



**SPARROW
SOUND & PICTURE
ARCHIVES FOR
RESEARCH
ON
WOMEN**

Publication Number 69

Published by

Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women
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Mouj Prakashan Griha,
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Mumbai - 400 004
Phone: 022 2387 1050

This occasional Newsletter for only private circulation, is published with the support of Stichting de Zaaier, Utrecht

SPARROW

newsletter

SNL Number 22-23

September 2011

CONTENTS

Editor's Note

Expressions: Bole Kishori: Mumbai ki Juggi Bastiyon mein Rahti

Ladkiyon ki Abhivyakti, Edited by Medhavini Namjoshi

Koozhangal: A quarterly for children by children

2-3

— C S Lakshmi

Reviews:

4-5

Nerkunjam by Thenmozhi & *Fragrance of Peace* by Irom Sarmila

A Thousand Streams by Rajeswari Chatterjee

— C S Lakshmi & Malsawmi Jacob

Issues: Sex Selection: Concerns and Action

6

— C S Lakshmi

Suicides: Behind the Suicides by Malsawmi Jacob

7

Archiving People, Archiving Memories,

Archiving Knowledge by C S Lakshmi

8-9

Events: Workshop and Conference

10-11

With the Printer: Sweeping the Front Yard

12-13

Action: Sculpting Lives and Voicing Perspectives 14

Homage: Nirmala Ramachandran, Charusheela Patwardhan, Sujatha,

Lakshamma, Mala Sen, Sheila Gujral, Rasika Joshi & Sadhnatai Amte

15-16

C S Lakshmi, Malsawmi Jacob & Sharmila Sontakke

[Editor's Note]

This double-issue of SNL takes a serious look at two issues which seriously concern women. The first one is the issue of sex-selection which has again become a serious concern after twenty-five years. MAVA (Men Against Violence & Abuse and YWCA and Population First organised workshops and brain-storming sessions where the campaigns done twenty-five years ago were revisited and new strategies discussed. SPARROW participated in these meetings and a short note is presented in this SNL on the various matters discussed in these sessions. The second issue that is threatening to become a major issue of urban life is educated and working women committing suicide because of the complicated politics of the family. Malsawmi writes about unresolved issues in women's life finally taking the form of suicide.

What young people think and feel is very important to know for the future belongs to them. Vacha is doing very important work in this area. A book published by Vacha written by young girls who live in slum colonies and *Koozhangal*, a quarterly for children by children in Tamil, are reviewed in this SNL. A short-story collection in Tamil by Thenmozhi and Irom Sarmila's book of poems are also reviewed along with an interesting autobiography of the pioneer scientist Rajeswari Chatterji.

We also take a look in this issue, for the first time, into the Private Papers section of SPARROW and how important it is in terms of archiving women's lives and knowledge about women's lives. Some interesting projects on women taken up by others, using photography and films are also reviewed in this issue.

We tell you about our forthcoming publication and also share with you our experience of a one-day workshop for Nordic students that was held in SPARROW and an interesting oral-history conference held at Bangalore in which SPARROW took part.

As always we celebrate the lives of women who have lived their lives on their own terms and are no more with us. Do visit our website www.sparrowonline.org and do write to us.

— C S Lakshmi

Expressions



Koozhangal: A quarterly for children by children



Koozhangal is an attempt to understand children and their minds. Teachers who want to learn from children are also a part of this and it is an effort to bring children and adults closer through education and expression. The Educational Research Centre in Madurai publishes this quarterly in which young girls and boys in the age group of 5 to 14 write little stories and poems and notes. The teachers also write about their experiences with children and what children expect from teachers. A little girl who is in a charitable boarding school writes about her mother whom she loves. She begins by describing her days with her mother when she got up early and cleared the threshold and smeared it with cowdung and drew kolam designs on it and later washed the vessels to help her mother. Her mother bought her everything she wanted. She has no father and so her mother has to borrow money to come and see her. She has run away from the boarding school before because she did not like it there. But she did not like it at home too. So she came back. She ends with the line that even though her mother does not come to see her she is fine in the boarding school. It is a touching note of a girl who misses her mother and yet understands the need to study. Another young girl writes about how she got a new pair of jeans, earrings, bangles and chain for Ramzan the previous year and how they gave their neighbours biriyani and how she and her sister and others wore new clothes and prayed at home while her father usually went to masjid to pray.

A twelve-year-old boy has already started thinking of forest conservation. He writes:

There is no evil spirit in the babul tree
 There is no evil spirit in the neem tree
 There is no evil spirit in the banyan tree
 There is no evil spirit in the peepal tree
 There is no evil spirit in the tamarind tree
 The person who cuts the tree
 Is the evil spirit destroying the forest

Five year old Yazhini is already thinking in terms of changing the order of things. She writes about a little kitten who wandered about in the jungle freely and got scared when it saw a lion and came running and got into Yazhini's stomach. It became fat drinking juice and eating ice cream. But Yazhini used to get very angry when people did what she did not like. So one day when she was shouting in anger, the kitten got out and the fat kitten became king of the jungle. Certainly Yazhini has a hand in that!

There is a lot to learn from children and from what they write. These books serve that purpose and present vividly the world of children in many different contexts.

— C S Lakshmi

Bole Kishori: Mumbai ki Juggi Bastiyon mein Rahti Ladkiyon ki Abhivyakti
Edited by Medhavini Namjoshi

Publications brought out by well-known publishers for children receive much attention and do well in the market. But some of the NGOs and some committed individuals bring out excellent books quietly without much fanfare. *Bole Kishori* by Vacha brought out in 2010 and the Tamil children's quarterly *Koozhangal* from Madurai with Salai Selvam and Va. Gita as editors belong to that category. Another book of Vacha, *Experiencing Girlhood* was reviewed in an earlier SNL.

Vacha, originally a women's resource centre, started working with youth from deprived communities in 1995. An action research project was taken up with girls in early adolescence as priority and later a resource centre for girls was established with a programme of girls' empowerment through educational inputs. *Experiencing Girlhood* is a book that talks about the girls they met during the Action Research Project and about the girls who are part of the girls' centres of Vacha. *Bole Kishori* is a book where the ideas, feelings and expressions of the girls from various slums are put together. In this book they speak about their lives and their ideas. The book records their various observations about life around them and contains their delightful drawings and unusual stories.

If *Experiencing Girlhood* told us what needs to be done for girls, *Bole Kishori* is about what a resource centre for girls can do for girls; how it can fill them with hope and make them feel that their dreams can indeed be realised.

— C S Lakshmi

Why do boys keep saying that men don't feel pain?
लड़के हमेशा क्यों कहते हैं की मर्द को दर्द नहीं होता ?

Is Chayawanprash meant only for boys? When girls become weak don't they need it too?
क्या चवनप्राश सिर्फ लड़कों के लिए ही होता है, जब लड़कियाँ कमजोर होती हैं तो उन्हें उसकी जरूरत नहीं होती ?

My dream is to become Miss world in a beauty contest. But my mother says we don't have the money for that. So I had to give up my dreams
मेरा सपना था कि मैं विश्वसुंदरी बनूँ। मगर मेरी माँ कहती है की अपने पास इतने पैसे नहीं हैं। इसलिए मुझे मेरा सपना छोड़ देना पड़ा।

If you tease girls you will get twenty years in jail And mind you, I will deal with you without fail
आगर लड़की को दिया तुने छेड बीस साल की जेल बिदाऊट फेल बच्चू तेरा तो निकालके रखुंगी तेल...

Growing Up As a Girl

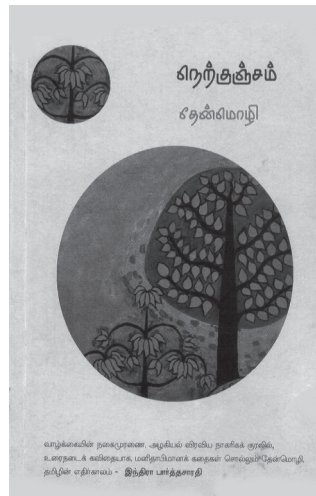
It is great that I am a girl
A girl I am; a girl
Don't ever feel bad
For being a girl
It is good to be a girl
It is good sisters; it is good
Always be happy
For being a girl

अच्छा है की मैं लड़की हूँ | लड़की हूँ मैं लड़की हूँ |
कभी न दुख करना तुम | क्यों मैं एक लड़की हूँ |
लड़की होना अच्छी बात | अच्छी बात बहना अच्छी बात |
हमेशा खुश रहना तुम | क्यों की तुम एक लड़की हो |

तसनीम सईयद जहीरुद्दीन

Nerkunjam

By Thenmozhi



Book details:

*Nerkunjam*Publisher: Manarkeni,
Puducheri, 2010 (2nd edition)

Number of pages: 133

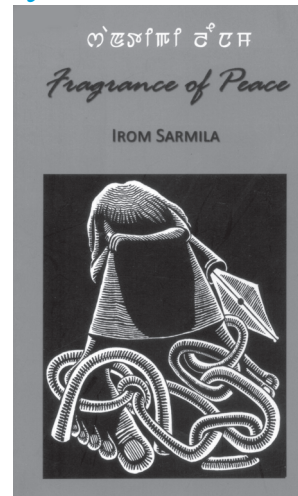
Price: Rs. 90

Thenmozhi is a poet and a writer of fiction. *Nerkunjam* (Grain Bunch) is her first collection of stories. In 2008, a poetry collection of hers, *Thuravi Nandu* (Hermit Crab) was published. Thenmozhi means honeyed language. Thenmozhi's style of writing certainly contains the poetic honey of the language but the subjects she chooses to write about and the way she tells her stories have nothing to do with the sweetness of honey. The stories talk about lives of women and men caught in the contradictions of everyday life and the irony of existence. Thenmozhi says in her preface that her stories come out like mushrooms in the rainy season; during uncertain moments in the overflow of life. Beginning with the first story which is a monologue of a dead woman surrounded by wailing relatives, talking to her lover with the unusual title *Kadarkol* which means land getting submerged under the sea and the second story of a farm labourer who decides to protest against sexual harassment, again with the deceptive poetic title *Nilakudai* which means mushroom, used here as a metaphor for people who are like poisonous mushrooms and fast spreading fungus in the society, the stage is set for eight other very deftly narrated stories. The titles of all the stories are abstract while the stories themselves talk of the brutal reality of life with controlled emotion and no sentimentality. Thenmozhi has managed to combine a heady, intoxicating style of writing with the hard truths of life. The result is a set of ten stories that carry several layers of meaning.

— C S Lakshmi

Fragrance of Peace

By Irom Sarmila



Book details:

*Fragrance of Peace*Publisher: Zubaan,
New Delhi, 2010

Number of pages: 56

Price: Rs. 125

For ten years now, Irom Chanu Sharmila, a young woman from Manipur, has been on a hunger strike, demanding the removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958, a draconian law that allows the army unfettered powers in areas that are considered politically “sensitive” or “disturbed”. In September 2010, Irom Sharmila was awarded the Rabindranath Tagore Peace Prize by the Indian Institute of Planning and Management (IIPM) and there is an active group working to get her the Nobel Peace Prize.

Twelve poems of Irom Sarmila have been translated and published by Zubaan. Twelve poems have been deliberately chosen to indicate the bizarre drama of Irom Sarmila being produced in the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate of Imphal West District every twelve months in the last decade only to be re-arrested and remanded to judicial custody. It is a slim book of 56 pages, but the poems and the interview of Irom Sarmila by Pankaj Butalia leave us numb with pain initially and later with a great sense of anger and frustration. The poems are simple, making no claims to great poetry but they move one with their simplicity and directness. In a poem of hers she says: ‘I long to live/ with dignity and honour’. Another poem ends with the words: unbind me/remove this chain of thorns/let me not deflect my course/do not fault me/this is only the desire/of a caged bird.

Irom Sarmila's conversation with Pankaj Butalia is deeply moving with her strong conviction that she has been chosen to take up this struggle, and her extreme humility.

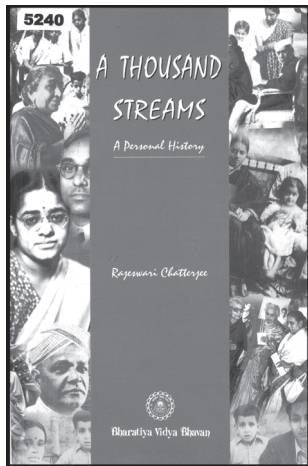
— C S Lakshmi



Neelima Mishra, one of the Magaysay award winners this year, has decided to donate the whole prize money of \$50,000 (Rs. 22 lakh) to Bhagini Nivedita Gramin Vigyan Niketan (BNGVN), her rural microcredit project. Her father Chandrashekhar Mishra said that she had won several small awards in the past too, and every rupee was donated to her cause. He said that her family and the entire town of Bahadarpur is proud of his daughter's “selfless social service has been accorded international recognition”. Since her childhood, Neelima, has a passion for helping people. It was with this attitude that she set up the BNGVN, which is today a force to reckon with in rural Maharashtra.

A Thousand Streams

By Rajeswari Chatterjee



A *Thousand Streams* by Rajeswari Chatterjee is subtitled 'A Personal History.' But it is much more than that. It is a slice of the history of India and a look at the social practices of some communities there, especially in the state of Mysore during the times of Mumtaz Ali and Nalwadi Krishnaraya Wodeyars. It also takes a peep into the personal lives of several characters from diverse backgrounds.

The author worked as a research student in the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore from 1944 to 1947 and later became a faculty member there from 1953 to 1982. In between, she went to USA for further studies and received her PhD degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Michigan. She specialized in Microwave Engineering and Antennas, and has more than 100 research publications on the subject.

The author was on a visit to Reno in the year 2000 when the English Department of the University of Nevada in Reno announced a project named 'Lifescapes' for seniors to write about their lives and experiences. She joined the project, and this book is the result. The narration is done in a story-teller's style, beginning with the author's birth, and mostly in chronological order. This gives it a sense of continuity. Detailed description of people and incidents makes them come alive.

Rajeswari's personality comes through clearly through the book. We see her as a serious worker and achiever, but also an enthusiastic explorer and fun lover who could enjoy life in any situation. Her love for life and people is evident in every chapter. When travelling for her studies to US by ship, she did not get seasick at all and enjoyed all the new food. She was used to mixing with different kinds of people at home itself; her parents had several Westerner friends.

She even managed to get along with Mrs. Sachs, in whose house she took a room while training in the Division of Radio Frequency Measurements in the National Bureau of Standards (NBS) in Washington DC. This landlady, who was a Jew, insisted on strict observation of kosher rules in food. She gave the author instructions not to sit on the bed but only on the chair. And since Rajeswari used to keep her toothbrush in her room instead of leaving it in the shared bathroom, Mrs. Sachs suspected her of using her toothbrush!

Earlier, while doing her PhD course she stayed in Ann Arbor in a rented room. The landlady allowed the boarders to use the basement kitchen where they cooked their own countries' foods.

'The house was like an international house, with girls from the USA, India, China, Korea, Pakistan, Cuba, Japan, and the

Philippines.... we used to cook dishes from our own countries and we used to share them with each other.... And also we learnt a lot about life in different parts of the earth...' This description goes well with the title of the book.

The book not only takes one on a tour of Indian culture and history and other parts of the world—Singapore, Hongkong, USA, London, Paris. It also tells the personal stories of several people. Among them are two women pioneers of Karnataka in emancipation of women: Kamamma Dasappa—the author's maternal grandmother and Samajada Nanjamma—the author's aunt. These women, who married early according to the custom of those days, became widows when still in their teens. But with the support of the men in their families—Kamamma's father and Nanjamma's elder brother—they got educated and then helped other women to do the same.

The other stories:—of Shamanna, an orphan who became an important member of the author's great grandfather's family; Madi Rama Bai, an orthodox Brahmin woman obsessed with ritual purity; Christanuja Watsa, a Brahmin who became a Christian and contributed to the first Kannada-English dictionary; Unnamalai, a Tamil woman from the lowest caste; Sidappa, a Dalit man who became a successful professional—all make engrossing read.

The author married a Bengali from West Bengal. Her first meeting with her husband's family that shows the contrast in the natures of the two cultures is described with a touch of humour: 'As soon as we entered the whole family.... surrounded us and started talking in Bengali, all at the same time.... I was quite amused at their excitement. People of Bengal are highly emotional and highly excitable compared to the people from my state of Karnataka, who are inhibited, do not talk very much and are less emotional. At night I asked my husband what they were talking so loudly and excitedly in the morning.... I told him that I thought that they were fighting about something.'

Though the book is very interesting to read, it has some serious flaws. For one, the narrative is bogged down by too much detail of facts and names in places, for example in introducing Samajada Nanjamma, the author's aunt.

Secondly, it needed proper editing and careful proof reading. The language leaves something to be desired; there are a number of clumsy expressions and repetitions. There are also inappropriate punctuations, like unnecessary commas, and wrong spellings.

And since the target readers seem to be non-Indians, explanations are inserted in several places. This rather hinders the pleasure of reading for an Indian who is familiar with the situations. But all in all, it is definitely a rewarding book to read.

—Malsawmi Jacob

Book details:

Publisher: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan

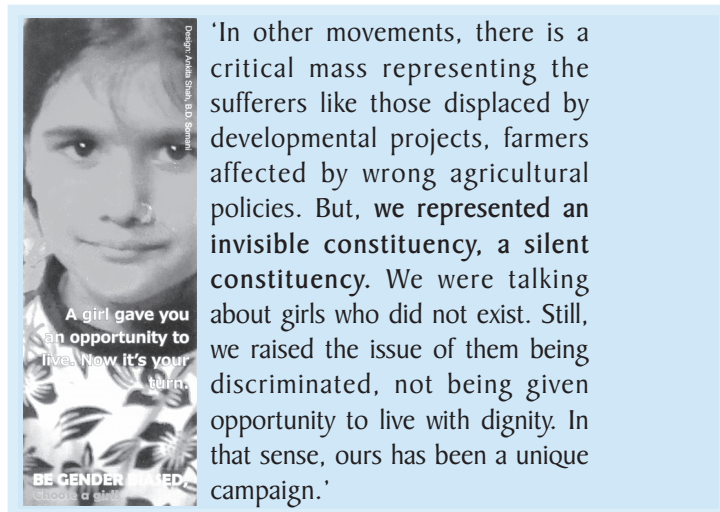
Number of pages: 261

Price: Rs. 150/-

Sex Selection: Concerns and Action

On 8th April, 2011, a one-day workshop was organised by MAVA (Men Against Violence & Abuse) and YWCA to commemorate 25 years of campaign against sex-selective abortions by Forum Against Sex Determination & Sex Pre Selection (FASDSP), which was covered briefly in our earlier SNL. It is important to elaborate on the issues raised in this workshop for the workshop not only recalled the history of what was done 25 years ago but it also set the context for current action plans.

In the workshop Dr. Ravindra R P made a brilliant retracing of the journey 25 years back and explained how the Forum was literally swimming against the current but yet managed to achieve what it did with help of supportive bureaucrats and yet it could not fully succeed because it had no backing of the media (which was focussing more on accuracy of technology and the trauma of wrong diagnosis which resulted in the abortion of the much-wanted male foetus, rather than on the sociological/demographic aspects) money or power. Dr. Ravindra's comments on what it is to sustain a national level issue-based campaign of this nature should form the basis of action plans and current strategy. Dr. Ravindra stated:



'In other movements, there is a critical mass representing the sufferers like those displaced by developmental projects, farmers affected by wrong agricultural policies. But, we represented an invisible constituency, a silent constituency. We were talking about girls who did not exist. Still, we raised the issue of them being discriminated, not being given opportunity to live with dignity. In that sense, ours has been a unique campaign.'

On 5th May MAVA convened a meeting of all interested groups and individuals to form a core group to take the campaign further. Many groups and individuals participated in the meeting. It was generally felt that while different groups may take up various awareness-raising activities the Forum (to be known as Forum Against Sex Selection, FASS) must basically act as a pressure group to see to it that the PCPNDT Act (Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act 1994) is strictly implemented. The call for the next meeting came from Population First. The letter of invitation for a brainstorming session on the issue clearly stated that the last few weeks had been very traumatic for those working on the issue of pre-birth sex selection. That the 2011 Census would reveal a further fall in the sex ratio was expected but the steep fall took everyone by surprise. Except for Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Chandigarh and Tamil Nadu all the other States have recorded a fall. In Maharashtra, Mumbai has recorded a fall by 50 points from 912 girls to 872 girls per 1000 boys in the 0-6 age group between 2001 and 2011. The brainstorming session

was for all concerned individuals and organisations to come together to plan concerted advocacy and ground level initiatives to ensure that the government implements the PCPNDT Act. The meeting was also to consolidate the gains of the past few years where pre-birth sex selection has become a visible issue and also to work on other issues like gender based violence, women's education, employment and empowerment etc., which would help enhance the value of women and girls in society. While the various organisations and individuals may have differing priorities and commitments there was a need to create space within those commitments to come together and work on this important issue.

The brainstorming session threw up several ideas for future action. In her opening remarks, Dr. Sharada, the Programme Director of Population First, spoke about the various levels at which the issue is addressed by Population First. She elaborated on community level initiatives taken during festivals like Ganeshostav to reach out to masses. She said a lakh of pocket calendars, 50000 Aarti and Mahiti Books, bhajan and Song CDs were distributed during the festival. She said special AV shows were developed in collaboration with the Pandal organisers on the theme of sex selection and gender discrimination. She also mentioned how the *Haldi-Kumkum* get-togethers organised during the festival were used to hold group discussions on gender issues. She also spoke about the work of Laadli with colleges.

An active discussion followed where it was rightly pointed out that while talking about sex selection one would also have to be sensitive to the reproductive rights of women and therefore this campaign should not impinge on a woman's right to safe abortion. So the terminology was important and one should also know how to phrase it in Hindi and Marathi. Two important action points emerged which are to be taken up in the next two months. One was to plan a major event on July 11, the World Population Day to draw public attention to the issue. Another action point was for delegation to meet the Chief Minister to put forward some of the demands.

It was heartening to see the enthusiasm and energy displayed in all the meetings. But there was a strange *déjà vu* kind of feeling for some of those who had been active twenty-five years ago. Talks about rallies, posters and stickers felt as if we were right where we had begun twenty-five years ago. It looked as if the struggle was still very much the same and that we were still representing what Dr. Ravindra referred to as an invisible and silent constituency of girls who did not exist. There was also apprehension when Dr. Sharada said that gender was a life-skill and that there was no need for feminism "and all that" and when she spoke with great enthusiasm about Ganeshotsav festivals as a space for intervention. Fortunately Nandita Shah of Akshara remarked that such community interventions may not be acceptable to many who were there for they had their own methods of exclusion.

More than 26 different organisations and many different individuals coming together for this cause is an extremely positive thing. Maybe this time on we are going to address the issue in many different voices in many different ways.

— C S Lakshmi

Behind the Suicides

In a shocking and tragic incident, Nidhi Gupta flung her two young children to their death from the nineteenth floor of a building in Mumbai. Then she jumped down and killed herself. Just about a month later, the same murder-suicide act was committed by another mother, Deepti Chauhan, who threw down her five year old son and jumped to her death. About 24 hours later, Komal Cheda, a highly paid bank manager, hanged himself.

Why did the three young women—all in their early thirties—end their promising lives? As reported, there were financial issues and quarrels in the family of Nidhi which may have led her to take the extreme step. In Deepti Chauhan's case, it is reported that her brother in law and his wife had expressed doubts about the paternity of her son. And a case of dowry death is registered against Komal Cheda's in-laws. Thus in the three cases, harassment by in-laws is the apparent reason for the suicides.

In most cases of married women killing themselves, the husbands and/or in-laws are directly or indirectly responsible. Women are often not given love and respect in the marital home; they are harassed for dowry, tortured mentally and even physically abused. Sometimes she is murdered by her in-laws or her husband because she is not able to bring in more. Or she kills herself due to incessant pressure and mental or physical torture.

Ironically, it is not only 'non-earning' women who suffer such fate. High flying women like Komal Cheda, who fetched a monthly salary of a lakh, are victims too. Pressure to go for paternity test has now emerged as another form of harassment. Ironically, a suspicious person will always find new excuses for suspicion even after test results have proved the suspicions wrong.

However, these are not the only causes for women committing suicide. Nor do they fully explain why they reacted in the extreme way while others in the same situation or worse endure.

More recently, a retired scientist from Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) ended her own life by overdosing on sleeping pills. Dr. Uma Rao was the president of the Indian Women Scientists' Association. She was 63, an age where she could still be professionally and socially active and productive. Uma is reported as suffering from bipolar disorder. Her suicide note states that she is killing herself because she cannot cope any more with her incurable illness.

When there is a suicide, coping with the situation is a big burden for the family. Most of the time, the family members are suspected of having abetted the suicide. They are often arrested and interrogated, adding to the trauma of having lost a loved one. While all sympathy goes to the suicide victims, those accused of having abetted it have a hard time getting their side of the story heard. These can even cause more suicides, as the case of Dalal family shows.

In 1998 June, an elderly couple in their seventies, Vasudev and Tara Dalal, jumped off a balcony. They had written a note blaming their son and his wife. After seven long years of trial, the middle aged couple and their college going daughter

plunged to their death from the same balcony.

When air hostess Sucheta Anand killed herself, her friend Captain Arjun Menon was arrested and jailed for three weeks, because he happened to be the last person to meet her. Arjun recounts the 'random crazy thoughts' he had, and fears that they would 'frame' him successfully.

There are many causes for suicide. Some of these are despair, depression, and mental illnesses like bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, alcoholism and drug abuse. Genetic disposition is also listed as a factor.

It is likely that there are several—a compound of causes—and not just one, for a person to commit suicide. Some psychiatrists state that it is very rare that someone commits suicide because of just one cause. For instance, Dr. Uma was not only suffering from bipolar disorder but was also living alone, which must have aggravated her feeling of loneliness. For Deepti, it would have been so humiliating to be accused of unchastity besides the other quarrels. The combined conditions would have added up to the feeling of depression and despair, leading to the extreme measure. There seems to be no hard evidence to explain why some people commit suicide while others in equally bad circumstances do not.

So, is there a solution? Is it possible to prevent suicides? Kevin Caruso, writing on a website, argues: 'Well, even those countries which have a good infrastructure to deal with the depressed and the mentally ill have a growing rate of suicide. And the modern world with the new society that it has spawned is not showing any signs of changing. In fact it seems to be getting worse. It's a dog eat dog world and we have to accept it... We simply have to learn to cope.... How we are going to do it I am not sure, but the toughest will always survive...'

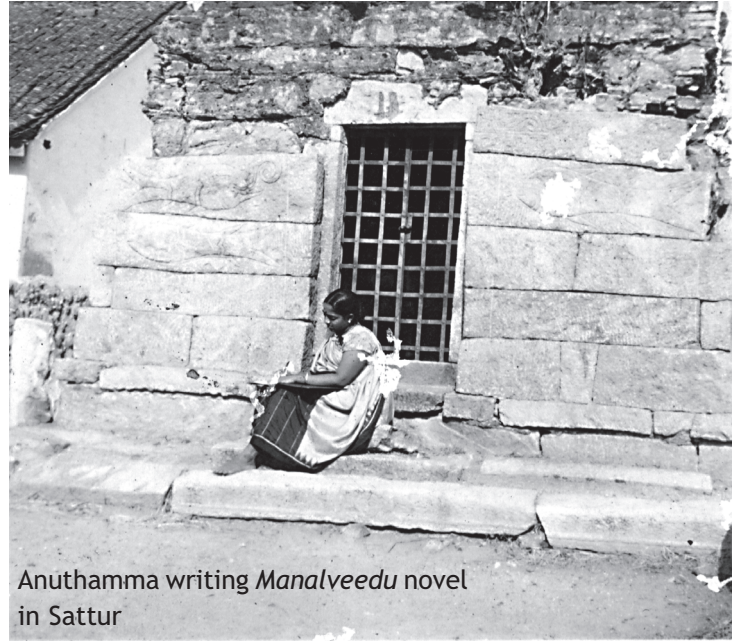
What Caruso says is quite true. The world is not going to change and we need to cope to survive. When situations are bad and things go all wrong, we need a motive to go on living. Perhaps we could take a cue from Viktor Frankl, an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, founder of Logotherapy. He is a Jew who survived the Holocaust of the Second World War. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl narrates his experiences in the concentration camp and describes his psychotherapeutic method of finding meaning in all forms of existence and a reason to live. He writes: 'If a prisoner felt that he could no longer endure the realities of camp life, he found a way out in his mental life—an invaluable opportunity to dwell in the spiritual domain, the one that the SS were unable to destroy. Spiritual life strengthened the prisoner, helped him adapt, and thereby improved his chances of survival.'

The bottom line is that one needs a purpose bigger than oneself for choosing to live on despite harsh circumstances.

— Malsawmi Jacob

Archiving People, Archiving Memories, Archiving Knowledge

When Dr. Neera Desai, one of our founder trustees, passed away in 2009, some books, photographs and letters from her collection were given to SPARROW for archiving. When the carton arrived and we opened it, we were opening not just a carton of books and photographs and papers but a carton that represented some aspects of a lived life. It brought back Neera Desai to us in a myriad ways. To a student, researcher or anyone who decides to see this material it may open other paths and other lives in history. That is what makes archiving an exciting and a humbling activity. One is excited by the range of material one gets to archive; one is also humbled by the knowledge one gains of women's lives. Uma Chakravarti once said in a seminar that when she went to activist and leftist intellectual Mythili Sivaraman's house and opened a blue tin trunk filled with books and papers of her grandmother Subbalakshmi and saw the book *Red Star Over China*, and held the actual purchase bill of another old book, she began to weep; she could immediately link herself with the life of a woman not allowed to study or work, who still wanted to be actively engaged in acquiring knowledge, ordering that particular book. What lay there in the blue tin trunk were not scraps of fading paper but sources of women's history.



Anuthamma writing *Manalveedu* novel in Sattur

A few years ago SPARROW had interviewed the veteran Tamil writer Anuthama and she had given her handwritten stories written in bound notebooks to SPARROW along with a collection of her books. Anuthama passed away last December and we took out one of her her handwritten manuscripts and stared at it for a while. When future scholars living in a computerized world write the history of women's contribution to modern Tamil literature, these original manuscripts will tell them not only what they wrote but how they wrote it, how they created the time and space for it and the manner in which the act of writing took place.

The renowned Tamil writer R Chudamani passed away a few months before her 80th birthday last year. A few months later some

Archiving People, Archiving Memories, Archiving Knowledge



Vindhya
(India Devi)



Anuthama



R Chudamani



Dr. Neera Desai



Hemanalini
by Sarat Chandra

books from her collection reached SPARROW in two cartons. R Chudamani had supported and admired the activities of SPARROW for many years. The cartons that came from Chennai



Devdas
by Sarat Chandra

had some of Chudamani's own books and books from the family library. We carefully took out old bound volumes of *Kalaimagal* from the 1930s and some other old books from her collection. Two small books in the collection caught our attention. They transported us to a different period of history. The 1940s were years when there was a translation movement in the Tamil region when literature from all over India got translated into Tamil. Many of us growing up in the 1950s benefitted from this. We read Sarat Chandra Chatterji and Vishnu Sakharam Khandekar who were just Sarat Chandirar and Vi Sa Khandekar for us. The two books from R Chudamani Collection are translations of *Devdas* and *Hemamalini* of Sarat Chandra. The first page of *Hemamalini* has Chudamani's mother Kanakavalli's name written on it probably in her own handwriting. Written in English is her name Mrs. K Raghavan. *Devdas*, translated by "Dinakaran" has in its first page many signatures of N Dinakaran and at the bottom of the page is R Chudamani's name written in Tamil in her handwriting. I imagined Chudamani in her early teens reading the book and wondering what love was all about.

India Devi who wrote in the name Vindhya began to write in the 1930s. A few months ago Vindhya's family gave all her stories and several photographs from her collection to SPARROW to be archived. Going through her stories in old Tamil magazines like *Swadesamitran*, *Kalaimagal* and other magazines of that period told us a lot about the range of her experience. The illustrations of the stories and advertisements in the magazines revealed a fascinating history of women's lives.

Mukul Dube is a writer and a photographer and in the last one year we have known him he has been very supportive of



SPARROW's work. He has given his photographs to SPARROW to be archived. Mukul Dube's efforts to capture lives in urban spaces are fascinating. The photographs teach us to look at life around us differently. We give below some of his photographs.

— C S Lakshmi



From
Mukul Dube
Collections

Oral History and the Sense of Legacy

The Oral History and the Sense of Legacy conference on 19 July 2011 was organised by The Centre for Public History (CPH) and Shrishti School of Art Design and Technology in association with The British Council. The venue was the National Gallery of Modern Art, Bengaluru. The conference was open to the public with a registration fee. Much to the surprise of the organizers the large auditorium had a capacity audience.

The presenters who were from different areas of research, documentation and archiving discussed their different areas of research interest and experience, highlighting some of the opportunities and challenges associated with using oral history as a methodology in the specific context of India. The speakers were Shabnam Virmani, Director of Kabir Project at the Sakshi School of Art, Design and Technology, Dr. Suroopa Mukherjee, Associate Professor, Department of English, Delhi University, Uravashi Butalia, Director, Zubaan, Indira Chowdhury, Head, Centre for Public History and Dr. C S Lakshmi, Director, SPARROW. From the British Library, Dr. Robert Perks, Lead Curator of Oral History and Director, National Life Stories and Mary Stewart, oral history

She said that narratives can become a tool of empowerment 'restoring knowledge back to the people.' Uravashi's Butalia's talk was a personal narrative of researching the hidden histories of Partition and the nature of private memory and how this meshes with public memory. She spoke movingly about how she got involved in the project of collecting Partition stories and how for those who had experienced Partition time was always divided into Before and After Partition. She also talked about her personal experience—how her mother Subhadra Butalia never went back to Pakistan and her own visit to Pakistan when she met her maternal uncle who had converted to Islam. Mary Stewart made an excellent presentation on the oral history archives in the British Library and explained how the recent developments in archival theory and post-colonial scholarship have broadened the definitions of what constitutes material of archival worth and have challenged long-held assumptions of archivists as passive agents. Dr. Robert Perks followed it up with his erudite presentation on the National Life Stories project of British Library. Indira Chowdhury's presentation was on forms of cultural memory in India and she spoke about using oral history to document the activities of the Naandi Foundation, an NGO that has been working with tribals and rural and urban poor in the areas of education, health, safe drinking water and livelihoods for the past ten years. C S Lakshmi spoke about SPARROW's perception of oral history and methods of using oral history. SPARROW's film *Ten Women, Ten Lives, Ten Concerns* was screened and appreciated.

The conference was organised in a way that made discussions and exchange of ideas possible. Unlike other conferences there was warmth in the interactions and a camaraderie that made it easier to speak about different perspectives on oral history.

— C S Lakshmi

SPARROW's heartiest congratulations to Justice Ranjana Desai on her elevation to the Supreme Court. We are truly proud of her dedicated service and achievements. Justice Desai had been a lawyer for 22 years, and then a judge for 15 years in Bombay High Court. She is one of three judges being elevated to SC and the second woman judge from the Bombay HC to have earned the honour. In an interview with Times Of India, she attributes her independence and high work ethics to her parents, especially her mother. She also acknowledges the strong support of her mother in law, her husband and her son for her ability to work long hours at her career. Ranjana Desai has contributed to the improvement of jail conditions, environment and civic affairs. In a landmark case, she upheld the death sentence given to Ajmal Kasab for the 26/11 carnage. She will definitely be an asset in the country's highest court of justice.

— Malsawmi Jacob

With her resonant voice filling the room one could feel that the TONE was set for the day and that what lay ahead would not be dry presentations of methodology but VOICES that would rise from the heart. And one was not wrong. What followed were PASSIONATE presentations.

curator and Deputy Director, National Life Stories, joined their Indian colleagues to speak about oral history programmes in the British Library.

The 19th of July became a day packed with many interesting presentations. It began with Shabnam Virmani's singing of Kabir and other poets and screening parts of films as a way of presenting the challenges of working with oral traditions of mystic poetry. With her resonant voice filling the room one could feel that the tone was set for the day and that what lay ahead would not be dry presentations of methodology but voices that would rise from the heart. And one was not wrong. What followed were passionate presentations. Suroopa Mukherjee spoke about listening to the voices of Bhopal gas tragedy victims and about Bhopal oral testimonials looking at the problem from the people's perspective.

A SPARROW Walk with Nordic Students

The International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai, in collaboration with the Nordic Centre in India, organises annually a training programme for students from Nordic countries, on *Demography, Gender and Reproductive Health*. This year the programme was from July 11- August 06, 2011. Around 21 students, mostly women from different European countries, participated in the programme this year. As a part of its training programme IIPS normally takes the students to different organisations to acquaint

preservation techniques interest them a great deal. They are full of questions and constantly comparing what they see with what exists in their countries. They are quick to notice the cultural differences and discuss them with the librarians taking them on the walk. The SPARROW library team also enjoys taking students around and get into enthusiastic discussions with them about some of the material. In fact, Sonja Ashti Ghaderi one of the students this year, made a slide presentation <http://sonjaindia.wordpress.com/2011/08/17/sparrow/> of the SPARROW Walk and sent it to us.



A SPARROW walk



with Nordic Students

them with the Indian scenario and perspectives on concepts of gender, gender inequality, marriage and dowry, childlessness, domestic violence, cultural practices in reproductive health, gender concerns in health care, HIV/AIDS- gender perspective, prostitution and health, gender in media and ethical issues in reproductive health and policy. It looks like a one-day workshop at SPARROW has now become a part of the IIPS training programme. The earlier batch of Nordic Students who visited SPARROW in 2010 for a one-day workshop had been fascinated by the archival material, the films and publications. And this year again brought Nordic visitors.

Twenty-one students arrived on 15th July 2011 as per schedule. After their arrival and welcome with a hot cup of tea during which general introductions were done, the workshop began with the SPARROW Walk, a guided tour through the SPARROW archives. The SPARROW Walk is always an exciting tour for students, especially students from abroad. The variety of print, visual and sound material, the manner in which they are kept, and the

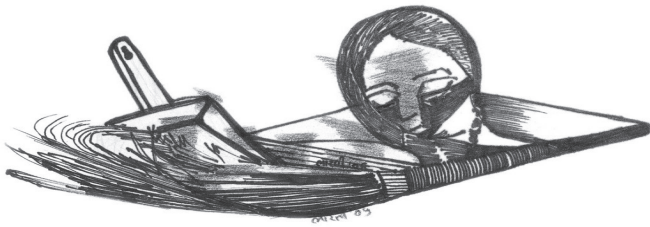
During the course of the day they were shown the film *Degham*, produced by SPARROW on transgender women and their aspirations in life in the context of the body. After lunch they were shown *Chakori*, a film from the SPARROW archives directed by Sumitra Bhawe. The film is about a young girl from a village whose world changes when she learns to ride a cycle. Although both the films were in different languages (subtitled in English) students loved watching them. They did not mind sitting through a 190-minute film like *Degham*. A lively discussion followed and it looked like the students wanted this to be a never-ending workshop! Many of them made contributions to the Dr. Neera Desai Memorial Library and also bought SPARROW publications. All of them including the IIPS academic team that came with them promised to visit SPARROW again next year. On that happy note the workshop came to an end.

— Sharmila Sontakke & Pooja Pandey

Sweeping the Front Yard: The Forthcoming Volume

SWEEPING THE FRONT YARD...

Poems and Stories of Women in
English, Malayalam, Telugu and Urdu



Edited by
Sampurna Chattarji

SPARROW's third volume on women writers has gone to the printer. This is the third of five volumes planned, with 87 writers from 23 languages of India. Two of them, *Hot is the Moon* and *Being Carried Far Away* were published earlier. This volume contains selected works of writers from Malayalam, Urdu, Telugu and English, along with interviews of the writers. The editor of the series, Dr. C S Lakshmi writes:

Like the other two volumes, working on the interviews of the writers for this volume was the most enriching experience. It was like listening to different kinds of music set to different tunes and yet there were no discordant notes. There were different voices but they rose as a chorus, dissimilar, yet similar. It was a magical experience and worth all the trouble we went through to allow it to happen.

The writers in this volume were chosen by language experts who support and help SPARROW in its various projects. Tamil poet Sukumaran gave us a list of names of Malayalam writers from which we chose the names of writers, and the dialogues with the writers in Malayalam were conducted by Renjini Lisa Varghese, Mini Sukumar, Anitha Thampi and V M Girija. The literary texts and the transcriptions were ably translated by J Devika and Gouridasan Nair from Tiruvananthapuram and Divakaran Periyam in Mumbai.

The book is edited by Sampurna Chattarji, well-known writer and poet. Three of her poems are published as a Postscript. Menka Shivdasani, with her team in The Source, did the design. The layout has been done by Pradeep Mhatre and Amol Khade. Bharati Kapadia has done the drawings as in the other two volumes. Here are some excerpts from Sampurna Chattarji's introduction:

Anitha Thampi's interview of V M Girija brings home with renewed force the fact that what is considered provocative depends on the socio-cultural context from which the 'provocation' is being viewed, that what may have 'shock-value' for one state may not for its neighbouring state (in this case Kerala and Tamil Nadu). Girija speaks very beautifully of tradition and continuity; of not necessarily having to be an activist through one's writing; of contemporariness—'Maybe, in future, someone somewhere might read what we have written and the essence of what we have written will be all our experiences, not what we experienced as individuals, but as people who lived at the same time. That essence is what I would call contemporariness... not writing about the issues of today.' When asked if enough critical attention is being given to new writing by women, she says no, because clichés like the 'era of the woman' pervade in a media that has 'long ceased travelling with the inner spirit of the times....'

In turn, when Girija interviews Anitha, the result is a deeply-intelligent conversation about poetry, technology, precision, society, the individual, and language. As Anitha says, her world-view is concerned not with simple binaries of rural/urban, pastoral/industrial, but rather an interest in expressing 'the absolutely stormy in the most restrained manner.' A student of Science, with a love for Physics, having worked in close proximity with machines, Anitha believes that 'we cannot allow our language to remain obsolescent'. One of the rare occasions where the interview becomes a true dialogue, this is a fascinating entry into the workings of a cerebral and sensitive poet, whose poem 'Sweeping the Front Yard' (Malayalam) captures the insignificance and beauty of a simple domestic chore, a dance made all the more poignant by the fact that it is, as Girija points out, 'no dance... only a piece of labour... that will vanish without leaving any trace'....

Dichotomies abound—laughter and pain, revenge and reconciliation, hatred and happiness, man and woman. In Afrose Sayeeda's conversation you discover the teacher, social worker, short fiction writer who worked part-time at a detective agency and who says, with heartbreaking certainty but no bitterness—'There is nothing called love in this world.' In Shafique Fatima Shera's words, 'I was given the freedom which is generally given to boys. That is why when I was made to sit in purdah I really cried out loud.... why are you wrapping a kafn around me?' When K R Meera says 'I was a specimen' while referring to her experience as the first woman at the news desk of Malayala Manorama, you recognize the scrutiny she was subjected to, the predicament of the woman venturing forth into an area where the lack of precedents becomes a weakness instead of a strength. A predicament shared by Volga, who says that when she joined the SFI student movement and the Girijana

tribal movement, she had to 'be like a man' as there was 'no role model' for her....

For some (Shashi Deshpande, Jameela Nishat) a literary atmosphere at home was a given, though in Jameela's case girls were not allowed to take part in intellectual discussions, much to her frustration. For others like Afroze Sayeeda, books were better than play. Poet, novelist, editor and critic Eunice de Souza remembers inheriting 'hundreds and hundreds of books' when her father died, and memorising passages of Ruskin's prose, reading constantly and writing down words and phrases that interested her, revelling in form and composition. Chandramathi talks of an idyllic childhood spent reading many books dangling her feet in the village lake....

Chandramathi, who began writing for the children's pages.... speaks of 'writing about the body well before women's writing and feminism became fashionable.' Like Arundhati, she finds the tendency of readers and critics to view everything written by a woman as autobiographical, directly connected to and lifted from her personal life, as being limited....

Similarly, when Arundhati Subramaniam talks of reading 'Prufrock' at the age of thirteen or fourteen and the visceral response she had to it, one realises why it was such an 'important moment' in her life. She speaks of the 'primal response to rhythm, image, to the patterning of language' that is essential to the experiencing of poetry; the desire to write poetry 'because of its marginality' and also because of its 'magic'; her belief that 'poetry is the most concentrated, simultaneous engagement with self and language' and that rage can be a 'kind of love'. She also returns to the point raised by Shashi Deshpande about the 'Indianness' of those writing in English and how you are 'never really regarded as rooted, as anchored, as robust, as organic, as someone writing in a regional language'. The idea of the woman-poet having to provide 'raw emotion', of not 'being woman enough' if you are too cerebral, all these conflicts are eloquently raised in her conversation with Jerry Pinto....

Which does not mean that the only thing the writers talk about is their lives. On the contrary. Process is integral to the conversations. What emerges is multi-textured and various. Vimala speaks of writing from 'a state of hope and despair'....

The other interesting thing is the way in which cultural and political histories emerge through the personal, fragmented narrations of individual lives. With the oldest writer in the anthology born in 1930 (Shafique Fatima Shera) and the youngest born in 1974 (Shahjahana), a broad spectrum of events enters the universe of the book.

Excerpts taken from SPARROW's forthcoming publication
Book details: Sweeping the Front Yard
Editor: Sampurna Chattarji
No of pages: 554
Price: Rs. 500/-



V M Girija
Malayalam writer

| Rain |



Not wanting to go out into the rain
lasts
only till one steps out...
as the finger that runs through tresses,
gentle touch that caresses the lips,
the ocean of milk
that swaddles the neck's conch-shell,
bright beads, broken loose
falling on the breasts,
a warm wave of pleasure
sweeping the belly,
the thighs,
the calves,
the toes,
as the pirouette of water,
as the dance of joy,
as the magnificent swirl,
of pleasure,
the rain...

Translated by J Devika from the original Malayalam *Mazha* published in *Jeevajalam*, Current Books, Kottayam, 2004.

Sculpting Lives and Voicing Perspectives

Zist Tarashi: *Sculpting Lives* is a photo exhibit, a collaboration between Point of View, Aawaaz-e-Niswaan, and the Photography Promotion Trust. Premiered at the Kala Ghoda Arts Festival in 2010, you can view it online at www.wix.com/zisttarashi/sculptinglives.

Sculpting Lives is “an effort to revisit and complicate the traditional relationship between the observer and the observed, and to allow women who are so often documented and catalogued in the public space to tell their own stories.” Sixteen Muslim women, associated with Aawaaz-e-Niswaan took most of these photographs at a workshop organized by Awaaz-e-Niswaan and Point of View and conducted by Sudhakar Olwe in 2009. The workshop was an attempt to give them, many of whom have been subjected to domestic violence, a sense of empowerment. The photographs, taken with basic digital cameras, document the familiar—their homes, neighbourhoods—with very few venturing

expect from former victims of violence. The images are interesting, the subjects are comfortable with the photographers who are not intrusive.

Maybe since the brief was to explore their own communities, they do not go into the unfamiliar, more glamorous neighbourhoods of Mumbai. They do not go beyond their ‘reality’—they seem to take their cue from other people’s perceptions of their lives. Even though they are telling their own stories, one wonders if these are stories about them told by others that they have imbibed and made their own.

The notes accompanying the photographs speak of the marital problems of the photographers but also suggest that the very act of taking these photographs has made them more self-assured and more confident and given them a new perspective.

Wave (Women Aloud Videoblogging for Empowerment) is an inspired idea of Sapna Shahani who directs the project, produces

30 Women 30 Regions
Videoblogging Everyday
Wave is our collective voice
for Positive Change



far from home—at the most a fish market or a bazaar. They have tried to document their families, daily rituals like cooking, eating, children studying, watching television and praying. The pictures are generally bright; there is no sense of unease that you might

WOMEN ALOUD
VIDEOBLOGGING
FOR EMPOWERMENT
aka wave



Sculpting Lives

the videos, and of mentor Angana Jhaveri. They have encouraged young Indian women from every state in India to voice their perspectives on issues that matter through video blogs each month.

All these video blogs can be accessed on their website www.waveindia.org. The blogs are very short and come straight to the point. They are on diverse matters, from female foeticide, education for girls to Khasi food and dance. They also have a training toolkit on their website to empower those interested in creative advocacy videos.

— Priya D’Souza

Passing Away of a Pioneer: Nirmala Ramachandran (February 9, 1936 – February 23, 2011)



Nirmala Ramachandran gave her first dance performance in the year 1947 when she was just eleven years old. She belonged to that era when parents of young girls wanted their daughters to learn dance for the stigma attached to dance and music had practically disappeared with the efforts of many individuals including dance legends like Balasaraswathi and Rukmini Arundale. Nirmala came from a family of music and art enthusiasts and encouraged by her mother Sivakamu, she learnt from some of the best gurus of the period like Mylapre Gowri Ammal, Guru Chokkalingam Pillai and Guru Swaminatha Pillai. Under the guidance of Dr.V Raghavan she submitted a survey of theatre-forms of South India to the National School of Drama which was much appreciated by E. Alkazi, the renowned actor, playwright and director. Nirmala was known for her 'abhinaya-geetam' in which she combined a vocal recital of padam-s and javali-s with abhinaya. Her passing away marks the end of an era of performing artistes dedicated to their art which went beyond gaining wealth, name and fame. They inspired a generation of girls who came after them to venture into areas which were not considered proper for a girl to enter.

— C S Lakshmi

A Voice to be Remembered: Charusheela Patwardhan



Charusheela Patwardhan was one of the initial news broadcasters on Marathi Doordarshan, at a time when there were no private television channels, and only government channels were broadcasting. In 1972 Regional channels had just begun, and people used to watch the news with a lot of interest. Charusheela Patwardhan started her career as a newsreader and put her stamp on it. Her clear accent, voice modulation, clean diction only added to her beautiful and charming countenance. It was a time when newsreaders had to read from scripts in their hands. Charusheela perfected the skill of reading yet looking straight at the audience. She worked with Mumbai Doordarshan for 27 years. Later she acted in some Marathi TV serials like *Swami*, *Avantika*, *Raja Shivchhatrapati* etc. She also did voice-overs for some advertisements. In 1983 when the Indian Cricket Team won the World Cup, the Maharashtra state government organised a big celebration-cum-felicitation programme on Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai, Charusheela compered this programme. And when Mumbai Doordarshan's News segment completed 25 years of broadcast service, Charusheela who was living a retired life in Pune, was specially called to read the news on that day.

On 12th May 2011, surrounded by family and friends Charusheela who made history in her own way, breathed her last.

— Sharmila Sontakke

A Continuing Story: Sujatha (December 10, 1952 – April 6, 2011)



It is a pity that actress Sujatha passed away in the year when K Balachander, the veteran Director who introduced her in Tamil films, received the Phalke Award. Sujatha was born on 10 December, 1952 in Galle, Srilanka, where she spent her childhood. She later moved to Kerala when she was about 14. Her first break came in *Katha Nayika* (The Heroine). She later acted in *Ernakulam Junction*, another Malayalam film, and soon drew the attention of K. Balachander. He introduced her as the protagonist in *Aval Oru Thodarkathai* (She is A Continuing Story) in 1974 and after that Sujatha became an actress much sought after. Sujatha has acted in more than three hundred films in Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and Hindi and was known for her restraint and subtlety in acting.

— C S Lakshmi

The Woman who Defied Fate: Lakshamma (November 1918 – May 25, 2011)



Lakshamma was not a public figure; nor was she a famous person. What makes her unique was that she was her own person. She worked and lived in a manner that allowed her to keep her self-respect and dignity and choose the way she wanted to live her life. Lakshamma was introduced to us by Vanaja Rajan and Govindaraju who have done translations for SPARROW and whose aunt she was. When SPARROW contacted her for an interview Lakshamma was 88 years old and she was living at Kamakshi Ananda Ashram, an old people's home in Nanganallur, Chennai.

Lakshamma was literally abandoned by a wayward husband and she came back to her parental home and gave birth to a boy. She trained herself to be a teacher and for most of her life taught in a school and was loved by her students. When she lost her son who had never married because he did not keep good health, she performed all the necessary rites for him and announced to the family that she would now move to an old people's home. At the home she was active in administration and management of the kitchen and was a counsellor to many. She spoke warmly and without any bitterness about her life and when the interview got over, she was ready with a gift of a blouse piece which she had gone herself and purchased for me.

Lakshamma died on 25 May 2011 at the old age home. She was 93. She had lived life on her own terms and died the way she wanted. They don't make women like her anymore.

— C S Lakshmi

Lady Behind *Bandit Queen*: Mala Sen
 June 3, 1947 – May 21, 2011



Mala Sen, the lady behind *Bandit Queen* and a passionate writer, is no more. She succumbed to her illness at Tata Memorial Hospital. The 64 year old writer, while in London, was diagnosed with esophageal cancer. She also had injuries due to a fall. She flew down to India for an operation, which was successful. But her body had become frail and she passed away on May 21. Film maker Shekhar Kapoor gives full credit to Mala Sen for his interpretation of Phoolan Devi's character in his finest film. The movie was based on Mala's diaries and on how Mala saw the character. Mala went to meet her friends in Delhi a day before she was admitted to hospital. She is fondly remembered by those friends.

— Malsawmi Jacob

Life with Politics and Poetry: Sheila Gujral
 January 24, 1924 – July 11, 2011



*When I'm no longer there
 Would you with your
 hands remove
 All the hurt of the poor
 Which I could not...*

...are lines and sentiments that Sheila Gujral has left behind. Wife of former Prime Minister I K Gujral, Sheila expired on 11th July, 2011 after a brief illness. She was 87. She was a well known social worker, poet and writer who had written books in Punjabi, Hindi and English. She received many prestigious national and international awards, including the Life Time Achievement Award from the International Poets Academy and the Golden Poet Award.

Sheila was a sensitive soul who chose to keep a low profile while supporting her husband in his political career. Born in Lahore, she got her Master's degree in economics and a diploma in journalism from Punjab University. Through her poetry, she spelt out the pain and agony of the Partition.

She is survived by her husband and two sons, one of them a Rajya Sabha MP.

— Malsawmi Jacob

Versatile Actress: Rasika Joshi
 September 12, 1972 – July 7, 2011



Rasika Joshi gave memorable performances in Hindi films and TV serials. She played the roles of Taru Fui in Ekta Kapoor's TV show *Bandini*, Tusshar Kapoor's mother in *Gayab* and a school principal in Shah Rukh Khan's *Billu*. She was known for her range and variety in acting. She also wrote the script of the Marathi film *Yanda Kartavya Ahe*.

People she had worked with have called her 'an extraordinary actress', 'a fine actress' who 'effortlessly portrayed her characters' and 'a very lively and knowledgeable person'.

Rasika was only 39 when she died of blood cancer on 7th July, 2011. Her death has deprived the Hindi cinema and TV of a talented actor.

— Malsawmi Jacob

Compassionate Social Worker: Sadhanatai Amte
 May 5, 1926 – July 16, 2011



Sadhanatai Amte, wife of late Baba Amte, passed away on 16th July, 2011. Her active dedication to her husband's social work is remarkable and she is affectionately known as 'Sadhanatai'. She has been dubbed 'Baba Amte's shadow'.

Sadhanatai and her family founded 'Anandwan', a rehabilitation colony for victims of leprosy in Chandrapur, Maharashtra. She had been ill for sometime.

She was 85, and is survived by two sons. The sons and their wives are doctors and have also dedicated their lives to social work.

Samidha is Sadhanatai's memoir that received an overwhelming response from readers and had to be reprinted many times. It has been translated into several Indian languages.

— Malsawmi Jacob

Do write to us if you come to know about a life, a book, a visual, a film or a song which you think must be documented in SPARROW. For reviews please send two copies of the book.

Positive change is possible only when we understand women's lives, history and struggles for self-respect and human dignity