


# It's book politics!

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## Features

***Title: Playing Pillow Politics at MGK***

***Author: Lal Madawattegedara***

***Reviewed by: Capt Elmo Jayawardena***

What I am writing is not really a review but an appreciation of a book I read. The judgement has already been given and the PPP at MGK has entered the Hall of Fame of Sri Lankan literature when it won the Gratiaen Prize. That award is prestigious and most local authors vie for the honour and it is certainly a case of many are called but few are chosen. And in giving PPP at MGK the award the judges had done yeoman justice.

Man! This book is different. I love the simplicity of it and the manner in which pages are set. Makes one want to read as it is easy on the eye. That matters a lot without having to find magnifying glasses to make the words bigger or run through long chapters where at the end the beginning gets forgotten.

PPP at MGK covers all that well – let me first state it is a fast-flow easy-read with small chapters and big print which adds a lovely tint to the totality of the book. Now! What has author Lal written? A very interesting concept of creativity where he gets the story recited by a completely deformed vegetabalic boy who has the eyes to see and the powers to think and give opinions on everyday happenings of the ordinary in his own way of deciphering the world around us. He does have the uncanny ability to get into the minds of people and know what they are thinking which the author calls the aura of a person. He is born almost freakish and the people in the area of the Maha Gini Kanda (MGK) turn the tables and make him a god and there begins the story. Simply put, this is what the book is all about and the cleverly constructed metaphor makes it a lovely read for all ages. It is all different drum beats, but collected to give a rhythm of its own which made it a worthy read for me.

The characters are fascinating and the best of them in my opinion was Toyota Nanda who gave parking tickets to cars. Wonder why she wasn't call Honda Nanda or Datsun Nanda? Her life is colourless, a day-to-day drudgery from the bottom of the ordinary list, just writing parking tickets. Yet she becomes romantic and her love story is great. Infatuated with a Bollywood heart-throb she saw in a magazine cover at a shop window she fell head-over-heels for him on "purified imagination" of a one-sided relationship. The make believe 'love-story' gave her a colourful life till such time reality took over and she ..... you read the rest. Let the book wise you up.

Natami the old man lost his wife and by pure chance figures out how to talk to the dead. That is where the book's name came about, Pillow Talk. Natami slept on his wife's pillow and noticed the pillow was speaking to him, just as his wife did. Yes, what came out as whispers were his wife's innermost thoughts. Man! That was a great find, to know what

people had in their heads by sleeping on their pillow. This miracle completely changed Natami's life. He started going commercial first by reading a pillow his sister bought. The cat jumped out of the bag; her husband was having a bit of a 'hide-and-seek' with a woman who sold coconut oil in the bazaar. No secret was safe if Natami kept his head on someone's pillow. Business boomed, Natami became known as 'Kotta Mama' and took to professional pillow-reading. 50 rupees to sun-dry the pillow and then sleep on it and listen to what the owner had been thinking and sell the information for 150 rupees. And so the story goes, Natami went from ordinary to celebrity and fame and the book goes to list Kotta Mama's adventurous discoveries of other people's secrets and gives first class entertainment in snippets of wild imaginative writing.

Victoria Malli the club steward too comes nicely with his role in the book. Another 'imaginary lover' who chases the 'teeth doctor's wife. Of course people rate him as 'Gode Posh' for the put-on acts he flouts on MGK people. It's all to do with the talk and traits he picked up from the rich and the famous and qualifies unconditionally to make a fool of himself with his imitation behaviour. All these people's fantasies and local magic the author writes about are realities in the lives of MGK people. They are the little intervals they create for themselves to get away from the mundane and prosaic existences they have inherited. The miniature tales of the ordinary turned into skilful story-telling obviously won Lal Madawattegedara the Gratiaen.

There is Bassa the electrician and his widowed girl-friend who cooked fish curry and gave Bassa fish plus bliss when his wife went to church. Print Preethi, loved printed paper so much that he made love to his wife on newspapers spread on the floor. Over headlines of the world the love machine went to over-drive with creaks for age and moans for pleasure. Lal's expressions too add spice. Near the well women (linda laga Gaanu) knotted a lie (boruwak gethuwa) and a host of others the author brings in purely for entertainment.

I like the 'to hell with conformity' attitude of the author in the manner he has written this book. He is not corralled by the norms of English-writing and language perceptions. He writes what he feels and some may find it difficult to digest. But I didn't and on the contrary liked very much the original approach of the book.

Who am I to defend him, he's already won the Gratiaen.

That says it all about the book.

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