

# NATIONAL POST DAY

## 10<sup>TH</sup> October

Dr Sunitha Madhavan The private papers of Dr Sunitha Madhavan, the great granddaughter of Rai Bahadur V. Venkayya, the renowned epigraphist to the Government of India, 1908-12 when Sir John. H. Marshall was the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India [A.S.I.], which she was kind enough to give SPARROW, contain some very interesting exchange of letters and among them are letters between her grandmother Thaiyalnayaki and her grandfather Advocate Balaraman. We have given here the letters of Thaiyalnayaki with a commentary by Dr Sunitha Madhavan. We have missed the World Letter Writing Day on September 1<sup>st</sup> but would like to post these letters which reveal so much about life and times of women in the family in the Tamil region, in the early twenties, on National Post Day (October 10th).

# Thaiyalnayaki: The Epistolary Narrative

Compiled by Sunitha Madhavan

Letter writing in yonder times was an art providing emotional support. It served for bonding relationships to soul satisfaction. Below are a bundle of epistles written more than a century ago by a young girl aged 16. She was Thaiyalnayaki, sent to her ancestral home at Tondiarpet for confinement. Her husband, V. Balarama Aiyar, resided at Old Mambalam. He had given his wife a bunch of self-addressed postal envelopes. The understanding between the couple was they maintain regular weekly correspondences. Given their circumstances, it was a practical way to express themselves freely to each other.

The letters from Thaiyalnayaki had been preserved with great love and care by Balaraman. They provided him the much needed succour when he was verging on his grave, to rise up for raising their only child. At the time of departure to the heavenly abode, he passed them on to his son, V. Suresham. Written in Tamil, these letters are produced here, with English translation. The content with the context is enumerated. The photographs capture the costume and the mood of the times.

These letters are particularly vibrant, vivid, warm, fanning out ebullience and disappointments. It is astounding how prolific Thaiyalnayaki was! Wistfully penned, her epistles express a feeling of great fondness, yearning and reverence for her husband. They exude Prema Bakthi in the Nayagan- Nayagi Bhavam of Tamil devotional literature. They are snapshots of the ethos of a bygone era.

Both Thaiyalnayaki and Balaraman hail from notable lineage with distinguished ancestry. Balaraman's father was Rai Bahadur V. Venkayya, Epigraphist to the Government of India, 1908-12 when Sir John. H. Marshall was the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India [A.S.I.]. His father, Brahmasri Appa Sitarama Ayyar, was a direct descendent of the Advaita philosopher, Appayya Dikshitar.

Thaiyalnayaki was the daughter of Justice Diwan Bahadur C.V. Viswanatha Sastri, who was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind Medal in 1943. His elder brother was Justice Sir C. V. Kumaraswami Sastri. Their brother-in-law was Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar. Sensing concerns regarding two brothers adorning the Madras High Court bench, Viswanatha Sastri resigned. The legal luminary was thereafter posted as District Judge at Chittoor, Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, etc. In fact The Board High School, Chittoor, has a prize instituted in his name.

Viswanatha Sastri sought the alliance of Venkayya's second son Balaraman, a tall, handsome, brilliant youngster's hand for his daughter, Thaiyalnayaki. She was well accomplished in music and scriptures even at a tender age. The marriage proposal is recorded in Venkayya's personal diary notes maintained for the year 1912. The girl and the boy were 8 and 14 years. But Venkayya was in a fix because his eldest son was not yet married.

Venkayya passed away in harness in Nov1912, sending the family into a tailspin. The eldest son Venkatasubbaiyyar graduated in 1915. Sir John Marshall, on compassionate ground appointed him as Assistant Epigraphist at Ootacamund office. He got married to Saraswathi. Balaraman completed B.A. Honours in 1917 and went ahead with legal studies to become a lawyer. He was married to Thaiyalnayaki. They were an ideal pair. Their family life although very short was pretty great. We get glimpses of it through the epistolary lens of Thaiyalnayaki. Her pen (wo)manship is neat and legible for perusing.

All is well, even if they do not end well in this ephemeral world. The virtuous life and wisdom of our forefathers hold the beacon light for a better tomorrow. V Suresham married his maternal cousin, C.V. Marakathavalli [both grandchildren of C. V. Viswanatha Sastri]. The noble couple lived in the same old Mambalam house and are revered to this day for their piety and philanthropy.

The letters, zealously guarded by Suresham and given to his daughter, Dr. Sunitha Madhavan, the author of this presentation of letters with explanatory notes, are strung together by her, as a tribute to the Indian family tradition and its many facets.



**Child Thaiyalnayaki, missing her mother**

---

Below are produced the epistles of Thaiyalnayaki, diligently preserved by Balaraman. They dispense the once distilled sweet scent of their pure love. Destiny broke the perfume vial, but the aroma fills the archaic inflexions for absorbing reading. \*

27.1.19

தண்டியார்பெட்டை

அருகதோடிருமஸ்காரும்கோடிம  
ம்கோடிம்க்கொடுவெறியப்படுக்குஷம்  
அம்மாருட்டிக்கீஉடம்புஜாஸ்தியாய்  
தூக்கிறகுள்ளுக்கெல்லப்பட்டுன்  
இப்பொழுதுஎப்படிதூக்கியது  
நான்எனக்கியமாய்தூக்கிறேன்  
இதற்க்குபதில்கடிக்கும்எழுதிமுடியு  
மாணல்எழுதினேன்

அருகதமஸ்காரும்க

உங்கல்பியமுள்ளா

தய்யனுயக



\*

27.1.19

Tondiarpet

Manifold crores of respectful salutations to you. I am good. Keep me posted of your well-being at your end. Heard that Ammakutti's illness is serious. How is she now? I am alright.

If you can, please reply.

With many regards.

Your loving

Thaiyanayaki

Ammakutti is Balaraman's sister. She and Thaiyalnayaki, are bosom friends.

A quick flashback is required to comprehend Balaraman's family situation. His father, V. Venkayya, the eminent epigraphist, fully aware of his failing health, left Simla headquarters early August 1912 on a whirlwind official tour of Southern region. He passed on the proofs of his work to the Government press at Ootacamund on Part IV, Vol-II, South Indian Inscriptions, a corpus compendium on South Indian dynasties.

Returning to Old Mambalam, Venkayya left his physical frame in the house he built in 1911. The doctor attending on Venkayya diagnosed him of T.B. end stage. However, he suggested a new vaccine. It could help his children as a preventive. Venkayya's condition was beyond redemption. Of Venkayya's four children, Ammakutti and Balaraman were at home. The T.B. vaccine was administered to them. Unfortunately, youngest kid, Ammakutti soon became a victim to the direful pathogen. Lakshmi Ammal despaired.

Dreading the inevitable, Thaiyalnayaki, the newly wed bride was sent early Jan 1919, to Tondiarpet on the ground of safe guarding her health, when she developed fever. Balaraman had just completed his legal studies. A six footer of strong physique, thanks to his yoga, pranayama practices, he kept the pathogen at bay. He was now taking full care of his sister who was very much attached to him. \*

12.2.19

தண்டையார்பேட்டை

அருகருகடிருமஸ்கரமம் ஜேஷமம்  
சேஷமத்தை ஒரு சியப்படுத்தவும்  
அல்லடம் வறுவதற்கு அப்பாலைகே  
ட்டேன் அவர் டம் பிறை ஜ் ஜாஸ்தியா  
ப் திருக்கு ம்பொழுது போகவேண்ட  
ம் குறியத்திக்கு முமை போய் அல்லடம்  
திருந்து வறும் படி சேர்னார்  
திருந்து கிவருத்தினு ல்கோடிக்கு  
கொள்ளவேண்டாம் குறியத்திக்கு முமை  
கட்டாயம் வறுகிலென் தின்துக்கடி குத்தி  
ற்க்காவது மதில் எழுதும் படி கேட்டுக்கொ  
ள்ளுகிறேன்  
அருகருகடிருமஸ்கரமம்  
உத்கள் பிறையுள்ள  
தய்யா யகி

12.2.19

Tondaiarpet

Many crores of respectful salutations. I am good; inform me of your well-being. Asked father regarding my visit there [Mambalam]. He said not to go when I have high temperature [fever]. He suggested I may go over this Sunday, stay there and return. Therefore do not get angry because I did not come today. Surely on Sunday I will come. At least for this letter I request you to reply.

Many regards.  
Your loving,  
Thaiyanayaki

In every letter we find the word, 'kshemam'. It translates to wellbeing or safety.

It is customary to enquire each other's welfare. In all her letters the opening sentence would be to allay her husband's apprehension regarding her health status. She would seek positive information from his end. The protocol shows mutual concern for wellbeing in the broad canvas of joint family system. Parents, siblings, relatives, were taken care of. The family as an institution was the apron, the trapeze net. The elderly, the sick, the poor brethren, orphaned children of the family were all berthed.



\*

19.2.5

தண்டியாப்பேட்டை

அநேக கோடி நமஸ்காரம் சேஷமம்  
சேஷமம் ஒரு சூயப்படுகுதலம்  
நேற்றை தினம் கடிதம் எழுதுகிற  
ல் கோபித்துக் கொள்ளவேண்டாம்  
டாக்டர் தினம் வந்துகொண்ட  
தார் அவரை மண்பலம்போகலா  
என்றுகேட்டுடன் போகலாமென்று  
சொன்னார் சுகம் கடிதம் நான் அல்லி  
டம் வந்துகொண்டேன்

அநேக நமஸ்காரம்  
உங்கள் விநியமுள்ள  
தய்யாயகி

19.2.5

Tondiarpet

Many crores of respectful salutations. I am safe. Apprise me of your wellbeing. Do not get angry for not writing to you yesterday. Today the doctor came. I asked him whether I can go to Mambalam. He replied I can. On Saturday I will come over there.

Many regards  
Your lovingly,  
Thaiyanayaki.

The letter is wrongly dated. From the stamped envelope it is ascertained 5.2.19. Constant separation from her husband upset her. Every time when she is eagerly looking forward to seeing her sweetheart, her plans go awry, and that puts her off.

Letter delivered on 6.2.19.



\*

சேஷமம் 1.3.19 கண்டயான்பேட்டை

சுடிரககேரடி நமஸ்கரணம் சேஷமம்  
சேஷமத்தொருவருடைய புகழை  
நேற்றை நினைவாக டாக்டர்வந்து இயற்கை  
முன்னா நாளாய்த் தம் மனைவியை குறைந்து  
இயற்கையே நேற்றை நினைவாக கடிதம்  
புகழைப் பட்டினை எழுதவில்லை  
அதற்க்காக மன்னிக்கும் படியாக  
புகழைகள் ஒரு நினைவு அம்மாதிரி  
கடிதம் புறப்படி இயற்கையே  
இன்றை கடிதத்திற்க்காகவது பதில்வருமா  
என்று நம்புகிறேன்  
சுடிரக நமஸ்கரணம்  
உங்கள் பிள்ளையார்  
கய்யையா

Safe

1.3.19

Tondiarpet

Manifold obeisance. Keeping safe. Apprise me of your wellness. Yesterday doctor came. For past three days thermometer reading is on the decline. Yesterday I was not able to write the letter. I seek your pardon for that. How is Ammakutti's health condition? I hope to get a reply at least for this letter of mine.

Many regards,  
Your lovingly,  
Thaiyanayaki.

Reminiscences of her mother's last days who died of tuberculosis probably haunt Thaiyalnayaki. By enquiring about Ammakutti, she is unwinding her feelings. Both youngsters were of the same mental frequency, talented, having the ability to converse in Sanskrit!

In fact Venkayya was proud of Ammakutti's literary attainments in Sanskrit, revealed in his diary notes.

Ammakutti, born after three male children is the darling of the family. Her real name remains unknown.

V. Venkatasubba Aiyar, alias Kannappa, V. Balarama Iyer alias Pappoi, and V. Sundararaman alias Dorai were three sons of V. Venkayya.



\*

திருமம் 8.3.19 தண்டையார்பேட்டை

அருகருகாய் நமஸ்காரம் திருமம் திருமம்  
மத்தை எழு கக்கோ அருகருகாய் நமஸ்காரம்  
தியகடியும் வந்து சென்றது வந்தது  
எல்லாம் விவரமாய் இதரந்தது

அம்மா குட்டி கிவடம் புளப்படி திருக்கி  
மது எனக்கு ஒரு வரமாய் உம் மாமை  
ன் டர்குறைந்து திருக்கிறது

அருகருகாய் நமஸ்காரம்

உங்கள் பிடியமுள்ள

தய்யநாயகி

Safe

8.3.19

Tondiarpet

Manyfold obeisance. I am good; request tidings regarding your wellness. Your letter reached me. From it understood in detail all the news from your end. How is Ammakutti's health? For the past one week, thermometer shows that temperature [fever] has decreased for me.

Many regards,  
Your loving,  
Thaiyanayaki

For reasons unknown, Thaiyalnayaki has been running temperature. Intermittent fever caused anxiety and kept the young couple apart, yearning for each other's company. Yet regardless of her condition, she is worried about her sister-in-law.

The letter above must be her response to the communication from her spouse. Writing letters gave Balaraman the space to explain his situation and feelings. She, on receiving them had the time to process the contents and discern the pall of gloom that hath descended on the Mambalam house.



\*

சேஷமம் 11.3.19

திண்டிவார்பேட்டை

அருகுகொடியருமஸ்காஹம் சேஷமம்  
சேஷமத்தை தெரியப்படுத்துவும் நீங்கள் எழு  
தியகடி கும் நேய் சூஸாயத்திலம் வந்து  
சேர்ந்து குடி வாக் களுக்கு எப்பொழுது வசூலதர்  
க்கு ஸ்ரீப் படுகிறதோ அப்பொழுது வசூலம்  
உங்களை டுத்தில் துணுது கடிதும் வசூலதினம்  
வெம்பவும் சந்தோஷமாய் துணுக்கிறதும்  
இந்தக் கடிதத்தை எப்பொழுதும் எழுதித்  
கொண்டு துணுக்கும்படியாய் கேட்டுக்கொள்ளு  
கிறேன்

அருகுகொடியருமஸ்காஹம்

உங்களைப் பிரியமுள்ள

குய்யநாயகி

Safe

11.3.19

Tondiarpet

Many crores of respectful salutations to you... I am well. Let me hear about your welfare. Yesterday evening your letter reached me. You can come whenever it is convenient for you. Letter from you makes me very happy. I request you to keep writing letters to me.

Many regards,  
Your lovingly,  
Thaiyanayaki

In good old days, marriage was not a mere alliance between boy and girl. It was the blending of relationships between two families. Correspondences kept them empowered and deeply connected. Thaiyalnayaki perfectly understood her husband's role as a dutiful son. From his letter she must have inferred that Ammakutti's survival is extremely unlikely.

The transparency the couple maintained through letters enabled them to withstand the ordeals of domestic life. Conscious of her role as a dutiful wife, she refrains from pressurizing her husband to visit her, making it clear that, when possible, he may do so as per his convenience. There is a tinge of melancholy. However, as a proxy for his presence, she finds solace in his handwriting. Hence, constant are her pleas for his reply.



\*



From mid -March to first week of July there are no correspondences.

It is inferred that Ammakutti's condition took a turn for the worse; Thaiyalnayakki hastened to Mambalam.

April-was the month of crises. On hearing the doctor tell Balaraman that Ammakutti's end is on hand, Lakshmi Ammal doing *japam* (chanting) collapsed. Ammakutti sensing her mother's demise, breathed her last. Two cremations took place on the same day.

---

←---- The portrait to the left is that of Lakshmi Ammal and Ammakutti. It was done in 1925 by P. Viswanathan, photographer cum artist in the epigraphy wing of A.S.I. as a mark of honour and gratitude. He had visited Mambalam house when Venkayya was alive. Having enjoyed the hospitality and food served by Lakshmi Ammal, he chose to paint her as a sumangali, an auspicious married woman.

When Viswanathan surprised Balaraman by presenting the portrait, the latter requested that Ammakutti be included in it.

The artist's minuscule signature with date is blurred in the painting.

---

The sorrowful events in Mambalam household produced a glimmer of positivity.

God willed there be a silver lining.

Thaiyalnayaki's stay at the place bore fruit. The family tree began to blossom. She conceived, bringing cheer to both families in north and south Madras.

\*



இசையம்

16.12.19

குண்டயாண்டியை

அநேக நமஸ்கரணம் சேய் மம் சேய் மத்தை  
 இசையம் படுத்தவும் சனிக் சீயை திருத்  
 தனிக் கிபாய் யாசுந்தேன் எனக்குவடம்  
 நேன் நுயில்லி மஜீம் மன அனுப் பனாடுபாய்  
 வன் குசே ந்து கால்துத் துடி பாயை ஸ்ரஸ்  
 லதியடம் குடுக் கவும் வற வறம் தி ஆத் து  
 ணிக் கிபாய் லட்டு அல் வடம் வறு தி டேன்  
 து லி ஜாத கத்திர்க்கு கடி குமளயு திநிர்  
 களா மத்தி நியல் கல் மடமல் தி ஆத் கவேண்  
 டம் எனக்கு நித்தியம் அடித வசா மாய்  
 து நுக் கி நு து நான் எழுதி னைதி அல சூயியை  
 ய் எண்ணி வடமல் உடம் னை ஜாத் தி நு தியாய்  
 பார்த்துக் கொள் எழும்க டு துத் னை பார்த்து  
 லட்டு பதில் எழு தாமல் து ஆக் கடு வன் டாய்  
 உடனை பதில் எழு தவும்  
 பதில் கடி துத் னை துநிர் பார் க் கி டேன்  
 உன் கள் பனிய முள் எ  
 தய்ய நாயி

Safe

16.12.19

Tondiarpet

Manifold obeisance. I am good. Inform me about your wellbeing. Saturday I went to Tiruthani. My health is okay. If the money sent by Rajamma reaches, that can be given to Saraswathi. Coming week I will go to Tiruthani and then come over there. Did you write a reply letter for the horoscope received for Dorai? Do not forgo your night meal. I am worried about it daily. Do not take lightly what I have written; take care of your health. Seeing this letter don't keep silent without replying. I expect your reply.

Your lovingly,  
 Thaiyanayaki

Thaiyalnayaki must have stayed in Mambalam during Aug, Sept, Oct. Before the start of Tamil month of Margazhi, the expectant mother had returned to Tondiarpet. Tiruthani Murugan is Tondiarpet family tutelary deity. Hence her affinity for the Kshethram.

A tiny cloth bag with strings was used by ladies of yester days to carry money. The money bag would be tucked on to the nine yards saree around the waist at the side. Rajamma lost it while coming from Central station to Mambalam. Thaiyalnayaki had pocket money given by her affluent father, which she promptly offered to Rajamma. The latter was touched and vowed she will return the amount when she gets back to Kurnool. Saraswathi, Thaiyalnayaki's co-sister is not a lady of means. Venkatasubbaaiyyar kept the purse strings tight. Indians were underpaid by the British. Thaiyalnayaki, aware of it, wanted the money if returned, to be given to Saraswathi. It may enable purchase of a few tit bits on her return to Ooty. In those times help was extended without asking.

In this letter, Thaiyalnayaki rolls out strict instructions for her stressed husband to be mindful of his health.



\*



←-Photograph of Thaiyalnayaki in regal bearing and in pensive mood.

Monday, Dec 15, 1919 was the transit of Sun from Vrichika rasi to Danus rasi. It signifies the dawn of the holy Tamil month of Margazhi. Thaiyalnayaki must have come before this day to Tondiarpet.

In the normal course, *Moggu Poochootal* (a South Indian pregnancy celebration, often a pre-baby shower, where the mother-to-be is adorned with flowers and given blessings for a safe delivery) at the end of the first trimester and, *Seemandham* samskara (traditional South Indian baby shower ceremony) in the beginning of third trimester would be performed in the husband's house for the pregnant lady. But things didn't augur well for Thaiyalnayaki

Celebrations are not held till the completion of the first death anniversary rites for the departed souls in the family. New attire is also not worn till then. It's eight months since Lakshmi Ammal and Ammakutty expired.

However, Thaiyalnayaki's *Valaikappu* (where the mother-to-be has different kinds of bangles put on her hands) function towards the end of her second trimester took place in Tondiarpet.

Thaiyalnayaki is bedecked with bangles in this photograph. But there is no cheer. \*



V. BALARAMA AIYAR, M.A., M.L.  
ADVOCATE

Balaraman is desperate to visit his pregnant wife who is experiencing swings in health.

The letter written with heart throbs in English by him to Thaiyalnayaki is not dated; nor was it posted. He kept it to himself.

Addressing her as “My dearest”, he is overwhelmed by emotions. His writing is interrupted.

After resuming his composure he must have written another letter with didactic traits to her for articulating in English.

Thaiyalnayaki, a tri-linguist; can speak- Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu [because of Chittoor connection]. The flair for languages now kindled in her the desire to learn English. The motivation came when her husband won the proficiency prize in Madras Christian College. It was a book on “Introduction to Science” by J. Arthur Thomson! She wanted her beloved to teach her English. He is unable to squeeze time for in person tutoring due to the situation at Mambalam.

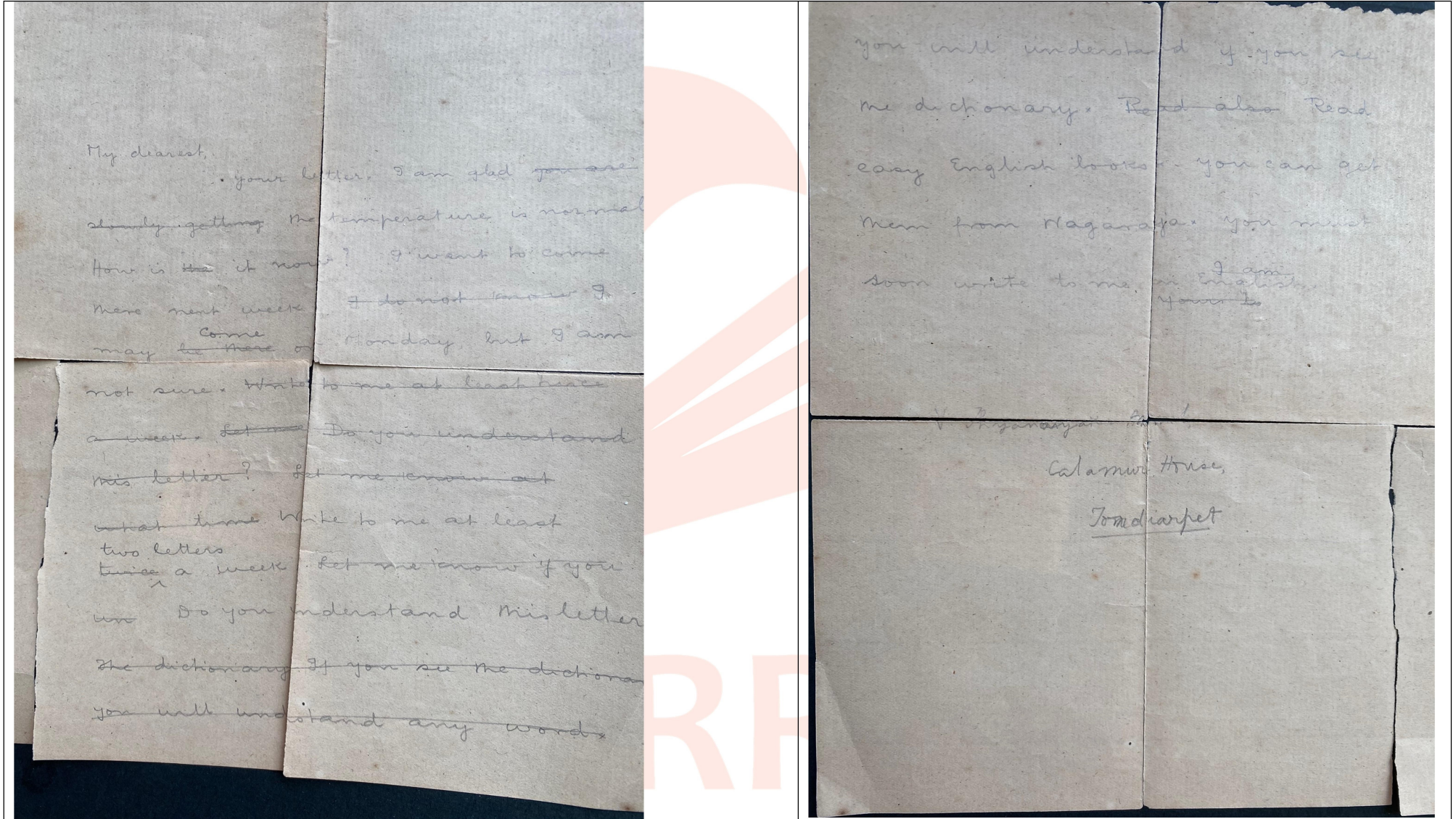
Balaraman therefore tried writing in simple English a letter to Thaiyalnayaki so that she may learn to read and possibly start writing to him in that tongue.

It is trying time for him to express the dismal home scenario that makes it difficult for visiting her often. Nevertheless, he encourages her to get English books from her cousin Nagarajan for reading and improving her vocabulary.

Balaraman is busy, having joined as junior to the leading lucrative advocate S. Doraiswamy Iyer, who later became the disciple of Sri Aurobindo.

---

← The cutline below photo to left is from Balaraman’s letter pad maintained by his son. \*



My dearest,  
 your letter. I am glad you are  
 slowly getting the temperature is normal  
 How is ~~the~~ it now? I want to come  
 here next week. I do not know I  
 may ~~be there~~ <sup>come</sup> Monday, but I am  
 not sure. Write to me at least once  
 a week. ~~Let me~~ Do you understand  
 this letter? ~~Let me know at~~  
~~what time~~ Write to me at least  
 two letters  
 twice a week. ~~Let me know if you~~  
~~are~~ Do you understand this letter  
 the dictionary. If you see the dictionary  
 you will understand any words

you will understand if you see  
 the dictionary. Read also Read  
 easy English books. you can get  
 them from Nagaraja. you must  
 soon write to me. <sup>I am</sup>  
 yours <sup>in English</sup>

V. Nagaraja  
 Calamuri House,  
 Tomdiarpet

Balaraman's undated letter to Thaiyalnayaki, kept to himself without being posted. Perhaps he penciled a rough outline of his thoughts writing for the first time in English to his wife. He appeals to her to write at least two letters a week! \*

சேஷமம்

22.12.19

அநேக நமஸ்காரம் சேஷமம் சேஷமம் சேஷமம்  
 உதரியப்படுதலும் நான் எழுதியிருக்கும்  
 வந்த தேர்ந்திருக்கும் மனம் புரிவோன்  
 ஆதிர்க்குபதில் என் எழுதி வல்ல நான்  
 தீண்டாதி என்னை மனம் விழுந்தேன்  
 புதின தீயமை அப்ப வறு தீயமை அன்  
 னாறுக்கு போனது கு போகல மனம்  
 உரியப்பாடுகான் இன் உங்களுடைய தீய  
 னைகுறிவந்தவுள் எனக்கு உடம்பு நன்று  
 மில்லை தீயகுறிவந்திர்க்காவது பதில் எழுதி  
 வர்களை அழகு புரிவோன் தீயகுறிவந்தி  
 து அப்பாடுகான் எனன் என போகல்  
 என் அ கோவம் து து து து து து து  
 பதில் எழுதி வும் அநேக நமஸ்காரம்  
 உங்கன் பரியதி என்  
 குயநாயகி

Safe 22.12.19 Tondiarpet

Manifold obeisance. I am good. Keep me informed of your wellbeing.

I hope you would have got my letter. Why have you not replied to it? I thought of coming there [Mambalam] today. It seems father is coming on Wednesday. Perimma said I can go after he leaves. I can come over there. Let me know what you desire. I am okay. I expect that at least for this letter you will reply. What is the reason for not writing to me? For whatever reason you are angry with me, forgive me and reply. Many regards.

Your lovingly,  
Thaiyanayaki

The letter exemplifies how Thaiyalnayaki lived her life in full faith without caviling at constraints that constantly confronted her.

The situation in which she is placed remind us of Nandanar Charithiram. She can be called 'Tiru Nalai Povar Nangai'. (Nandanar was an ardent devote of Shiva from the Pulayar community that was considered a lower caste. Due to his deep devotion to Shiva, he was counted as one of the Nayanars, devotees of Shiva.) The Obstacles keep appearing and will not allow her to act her way. They topple her applear, the cherished dream of visiting Mambalam. But she remains ever hopeful of meeting her husband. Till then exchange of letters will bridge the distance. They both struggle with anxiety on daily basis. Receiving letters from each other kept them invigorated, appeased and empathetic.



சேஷமம். 30.12.19  
 அநேகமஸ்காரம் சேஷமம் சேஷமம் சேஷமம்  
 ஒரு நியம்பட்டுத் தாய் நான் வந்திருக்கிற  
 மையலவது சைல் வலம் கீழ் மயலவது  
 அல் வடல் வது கிணை நிக் கள் அது பன்  
 ன ஜாரு கம் வந் து சேர்ந் து து நான்  
 உன் புணை நு யில் லபல் சைஷ சியல  
 ப் திருக் கிணை  
 உடனே பதில் எழுத ஆம்  
 உங்கள் பரியமுள்ள  
 உய் ம நாயகி

Safe

30.12.19

Manifold namaskarams. I am okay. Notify me of your wellness. Coming Monday or Tuesday I will come over there. The horoscope sent by you came. I am good without health concerns.

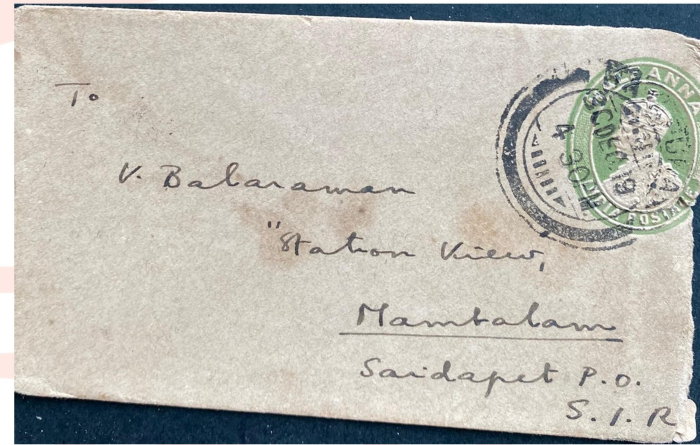
Reply immediately.

Your lovingly,  
Thaiyanayaki

Namaskaram is soulful greeting, recognizing God resides within everyone.

Balaraman's younger brother, Sundararaman alias Dorai in college is for marriage. Given the grim situation at Mambalam household, Thaiyalnayaki has taken up the initiative of finding a bride. To proceed further on the matter, she required the horoscope which was promptly posted by Balaraman.

Often in her letters, Thaiyalnayaki's positive report on the health front was meant to assuage her tensed husband.



சேஷ மம் 3.1.20

அநே கருமஸ்காறம் சேஷ மம் சேஷ மம்  
தை தை நியம் படுத்தவும் திங்குக்கி பூமை  
வநலமென் னி ஆந் துன் பெரியம் மா  
தை மாஸம் முதலில் போகலாமென் னுசொல்  
பூதி மன் உந், கருடய து வ் படுத்த எழுதின  
ல் ஆதன் படி செய்து நன் னுறஸ்வதி அங்  
தை தி ஆக்கி மள தி ன்ருக் கடி து த்திர்க்  
காவது பதின்னாறு து வர் களை ன் னு ன் திர்  
பார்க்கிடுமல், ருமஸ்காறம்

உங்கள் மரியாதை

கய்யநாயகி

Safe

3.1.20

Manifold obeisance. I am good. Keep me posted of your wellness. I was hoping to come there on Monday. Perimma says, I can go when the month of Thai begins. If you pen your wish, accordingly I will act... Is Saraswathi there? I expect a reply from you, at least for this letter.

I bow down to you.

Your lovingly,  
Thaiyanayaki

From the time Thaiyalnayaki lost her mother, she grew up under the care of her aunt who is addressed here as Perimma. She is Lady Sundarammal Kumaraswami Sastri. The reverence children of those days held towards family elders may be evinced in this letter. Despite her longing to visit her husband, she is reluctant to cross her aunt's advice, waiting for the dawn of the auspicious month of Thai. She is now in the second trimester of her pregnancy and very much concerned about her delivery. Nevertheless, she desires to abide by the wish of her beloved and would always ask his opinion.

In this letter she enquires about her co-sister Saraswathi, wife of Venkatasubbaiyyer.



\*



சேஷமம் 19.1.20

அநேக நமஸ்காரம் சேஷமம் சேஷமம்  
கூடுதலாகப் படித்து வரும் நான் சனிக்  
கிழமை தின்று குணக்கி போய்திருந்தேன்  
நேற்று மூன்று மணிக்கு வந்தேன் நீங்கள்  
எழுதிய கடிதம் வந்தது கிடைத்தது நானே  
உங்களுக்கு குறைந்த கடிதம் எழுதவேண்டி  
மென்று துருந்தேன் உங்களுக்குத் தின்று  
கடிதம் வந்தது உங்களுக்குத் தின்று  
என்னை அல்லவாம் வரும் படி நீங்கள் சொ  
ன்னதாகப் பத்திரம் தின்று கொண்டுள்ளீ  
எனக்குத் துண்டு கொளைய உடம்பு கொளைய  
தின்று தின்று அதனால் பெரி யாய் மாநீங்க  
ள் எல்லோரும் கல்யாணத்திற்குப் போவதின  
என்றினைப் போகவேண்டாமென்று சொல் று  
தின்று தின்று அல்லவாம் வரும் து விடாது  
மை தின்று பவநு வரும் சொன்னேன்  
கிப்பொழுது போய்தின்று பவநு வதில் என்ன  
பிய யோ ஜங்கடிதம் எழுதிவரு என்று சொன்  
னார் அதனால் நான் அல்லவாம் வரும்

நீங்கள் எல்லோரும் தின்று பவநு  
வந்து நீங்கள் தின்று வந்து தின்று  
நான் அல்லவாம் வரும் தின்று பவநு  
வைவிடும் உங்களுக்குத் தின்று  
கிணர் என்னுடைய தின்று தின்று  
மென்று தின்று தின்று தின்று  
கிணர் என்னுடைய தின்று தின்று  
மென்று தின்று தின்று தின்று  
கிணர் என்னுடைய தின்று தின்று  
மென்று தின்று தின்று தின்று

உங்களுக்குப் பவநு  
தின்று தின்று



\*

Late Lakshmi Ammal hails from Chittoor. At her parental home there is a wedding. Ladies go in advance to help prepare wedding sweets. Dorai is in college and can't avail of much leave. Balaraman will take him for the wedding and quickly return. Such a hurried trip is not advisable for Thaiyalnayaki. She makes sure that her Perimma's genuine concern is not misconstrued.

Thaiyalnayaki's endearing epistles exhibit her powers of reasoning, persuasive eloquence, and candidness. She avidly awaited news from her husband and would demand immediate response to her letters.

The perfect understanding and immense confidence between the couple unravel their deep and intimate comradeship. \*

**Safe**

**19.1.20**

I went to Tiruttani on Saturday. Returned yesterday evening. I got your letter. I had been wanting to write to you on this. I am very happy I got your letter. Padmavathi told me that you wanted me to come over there. For the past two days I am having body ache. So Perimma is saying since you are all going for the wedding [to Chittoor], I need not go there. I said, I will go today and return on Thursday. She says of what use it will be; instead I can write a letter. Therefore, I am not coming there. When will all of you be returning? If I get to know this, I will come. Did you send Saraswathi today with Padmavathy? I do not desire to go to Chittoor now. Let not anybody know about what Perimma had said. Expect you will reply to this letter immediately.

Your lovingly  
Thaiyanayaki

SPARROW

## Epilogue

These letters become even more important since Thaiyalnayaki did not live long after delivering a baby boy. She cuddled her baby, lived for ten days when matters suddenly deteriorated and she died on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of delivery. The date was April 29, 1920. She was 16 years old. There was no immediate communication facility to inform the near and dear ones of the tragedy. Relatives who turned up for the *Punyavachanam* of the new born, a purification ceremony to cleanse the house and sanctify a home after child birth, performed after the 10<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> day after the child birth, came with all auspicious offerings—betel leaves with areca nuts and blouse pieces. They were tucked into the pallu of her *madisar* sari (nine yards sari) in which her body was wrapped and laid. Dr Sunitha Madhavan adds that she had gone to Thiruttani to the Veeraraghava Perumal temple on the Srirama Navami day, hardly 20 days before the delivery. After the temple visit she sent the kumkum prasad with the letter to her husband. Her wishes to see the deity, her baby and her husband were fulfilled. There was no remorse on her face as she lay for the final rites to be performed. The baby boy was named Suresham, one of the 108 names of Krishna, meaning Lord of all demi-gods. Suresham was Dr Sunitha Madhavan's father, who like his father, carefully preserved these letters and gave them to his daughter, who has kindly passed them on to SPARROW to be archived.

