

....*Pandavapuram* on the other hand, is a novel of Space, lost found and created, which seeks to invest individual affects into historically relevant places and ways of life. Its basic time structure is not cyclic nor uniform since it is sharply and conflictively cleft between ever moving historical time which should drag the characters along with it, and two individual times: the one of the paramour who, like another Wandering Jew, is never allowed to stop somewhere and be redeemed, and the arrested time of the lonely abandoned wife who wants to attract the paramour to her, manipulate and destroy him in revenge. In one painful hallucinatory moment, the unfaithful husband visits Devi's house and she offers him to become one of the paramours, the last one in a long queue. For all the above reasons, the novel remains as enigmatic after a second or subsequent reading as it was at first, that is, if one tries to explain away its discordances using ordinary linear logic. But we can at least clarify its relativistic distortions of dialectics if we have a closer look at its different locations....

*(Prof. Didier Coste, Michel de Montaigne University, Bordeaux)*

Sethu belongs to a highly innovative generation of fiction writers in Malayalam who pioneered a radical transformation of sensibility in the sixties and early seventies. A pre-occupation with the abnormal, the morbid and the weird in life and attitude, an exploration of the irrational and the instinctive drives of the human species, a privileging of the subjective over the objective and psychological over the sociological, an obsession with evil and cruelty, an unprecedented freedom from inhibition in the treatment of sexuality, a Kafkaesque super-sensitivity to states of despair, solitude and alienation, a dream-like condensation of space and time and the constant employment of non-realistic narrative strategies marked them apart from their realist predecessors concerned mostly with the macro issues of class and caste. *Pandavapuram* is a typical product of this 'high-modernist' conjuncture in Malayalam fiction.

*(K. Satchidanandan \_ Indian Review of Books 16 May 1996)*

Sethu is one of those writers who bring to bear upon their works a sense of the impossible, or the unknowable, together with a haunting quality, that is, though rooted in the mundane and the routine, remarkable for the way it calls up a subtext of profound psychological, anthropological and, at times, occult or mystical significance. *Pandavapuram* is an accomplished work of this kind and it has an important place in the history of Malayalam fiction.

*(Dr. V.C.Harris, in the introduction to the Book)*

An interesting feature of the novel is that the narrator does not feel required to make explanations: much is left unresolved. It is not only a novel of sexual politics, torn love and vision but also surfaces/masks. There are some desperately sad stories of missed connections and opportunities and thwarted love. The prose is always well controlled and has highly sensuous descriptions. It is a self-conscious narrative maneuver that is deftly handled, reflecting serious social concerns yet always sustaining interest. The book is remarkable for the way in which a male writer deals obsessively with the passionate thoughts and experiences of a woman. He handles the role with sensitivity and insight.

*(K.T.Sunitha Byrappa – Deccan Herald July 5, 1998)*

Pandavapuram is hailed as a landmark in the history of the Malayalam novel in its bold jugglery with form, to describe the complex face of modernity, deliberately blurring the boundaries between fantasy and reality. Drawing upon the familiar epic context of the polyandry of the Pandavas in the Mahabharata, Sethu gives it an atemporality, a primeval quality raising it to the level of being the only authentic grammar of sexual expression in a pan-Indian cultural context.

*(Dr. Janaky – The Book Review – Vol. XX – No.7)*

It would be unkind to read a novel of this kind with the cool sanity of reason. Even so, the question remains. Do women –more particularly unhappy women- seek a lover all the time? Do they see a potential lover any in any man who is sympathetic to them ? Or is this an obsessively male point of view generally about women in distress?

*(Lakshmi Kannan – Biblio – Sept. 1996)*

The novel offers a serious examination of contemporary attitudes to female sexuality. Sethu creates a troubled world of passion and power which is seen alternately through the lecherous, public gaze of the male and the tormented inward vision of the woman. If Devi's name signifies 'goddess' her husband's name suggests the pampered, possessive male child with infantile, destructive passions. Patriarchal society's compulsive need to regulate woman's behaviour arises from its anxiety about the disruptive effect of female sexuality on a male-centred power structure.

*(E.V.Ramakrishnan \_ The India Magazine of Her People and Culture- Dec. 1996)*

My thesis is that the key to understanding why Devi is considered to be one of the most fascinating characters in Malayalam fiction lies in analyzing the manner in which she is related to the Goddess after which she is named. Such an approach to understanding Devi's irresistible appeal is fortuitously supported by one of the more exploratory aims of my project, namely, to evolve an Indian feminist approach by using the concept of shakti and other Goddess-related concerns. But what about the matter of female sexuality as it operates within the Nair matrilinear context ? It is my view that the appeal of the character Devi lies in the manner in which Pandavapuram negotiated two inter-related contexts : the 'mystique' of matrilinear Nair women's sexuality and the fraternal polyandry practiced by epic Draupadi, and Devi's dynamic and mutually reinforcing relationship to the Goddess; these two aspects can be likened to the social and the mythical dimensions of the Indian woman's existence respectively, and by extension, my feminist critique. It is in the ingenious use to which Pandavapuram puts the polyandrous sexuality of Devi for the purpose of evolving Devi's mysterious relationship to the Goddess, that the roots of Devi's occult appeal and that of the text as a whole, lie. The interplay between the mortal Devi and the Goddess, is in turn, dovetailed into the novel's broadest theme, the relation between fantasy and reality.

*(Archana Sahni, Punjabi poet, in her research paper on 'Mutation of Draupadi'- Chapter on 'Devi, Draupadi, and the Goddess in Sethu's Pandavapuram')*