



PONNI'S BELOVED

Volume 3 : The Sword

SUMEETHA MANIKANDAN

Ponni's Beloved

AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF
KALKI KRISHNAMURTHY'S PONNIYIN
SELVAN

by

Sumeetha Manikandan

Part 3 of 5 - The Sword

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sumeetha Manikandan is a top bestselling romance author whose novellas 'Perfect Groom' and 'These Lines of Mehendi' (which was published as a paperback novel called 'Love Again') 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 Ponnaiyin 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 twelve-year-old 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 fueled 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. I would like to thank Inderpreet Kaur Uppal for her stellar efforts in editing the initial draft copy.

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 Ponniyin Selvan series and rendered great help in translating Poonguzhali's song and 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.

Thank you,
Sumeetha Manikandan

PS. For those who wish to sign up for this tour trail, do contact Tour Bee (7299646588). The tour trail was well organized and at the curator had many interesting stories about each place that we visited.



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 Ponniyin 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 II – 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 empress of the Cholas, she is the mother of Crown Prince Aditya Karikalan, Princess Kundavai and Prince Arulmozhivarman. Her father is the nobleman Thirukovallur 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 - Younger sister of Aditya Karikalan and the daughter of Sundara Chola and Vanamadevi. Kundavai is cherished throughout the kingdom for her wit, wisdom, grace and intelligence. She lives in Pazhaiaarai along with her companions and friends.

Arulmozhivarman - The youngest son of Sundara Chola and Vanamadevi, Arulmozhivarman is known throughout the kingdom as 'Ponniyin Selvan'. At the time of the story, he is in Ilangai (Sri Lanka) on a campaign against King Mahindan and had captured many parts of the island. He later ascended the Chola throne as Raja Raja Cholan (985 - 1014 CE).

Gandaradithan - Son of Paranthaka I and Sundara Chola's uncle. He was the Chola king from 950 to 957 CE. Gandaradithan was known for his piety.

Sembiyanmadevi - King Gandaradithan's queen who was equally virtuous and spiritual. She belongs to the clan of Mazhavarayar and married the king despite his advanced age.

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

Arinjaya 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 King Arinjaya Chola and the mother of Sundara Chola. She belongs to Vaithumbarayar clan.

Rajadhithan - Eldest son and heir apparent of Paranthaka I. Prince Rajadhithan died in the Thakkolam war (950 CE) after which the crown passed on to his younger brother.

Paranthaka I - Grandfather of Sundara Chola, Paranthaka I ruled from 907 to 955 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 petty 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

Budhivikrama Kesari - The commander of troops in Ilangai, he is also known as Kodumbalur Periya Vellar. He is the patriarch of the Kodumbalur Clan.

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

Kodumbalur Sิริya Vellar - Father of Vanathi and the younger brother of Budhivikrama Kesari, he died valiantly in Ilangai after leading a campaign across the sea.

SAMBUVERAYAR 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 conspirators 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 - One of the Pandya conspirators who works in the Kadambur palace.

OTHER IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

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

Parthibendra Pallavan - Close confidante and friend of Aditya Karikalan.

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

Senthan Amuthan - A devout man who would offer the flowers of his garden to Thallikullathar Temple in Thanjavur. Vandiya Devan

stays in his house while visiting Thanjavur.

Poonguzhali - Senthana Amuthan's cousin who lives in Kodi Karai.

Glossary of Terms

Abathudavigal – The army of bodyguards that guarded the Pandya King

Adey – An expression used to refer someone with derision and disrespect

Adigaley – A respectful term used to address a monk

Amma – Mother

Ammavasai – New Moon

Anna - Elder brother

Anni - Elder brother's wife

Anthapuram - Women's quarters in a palace, usually located in an interior and protected part

Akka - Elder sister

Appa - Father

Ayya – A respectful term in Tamil used to address men

Ayyo / Ayyayo – An exclamation of distress

Battar – Term used to refer to the priest

Bikshu – A Buddhist Monk

Chi Chi – An expression of disgust

Dalapathy - Army Commander

Devi – Used to address royal or noble women

Dhanadhigari – Treasurer

Dhoomketu – A comet

Gurunatha – Teacher

Jodhidar – An Astrologer

Kalapathy – Ship's Captain or Commander

Maha Mandiri – Prime Minister

Maharaja – My King

Maha Guru – Chief among teachers

Mandapam – A canopy, usually built of stone with four or more pillars.

Mandiravadi – Magician

Malai – A Mountain

Natha – My beloved

Olai – Palm leaf used to write messages

Padai - Army

Paatti – Grandmother

Pujari – A priest

Prabhu – A respectful term to address a lord, prince or the king

Rani – Queen

Raja Drogam – Treason against the king

Rakshashi - Demoness

Senapathy – Army Commander

Samudra Rajan – The Sea God

Sangu sakkaram – Conch and discus

Thambi – Younger brother

Thatha – Grandfather

Theevu – An Island

Vajrayudham – Thunderbolt

Vaikuntam – The abode of Lord Vishnu

Vihara – A Monastery

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An excerpt from The Crown (Ponni's Beloved Volume 4)

The story so far...

In the 10th century AD, Southern India was ruled by the mighty Cholas who expanded their Kingdom from Ilangai (Sri Lanka) to River Krishna. Our story begins during the reign of Emperor Sundara Chola (Paranthakan II) who was sick abed with paralysis. His son, the Crown Prince Aditya Karikalan was gathering forces in Kanchipuram to expand their empire, while his second son, Prince Arulmozhiarman had conquered Ilangai and was setting up Chola suzerainty in the island kingdom.

Worried about his father's health and security at the hands of Pazhuvur brothers (prominent noblemen in the Chola court) Aditya Karikalan sends his friend and trusted bodyguard, Vandiya Devan with a message to the Emperor, inviting him to Kanchipuram. On his way to Thanjavur, Vandiya Devan halts his journey at Kadambur and stays at his friend Kandanmaran's palace for a night. There, he inadvertently, discovers that the Pazhuvur brothers were plotting a conspiracy. They plan to crown Prince Madhuranthakan (who is the Emperor's cousin) as the next Emperor and thereby denying the throne to the Crown Prince Karikalan.

While on his journey, Vandiya Devan meets Azhwarkadiyan, a spy who works for the Chola Prime Minister Anirudha Bhramarayar. Azhwarkadiyan tells him about Nandini, the young beautiful wife of Periya Pazhuvetarayar. Nandini happens to be the secret leader of the late Pandya King's loyalists who have vowed avenge their king's death.

They conspire to kill Aditya Karikalan (who had beheaded their king ingloriously) and wipe out his family in vengeance. Vandiya Devan meets Nandini and procures a signet ring from her, citing

Azhwarkadiyan's name (who was her foster brother), which he uses to enter the fort.

At the fort, he meets the Emperor and tries to warn him about the plot but is interrupted by Chinna Pazhuvetarayar who suspects him to be a spy. He also meets Nandini at her palace garden whose attempt to seduce him fails. While escaping from Nandini, he encounters his friend Kandan Maran in the dungeon passage and saves his life from a murderous guard but his friend mistakenly concludes that he was a killer. He then escapes from the fort and leaves for Pazhaiaarai with the help of his friend Senthana Amuthan.

At Pazhaiaarai, he meets Princess Kundavai and finds out that she is the same woman with whom he had fallen in love in Kudanthai. He tells Kundavai about the conspiracy that the noblemen are hatching. She writes a message to her brother Prince Arulmozhi and asks Vandiya Devan to bring him back home from Illangai. Vandiya Devan immediately leaves for Kodi Karai.

Prince Aditya Karikalan is furious that his friend has been branded a spy and wants to march his army to Thanjavur to crush the power of the Pazhuvur brothers. His grandfather Malayaman advises him against it and asks him to bring back Prince Arulmozhi home. They decide to send Karikalan's friend Parthibendra Pallavan for this task. Before he left, Karikalan tells Parthibendran about his unrequited love for Nandini and how she had betrayed him by sheltering and pleading for Veera Pandyan's life, which led him to behead the king in rage.

Kundavai leaves for Thanjavur along with her companion Vanathi, the Kodumbalur Princess. Vanathi is in love with Prince Arulmozhivarmar but she is also very faint-hearted. One night Vanathi sees the Emperor moaning in pain and shouting at someone who resembled Nandini. Next day, the Emperor calls Kundavai for a private audience and reveals his past to her.

When he was a young Prince, Sundara Chola gets stranded in an island near Ilangai and there he falls in love with a deaf and mute fisher girl named Mandakini. One day, the King's men find Sundara Chola and he goes back to the Kingdom after promising her his hand. After his return, circumstances force him to take the mantle of responsibility for his empire and he becomes the crown prince. Heartbroken by the turn of events, Mandakini commits suicide by jumping from the Kodi Karai lighthouse. Sundara Chola believes that Mandakini's ghost is haunting him since then and is asking him to give up the kingdom to his cousin Maduranthakan.

Vandiya Devan, in the meanwhile, meets Poonguzhali, a boat girl in Kodi Karai and goes to Ilangai with her help. At Ilangai, he meets Azhwarkadiyan again, who escorts him to the Prince. Prince Arulmozhivarmar is taken in by Vandiya Devan's personality and they become fast friends. Arulmozhi also reveals to them that a deaf and mute woman has been saving his life and helping him in Ilangai. He also tells them that she had saved his life when he was young and calls her 'Kaveri Amman'. Kaveri Amman (Mandakini) saves them once again from the murderous gang led by Ravidasan - the leader of Veera Pandya's erstwhile bodyguards. Vandiya Devan is taken aback by her resemblance to Nandini and guesses that she might be her mother.

Poonguzhali meets them again and gives a message that two warships have come to arrest the Prince on the Emperor's orders. Kodumbalur Periya Vellar and Parthibendran try to counsel the Prince against surrendering but in vain. The Prince decides to meet the ships and give himself up. He leaves their army in an elephant along with Poonguzhali but the warships had by then met a bad end. One of the warships is broken after running aground, while the other is captured by Arab pirates. Vandiya Devan who sees the Arab Pirates going along with Ravidasan assumes that the Prince is held a prisoner in the ship. He swims towards them and gets into the ship, only to find that he is gravely mistaken.

Prince takes Parthibendran's ship and goes in search of Vandiya Devan. During a fierce storm, Vandiya Devan kills the Arab Pirates and then Ravidasan (Mandiravadi) and his companion abandon the ship leaving him alone in it. When the storm intensifies, a bolt of lightning strikes the ship and its sails catch fire. The prince rescues him from the burning ship, but they fail to reach Parthibendran's ship and end up floating in the sea. They are later rescued by Poonguzhali.



Chapter 1: At Kodi Karai

The storm that began in Ilangai crossed the sea and made its way through the coastal cities of Chola Kingdom leaving behind destruction and death in its wake. From Kodi Karai to Kaveri Pattinam^[1], the cyclone rendered many people homeless, uprooted trees and destroyed many a property. The backwaters of Kodi Karai were flooded and the quicksands became more deadly and dangerous than ever, capable of swallowing large elephants.

Two days after the storm, Periya Pazhuvetarayar and his entourage came to Kodi Karai. A veiled palanquin followed the entourage but this time, it was indeed Nandini who travelled in it. There was no reason to take Prince Madhuranthakan with them and Lord Treasurer felt that it was important that Nandini travelled with him sometimes. It might be necessary to take Madhuranthakan again in the same veiled palanquin and if the Pazhuvur queen were to travel genuinely with her husband on some trips, no one would suspect otherwise. This was one of Nandini's arguments, but it didn't take long to convince her husband. Pazhuvetarayar readily accepted her suggestion and gleefully anticipated a romantic trip by the coast, along with his beautiful wife.

Just before the storm struck Kodi Karai, they were in Nagapattinam for a day, where Pazhuvetarayar met people on affairs of the Kingdom.

Nagapattinam was a busy trade route for many merchant ships, in those days. Ships laden with goods would often anchor at the port and boats would ply their way to the coast to unload and ferry them

back to the mainland. Trade merchants and officers of the guild would be at hand to levy taxes on the goods that are brought by the ships and the merchant ships would trade for items that they wish to take back to their respective kingdoms. There were many royal officials at the Port to conduct this business and as the Treasurer of Chola Kingdom, it was his duty to oversee their records.

After meeting the guild of merchants, Pazhuvetarayar headed to Chudamani Viharam^[2] where he was accorded respect and courtesy due to his status.

A few days ago, two Buddha Bikshus from this Viharam visited Thanjavur and requested permission to meet the Emperor. The Pazhuvur lord allowed them to meet Sundara Chola and they blessed him with good health and showered praises about his benevolence towards them. They had many praiseworthy things to say about Ponniyin Selvar who was helping the Buddha Sangam in Ilangai by renovating their monasteries and temples. They also imparted a piece of important information to the Emperor...

“Chakravarthy! The Buddha Sangams in Ilangai are delighted with the Prince’s benevolence that they have decided to offer the crown of Ilangai to him. This news has not only made us proud but also happy! There is no higher praise for the Chola Kingdom than this!”

Periya Pazhuvetarayar who was present there had an unusual idea that he voiced to Sundara Chola after the Bikshus left.

“My Lord! While there is no doubt that you rule over this vast kingdom, unfortunately, your sons rarely listen to you and nor do they respect your wishes. The reason for this is the ill advice given to them by certain people who have coveted important positions in our royal court. Crown Prince Aditya Karikalan refuses to come to Thanjavur and is instead asking you to travel to Kanchipuram. He is being taught by your noble father-in-law Malayaman to disrespect your wishes. In the case of your younger son, I have sent messengers one after another, across the sea asking him to return

home but in vain. These messengers find it difficult to meet the Prince, thanks to the schemes of Commander Kodumbalur Vellar. If Prince Arulmozhi knew that you wished to see him, he would immediately set out from Ilangai, I am sure of it. I would like to propose a plan that would make it hard for the Prince and the Commander to ignore your commands. If you permit, I can elaborate...”

When the Emperor nodded his ascent he said, “Let us send a warship with the Emperor’s royal commands to imprison the Prince, on charges of trying to usurp the throne of Ilangai. Kodumbalur Vellar cannot ignore a direct command from you and our men will have to meet the Prince directly. The Prince will never disrespect your orders, he will return immediately,”

When Sundara Chola heard this, he smiled. It was a strange idea and it might even work. The Emperor wished to see Arulmozhi, as soon as possible because he knew he was nearing his death. He wanted to speak to the young prince about the giving up their claim on the throne to Prince Maduranthakan. He hoped that the Prince would aid him in this plan and help change his older brother’s mind.

Thinking thus, Sundara Chola acceded to the Pazhuvetarayar’s idea of sending warships to Ilangai to imprison the Prince. Periya Pazhuvetarayar arranged for the warships and sent his own soldiers along with the sailors to Ilangai. The Captain of the ships had strict instructions not to cause any bodily harm to the Prince and to treat him with the utmost respect.

After the ships departed to Ilangai, Periya Pazhuvetarayar started worrying. He was concerned about his reputation. If something untoward were to happen to the Prince, whilst on his journey home, he would be blamed for the same. He, therefore, decided to go to Nagapattinam to welcome and receive the Prince ceremoniously and to bring him back to Thanjavur, under his protection.