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[Editor's Note]

This issue of SNL has become a Homai Vyrawalla special so to speak. And we are happy it has turned out to be so for India's first woman press photographer has been honoured with a Padma Vibhushan this year and an exhibition of her photographs archived with Alkazi Foundation and curated by Sabeena Gadihoke was held in various cities and the film produced by SPARROW and directed by Anik Ghosh on Homai was screened as part of the exhibition. In Tamil you have a saying that along with the flower the fibre string with which the flower is strung together also becomes fragrant. Likewise, along with Homai's photographs SPARROW's documentary also got shown. This issue carries details about the exhibition and also an article by Sabeena on her travels with Homai. Maybe we should call this Dalda 13 Special for she was professionally referred to as Dalda 13, a name derived from her birth in 1913 and her first car's license plate, DLD 13!

The month of March is always full of International Women's Day events. We have covered some of them in this issue. There is also a review of Neera Adharkar's interesting book on the chawls of Mumbai.

In this issue we pay homage to a great educationist, two film artistes and a Tamil writer who have made life, art and literature richer for us. Do visit our website www.sparrowonline.org and do write to us.



Exhibition

Homai Vyarawalla: A Curator's Perspective

After a long search for an archive to house her life's work, earlier this year, 97 year old Homai Vyarawalla gave her entire collection on permanent loan to the Alkazi Collection of Photography. In August various organisations pooled resources to make possible a comprehensive exhibition of her work at the NGMA.

This retrospective emerges out of my thirteen year journey with this extraordinary woman who was India's first woman press photographer. Through it, I have sought to map the significant moments of Homai Vyarawalla's repertoire by including her well-known political photographs along with others of urban life and culture that have not circulated as widely. My attempt was to frame the images within a larger cultural history of photography and draw attention to their circulation in public and private domains. In addition to her cameras, the exhibition also displays letters and other memorabilia that speak of alliances and friendships forged through photography.

Often meant for a fleeting glimpse in the newspaper, these press photographs became visual archives of the future. Some of Vyarawalla's images chronicling the defining moments of India's Independence acquired an iconic status and are now integral to a Nationalist version of history. According to this version, some people led and others followed. As important people dominated photographs, ordinary citizens frequently found themselves relegated to the margins. The exhibition seeks to foreground this absence by reinserting images of the 'crowds' along with iconic portraits of leaders and events.

Another cluster of images are those of the photographer herself. These offer insights into the life of a woman who was pioneering because she chose an unconventional profession. Vyarawalla's attempt to lead an ordinary life was transformed through the extraordinary circumstances of history. While she shot official histories as they unfolded, she also chronicled the lives of people like herself. The former found permanent place in collective memory while the latter lie scattered in the personal archives of those who were photographed by her. The exhibition features one such image from the family collection of Uma Chakravarti. In this picture, her mother poses at a function to showcase women of 'South India'. Besides drawing attention to a key agenda of the Nehruvian era,

that of 'unity in diversity', the photograph bears physical traces of more everyday family histories—Uma Chakravarti's sister Shakuntala had cut herself out of the photograph! Images like these from Vyarawalla's 'missing archive' would circulate through different registers telling other cultural histories of her times. Like all exhibitions, this too is only partial. But it hopes to start a journey of many new discoveries about the life and times of Homai Vyarawalla.

— Sabeena Gadihoke

Sabeena Gadihoke is Associate Professor at the AJK MCRC, Jamia University and author of a book on Homai Vyarawalla.

A Photographer Photographed

“In a country where a great man like Gandhiji has been forgotten, why would I be remembered?” asks Homai Vyarawalla, India's first woman press-photographer. One disagrees with her bleak viewpoint, if one dares disagree with a 97 year-old lady.

She may have chosen oblivion, but Homai's presence is palpably felt. The current exhibition at NGMA of her variegated photographs (curated by Sabeena Gadihoke), along with the video-recording (a SPARROW production), and Sabeena's book, *Camera Chronicles of Homai Vyarawalla* offer a retrospective on this remarkable photographer. Her “stories in pictures” recreate our histories, our geographies, our cultural and social spaces. Besides, they trace the trajectory of her life.

The pioneer photographer was always seen in public, Roliflex in hand, “her Third Hand.” A rare sight in the 30s and 40s, the lady was once asked, “*Kya hajamat karne ja rahi hai?*” Pat came the retort—would he want his *hajamat* done? Significantly, the video-film opens with Homai displaying the working of her life-companion, the same Roliflex, which is a crucial exhibit at the NGMA. Now, of course, Homai, the Photographer, becomes the object photographed. However, the word ‘object’ cannot fully convey the vitality which emanates from every shot of that film. We glimpse

into her Baroda home, watch her green fingers tend her plants; we hear her chuckle as she reminisces about her girlhood. She met her husband-to-be when he was helping her solve her math problems. "He solved my parents' problems as well" since they would not need to look out for a suitable boy! Pouring out a drink in the kitchen, she reflects on the constant help her husband would offer on the domestic front. The home was also their workplace since they had created their own dark room for processing their films through "trial and error."

Homai's earliest photographs for *The Illustrated Weekly*, were of "Bombay the Beautiful," a city which, for her, had been a "village" till the Parsis arrived on the scene. Her camera has captured for all times—Chowpatty Beach, Ganpati festivals, Parsi families emerging from the agiary, scenes whose serenity we can re-live only through photographic memories. But, then, nostalgia is the privilege of the old.

Life in Delhi, where the family moved in the 40s, was far from serene. Without quite realising it, Homai was recording history and in many ways, creating history as well. The freedom struggle, Independence Day, national and international dignitaries, Gandhi's prayer meetings, except the final, fatal one—all were caught and immortalised by her camera-eye. Being the only woman photo-journalist and caught in the whirlpool of momentous events and iconographic personalities, Homai's was certainly not a subaltern's perspective. "I was in the crowds but not of the crowds". But just like the low-angle shots for which she was famous, her mind's eye would capture the extraordinary in the ordinary. A photograph, for instance, which you would pass by, unnoticed, till the caption arrested your attention—clandestinely taken, it depicts the arbitrary show of hands at the AICC session, which decided the irrevocable step of Partition. Even today, her voice quivers with anger at the manner in which "a handful of people" had decided "the fate of millions...as though it was their *jagir*."

The final frame of the video-film shows Homai, forever dignified and gracious, reading a newspaper. Is she dismayed by the screaming headlines, the sensational photographs? Or, as she occasionally gazes into the dusky distance, does the "Lady in the Rough Crowd" travel duskier distances to long-ago times?

—Roshan G Shahani

International Women's Day Events

Vithabai at Maharashtra Seva Sangh, Airoli

The programme was arranged on 5th March, 2011, by Maitra, women's wing of Maharashtra Seva Sangh, Airoli, on the occasion of International Women's Day, from 4.00 to 7.00 pm at their auditorium.

SPARROW's film *Vithabai Narayangaonkar* on tamasha artiste Vithabai, was screened after a woman achiever of Airoli was felicitated. Mrs. Bhavna Patil, who learnt to drive from her rickshaw

driver husband and was enterprising enough to buy a van and use it for picking up and dropping children at school, was felicitated for her spirit of enterprise and courage. Bhavna Patil spoke about her experience and about her initial fear of driving. She also talked about how she overcame all the criticisms and ridicules of others.

About fifty women watched SPARROW's film with rapt attention and said they would like to watch more such films.

— Sharmila Sontakke

Towards Equality

On the occasion of International Women's Day, MAVA (Men Against Violence & Abuse) had organised a programme on 7th March 2011 at Ravindra Natya Mandir. The first part of the programme was a Poetry Reading on woman-man relationship. Five women (Cecilia Carvalho, Pragnya Daya Pawar, Neerja, Sangeeta Dhayagude, Farzana Iqbal Dange) and five men (Prashant More, Arun Mhatre, Kiran Yele, Anil Dabhade and Raj Chinchankar) read out their poems. The second half of the programme was *Samatekade Vatachal*—a presentation of last 200 years in women's history in a musical form with a slide show. It was produced by Stree Mukti Sanghatana and written by Jyoti Mhapsekar and directed by Sushama Deshpande.

— Priya D'Souza

Renutai's Stories

Jeshtha Nagarik Sangha (Senior Citizen's Club), Dahisar West, organised a lecture by Renutai Gawaskar on the occasion of International Women's Day, on the 7th of March in their auditorium.

Renutai Gawaskar, a social activist who works in and around Pune, is a well-known figure in Maharashtra. A post-graduate with Philosophy as her subject from Mumbai University, she set up Amhi Yuva in Mumbai and later Eklavya Bal Shikshan and Arogya Nyasa in Pune. She used to work with destitute children in Mumbai and now she works with children of prostitutes and with the women members of the families of addicted men. Renubai was drawn to community work when she lost both her parents. She gave up a safe bank job to take up this task which has now become her life. In a sensitive narration, she talks about her experiences with institutionalised children in her book *Amcha Kay Gunha?* (What is Our Crime?). Renutai, as she is affectionately called, is a great raconteur and feels that story-telling has therapeutic values.

She conducts workshops for students as well as teachers. She spoke about her life and work on this day and an enthralled audience was soon caught in the stories she narrated from real life about the children she works with.

— Sharmila Sontakke

Speaking from the Mountains

Sahitya Akademi, Delhi, and Nepali Sahitya Parishad, Sikkim, organised an All India Women Writers' Meet at Gangtok from 26th to 27th March. It was a long journey for the writers especially for those who had come all the way from Kerala, Goa and Maharashtra. The long flight to Bagdogra and then a five-hour van ride to Gangtok nearly did us all in but it was wonderful to be together to talk about literature. Sugatha Kumari, the eminent Malayalam writer, was the guest of honour and she gave a moving speech on what poetry meant to her. Shanti Chettri, the well-known Nepali writer, was also there and it was heartening to hear her say that the SPARROW writers' camp in Kashid inspired her to write more. Pratibha Ray, Pushpa Bhawe, C Mrinalini Devi, Karabi Deka Hazarika and Asha Devi began the discussion on *Writing the Body: the Politics of Gender* which was followed by two days of poetry readings and short-story readings. The sessions were not interactive but since all the writers were put up at one hotel there was a lot of discussion before and after the sessions. The mountains looked beautiful but since it began to rain we had to watch them from afar. The return journey had to be planned before sun rise on the 28th because of a threatened strike which meant long hours of wait at Bagdogra but it also made a long private session with Sugatha Kumari possible for a few of us. It was nice to meet Volga, Memchoubi, Pushpa Bhawe and Varsha Adalja once again and talk about literature and life. Meeting writers we don't know makes these meetings interesting and makes many different kinds of future collaborations possible. Among other things, meeting Vimmi Sadarangani, a Sindhi writer, and talking to her about Sindhi literature and her trip to Karachi during long walks in the morning in the mountains made the Gangtok trip a memorable one.

— C S Lakshmi

Revisiting Campaigns, Rethinking Strategies

To commemorate the first ever planned campaign on sex-selection in 1986, organised by FASDSP (Forum Against Sex Determination Sex Pre-Selection) in 1986, Men Against Violence & Abuse (MAVA) and YWCA organised a workshop on 8th April, 2011 in YWCA, Mumbai Central. The workshop called *Revisiting Campaign, Rethinking Strategies* was attended by over eighty people from various NGOs and other organisations. Meena Lokhande (YWCA) welcomed the participants, while Harish Sadani and Dr. Ravindra R P gave the background of the workshop and a brief introduction. Dr. Vibhuti Patel shared her experiences with FASDSP. On behalf of SPARROW I showed pictorial glimpses and nostalgic moments of the Forum through Power Point slides that were much appreciated by the audience. A large part of the photographs shown had been donated by Dr. Vibhuti Patel to SPARROW to be archived. Dr. Kamakshi Bhate (KEM Hospital) spoke about her involvement with the campaign as

a doctor. Sonal Shukla and Kunda P N spoke about their past experiences with the Forum.

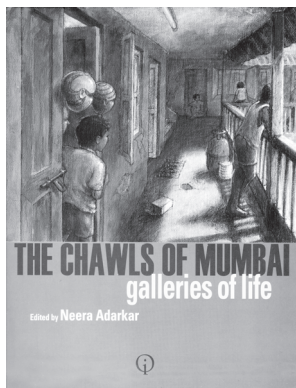
Kalpna Sharma moderated a discussion with Ranjani Murthy and Lakshmi Menon on *Revisiting Complexities, Concerns* while Sandhya Srinivasan moderated a discussion on the media's role in the campaign, with fellow journalists Meena Menon, Pragati Bankhele and Prajakta Dhulap. Manisha Tulpule (Majlis) talked about the legal challenges she faced and Vrushali Magdum talked about her experiences as advisor on the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation. Sana Contractor from CEHAT, Anuja Gulati (UNFPA -the United Nations Population Fund) and Dr. A L Sharada (*Population First*) made presentations with statistics and strategies used by their organisations in the campaign. Girish Lad (Magnum Opus) spoke about the functioning of the 'silent observer' and 'active tracker' devices which are used to collect ultrasound data in Kolhapur. The workshop ended with Gulobi Fernandes, President of YWCA, summing up the key aspects covered at the workshop, reiterating that all concerned individuals and organizations need to come together and work collectively on the issue of sex-selection. She offered the space and infrastructure of YWCA for all future meetings by the group.

— Priya D'Souza

Visitors from Pune at SPARROW

25 students from the Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule, Women's Studies Centre, University of Pune, visited SPARROW on 14th March and spent a day as participants in a one-day workshop organised by SPARROW. After a brief introduction about SPARROW and its work and a guided tour around SPARROW's premises and some time spent in browsing through SPARROW publications and a brief lunch break, the students settled down to watch part of *Degham*, a film produced by SPARROW on transgender women and their aspirations in life in the context of the body. There was some interesting interaction with promises to visit SPARROW again in future.

The Chawls of Mumbai Galleries of Life Edited by Neera Adarkar



The 'arrogant ignorance' of the privileged classes tends to characterise chawl life as one of relentless squalor, violence and apathy, failing to recognise its interesting complexities. Undoubtedly, an enforced congested way of living, has bred its own set of problems but the chawl experience has also bred revolutionary movements, intellectual and social activism, physical prowess

and artistic creativity in various fields. *The Chawls of Mumbai, galleries of life* (ed. Neera Adarkar) with its multi-genred collection of essays, screenplay, photographs and floor plans, offers a rich tribute to the city's fast-fading culture.

The collection is an Insider-Outsider perspective on the one room tenements of the central and northern sections of the city. 'Chawl' or 'Chaal'—the literal meaning possibly being a kind of walk/passageway,—has given, the contributors argue, a unique identity to this system of housing, originating in the rapid industrialisation of 19th century colonial Bombay. However, the ramshackle, ad hoc housing system was meant to accommodate cheap migrant labour, with no thought, either by the colonial State or the mill owners for health, sanitation, family accommodation, leave alone aesthetics. Damned into a ghetto and then, equally damned for a ghettoised existence, the 'natives' then, as the labour class today were confined to performing their tasks and then, "to disappear into the woodwork when the working day ended and the party began." This same period, Adarkar continues, witnessed "the enormous expansion of residential areas on the frontages of Chowpatty, Walkeshwar and Cumballa Hill where private bungalows were built."

Chawl residents have had to share common corridors, common walls and toilets. Yet, precisely because private and public spaces are blurred, they have traditionally shared common "food, festivals, friendships, weddings, funerals, homework, and 'corridor cricket'." However, as Sameera Khan's essay reveals, after Babri Masjid, communal relationships have altered, breeding mistrust and animosity. A mine of information on the histories, culture, architecture, politics, cinematic reproductions, problems and paradoxes of chawl life—chawls which range from Girgaon to Girangaon, Bhatia Wadi to BDD—the book covers geographical space and historical time. An entire section consists of the lived experience and personal life stories of poets, architects and activists who were former chawl dwellers. The narratives meander in and around the cityscape, like the myriads of chawl corridors, with their "laundry lines of ...nine yard saris,...medicinal tulsi plants

...in Dalda tins,...a few left-over lanterns from the previous Diwali."

Review/Journeys

Even while many of the writers express fond memories of neighbourhood solidarity, they warn against the diasporic-nostalgia-syndrome. They also raise a relevant question: can the isolating towers of today's Mumbai be a solution to the crowded chawls of old Bombay?

— Roshan G Shahani

Edited by Neera Adarkar with inputs from Sandeep Pendse and Maura Finkelstein

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Traveling West with Homai Vyarawalla

“Why Not?” This was Homai Vyarawalla's response to my question to her a year earlier, "If they invite you, would you be willing to travel with me when I give my talk at Harvard next year?" I wasn't entirely surprised with the answer given by India's first woman press photographer on that hot and humid evening because being adventurous and open to new possibilities has always defined the contours of her eventful life. Beginning a career in 1937 with pictures of a women's picnic at the JJ School of Arts in Bombay, Homai Vyarawalla was to become a significant chronicler of early nationalist history when she moved to Delhi in the early 'forties. An employee of the British Information Services, Homai was allowed to 'free-lance' and she travelled all over the country on assignments; to the ravines of the Chambal Valley, on cranes high above the Bhakra Dam, trekking through the jungles of Manipur and hitching rides in Sikkim where she shot the first crossing of the Dalai Lama to India in 1956. Strangely enough, she had never been abroad and at age ninety-five, this would be her first journey outside the country. For a start, we had to get her a new passport and medical insurance. To make the long journey comfortable, Harvard University could be persuaded to pay for one business class ticket but we would have to sit separately. There was also the business of getting a visa in a post 9/11 scenario. With mandatory biometrics, Homai would have to be 'fingerprinted' in a different city from mine. In the months leading up to our travel, I still recall a conversation with one of her relatives who pointed out that I would be travelling with her at my own responsibility. I had defiantly replied, "She has never been abroad before. If she wants to do it now, who are we to stop her? I will certainly not regret it." I wondered if I had spoken too soon.

I had first met Homai Vyarawalla in the summer of 1997 when I started to film my documentary, *Three Women and a Camera* made on her along with two younger photographers. It was a search for a legacy of women operating the camera in India that became a more detailed body of research to locate other forgotten names in history, finally culminating in a book. After a rich career spanning three decades, Homai who had photographed Parsi Bombay and its suburbs in the 'thirties, the trials and tribulations of the political nation in the making and sub cultures of social life in the city of

Delhi such as events at newly formed embassies and the elite gymkhana club, marriages, school functions and fancy dress parties, gave it all up one day in 1970. It was a simple act. She just “capped her lens.” To understand this rather abrupt decision, would require a re-assessment of the euphoria of an entire generation fired by independence and its subsequent disillusionment with undelivered promises during the two decades that followed.

There were many photographers like Homai in Delhi in the ‘forties and ‘fifties. They were all in the same place, at the same time, photographing the same charismatic ‘leaders’ and grand political events. Many of them photographed the pageantry of independence and the crowds at Red Fort when the flag was unfurled for the first time. They also documented the building of dams, steel plants and educational institutions. Nehru was their favourite subject, ever ready to perform for their cameras. Among Homai’s well known pictures is a spontaneous image of Nehru hugging his sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit on her arrival at Palam airport in 1954. There is also a more deliberately posed picture taken a few minutes earlier as he smiles against a board saying “Photography Prohibited”. If you hunted deep in the archives of these photographers, you would eventually discover other kinds of visual histories, some of them mainstream and not so euphoric, others not so mainstream either. One such example is a Congress Working Committee meeting held in mid June 1947 when leaders like Nehru, Patel and Rajendra Prasad voted by a show of hands to ratify the June 3 plan to partition India. Homai Vyarawalla was present at this meeting along with photographers P N Sharma and Kulwant Roy, where in her words, “some decided the fate of all of us.” These pictures never became part of our collective visual memory of partition.

As the years went by, Homai and her contemporaries were witnesses to all kinds of changes. They saw streets being renamed, a more conflicted parliament, the deaths of Gandhi, Patel and Nehru, several wars, language movements and the other edges and contradictions of Nehruvian modernity. They also watched a different work culture emerge in their profession. The intimate relationship between photographer and subjects (Nehru knew many of them by name) was no longer possible. Press photography was to become more crowded and Homai would often find herself at a loss in the more belligerent ‘sixties prompting B R Ambedkar to once inquire, “How did you get into this rough crowd?” The space of the “gentlemen photographers” as Homai liked to describe her colleagues was to be usurped by a new generation of camera persons. A lament about the ‘older order’ changing was to spread all over the country. In 1959, the sensational Nanavati case where Commander Kawas Nanavati shot dead his British wife Sylvia’s lover, Prem Ahuja prompted resentful letters to the editor in *Blitz* about the ‘lack of culture and values’. Among many other conflicts, the Nanavati trial was also representative of a struggle between the old elite of Bombay, the Parsis and the new Sindhi ‘upstart’ (that Ahuja represented) now staking its claim on the city. While she shared with others of her generation a general disillusionment with the Nehruvian dream, there were other reasons for Homai moving

on. Her long time partner Maneckshaw had passed away and her only son Farouq was now a professor in Pilani. He needed someone to run his home and Homai who had been a career woman all her life, wanted time off to be a homemaker. She now took delight in doing other things that she had enjoyed but never had the time to do like Ikebana, macramé and baking. She directed plays with the local women’s club and built a beautiful garden that everyone would talk about. Of course, as the sleepy town of Pilani discovered, Homai could also make tables out of wood, she could build a staircase with cement and create things of beauty from discarded rubbish. Not many there knew her background. In a history of post independence photography in India where press photographers remained unsung, Homai as the only woman among them was even more anonymous. Living alone and totally self sufficient after the premature and tragic death of her only son in 1988, she once described herself as ‘Robinson Crusoe’. The city of Baroda where she has lived for twenty-five years isolated from the world outside became her island.

I was reminded of all of this when I found her pottering through her handmade purse on the morning after our talk at the Harvard Inn. I had carried a small video camera with me and as I checked out the controls, there were strange items emerging from her bag. Along with several tools, was a tube of rubber cement to mend her hand made slippers in case of an emergency, some nutmeg and other home remedies for possible illness and a grater to shred hard fruit like apple. She had used that earlier that morning when she had been shocked at the quantity of food served at breakfast. Conversant with ‘American servings’ and with Homai’s measured life and dislike of wastefulness, I wasn’t surprised at that. We had arrived at Boston after a long journey and stopover in London. I had been upgraded to business class along with Homai who had charmed the crew members of British Airways and a couple of co-passengers travelling with us. The friendly head stewardess was surprised to know that Homai had been the official photographer for the British High Commission for most of her career. When researching our book, she had often regaled me with stories about upright and graceful employers, many of whom had become her friends for a lifetime. Among Homai’s many such lasting relationships was one with her former Australian boss Hugh McInnes, a friendship that spanned two continents and sixty years. India had left a lasting impression on McInnes and his last card to her in 2003 from the nursing home where he was admitted for senile dementia read, “To Homai from Hughie who once was in India”.

On the journey to London, I kept thinking about Homai’s reactions at Heathrow. What would she feel to be in the country that had fired her imagination for so many years? It turned out to be quite different from what I had expected. We disembarked from the plane with at least twenty-five elderly Indian passengers, all of whom needed a wheelchair and had to wait for almost two hours in a seedy part of the airport for transport to arrive. There was only one electric cart that could ferry three people at a time. Homai was clearly the most able and as we waited endlessly as the last in line,

she walked up to the woman in charge and said “Madam, this doesn’t speak well for British efficiency.” Clearly the experience at Heathrow was completely at odds with her vision of the dynamic and hard working employers she had worked for in Delhi. Back to more humble travel during the next leg of the journey from London to Boston, I was woken up by a sparkling Homai who had walked up from club class to slip me some special eats. She had brushed aside all my suggestions about exercises on the flight and seemed to be managing very well on her own. As the cab weaved its way towards our final destination at Harvard square, I watched her face in the fading sunset as she curiously looked out at the tall Boston skyline. It was a moment I had imagined for months and suddenly all I seemed to want to do was to get to sleep. The next morning was a nightmare. Homai was up bright and rested and I was down with a killer migraine. It was just as my friends in Delhi had wryly predicted! Despite migraine misery the talk at Harvard went off well. We would repeat the pattern at North-Western at Chicago and at the University of Westminster in London. Having Homai with me changed the nature of our talk because there were all kinds of questions, and not just to do with her images. Fifty years apart in age and with different expectations of gender roles, we would sometimes contradict each other. At a packed event in London, asked how she juggled career and family, Homai declared that it was possible because her husband and she shared everything ‘Fifty-fifty’. I got a playful rap on my head with her stick for asking, “Why then did he not wake up at 4.30 in the morning to fetch the milk instead of you?” She was cheered for calling herself a ‘bachelor girl’ since the death of her husband. Historian, Uma Chakaravarty noted how along with many other women of her generation, she had been photographed by Homai in performative ‘Costumes of India’ parties and competitions. Personal collections offered the possibilities of other kinds of visual histories of the ‘every-day’ that provoked conversations about the nature of archives, both public and private.

A significant presence at all our talks was that of Homai’s Zoroastrian community, severely under threat due to a dwindling census in India today. Families of NRI Parsis swamped us at every venue demanding to have ‘photo-ops’ with ‘aunty Homai’ and after a while I gave up trying to deny Parsi origins because it just seemed more convenient than to explain how I ended up writing a book on her! It was a time of connecting: For Homai a reunion with very old relatives; for me, with friends whom I had not met for years. After the release of our book in 2006, this was the first time that Homai and I could spend more time together. We would go out for short walks when the weather was good. While being impressed with clean streets and the tulips in full bloom everywhere, I could also sense Homai’s alienation with the lack of human contact in public space. She would often stand at the window in our hotel in Chicago looking at the men working at a construction site below, possibly because it was a reassuring reminder of her noisy and crowded surroundings back home in Baroda. The skyscrapers of downtown Chicago did not impress her either. After half an hour of an extremely informed tour through the city centre by South

Asianist Kathryn Hansen who had flown down from Texas just for the talk, she declared that all the tall buildings looked the same! Kathy had specially hired a car so that it would be easy for Homai and I am truly grateful to others like Chris Pinney, Geeta Patel, Joyce Singha Ghosh and Bhavna Dave for stepping in at all difficult moments on the trip. On our last stop, we arrived to a grey and foggy London. This wasn’t a surprise as sunny weather is almost always within tantalising distance but never quite seems to make it there. I took Homai in a slight drizzle to Tavistock Park opposite the hotel where she wandered up to a rather pathetic bronze statue of Gandhiji and declared scornfully that it didn’t look like him because he had no spectacles! She paused at the road for a considerable amount of time and admired the ‘orderly’ traffic. She seemed to like London a lot better than Cambridge and Chicago because she could see people on the streets. The event at the University of Westminster was special in more ways than one. Our talks in the US had been well attended but they couldn’t match the passionate engagement and chemistry with the audience in London because of the rich nuances of a shared colonial history.

As we returned to Delhi and then two days later to Baroda, I took out my camera for the last time and asked what she had thought of the trip. Her cryptic response, “Alright” seemed a bit disappointing. Like everything in Homai’s life, the reaction to the trip that I had looked forward to for months, was quiet and measured. “What now?” I asked her. She said that she would spend the next week cleaning the house. She would then get her fifty-five year old Fiat repaired. If it didn’t get repaired, she would think of buying the new Nano next year. She brushed aside my continuing apprehensions about her driving in Baroda traffic. She also checked out the new steel baking tray that my class-fellow from Jamia, Joyce had bought for her in Chicago. It was too big for her oven and she calmly told me that she would cut off the edges with a chain saw! As I left her in peace on her quiet and noisy ‘island’ in Baroda, I wondered about her response. Perhaps there was a right time for everything. Had this been the wrong time for her? And then an image came to my mind: of Homai napping on the bus in London. On the last day of our trip we had done the touristy thing and taken the Big Ben tour to see London. Homai had been perfectly at ease hopping on and off and while on the bus would slowly slump into a sleep after every half hour which was a pretty efficient way of dealing with all the different time zones we had been through in two weeks. When she awoke, I had been surprised as she seemed to recognise many of the regular sights of London. Suddenly it clicked. Sitting in her armchair in Baroda, I realised that Homai Vyrawalla had already traversed the world long before our trip through books, photographs and satellite television. Like many others of her generation who had never been abroad, she had been an international traveller through a world of imagination. The actual trip then ceased to matter. Whether it was the ‘right’ or the ‘wrong’ time, Homai Vyrawalla on her ‘island’ had already made that journey long before we physically made it.

— Sabeena Gadihoke

Educating the Society: Dr. Chitra Jayant Naik (15 July, 1918 – 24 December 2010)



In the course of a long life dedicated to education Chitra Naik worked in various capacities including that of Director of National Institute of Basic Education, New Delhi, Chairperson, Non-formal Education Committee of the Union Human Resource Development Ministry and Member of the National Literacy Mission. During her tenure as Chairperson, Indian Institute of Education (IIE) from 1973-76, she made education easily accessible to students from the rural areas by making it possible for them to study in the languages they understood. She was the author of the book *Shikshan ani Samaj*. She strongly believed that education was a great tool for social change and worked tirelessly to make her belief a reality. She was a visionary who inspired many young educationists for whom she was a role model. She was honoured with a Padma Shri and the Jamnalal Bajaj award. With the death of educationists like Chitra Naik one gets the feeling that a great era of educationists who worked with zeal and enthusiasm is slowly coming to a close.

She Who is Above All: Anuthama (16 April 1922 - 3 December 2010)



A few years ago I had hesitantly approached Anuthama to record a dialogue with her for SPARROW. She readily agreed. Many young people of my generation grew up reading writers like Anuthama whose real name was Rajeswari Padmanabhan. She had studied up to Matriculation but taught herself Hindi, English and French. She began to write at the age of 25, after her marriage. For a pseudonym she chose the five hundred and forty-first name of the thousand names of goddess Lalitha which meant *She who is above all: Anuthama*. It was a name well-chosen for as a person and as a writer Anuthama remained her own self writing only what she believed in and making no compromises. Her first story *Ankaiyarkanni* appeared in *Kalki* in 1947 followed by the prize-winning novel *Manal Veedu* (Sand Castles) in *Kalaimagal*. She wrote some twenty novels and three volumes of short stories. She has written five volumes on birds for children and translated Monica Felton's biography of Rajagopalachari into Tamil. She continued to write and read what others wrote till the end. In September when writer R Chudamani passed away she wrote a moving piece in *The Hindu*. I contacted her then and we had a long conversation over the phone when she invited me to come and see her next time I was in Chennai. I promised her I would for a visit in January was due in connection with the book release on Chudamani's birthday. But Anuthama passed away on 3rd December 2010. The death happened gently and unexpectedly without even her knowing that she was breathing

her last. That is the kind of death a gentle, unassuming and warm-natured person like Anuthama would have wished for. In SPARROW we have her original manuscripts and a long interview with her and some photographs from her family album which will remind us and future scholars of her contribution to Tamil literature and women's history.

Jeevan ke Safar mein Rahi: Nalini Jaywant (18 February 1926 - 24 December 2010)



With her large, liquid eyes, Nalini Jaywant scaled great heights in the Hindi world in the forties and fifties. She acted with all the big stars of that time including Dilip Kumar, Dev Anand and Ashok Kumar. The songs of her films like *Jeevan ke safar mein rahi* (*Munimji*), *Gore gore o banke chore* (*Samadhi*) and *Thandi hawaen chore* (*Naujawan*) were hit songs of that period and were on the lips of everyone. She rose to great heights in the film field, married twice (once with Director Virendra Desai and second time with actor Prabhu Dayal) and once her acting career came to an end she withdrew totally not only from the film world but also from the world around her and began to live a reclusive lonely life in her bungalow in Chembur. She broke off all contacts even with her cousin Shobana Samarth and her family and became completely non-communicative. She died quietly in her sleep without even her neighbours knowing it leaving her pet dogs to wander in the streets and mourn her death. The BMC came and took her body away wrapped in a white bed sheet. It is a sad way to go but maybe she preferred it that way. It is difficult not to hum the song *Jeevan ke safar mein raahi* while paying homage to this yesteryear actor.

Death of a Dancer: Nargis Banu Chikhalikar (1943 - 12 February 2011)

Nargis Banu Chikhalikar was a dancer known for the dexterity of her footwork and the ease with which she danced. She was an actor in Marathi and Hindi films almost for 40 years. Folk theatre was her first love and she became famous for her lavani performances. Lavani and Nargis were synonymous at one point of time. She acted in Marathi films like *Chaal mazya payat*, *Shikaleli bayako*, *Kanyadan*, *Bai mee bholi*, *Deva tuzi sonyachi Jejuri*, *Totaya Amdar*, *Dongarchi Maina*, *Sudarshan* and *Pach najuk bote*. She also acted in the Hindi film *Ram aur Shyam* and later acted as a character artiste.

She donated her bungalow for a hospital and breathed her last in the same hospital on 12th February 2011. She was 68. She will be remembered by a generation of artists who became part of the film world in the sixties and seventies.

— C S Lakshmi