907) vanquished the Pallavas and the Kongu land. Later, under the reign of his son Paranthakan I (AD 907-953), the Cholas acquired a dominion that laid the foundation for the vast empire that later Kings Rajarajan, Rajendran, and Kulothungan would establish and expand.

Paranthakan I won significant victories over the Banas, the Gangas, the Pandyas and the King of Elangai and one can learn all about his conquests from the many inscriptions that were written about him. Towards the end of his reign, the Rashtrakutas under the command of Krishnaraja III invaded the Chola Kingdom and the Chola Crown Prince Rajadithan, who led the army, fell dead at Thakkolam (near present day Arakonam) in AD 947-948. Following this defeat the Rashtrakutas seized Tondainadu and ruled over it for about a quarter of a century, confining the sway of the Cholas to their ancestral dominion comprising of Thanjavur and Tiruchinapalli.

King Paranthakan I had three sons, the eldest Rajadhitan (who was killed in the Thakkolam battle), Prince Gandaradithan and Prince Arizhayan. After the demise of King Paranthakan, Gandaradithan ascended the throne, but he was a widower who had no intention of marrying again or siring heirs. Instead, he proclaimed his nephew,

young Paranthakan II, (his brother Prince Arizhayan's son) as his heir apparent.

However, unexpectedly a few years before his death, King Gandaradithan got married to Sembianmadevi and begot Prince Madhuranthakan. Despite the birth of his own son, he willed that his nephew would remain the crown prince and his heir apparent. After his death, his Queen Sembianmadevi upheld her husband's wishes, as her own.

Paranthakan II ascended the throne after his uncle's death and ruled the Kingdom wisely. He was so attractive and handsome that he came to be known as King Sundara Chola, by his subjects. King Sundara Chola had two sons and one daughter. He made his eldest son, Prince Aditya Karikalan, a peerless warrior, his heir apparent.

This is where our story begins.

Chapter 1 - Aadi Perruku

Let us journey hundreds of years back in time. We are now in a Kingdom ruled by the glorious Chola^[1] kings.

To be precise, we are near a lake named Veerananarayana^[2] that is known today as Veeranam^[3].

Such a breath-taking sight! The vista of this lake makes one wonder about the wisdom of our ancestors and their perceptive farsightedness that made them build structures that would last for generations to come.

Today is the eighteenth day of the holy month of Aadi^[4]. On this day, every year, people gather along the banks of the nearest river or lake to enjoy the beautiful moonlit night and have a picnic with their families.

On the banks of the Veerananarayana Lake^[5] there appeared a young soldier on horseback who belonged to the brave warrior race of Vanars (Bana)^[6]. His titular name was Vallavareyan^[7] Vandiya Devan. While his tired horse trotted slowly, its master wasn't in any great hurry, as he was much engrossed by the spectacular sight that was unfolding ahead.