

Cultural nuances

The urban milieu and space are two predominant motifs. **INDIRA NITYANANDAM**

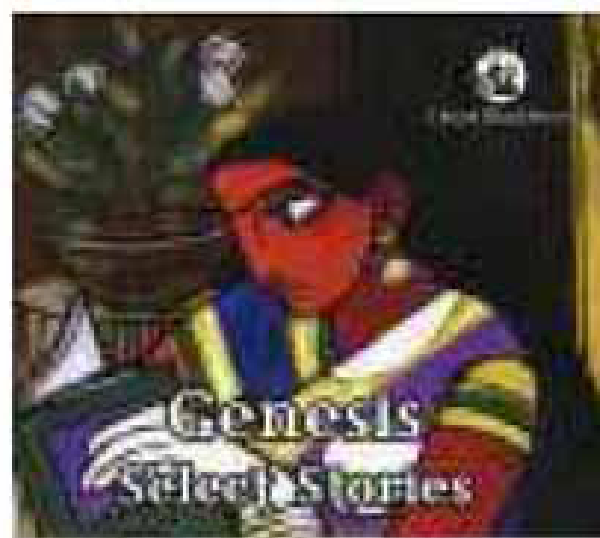
Space seems to be the common link between almost all the stories in this collection, the trope that runs through is “set adrift on the stream of time”. The lack of space, the need for space, the desire for space, the futility of all these! Selected (culled would be more appropriate) from earlier published collections, these stories are truly representative of Lakshmi Kannan’s writings. One finds in Kannan’s writing, her ability to appreciate and use the innate cultural nuances of language. For a reader equally comfortable in both English and Tamil, the title often whets your appetite to read the short story. But these titles create different expectations. This is not to discount the effectiveness of the translation but to point out the possibilities. Her vast reading and teaching experience, her familiarity with more than one Indian language (and hence, as an offshoot, culture), her living away from her home-state have all contributed in no small measure to her writing.

Moving easily from Tiruchi to Puri to Berkeley to Lucknow, the social milieu in most of the stories is that of the educated upper caste, upper middle-class. Kannan’s sto-

ries reveal her concern for women, whether the educated Padmini in ‘India Gate’ or poor helpless Champa in ‘*Parijata*’. At the same time, one sees traces of the inner strength of women like Mrs. Lobo in ‘Phantoms of Truth’ or in Padmini; though Revati and Pankajam are ready to walk on the dotted line, making no attempt to protest or change the centuries-old traditional way of life. (One wonders if Lakshmi’s women would be portrayed differently two decades later today!) It is the urban milieu that predominates in this collection, probably because as Jasbir Jain points

out, “urban lives, lived in non-Tamil environments, myths, eternal truths can safely be transferred to another language without much loss...” (p.xv), while to Kannan, “once a translation is done, it unshackles many a work from narrow, regional limits”. (xxiv) And yet, mention must be made of ‘Mangal’s Requiem’ where the illiterate Ammaji can make no sense of the touching poems penned by her son from death’s row.

To me, however, ‘An Evening with You’ sticks out like a sore thumb and does not blend with the rest of the collection.



Edited and translated by
LAKSHMI KANNAN



Genesis: Select Stories;
Lakshmi Kannan, Orient
BlackSwan, Rs.350.

.....