

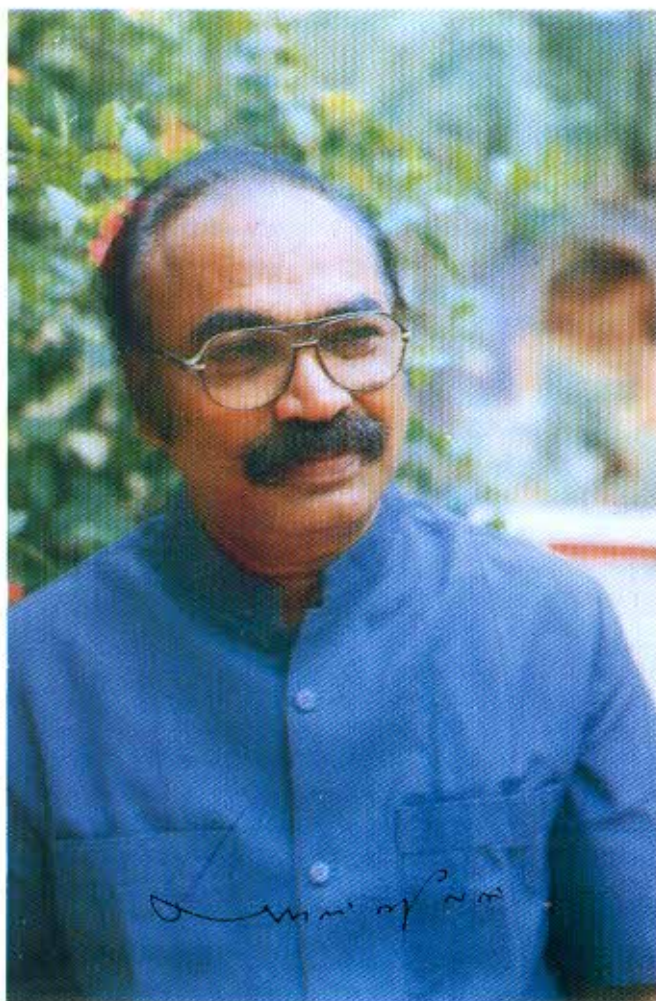
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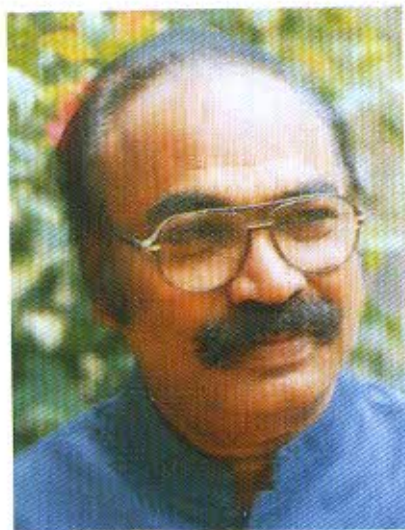


Sahitya Akademi

meet the author

PONNEELAN





PONNEELAN was born in 1940 in Manikattipottal, a small village near Kanyakumari. His father Siva Ponneelavadiyoo was a committed Gandhian. His mother Azhakanayaki Ammal, the author of the celebrated novel *Kavalai* (Grief), was also the first in inculcating in Ponneelan an involvement in the world of letters.

Even as a student Ponneelan wrote poems. He wrote quite a lot of poems under the influence of Bharathi and Tagore. But then he had no links with the Tamil literary world. Naturally he did not evince any effort in getting his works published. A few pieces appeared in the local journals. That was all.

His attention has, however since 1965 turned to writing fictions. His first novella *Ootril Malarntatu* (Blossoms in the fountain) was published in the literary magazine *Tamarai* in 1972. It is the tragic tale of the plight of women of the oppressed communities. At that time it made a tremendous impact in the Tamil literary world. He continued to write novellas in *Tamarai* and *Kannadasan*.

His first novel *Karisal* (Black soil) was published in 1976. It brought him recognition as a novelist of rare distinction. Prof. S. Thothathri, a critic of the Tamil novels, feels that, of all creations of Ponneelan, this novel is perhaps the best in its structural perfection, in handling the images, and in highlighting the thematic forms. It also received the Best novel award of the Government of Tamil Nadu in 1982.

The nucleus of Ponneelan's works is the development of social life and the collective endeavours of mankind towards its accomplishment. This indeed the central trend that penetrates itself through all his poems, short stories, novels, in his articles in aesthetics and sociology. This is also the reason why he shows more involvement in novels than in all other literary genres. His conviction is that today there is no literary form other than the novel which can give more space for depicting the movements, aspiration and ups and downs of the widened social life.

Of the novels which came after *Karisal*, *Kollaikkararkal* (Brigands) widely drew the attention of the readers (serialised in *Tamarai*, the Tamil literary journal). This is the first Tamil novel based on liberation theology. Even its formal structure was the subject of controversy. Prof. N. Vanamamalai, the noted scholar held that it was not a novel; a short story, but a long short story.

Ponneelan's novels excel in their aesthetic aspects too. He is an expert in handling images. He is equally competent in adopting the regional dialects. Once you

enter his world of creation, you feel as if you are also living in that world. He is a realist. Before commencing the writing of each one of his novels, he does a strenuous field-work in gathering basic materials, in identifying the appropriate characters, in assimilating them and recreating them as art. Till he is satisfied, he revises, and re-revises his writings.

The novel, *Putiya Tarisanangal* (A new vision) won him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1994. The largest ever social novel published in Tamil, its form is so powerful that it attracts and absorbs its readers. Ponneelan took fourteen long years to complete this novel. He rewrote the entire novel thrice. The last revision took five years. Dr. Durai Seenichamy, Prof of Tamil, Tamil University Tanjore, holds, 'Undoubtedly *Putiya Tarisanangal* written in the back drop of emergency, portrays the multidimensional events that took place during its short space, with an explorative social conscience and a sense of righteous indignation so very characteristic of the novel form.

It is a great novel conceived with the idea to extend

in the minds of the reader a debate on the universal fundamentals of wisdom, with a view to place the ideological structure based on the problem of social history that belongs to every segment of Indian history. Though this novel is concerned with an artistic generality one may claim that a lively question reverberates in the Indian firmament.' Kovai Gnani a neomarxist scholar collected and edited a compilation of detailed critical views on this novel and it was brought out in November 1994 by the Vijaya Publishers, Kovai.

So far as Tamil Literature is concerned it is a rare event to have published a book of criticism on a novel, and that too within a period of two years of its publication.

'In *Putiya Tarisanangal* Ponneelan is not a monist. By and large he is a pluralist. As Ragavan claims democracy in politics is his ideal, Ponneelan has attempted a democratised process of creativity in this novel. He has not imposed the dictatorship of the proletariat on his characters. The events and the characters of the novel flow in their own way.



Receiving the Sahitya Akademi Award from Prof. U.R. Ananthamurthy



Sri Ponneelan with Kunrakudi Atikalar, Perur Atikalar, and TMC Ragunathan

'Ponneelan's mode of creativity in this novel is realism, strongly deeprooted in Tamil fiction. But this is a realism with openness. It is questioning, with a quest for truth, it is dialogical and argumentative. It is not an arbitrary realism. Ponneelan must have imbibed his mode of creativity through the democratic treatment of realistic life which he so dearly loves through his openness and through his nonpedantic approach', so says Dr. N. Muthu Mohan a literary critic.

Of the other books by Ponneelan *Jeeva Enroru Manudan*, *Tavattiru Kunrakudi Atikalar*, *Tamilakattin Anmika Valikatti* are worth mentioning. Equally significant are his translations of Russian Classics, *Vazhkaaip Pathai* (Road to life) and *Marxia Azhahialin Adippadaikal* (Fundamentals of Marxist aesthetics).

Marxia Azhahialin Adippadaikal received a special award from the Tamil University, Thanjavur. Apart from all these he has written a lot of articles on literary criticism and sociology.

Terkiliruntu (From the south) a book on the cultural

history of the south is the latest book written by him. He tells about the three sages *Vaigundaswami*, Narayanaguru and Iyenkali who devoted their entire life for the upliftment of the downtrodden of the 19th century. The book he is at the moment writing *Maru Pakkam* (The other side) is to be released shortly. It is also a criticism of the cultural history of the 19th and 20th century of the south.

At the invitation of the Srilankan Progressive Writers' Association he undertook literary tour to Srilanka for 14 days in 1996.

Ponneelan's full name is Ponneelan Srikandeswara Bhaktavatsalan. Having served the department of school education, Government of Tamil Nadu for a very long period, he retired as the chief educational officer, Coimbatore in 1998. He published his experiences in the department of education in a book *Vidai Perukiren* (Taking Leave) on the very day of his retirement. Many of his books are prescribed for various courses of studies in Indian Universities.

A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Malayalam poet Sri ONV Kurup felicitates Sri Ponneelan

A CHRONOLOGY

1940 Dec. 15	Born at Manikattipottal Kanyakumari Dist.	1985	Led a peace march first from Kanyakumari to Kerala and from Kanyakumari to Chennai
1960	Graduated in Physics from Scott Christian College, Nagercoil		Attended the World Peace Congress, Denmark, Copenhagen
1962	Graduated in Education, Thiagarajar College of Preceptors, Madurai		Visited the Soviet Union
	Entry into Tamil Nadu Govt. Service, Education Department as a Science Teacher	1988	Elected as General Secretary, Tamil Nadu Kalai Ilakkia Perumanram. A Progressive Literary Organization founded by Jeeva
1967	Married Umadevi alias Kaniammal	1994	Sahitya Akademi Award for <i>Putiya Tartisanangal</i>
1972	First Novella published in Literary Magazine <i>Tamarai</i>	1995	Nominated as member of the senate of Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli
1982	Tamil Nadu Govt. Award for <i>Karitsal</i>	1996	Visited Sri Lanka to attend the Srilanka Progressive Literary Congress
1983	Tamil Nadu Govt. Award for <i>Jeeva Enroru Manudan</i>	1998	Retired as Chief Educational Officer Coimbatore on 31.12.1998
1984	Thanjavur Tamil University Award for <i>Marxia Azhakialin Adippadaikal</i>		



With his wife Kaniammal