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M.T. Vasudevan Nair

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Date : Published by Disha Books (first published 1969)

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Author : M.T. Vasudevan Nair

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Hari says

I am not qualified to comment

Harsha Priolkar says

Let's just cut to the chase shall we? This book left me depressed :(I think it was the wrong choice right after reading *The God of Small Things*, which is no picnic in the park either, although written in an interesting style. This one is just too languid and relentlessly oppressive. The characters seem doomed and exhibit an apathy towards battling and/or bettering their circumstances that is appalling. I can accept a couple of losers in a book – but a whole novel populated by them can get really dull and boring. Since you know nothing's going to change because no one is interested, you begin to wonder why you should be!

This book is by renowned Malayali author M.T. Vasudevan Nair (for which he won the Kendriya Sahitya Akademi Award), and he obviously knows his subject inside out – a joint matriarchal Nair family in an obscure village in Kerala, poor, defeated and apathetic except when it comes to petty gossip. The story tells Sethu's story from his perspective of life in such a household – where the women run everything, where his father is absent, where poverty is omnipotent, and a young teenager like himself can find no relief, no escape. He amuses himself with what little he has – mostly for a while – with the girl next door. But Sethu is no lovable teen, not someone who evokes sympathy. He is shallow, selfish and callous and although that can be explained to a large extent by his circumstances and lack of familial support, it is his choices at crucial junctures that disappoint; choices made when he should have known better. Money is scarce and jobs even more so, but while his friends and colleagues show a willingness to rise above circumstance, Sethu's defeatist attitude and self-pity just irritated and frustrated me. He's not a character I can feel sorry for and when in the end Sumitra tells him exactly what he is – I was screaming with relief and joy that someone finally did!

There's a reason the joint-family system fell apart eventually – the petty jealousies, the interference, the burden of a thousand expectations, the fact that the needs of the family as a whole were always more important than the needs of its individual members, the gossip, poverty and resistance to change – none of these make for a fulfilling family life. The characters in the story are well etched – they're just not very likable is all. Except for the three women that are involved with Sethu at different times in his life – nobody shows much spunk, least of all Sethu! They were my favourite characters! This is a translation from the original Malayalam and I get the feeling yet again that I'm missing out on something crucial, from not being able to read the original. It will be a while before I read a translation again.

Maybe my disappointment with this book is because yet again, an award winner fails to excite me! Or maybe it's just a question of timing where I needed an uplifting story, not one where the journey seems futile and lessons stay unlearned. Or maybe it's just too much of Kerala for this hapless Goan ;) I confess that towards the end, the narrative did hold more interest especially when Sethu appeared to finally be gearing up for a righteous confrontation. However Nair downplays the actual confrontation with his staid narrative style, which robs much of the joy of victory. As in many stories set in Kerala – there is a river! I guess the flow of water and the passage of time are so conducive to comparisons, that authors cannot resist the temptation of that particular metaphor! Nair doesn't either. Although there are a few instances in the narrative when he is

clever and sharp, using irony with great effect, the overall tempo and flow is a little sluggish for me, although I accept apt for the story being told. I think the best lines for me were the final lines in the book,

“The river, his river, dreaming of floods even as it grew dry, lay behind him like a lifeless body drained of blood and movement.”

A great line, but such a depressing thought! Although I tried to imagine that Nair is telling us that the worst is behind Sethu...I just can't bring myself to believe that's true. Nothing happens throughout the story to suggest a change in Sethu's attitude or approach. He is still as self-pitiful and selfish as ever. Always dreaming, never doing! A weak character is our Mr. Sethu and I don't have patience for the likes of him. I would love to hear if any of you out there have read this in the original Malayalam? Would be interesting to compare notes! I quite liked the cover on my copy though – a painting by one of India's foremost artists Anjolie Ela Menon entitled Shapurjat.

For me a disappointing read and rather anti-climatic after a great run of books in the past few weeks. I truly think this is a great time to take a break for reading the List – too much reading 'outside the box' has left me jaded I think :P Time for Ms. Christie – YES! A return to their roots never hurt a soul ;) Murder on the Orient Express it is in the company of the inimitable Hercule Poirot :D

Smithun says

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Shajith P R says

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Shweta Ganesh Kumar says

Being the first book, I've read by iconic Malayalam writer M.T Vasudevan Nair, I wish I had, had the chance to read this book in Malayalam.

But being in El Salvador, where let alone Malayalam books, but also English ones being scarce to come by, I had to settle for the eBook version.

The book has suffered due to its conversion into this format - with typos galore. The translation is a little stilted as well.

But I still ploughed through, devouring the story of Sethu - a young boy in a joint family that follows the matriarchal system as was tradition in Kerala. He loves and dreams and studies and falls in and out of love. He matures and falters and makes mistakes and drifts through life as do the others around him like his first crush, his family, his first love, his employers and later his wife.

Like the river in his village, ebbing and flowing, sluggish at times and fast-flowing at others, Sethu meanders through his life not really achieving much and wondering whether the worst is yet to come or already behind him.

A short read rooted in stark reality.

I'd recommend reading it in Malayalam though, to enjoy the book better.

Sameer m says

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Meghna says

I read the book with high expectations as it is written by an esteemed writer. But the book was boring although it has an interesting writing style. It is the story of Sethu who is an ambitious person who lives in a joint family. But the selfishness of Sethu is shown throughout the story. I like the female characters who appears in Sethu's life at different times

Vishnu Kartha says

as this one is the second malayalam novel im reading, and the 1st one being 11 years ago, it has its unique style which is entirely different from english novels. initially i was not that impressed until i understand how a malayalam novel is really different from english novels. both of 'em cannot be compared since they are originated from different corners of the world. both are different in their own ways...talking about Kaalam, it

Shajeer Marakkar says

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Jaseena AL says

Book Set against the backdrop of a crumbling matrilineal "tarawad" system of the Nairs in Kerala with its petty rivalries and jealousies, its sambandhan system of contractual marriage, its conflicts and problems, and the changes in land legislation which sharply erode the feudal order.

Kaalam is the story of sethumadhavan Nair who starts out as an ambitious and confident adolescent - but in his journey towards adulthood, where material and social success go hand in hand, he is faced with an overwhelming sense of disillusionment. The river of Sethu's village, a mute witness to every crisis in his life, mirrors this journey, its sensuous beauty transformed to dry sand. MT's lyrical prose captures the changing moods and seasons of the landscape of his own childhood in a novel that, though not strictly autobiographical, shares some of the emotional experiences of the protagonist. In a finesse characteristic of Nair's profound, yet minimalist sense of expression, the starkness of reality found in this story is touching and insightful.

Alfa Hisham says

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Sreerag Nair says

A tale of time, told through the change of the protagonist with his encounters with the realities of life. A slow paced which gives an outlook towards the story of the social structure of Kerala towards the mid 20th century. M. T also discusses about the unemployment issues faced by the youth at that time.

Rekha says

This is the first book of MT which i read . I like the way of writing and the book too.It's a must read book :)

Vijay Prince says

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Jincy says

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Sumith Prasad says

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