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[Editor's Note]

This is the second and last Coral Jasmine Special Issue of SNL For this Coral Jasmine Special, we approached Prabha Krishnan who has recently brought out a book entitled *Self Healing the Self*, to write the lead article. Also included in the special issue are excerpts from the oral history transcripts of traditional practitioners of medicine, Dakshayani, the traditional bone-setter from Tamil Nadu, Pammu Hengsu, the birth attendant from Karnataka, Parvathamma, who practised as a traditional doctor in Karnataka and Pi Rothangi, a traditional (religious) healer from Mizoram.

Two book reviews are also part of the special issue. One review is of Prabha Krishnan's book and the other is Judith Cornell's book on Mata Amritanandamayi, known as a "hugging saint" who is on a mission to heal the inner wounds of humanity, entitled *Amma: Healing the Heart of the World*. There is also our homage page where we pay homage to Shafiq Fatima Shera, an Urdu poet SPARROW had the honour to speak to and include in our third volume of translated stories and poems and Abha Mistry, the well-known tabla player.

Do visit our website www.sparrowonline.org and do write to us.



CORAL JASMINE SPECIAL ISSUE

Her Healing Heritage

Many of us have grown up with women around us who were healers in many ways. There were always herbs in the garden and in the kitchen that took care of most ailments. There were also professional healers and medical practitioners who were called in for birthing or treating a snake bite, scorpion bite, jaundice or small pox or chicken pox. Before Reiki was popularised as a system of healing, there were women who healed pain by touching and meditation.



Strangely, when the western medicine system came in and was being promoted, the traditional medicine systems and healing practices began to be termed alternative healing systems. They were seen as alternative systems to western medicine and generally seen as unscientific and even spurious systems. In their article in *Radical Journal of Health* (January 1995) Malini Karakal, Manisha Gupte and Mira Sadgopal say that the development policies have medicalised the human body, especially that of women, because easily accessible, rational and humane medical services become unavailable to people. They also argue that women's indigenous knowledge of health care has been marginalised or lost, and their continuing role in maintaining the health of their families has been devalued. "Self-help measures and remedies that address women's ailments, passed down through generations, are being replaced by mystifying pharmaceutical and high-tech paraphernalia."

In her book *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Politics, Medicine and Historiography*, Geraldine Forbes talks about Indian birth attendants (dhais) in the chapter *Managing Midwifery in India*. She argues that there was a widely shared perception among the practitioners of western medicine that the dhai was unhygienic. In 1934 the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) passed a resolution at its annual meeting calling for legislation requiring the "compulsory registration" of all dhais and midwives. "By this act," Geraldine Forbes says, "reformist middle-class Indian women made it clear that they agreed with Western missionaries, medical personnel, and British authorities that traditional Indian birth attendants had to be replaced by midwives trained in western medicine and hygiene." In total contrast to this image of the dhai is the description given by Dr Julius Jolly in her book *Indian Medicine* translated by C G Kashikar from German, which Geraldine Forbes quotes. Dr Julius Jolly has characterised the dhais as "experienced and courageous women of advanced age and with

clean clothes before whom she (the birthing mother) may not feel shy, who have cut their nails and who cheer her with friendly words."

According to Geraldine Forbes the dhai performed several functions associated with the birth of a child. She has to be seen as a "traditional birth attendant" rather than just a midwife. However, the mechanics of hegemony constructed the image of the dhai as a dangerous one. Hegemony did not operate to change the system of health care but it turned the dhai into a social pathology. "Proponents of Western science, face to face with the dhai," Geraldine Forbes concludes, "had created an ideology, not a system of medicine. Science and medicine had been accepted by and benefitted the progressive middle-class; at the same time it undermined the legitimacy of the only caregivers to whom the larger population had access."

Beginning with late seventies it was generally felt by many women that what was most important was to deal with health issues.

The goal of 'Health for All' seemed an impossibility since development policies saw health services as being linked only to modern synthetic drugs, big hospitals and sophisticated western technology. This perception of development policies and health gave rise to efforts to validate a healing heritage that was available within the culture. In the preface to the compilation of local practices and beliefs concerning health by Vd. Smita Vajpai (edited by Mira Sadgopal), Vaidya Ramesh Nanal says that traditional medicine in India flowed through two streams, the folk (lok) healing traditions and the classical (shastric) medical systems. The folk stream functions in the villages and the rural areas and is "diverse and deep, having evolved over years and years from the local needs, bio-resources and culture." The folk stream also functions in a highly decentralised manner, Ramesh Nanal points out.

Women have been very much a part of this folk stream of traditional medicine. Many women's groups like Aikya in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, MASUM (Mahila Sarvangin Utkarsh Mandal) in Pune, Asmita and Bhumika in Hyderabad to mention a few, have actively taken up the task of legitimising the knowledge of women as healers and health has become one of the major issues of the women's movement in India.

SPARROW was able to speak to four women healers. Two of them are traditional medical practitioners trained in the classical medical system who have inherited the knowledge from the family. One of the interviewees has been a birth attendant by experience and another one has linked healing with religion. One interesting fact about all four of them is that they do their work not for money but because they consider healing their call in life. The trained healers feel that it is their duty to preserve this inherited knowledge; how much they earn is immaterial. There is a larger cause that they feel they should serve. In this Newsletter we share excerpts from the dialogues with Parvathamma, Dakshayani, Pi Rothangi and Pammu Hengsu. This is just the beginning of a larger project we plan to do on women and healing traditions.

— C S Lakshmi

Parvathamma

Parvathamma is a traditional healer, who gives herbal medicines, specially to women and children. She treats women for infertility, menstrual disorder, anemia etc. She has treated more than fifty women for infertility and all of them have conceived.

*Parvathamma learnt Naati Vaidya (traditional medicine system) from her father-in-law Vaidya Shankarnarayana Bhat. She was married at the tender age of 12 and became part of a family of healers. Her mother-in-law and husband Ishwar Bhat were also into herbal healing. Parvathamma has grown a moolikavana, a farm that has the rarest of herbs. At the time of interview she was 80 years old but was continuing to be a healer. Despite the fact that Parvathamma is a regular practitioner of traditional medicine in which she was trained, it is interesting to note that when she wrote a book it was called **Ajji Maddu (Grandmother's Medicine)**. Parvathamma lives in Vittla, in South Canara district, Karnataka.*

**Excerpts from an Interview in Tulu with Parvathamma, a traditional healer, by Tulasi Venugopal
Place: South Canara, Karnataka Date: 20 April, 2004**

Tulasi Venugopal [TV]: Please tell me something about yourself.

Parvathamma [P]: My name is Parvathamma. Born in 1924. Father's name is M G Govinda Bhat and mother's name is Smt. Devakiamma. I was born at Nellikunte Guthu, in South Kanara.

TV: How many children were you?

P: Ten; seven boys, three girls.

TV: Born in 1924. That means not much schooling then. When were you married?

P: When I was 12.

TV: Had you attended school then?

P: Those days, schools were very far. One had to walk seven or eight miles. So, I studied at home till the second class from my mother. Then I joined school. The school was started by my uncle (father-in-law) run by the Shiksha Samithi.

TV: That is, after marriage?

P: Yes, it is the first school. First Kannada School till the Fifth Class. Then till Eighth in the Sanskrit school.

TV: Your husband's name?

P: Ishwara Bhat, Dr Ishwara Bhat.

Q: Ayurvedic?

P: No. He passed LMed (Licentiate Medical Practitioner) Madras, and he learnt at the Ayurveda College.

TV: Parvathamma, we have heard that you have earned fame in native medicine and being a woman, you have great skill in it.... Who taught you native medicine? From whom did you learn it?

P: I learnt it from my uncle. He was an Ayurvedic Pandit. For all sickness, he used to produce medicine, from the medicinal herbs around. So with him, I learnt to collect herbs, show him and learn through experience.

TV: What is your uncle's name?

P: Vaidya Shankaranarayana Bhat.

TV: He too was famous for Ayurvedic treatment, isn't it?

P: Yes; he went to Kerala to Anantha Shayana and learnt from Vaidya Pandits for seven years, as was the custom, and returned to practise at home. He had three, four small children then. My aunty used to prepare native medicine. I was not married then. I learnt from them and practised after my marriage, under her guidance. Having helped cure several people around, my uncle thought of starting a Vaidyashala and bought 20 acres of land at Uppinangadi and cultivated medicinal plants in it for the Vaidyashala and started producing medicines. That time, I was married and I became a helping hand to him, assisting in the work.

TV: That means you were related to him even before you were wedded?

P: Yes; related from my granny's side. My husband was 21 years, I was 12. They used to marry off girls very young then. I was also learning music from my father. So at that young age itself, I learnt everything.

TV: So you learnt native medicine from your father-in-law after marriage and started practising and giving medicine. Meanwhile your family also grew; there were three children [then].

P: Yes.

TV: How many children do you have?

P: Three boys and seven girls. I used to give my kids the native medicine itself and never brought allopathic medicines from the hospitals. I used our Arishta (fermented decoctions), Kashaya (astringent), Moolike (herbs), this way. When my daughter had severe dysentery, my uncle directed me to herbal medicine. My son developed whooping cough, which remained severe for three months; but still we cured him with our native medicine. I did not give my kids allopathic tablets. They may have taken after they grew up. But I never gave them on my own.

TV: You were successful too?

P: Yes.

TV: You say it is good?

P: Yes, I do say that. It is my experience. For I prepare it myself at home and I am very proud of it; we prepare everything ourselves.

TV: Preparing all the medicines at home itself?

P: Yes; at home. I am eighty now, but still I have full faith in it. We prepare Arishta (fermented decoctions) and all the medicines—ayurvedic medicines, kashayas (combination of herbal medicines), as in yoga. Ten types of medicines. Ten types of Arishta, ten types of Asava (fermented infusions), Kashaya (astringent), Kattu (liungent), Dhavanthari tablets, Chintamani, Gorochana tablets, everything.

TV: Do you grow all plants at home?

P: Yes, all; almost all; jaikai (jaiphal in Hindi; nutmeg), lavanga patta (cinnamon, dalchini in Hindi) cloves, cardamom—these we buy from the shops too.

TV: How is Ksheerabala Thaila prepared? Please tell us.

P: Ksheera (milk) Bala— first we bring bala— Kurunthotti (Sida Cordifolia herb)—we bring a kilo of bala root, skin it; secondly, grind it into a smooth paste with milk. Then boil it with 1 *kudthe* (liquid measurement of 150ml) milk, stirring well, then keep it covered after it becomes cool. Next day again add a kilo of skinned and ground Bala, add milk to boil. This will be repeated for days. Thus, bala and milk—that itself is Ksheerabala—48 times; 108 times, when done, it is known as 108 Avartha Ksheera Bala. It is difficult to achieve that much. I have done 28 Avartha. My uncle had prepared 108 Avartha, they say, I don't remember. Thus cooking constantly, when it turns ghee like, it is known as Ksheerabala.

TV: Is it especially for pregnant ladies?

P: Yes. In pregnancy and for sprains. Also for heart patients given as Baladeergha Kashaya. Formally we used to give it for ubbasa—i.e. [wheezing] in Asthama patients too; it is important for pregnancy.

TV: How is it helpful for pregnant ladies?

P: It does not help in delivery; but it is good for the babies. And to lessen the fatigue of mothers carrying a child [in the womb]. When you add Ksheerabala to cumin (jeera) and coriander (dhaniya) Kashaya and take at night, it gives good sleep too. Baby in the womb will also be safe. Mother won't feel suffocated. Ksheerabala is very useful.

TV: You started with the Ayurvedic method when you were still very young, when did you start giving medicine?

P: I started giving medicine, when my uncle started directing me to give the medicines to patients who came home, when I was about fourteen years old. Then I never stopped and continued with it, even in my school days. One uncle asked me to give him *Tulasi theertha*, when he was taking his last breath. I gave him the *theertha* and his breath stopped instantly.* Tulasi is crushed to take out the juice and it is very powerful.

TV: For how many patients you must have given medicines? What is your speciality?

P: Around 500 maybe.

TV: For which cases specifically?

P: For pregnant women, especially for maintaining pregnancy, for small children, rheumatoid arthritis patients and so on. Applying *lepas* (the medicines that are in the form of a paste and used for external application are called *lepas*).

TV: To maintain pregnancy, has your medicine worked?

P: Yes, very much. Women past thirty also conceived after forty-eight days' treatment. Around 50 women have come to me with their kids.

TV: You must be treating mainly for menses problem and infants. For infants, what treatment have you given?

P: I have treated children with worms problem, dysentery, very weak children and those with asthma. Chintamani tablets mixed in buttermilk eradicate worms. I gave my children this medicine of Chintamani tablets and they didn't have any problem. Other herbal medicines too. Due to heat children develop whitening of urine—urine becomes powder like and with bad odour too. Halukashaya treatment strengthens them.

TV: What is Halukashaya?

P: Halukashaya is: to 15 gms of medicine powdered, add 4 *kudthe* water, boil and reduce to 1 *kudthe*; add 1 *kudthe* milk, boil again to bring to 1 *kudthe*.

TV: This is strengthening?

P: Yes, strengthening.

Q: Your house is named 'Poogavana'

P: Poogavana. [The Garden of Arecanut].

TV: You have cultivated a herbal garden there, I heard. What special plants are there?

P: So many special medicinal plants, from far and wide—all special plants.

TV: You take special care of them?

P: Yes; watering, manuring; some need water; some don't; such different varieties.

TV: You have treated around 500 patients, you say. How did you manage your household and medicine together?

P: We did not do much. It happens automatically, without a break or fatigue. People come seeking, isn't it, anytime; even when we are having food. But we are happy about it. My daughter-in-law and myself, we are happily engaged in it. People, even college students, come to us from Ayurveda College. They stay at Mangala Mantapa and conduct meetings.

TV: Mangala Mantapa is yours—it belongs to you

P: Yes, it is ours. Students stay there to conduct meetings.

TV: That is, they come there to study?

P: Yes. Now during summer holidays, ten to twenty people come there to stay for 10 days. My son has made all arrangements for them. People come from colleges too.

TV: What is your elder son doing?

P: He is looking after everything. Mangala Mantapa is a wedding hall. He looks after farming too—coconut, arecanut farms, medicinal plants, medicines, everything.

TV: Other children? How many years is it now, since your husband passed away?

P: It is fourteen years.

TV: Your whole family is dedicated to Ayurvedic school of medicine.

P: Of my sons, one is an anesthetist in a hospital; another is an eye-specialist. Girls are all married and settled in villages, owning farms of their own. They too give herbal medicine to their children but they can't prepare the medicine on their own.

TV: Studying in college is different. You have carried your knowledge at home itself. What response do you get?

P: Response is good. Everybody comes for medication to me.

TV: That means they are all fond of you.

P: Yes, they are fond of me, and I do not take money for the treatment.

TV: Can you tell us about the awards you have received?

P: First, in 1995, I was awarded at the state level conference of the Sthaliya Adalitha Paramparegala Punarutharana Parathishthana; second, Elinje Award by the Dakshina Kannada Sahithya Parishat, Moolky; Third, Hirija Janapada Chikithsaka award at the Akhila Havyaka Sammelan and

fourth, honoured with the Naativaidya award by the most revered Shri Balagandadharanatha Swamiji of Adichunchanagiri Kshethre. This was in 1996. There may be some more, but I did not preserve them.

TV: That means, you didn't have interest in it?

P: Yes, I didn't have interest. All this preservation has been done by my son. He has collected them. I am happy just giving medicines and treating the sick.

TV: You have earned so much knowledge. Have you ever tried experimenting?

P: Yes, I have that experience too. My daughter was once seriously affected by typhoid. She used to just get up and run. I collected Kumbala balli (ashgourd) tender leaves, mixed with cumin, made kashaya and gave her. She was cured in three days.

Another boy suffered from dysentery. I collected illikivi, vainganga and kepala, made kashaya and gave him to drink. It worked. Like this I have learnt to experiment.

TV: Have you conducted deliveries?

P: No, I haven't.

TV: You have treated infertile women for conception.

P: Yes, even now, two, three women are taking this treatment. I am giving them medicine.

TV: In your long span of life, have you had any special or great experience in treating people? Like people saying, 'Because of you, we have been blessed'?

P: Yes.

TV: Then please narrate such incidents.

P: The other day, one woman, who had conceived came and said thank you, that after many treatments, she had succeeded in begetting a child with my treatment. Such people tell others also and other people too come for the medicine. I am fully confident of my medicines. Of course, when there are other sicknesses, the medicine may not work. Similarly, in cases where gents need treatment, we give medicine to them also. For not conceiving, gents are also responsible, sometimes.

TV: Our common belief is that ladies are only responsible for not bearing a child. Though you have not learnt at any college, you know this fact about men. How come? Did you learn this from your uncle?

P: Yes, I learnt this too from my uncle himself. He told me about such problems in men. He used to discuss with both husband and wife and treat them, telling me the respective medicines. It has been very useful.

TV: What is your opinion about the present day allopathic medicine treatment?

P: Medicine is necessary. Even in deliveries, where surgery is necessary and is unavoidable, Ayurveda doesn't help. In such cases, I don't say you should not go for it. Ayurveda is necessary for conceiving, where English medicines do not work.

TV: Are there such examples?

P: Yes, many. I have seen people coming to my uncle, after all the English treatments failing.

TV: Your husband was also a doctor. Was he practising Ayurveda?

P: Yes.

TV: Have you been giving medicine with him?

P: Yes, I have; plenty.

TV: You have a clinic of your own. Where is it?

P: Yes, at Vitla, at Gajanur. There we used to give both Ayurvedic and allopathic medicines as per demand. At Vitla, he practised for many years.

TV: Your husband did not have any problem with your not having studied in college?

P: No, not at all.

TV: He used to take your advice?

P: Yes, I used to guide him in preparing Kashaya and oil as my uncle taught me. My husband also had seen and learnt from him. We both used to discuss together about the medication. My uncle used to prepare it himself till he died. Even till the previous day of his death.

TV: When did he die? What age?

P: When he was 60.

TV: Even now you are giving medicine?

P: Yes, even now. And I have never taken Allopathic medicine myself.

TV: Not taken allopathic?

P: No, not taken even in my ten deliveries. I took Ayurvedic medicines only.

TV: You have so much knowledge and practical experience. Have you imparted the knowledge to others? Written books?

P: My daughter-in-law knows it and practises it. So also my son and my third daughter. They know to prepare the oils too. Two of my youngest went into different lines.

TV: To preserve this knowledge, have you written any books?

P: Yes; I wrote a small book called *Ajji Maddu*. There are books already written by our ancestors. So I didn't give much attention to it. I don't have much time to spare too. But, now, I want to write one, as soon as possible, before I die. I want to put into writing everything.

TV: Do write please. Because, this is a very useful field that is reviving now; not known to many.

P: Yes.

Q: As a woman in this field you have been felicitated by many. Have you come across other women too in this field?

P: No, not much. In Vishavaidya (treatment of poison), one Mr. Aithal in Puttur has good knowledge. He used to come to my uncle too. Now, my son too has started slowly with it.

Q: Among women, do you know others who have been practicing?

P: No, nobody in Vishavaidya.

TV: Not in Vishavaidya, but in [general] Ayurveda?

P: No, nobody.

TV: Nobody? Being engrossed in household duties, I know it is difficult for women. But you don't know of any?

P: No; not even relatives who are interested.

TV: You were nearby your uncle...

P: Yes, from my uncle, I learnt everything. More than what I would have learnt for seven years elsewhere.

TV: What do you have to say about your life? Treating others, are you satisfied? Or do you feel you have to achieve still?

P: Yes; I am satisfied, because everybody that I treated was cured. So I always want to treat people and work in this field. I am never tired. I don't deny or grumble at patients, who come at any time. As for preparing oil, if people say they don't know, I happily teach them.

TV: You don't take any payment; you are happy because you don't ask for reward.

P: Yes; I don't. If they come and tell me that they are cured and fall at my feet, I am happy and satisfied.

TV: You are 80, now?

P: Yes, I am 80.

TV: Their bowing to you itself makes you happy.

P: Yes; the fact that they are cured and happy makes me happy. At night I get sound sleep.

TV: Music—you have learnt music, I heard.

P: Yes, I learnt and passed the vidwan exam. But could not continue with it. My daughter-in-law sings very well. My father himself taught her before marriage and asked me to bring her as my daughter-in-law.

TV: Because of this medical field, you could not continue.

P: I could not. Medicines, family, small, small children. I had performed at Music concerts at Madras, where my husband was attending college. Then at Puthur. Then I had to give up. Even now, if I am asked to sing a prayer. I do. That enthusiasm has not left me.

TV: That enthusiasm is important in life.

P: Yes. That is important. I can't sit idle. Now I am at my son's place. If I go to the village, I can't lie down, if asked to. I want to work always. Body strength might have diminished, but my enthusiasm has not dwindled. I'd go to the farms, pick up a [herb] and so on, something or the other.

TV: You say that will power is important.

P: Yes; will power is important.

TV: You say that we should preserve and continue with the Ayurvedic medicine.

P: Yes, It should not come to an end. Students should be encouraged to cultivate medicinal herbs and learn about the medicines. Ayurveda colleges can teach herbal medicines like Ekamoolike.

TV: What does Ekamoolike mean?

P: Ekamoolike means, one herb—i.e. karika grass. It is for wounds, stomach-ache, itches, red allergy etc. Mixed with tender coconut water and kept overnight and used the next day, it is very effective. This Ekamoolike could be taught to the present day Ayurvedic students. This help without spending money will be always remembered.

TV: Do you preach this to the visitors to the Moolika Vana (Garden of Herbs)?

P: Yes, I have taught many with all my experience.

TV: Because, when we have the precious herbal wealth around, our depending solely on Allopathic medicines, has made Ayurveda lose its importance.

P: Yes, Now take arishina—turmeric. Arishina is so important. Even after the menstrual bath it is used because it is antiseptic. We use it in cooking too. Such Arishina is made patent by the Americans. For vegetables like Brinjal and drumstick (Moringa) it is necessary; for cucumber and gherkins (thondli) it is not necessary as they don't cause sepsis [of any kind].

TV: What about Tulasi? What is its special quality?

P: Tulasi purifies the air around us. One spoon Tulasi rasa with drops of gomoothry (cow urine) is very good medicine.

TV: Lessens kapha (phlegm)...

P: Yes, lessens kapha and cures boils too.

TV: For menses problem, do you prescribe herbal medicines?

P: Yes; for that problem too. From chennekai, Athavyashashti—three types of kashaya is prepared. During menses, blackish, lumpy (clots), whitish, mucus like continuous bleeding problem medicine is given. For those with stomachache during menses, I give kumara— i.e. loksara as medicine.

TV: For bleeding?

P: For severe bleeding too, Fig tree root is cut, milk accumulated and if this is given for three days, it cures it immediately. My mother herself who became unconscious due to heavy bleeding was revived and bleeding completely stopped in three days.

TV: For pregnant mothers, is there any special medicine?

P: For carrying mothers, to stop vomiting, kadri beru, ginger, kothambari kashaya is given. Till nine months, kashaya is given. I have had this kashaya. Taken for three days a month, keeps them healthy.

TV: For bleeding, you mentioned the medicine and root of the fig tree, collecting milk and preparing medicine. Similarly for problems of menses and white discharge in women you must have given medicine.

P: Yes, I have given medicine.

TV: Can you tell us about it?

P: For that, we should bring lolesara—known as kumari in Sanskrit—remove the inner rind, add half rind, half kudthe cow's milk, sugar candy and a fresh egg—mix well and give for three days. It cures stomachache during menses, permanently. It is a divine medicine.

TV: Similarly, for white discharge, is there medicine?

P: Yes, there is. Use white dasvala—hibiscus—buds and root, make Haalu kashaya (milk decoction) and give it to drink. Similarly, take its flowers and mix sambar (salt) or coconut flowers' tender part—tender singara—grind well with sambar (salt), cumin, add water and take.

TV: This singara as medicine, is it good to avoid miscarriage?

P: Yes, it is very good for white discharge also.

TV: It was in the newspapers that a young girl has discovered this medicine. But actually, it is practised since ages, isn't it?

P: Yes, yes; it has been practised for long.

TV: For newborns, new types of oil are used. In ayurvedic method what is applied for infants?

P: We give plain bath for newborns till three days. After three days, garika (Bermuda grass, arugam pul in Tamil, dhob in Hindi, also known as dharba grass used for worship) ondelaga (brahmi), pinch of turmeric is ground into a smooth paste and applied before bath for ten days. This saves the baby from rashes and boils, even when they are grown up. Then for forty days apply cow's ghee. No other oil or anything else. When fifteen days old, infants should be given honey and ghee, the size of a tamarind seed. This is good for kapha. Like this, for infants, there are several native medicines called Ajji Maddu (Grandmother's medicines) in practice.

TV: Parvathamma, you have achieved success as Ayurvedic vaidya, in your life and you are satisfied. Are you also satisfied with your family life?

P: Yes.

TV: You are sharing your experience with everybody. You are a leading light, I feel. By sharing your experience thus, you have really achieved something. Some women, just limit themselves to the four walls of their house whereas you have had a successful life of 80 years. You are happy, isn't it?

P: Yes, I am happy, very happy sharing it here. In fact, I feel like still going on with my experience. But sometimes I forget as I relate....

End notes

(kuDthe) = liquid measurement of 150 ml

Kashaya is a decoction prepared by boiling a powder prepared using herbs and spices. This home remedy when consumed gives relief from common cold and cough.

Ksheerabala - A marvelous oil, it has a mild 'toasty' fragrance and feels very *sattvic*. Ksheerabala is a traditional nervine tonic used for anti-rheumatic, anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties, similar to Mahanarayana, but more cooling. It has been shown to be helpful in fibromyalgia, arthritis, burning sensation, central nervous disorders and insomnia. Good for massage and especially for Shirodhara and as a head oil.

Tulasi theertha- Being asked by someone who is dying to be given Tulasi theertha is considered an honour. It means the person trusts you and feels close to you and believes that water given by you will ease his journey to death.

—Translated by Shyamala Madhav

Pi* Rothangi



Malsawmi who spoke to Pi Rothangi on behalf of SPARROW first came to hear about Rothangi from her brother in law, her sister's husband. He had broken an arm, the doctor had not set it right and it refused to heal. So he went to 'Pi Rovi', as she is called. She massaged it and it became all right. At

that time Malsawmy thought that it was purely the traditional skill that she practised, and was not aware of its religious nature. Only while interviewing her she came to learn about the healings being connected with her Christianity.

Excerpts from an interview in Mizo with Pi Rothangi, a traditional [religious] healer by Malsawmi Jacob
Place: Lunglei Date: 8 December, 2009

Malsawmi Jacob [MJ]:All right, Pi Ro, please tell me your story, from your childhood onwards.

Rothangi [R]: I don't have much to say about my early days.

MJ: Just talk about your childhood.

R: When I was about 12 years old, I went to the fields with my mother. We are farmers. On the way my mother had a severe tummy ache and could not walk at all. Then I prayed. I said, 'Mother, in Sunday School we are taught that Lord Jesus healed many sick people. He can heal you also, so let me pray.' My mother was also fond of prayers. When I prayed, God answered. After a short while, my mother said, 'It's amazing, the pain is gone!' So she could walk home without troubling anyone, without having to be carried on a stretcher. She had said, 'I won't be able to walk home, they will have to carry me.' But she got well and could walk home. I was so delighted, with tears of joy in my eyes I sang praises to God.

MJ: Just a moment, what is your mother's name?

R: My mother's name is Ngurthangi. My father's name is Thansanga.

MJ: What village are you from?

R: We are from Thehlep village.

MJ: Where is it, Thehlep village?

R: Below Lunglei town, down there.

MJ: Can you tell me which year you were born?

R: '45 December 20.

MJ: Okay, continue your story.

R: I grew up and became a young woman, and I was led by God in faith. I was careful to obey my mother, and in school and Sunday school I was careful not to be a mischief maker. I used to do well in the Sunday school exams and got prizes. Was it 1960 or the next year I'm not sure—they appointed me as a Sunday school teacher in the Primary department. I was very happy, and the children I taught were very happy too. And several of us formed a group to support missionary work. We used to fast and pray. But since we had to go to work, we rarely had all night prayers.

MJ: What work were you doing?

R: We did farming. Then when I grew up, the disturbance (insurgency) overtook us. Then for going out to preach, we had to take permit and identity card from the [Indian] army. So we used to take those and go about with difficulty. And I got married in '67. My husband was posted in Hitesora, in a Chakma village. So we went there and built a new house.

MJ: What work was your husband doing?

R: He was working in Home Mission [of the church]. We were planning to build a church. But before we could occupy our newly built house, the army expelled us.

MJ: For what reason?

R: Some of the Chakma people who were against Christianity gave a false report about us. They accused us of hosting the undergrounds. But God revealed the truth. A drunk Subedar tortured my husband. He asked, 'Are you trying to convert the Chakmas into Christianity?' 'Yes, if they would trust in Jesus,' he replied. So he (the Subedar) was badly offended. He kicked him and hit him. He threatened to shoot him with his gun. 'Even now, your faith in your God is badly shaken,' he said. My husband replied, 'I am not shaken, in my God's name I am not afraid. If He wills that I become a martyr, I know the church will grow through that. I am not afraid of you at all.' Then the man said, 'If you are not afraid, come and stand before me.' My husband stood before him and snapped the front of his shirt open, causing the buttons to scatter. 'This is to show I'm not afraid!' Then—God heard my prayer from a corner of a house—that intoxicated Subedar bowed down in front of my husband. Then he asked us to let him live in our newly built house, and we consented. And they gave us food items from their supply, so we got to eat some good food.

MJ: Was there any bad effect of the torture on your husband's health?

R: Perhaps. His health went down but his illness was not diagnosed. They informed the post commander at Tlabung. He summoned us to meet him at 10 in the morning. So we went to Tlabung by boat. When we looked back, we saw our house burning. We went to the post commander. The

VC (village council) and church members of Tlabung were very caring. They had gathered together to receive us, and tried to come with us. But they were not allowed to enter the army camp. So we met him, and he did not say anything to frighten us. He said, 'If you go to Lunglei, bring me a New Testament (part of the Bible).' So we brought New Testament books for him and the Subedar.

MJ: In what language?

R: English. From there we went to Zotlang. We built a house in Zotlang and stayed there. My husband was appointed by the assembly [of churches] to serve God in the whole southern region among the Reang and Chakma peoples. It was a wide area. He had to keep traveling around the region. He used to go with Pu Vanlalliana, a missionary, who died a martyr. They were both very happy. They would inform each other where they were going, and pray for each other. Later, when the mission field in Tripura opened, we were sent there. I was badly travel sick, and kept throwing up until we reached Aizawl.

MJ: You were not used to travelling?

R: No. And staying in a rural area, we were not used to sitting in a vehicle. And when I turned back at times, our village could be seen from a long distance and I kept crying. And as I was crying, I was reminded about Lot's wife [who turned back to look at their town that God had told them to leave and turned into a pillar of salt] in the Bible. I prayed, 'Help me to forget the things of Sodom city, and to look forward to the unseen place you are going to show me because of your grace.' When we reached Silchar and saw rice fields, elephants, and many strange, new things—even beetle palms were not yet to be found in Mizoram at the time—when I saw all these things I thanked God. Then we reached the place of our stay with difficulty, we had to hire men to carry our luggage. We reached Duptoli village first. When they told us we could all choose a place to stay, my husband said, 'I'm not going to make a choice. I'll go where none of the others want to go, in God's own choice.'

MJ: How many of you were there?

R: Five. No one asked to go to Dupdolai, because it was close to Bangladesh. So we chose to stay there. Our friends were all reluctant to go there. Earlier, Garo Christians used to stay there. Stones were thrown at them, and they were beaten with sticks. They called it a violent village and were scared of it. And we stayed there. As soon as we reached the place I said, 'Lord, I praise your name because you are going to give us people who trust you from this village.' I prayed this way, and was answered. We faced opposition... But God overcame it for us, and we were very thankful.

MJ: What was the population of the village?

R: About 40 houses, I think, I'm not sure. And so we stayed. When children got ill, the parents would bring them to me and say, 'Pray to your God, and make this child a Christian!' and put them down on my lap. I put my hand on their heads and prayed. The Lord always answered my prayer, and they all got well. None of them died.

MJ: How many years did you stay there?

R: Three years in that place. From there we went to a Reang village. The missionary working there had to leave for home due to some difficulty, but there was no one to replace him. Besides, there was no one else who knew the language. Since my husband already knew the language, he was posted there, in Doko village. And even there, they used to bring the sick to me. Some of them had repulsive sores. I washed the sores with salted hot water and applied whatever medicine I had, and they got well. I prayed and applied the medicines.

MJ: What medicines were they? Normal (allopathic) or Mizo medicines (herbal, etc.)?

R: Some were normal medicines, others were herbs and things.

MJ: Did you know the use of those medicines earlier?

R: Yes, I knew them. It would seem that they had antibiotic properties. Like *Hnahkiah* (leaf of a tree, I don't know the English name) is good for stopping bleeding. And it healed their badly festering sores. How they treated such cases were—they cut the sore with a knife. And on the bleeding wound they put finely ground chilly powder.

MJ: It must be painful!

R: They tie that in a piece of cloth and knock on it, letting the fine powder fall through, till it fills up the cut completely.

MJ: Don't they feel pain?

R: They find it very painful, they scream loudly. When that gets blown up, they know the person has to become a Christian [i.e. it was not healing]. They would ask me to take over and I would do it. I used to be very finicky before, but after we became missionaries my finicky nature went away. So we were joyful, God blessed the medicines I gave them. Then we shifted to another village, Mipangrongba. The people there were of Kaipeng tribe.

MJ: Was their language different?

R: Yes, different. God gave me ability to learn languages.

MJ: So you learned their languages?

R: Yes, I learned them well. We stayed in a Reang village,

but not for long. I learned quite a bit of their language. Then we stayed in a Kaipeng village, and within a short time I could speak their language very well.

MJ: Surprising!

R: My husband is very fast at learning languages. When we were in Mipangrongba, a woman was in labour. It had gone on for three days and three nights. I just went there and watched silently. I prayed in my mind. 'Lord, unless they call me, I will not say anything. You know that I have not done a single delivery. But if you want them to believe in you, let them feel the need and let them call me.'

MJ: You were prepared in your mind, ready to do whatever was required?

R: Yes. They burnt sawdust, and chanted like the [pre-Christian] Mizo shamans did. They finally lost hope. After they gave up, they turned to me and said, 'We have called all our gods, and her husband has nothing left, all his paddy and other food have been sacrificed.' I said, 'My God is the true God, so I will pray, then the baby will come out. If the baby is well, will you give it to become a Christian?' I asked. They said yes. I put my hand on her lower abdomen and prayed. I rubbed it with my hand, and the baby came out.

MJ: Did you know that your prayer was going to be answered?

R: The baby came out dead.

MJ: The baby, dead?

R: Mm, it was dead. Then I said, 'it won't die, it will live.' As soon as they came to know about the death, their priests came forward. Their priests and their village leaders, whom the chief appointed as village elders, came and tried to take control. 'You have given this child for God, you can't come here,' I said. I pushed out those who came with burning sawdust, God gave me the courage. Then three women took off their sarong and walked over the dead baby three times each. They thought it could come back to life that way. Then they spat on its face. I made them stop that and pushed them away. I took the body and hung it upside down and massaged it alternately with warm and cold water. Finally it cried. But some mucous substance closed its mouth after that. I couldn't think of feeling dirty—I closed the nose and sucked on the mouth. It came out. After that it became normal. It grew up into a normal healthy child. Then there was a child with a lump on the neck. I asked God what I should do. Then I decided to cut it. When I cut it open, puss and dark blood came out. I cleaned it and cleaned up the child's body. I applied medicine just once.

MJ: What medicine?

R: Which I had got from Agartala hospital. It was powder. I

applied that and it got completely healed. After that they kept calling me to deliver babies. I did not count, though at first I did—how many babies I delivered. I prayed, 'If it's going to make me proud, let me not count them. Let only your name be glorified.' What I can remember is about 37. After the delivery, I cleaned up all the mess, like a servant. Cleaning them up, bathing the baby, washing all the dirty clothes, I did it all. After the delivery I stayed with them for a week to look after them. In an undeveloped place, where there were no doctors, I prayed, 'Lord, please give them a healer. Help them to become your followers.' God answered my prayers. And when some students who went to study in Shillong returned and wanted to learn about Christianity, their families turned them out of their homes. So they all came to stay with us. We planted tapioca and survived on it. And when we came back here, I was awed to find that God still wanted to use me. Now, people with dislocated and broken bones are healed by God, using my humble hands.

MJ: Aren't you working mostly on bones now?

R: Yes, mostly bones. But also muscles. Some of them could not walk for a long time and they got well again. After doctors could not do anything, they give up hope, come and say 'We are disappointed.' I know doctors can, and treat patients, but when these people come to me claiming to be hopeless, I can't turn them away. Whoever comes, big or small, I can't say no to them. So I say, 'Lord, if you wish to use my hand, use it for your glory, and please let me be with you.' I pray like this all the time. There was a government officer who was going outside the state for consultation. Doctors had referred him. He was given a vehicle and money. Before he went, I felt an urge from God, so I requested him though I was feeling very shy, 'Can I give you a massage first, if you don't mind?' And God overcame the problem. So the man returned the vehicle and money. I am glad you came to meet me and we could talk. But I don't deserve this! How did you come to know about me?

MJ: From one of your patients. How many children have you?

R: Three.

MJ: Please tell me their names.

R: The eldest is Vanlalthianga.

MJ: What is he doing?

R: He is working in the Higher Secondary Baptist School. The middle one is a girl. She doesn't have a job. The youngest is working temporarily in an office.

MJ: Do you have siblings?

R: We are 10 altogether. The rest have died, one elder brother and sister are alive. I am the youngest of the siblings....

End Notes

* *Pi* is used as prefix to a woman's name as a mark of respect.

—*Transcribed and translated by Malsawmi Jacob*

Dakshayani

Dakshayani is a traditional bone setter. It was easy to reach Dakshayani's place. It took only 45 minutes from Nagercoil to reach her place. And once near her village when her name was mentioned everyone knew her and gave directions to reach her place. She lives in a place called Athankodu. And her residence is called Vattavilai Veedu. She is a doctor, who has learnt to be one as a family tradition. That is, she has learnt it from her father, whose name is Narayana Vaidhyar. Actually she learnt from her brother for her father died when she was young but it is her father's name that is mentioned as there was a Narayana Vaidhyar many generations ago and his name has been given to boys in the generations that followed. She seemed surprised that someone would come from Mumbai to interview her but she was cool about it only saying that she was in the middle of preparing a medicine. She agreed to talk but would rush in between to attend to her medicine. She was making Kaya Thirumeni oil considered a panacea for all body ailments like aches, pains, wounds, swellings and so on. She did not have a board outside for everyone knew her. She has been practicing this for 48 years but she said she was not doing it for money but was doing it so that the knowledge she has inherited can last.

Excerpts from an interview in Tamil with Siddha Doctor
Dakshayini by C S Lakshmi

Place: Athankodu, Vattavilai Veedu : 19 July, 2004

C S Lakshmi [CSL]: Dakshayaniamma, there are very few women practitioners in the Siddha medical field and many have told me you are one of the most important among them. Where did you grow up? Will you please tell me about your family? Your father, mother and others?

Dakshayini [D]: I grew up in a small town called Melkot.

CSL: Melkot.

D: I was born in Melkot. When I was 3 years old, my mother passed away.

CSL: Your mother died.

D: I lost my father when I was 3 months old.

CSL: Is that so?

D: I have an elder brother—Yakshana Vaidhyar

L: Yakshana, is it?

D: Yakshana Vaidhyar. Yakshana. We are 4 daughters. It was my elder brother who took care of us and brought us up. When I had finished my Sixth Standard— in those days they never allowed girls to study.

CSL: Yes

D: But I told my brother I want to continue my studies. Then my elder brother said, "Okay. I will educate you." And he taught me this Siddha Vaidyam or Siddha School of medicine.

CSL: Was your father also a medical practitioner?

D: Yes, my father was a doctor. So was my paternal grandfather. It goes twenty generations back. 200, 300, 1000 generations ago, there was a doctor in Siddha medicine called Narayanan Vaidhyar. And that name has appeared generation after generation.

CSL: Oh!

D: And the last in the line is my elder brother. The younger son. Then I began to study this form of medicine, started at the age of 13 and by the time I was 17, I began to do massaging and smearing method.

CSL: This massaging, is it also a part of this Varmam school of medicine?

D: Varmam, and bone-setting... we will press the nerves. All these, my elder brother taught me. So, I studied all these.

CSL: How do you do the splints and casts when there is a sprain or a fracture? What do you use? Something like the outer covering of the plantain tree trunk?

D: I do not use all these to do the cast. We bring a clean cloth and tie up at those places where there has been a fracture or a sprain, and then tie it with flexible bamboo with holes made in it and we pour oil through the holes we have made and soak it. We use oil and soak the cloth.

CSL: Okay

D: Otherwise, if it is complicated, we will fill the spaces between the nerves with herbal leaves and tie it and they will tie them up, and make it stick and later make a medicinal cover with eggs etc., and set it right. You can do it that way also.

CSL: You can heal any type of fracture?

D: Yes. Many patients, who went to hospital and did not recover, I have brought them here and I have smeared oil on all the nerves and I would massage the nerves. There are 72,

000 nerves in our body. And from where do these nerves separate? From the primary source, from the head they come—these nerves have their origin there.

CSL: Okay.

D: From the head, they separate and go to the arms and legs. Now how does the nerve go all over the body? The sprains and fractures follow this route. We have 4 pieces in a leg. And our knee is one such piece. We have to see and test all that before we start our massaging or pressing.

CSL: Okay.

D: In this, there are 32 parts. If we do not take care when we press these 32 parts, the limb will bend; the leg will bend and will not be straight.

CSL: Okay.

D: Likewise, there are 100 parts in our neck. And, we have to take all this into account, while we press the nerves. Otherwise, the neck will get damaged. And all this I began to do at the age of 13.

CSL: You began to do all this when you were just thirteen years old?

D: My elder brother made me read the palm leaf scripts at the age of 13. My elder brother taught me to read them. I studied the scripts and began doing the massaging and pressing methods of healing at the age of 17. And in those days, they would bring in injured patients, who had fallen down from trees or were hit by vehicles. I would carefully massage and press those injured parts and I learnt all this well. Many patients would come then. My father had 6 brothers. Older and younger than him. All the six of them were good native medicine practitioners. All of them were doctors. And the children of those six people practise medicine.

CSL: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

D: I have one elder brother. First [doctor] was my father. [Then my elder brother.] Sashidharan Vaidhyar's father is my elder brother.

CSL: Okay.

D: We are four sisters.

CSL: And you are the youngest daughter?

D: Yes. I am the last. Youngest. That is why, my elder brother trained only me in this Siddha School of Medicine.

CSL: And not the others?

D: The others do the massaging. But they did not study the palm leaf scripts.

CSL: Only you did?

D: I read all that, because I was the youngest. My elder brother educated me and even when he went away from here, I could do everything.

CSL: Those palm leaf scripts, in which language were they? In Tamil?

D: In Malayalam.

CSL: Malayalam.

D: Ancient Malayalam

CSL: Oh!

D: My elder brother taught me to read them in Malayalam.

CSL: Oh!

D: We will keep reading those palm leaf scripts. The he used to constantly teach me to read it critically and point out my mistakes. He taught me massaging and bone-setting. He used to teach me where the nerves and the varmam points are, asking me to touch his body with my hand and press at each place and point them out to me. That is how I studied and learnt. And later on I became such an expert on those palm leaf scripts that I could reel off details.

CSL: Is that so?

D: And after finishing all this, I got married at the age of 20.

CSL: You were 20 then?

D: I got married when I was 20 years old

CSL: Whom did you marry?

D: Huh?

CSL: Whom did you marry?

D: A person called Ramakrishnan. He is no more.

CSL: Was he also a Siddha Vaidyar?

D: No, no. he had a lot of cattle; many people worked under him. His younger brother had done his BA and then MA. He got a degree when his elder brother was alive.

CSL: Your husband's younger brother.

D: They were only 2 brothers. There were 3 sisters. They were living elsewhere. His wife (the younger brothers' wife), she got a good daughter-in-law who ran a school. His son is a collector in Madras. Another one is an engineer.

CSL: Is that so?

D: He has a jeep, the government has allotted to him. She (his wife) is well-educated. She has done her MBBS.

CSL: Was this Ramakrishnan your relative?

D: No, no. He lived here and my elder brother arranged my marriage.

CSL: Your elder brother arranged it.

D: (Mistaking that I was asking her if she knew her husband before marriage and if she had chosen to marry him) We do not get married among relations. We are four sisters. Then the others will speak about our family and our ancestry.

CSL: Is that so?

D: It was not possible there. They did not let us out. So, we cannot go out to work. We were not allowed to. We did not have such facilities where we lived.

CSL: So it was a marriage arranged by your brother.

D: That is how it is done. We do not do anything on our own. We arranged the marriage of five of my daughters. They have no say in the matter.

CSL: So when you got married you were 20. How old was he?

D: He was maybe 30, 32.

CSL: And even after marriage, you continued with your medical practice?

D: Yes, I did. I was doing it here.

CSL: In Athankodu?

D: Yes, first in Athankodu. And here, it is almost 48 years, since I began to work as a Siddha Medical Practitioner.

CSL: For the past 48 years?

D: Yes, it is 48 years since I began.

CSL: How many children do you have?

D: I have 5 daughters and 2 sons.

CSL: How many of them are practising this form of medicine?

D: My youngest son. And second. The older ones did not get trained.

CSL: Okay.

D: My fifth child, my son, he is in Madras. He works in a ration shop. He has built a house there. My second son, when my husband died, he was in Madras. He was a driver, working for some MLA. After my husband died, I asked him to come here. There was no one at home. Then he studied this school of medicine.

CSL: One of your daughters is also doing the same thing.

D: Two of my daughters have studied Siddha form of medicine.

CSL: Siddha School, is it?

D: Varma Siddham.

CSL: Are they practicing Varma Siddham?

D: One daughter is beyond Adyar. She is in Tambaram. She has a house in Tambaram and practises from there. She has put up a board and all that.

CSL: What is her name?

D: Sasikala Bai.

CSL: And the other daughter?

D: She is Karuna Bai.

CSL: Is she also practising Siddha medicine?

D: No she does not. She has not been able to set up a dispensary. She is working in (High) court in the computer section.

CSL: Computer. Another daughter works in the income tax office, isn't it?

D: That is my eldest daughter.

CSL: But she did not study Siddha?

D: No, she didn't.

CSL: You said, you learnt this medicine system from your elder brother. You had many patients who had fallen from trees and got injured. Do you remember any case, which you found the most difficult?

D: There are some cases I won't take up.

CSL: You won't take up. You won't even touch such cases?

D: I will see. But only if I feel I can heal I will take it up otherwise I won't touch it. But I did experience something like that once. There was a marriage in one house. There were 8 to 10 people... The marriage was taking place near Guruvayoor.

CSL: Can we look at your hospital later?

D: Yes, you can. You have to climb down a bit this way. Then these... what was I talking about?

CSL: About some case that you had to attend.

D: Yeah, a case. What happened was, they brought that person in. He had got hit in the liquor shop in a brawl and about three inches above the navel there was a knife wound. *Kari* liver Varmam. It was a *Kari* Liver Varmam. And if anyone gets hurt at that spot, blood will gush out of the mouth.

CSL: Blood will gush through the mouth?

D: And third day, that person will be no more.

CSL: Okay.

D: Then, when they brought him, I checked him. I did not know where he lived and nobody was willing to give a vehicle, to bring the case here. I would have to pay then for coming back.

CSL: You rang up the police.

D: I did that on the eight day. We checked it that day and from then on we began giving him a delirium treatment called Sarvangam. Whenever there is deep wound or gash, I give Sarvangam. It will take care of things for some time. Then, on the 8th day, I informed the police.

CSL: Dakshayani, what is Sarvangam?

D: Sarvangam is a medicine primarily meant for delirium. Delirium is due to deep wounds. Sarvangam is the best medicine for that. There are four types of Sarvangam. If we get a fever and become delirious, there is a Sarvangam for that. Joram Janni Sarvangam. Sarvangam to cure delirium because of high fever.

CSL: Okay.

D: In this way, I treated him with Sarvangam for three weeks.

L: It is a curative treatment, this Sarvangam.

D: Yes, a type of medical treatment.

CSL: Okay.

D: Sarvangam is a panacea, a cure-all to control and subdue delirium....

The talk shifts to incurable diseases.

CSL: Filaria cannot be cured?

D: No. And I do not attend to such cases, which cannot be cured or controlled.

CSL: You do not touch them?

D: And, cancer, I will not touch. I will not treat.

CSL: You will not treat cancer patients? Why?

D: There is no cure for cancer.

CSL: You say so. But I have seen many people advertising some medicine for cancer?

D: There may be many medicines, but the cancerous growth will go on and on ad infinitum. It will go on for years and in the end it will take away their lives. That is why I stay away from cancer.

CSL: There is no medicine in Siddha Medicines for cancer?

D: Not any that I know. I do not know. So I will not treat them.

L: Okay. Nowadays women get breast cancer.

D: They get breast cancer, uterus cancer. All those are difficult to cure.

CSL: They can't be cured.

D: No, they can't be cured. It will prolong for days. We will give some medicine. It will subside but rear its ugly head again. Then it will become very serious. They might have to do mastectomy. (Removal of the cancerous breast). Not for me these things.

CSL: Do women approach you when they are unable to bear children?

D: Not for that. But there are medicines for wind filling the uterus.

CSL: There is medicine for that.

D: I don't give medicine to abort. All that we do not do.

CSL: Then what else?

D: For wind filling the uterus, we give nellikkai kirudham (a medicine made from gooseberry) and other kinds of medicines. First we will take out the germs and for that we give Chithadi oil.

CSL: This is for those who are unable to have children, to enable them to bear children.

D: But here, you have to take the age into consideration. You can bear children only up to a certain age.

CSL: Is that so? Come to think of it, a doctor in Madras has said even forty-year old women, can have children.

D: They bear children, is it?

CSL: Yes.

D: Maybe it works for that doctor.

CSL: But not you?

D: Once you are in the age range of 40-45, it does not work for me.

CSL: So you do not treat such women?

D: No.

CSL: But your speciality, the area in which you are an expert is treating fractures, isn't it?

D: I treat fractures and sprains. There is medicine for everything. But no medicine to extend your life span.

CSL: What?

D: We have no medicine to hold back death, not let life go.

CSL: (Laughing) But who has medicine for that?

D: There is medicine for each and every ailment....

L: So you have been practising this hereditary occupation isn't it? In your house after your brother, only you have mastered it and practise this hereditary method of healing. But your elder sisters have not been able to do that, isn't it? Only you have done it.

D: Only I am practising this hereditary system of healing.

CSL: Only you read those palm leaf manuscripts.

D: Only I did. But my father had 6 siblings. And even among the children of those six, among all the daughters, only I have done it.

CSL: Only you.

D: The other daughters know nothing about all this. But the sons have read the manuscripts. Dayanandan, Srinivasan. All of them have advertised in the newspapers. Sasidharan, some others like that they are my nephews. Children of my brothers; elder and younger brothers.

CSL: You have not attended to child birth?

D: No.

CSL: No, you have not?

D: I do not attend child birth.

CSL: Only these fractures.

D: I do only this Siddha Varmam treatment.

CSL: You are not a gynecologist. But after child birth, you treat the neo-natal mothers?

D: Yes, after child birth, I give medicine—like anti-infection decoctions and pastes...

CSL: You give all that. But you are not present at child-births.

D: No, I don't.

CSL: Why?

D: I am not comfortable doing that.

CSL: Do you feel it is not suitable for you to do?

D: It is not for me. I have never done it.

CSL: Dakshamiamma, you did not learn to do all that, is it?

D: I have not done it so far. And I do not know anything about it.

CSL: You are also not well versed in it

D: I have not done it. But there are medicines to be given during 10 months of pregnancy.

CSL: There are medicines and you do give.

D: After six months, I give Choolai Oil. (oil for the uterus). And if this is not given there will be fever every now and then, rheumatic pain in the knees, stomach burn, tiredness, heart burn, fainting sensation, breathlessness, pain in the limbs and all over the body....

—Transcribed and translated by Rajeswari Thiagarajan

PAMMU HENGUSU

It is very interesting how Pammu Hengsu has Hengsu added to her name for Hengsu means, a woman. She herself did not have an explanation for that. Women did not particularly



use family names or caste names with their names and very often were only known by their first names. Later, the educated, middle-class women began to use family names with their names. It is possible that the village people began calling her

as just Hengsu referring to her gender, as a short form for Pammu, the woman who takes care of the birthing process. Pammu Hengsu is a traditional midwife, who has helped many women in labour to have a normal delivery. After more than 80 years of experience as a midwife, she retired from her profession. Pammu Hengsu was 105 years old at the time of interview. Her eyesight and speech were sharp and clear. The only concession she gave to her age was a walking stick.

Pammu Hengsu has handled many tricky deliveries. Doctors attached to remote villages like Bayaru always preferred Pammu to attend the delivery cases. She would walk miles in odd hours to serve women in labour and stay with them until she was sure that the mother and the newborn were safe. Three generations of the villages around have benefited from her service.

The unusual thing about Pammu Hengsu is that she also helps animals deliver their young ones.

Excerpts from an interview in Tulu with Pammu Hengsu, a traditional healer and mid-wife by B M Rohini and Tulasi Venugopal

Place: Talapady Date: 1st March, 2005

Rohini[R]: Please tell us everything that you remember. From your childhood to after marriage whatever you remember just keep telling us about it.

Pammu Hengsu [PH]: Okay.

R: First, where were you born?

Pammu: I was born there only, in Baayaar, Asurgudi.

R: Your parents? Their names?

PH: My mother's name is Subbu and father's name is Diju Moily.

R: How many children were you all?

PH: We were five. I was the eldest.

R: At what age did you get married?

PH: I got married when I was about nineteen or twenty.

R: Thereafter... How many children do you have?

PH: Two. One boy and one girl.

R: Okay. You have gone into a profession which was unbelievable for women of those days. I heard that you were a traditional healer and midwife. Where did you do the first delivery work? Who initiated you into this?

PH: First, I learnt the tactics. There was a well known doctor called Keshava Doctor. I learnt it from him. Later, if he could not manage to go to do a delivery, he used to tell [people who came to him] 'Take her, She will manage' and send me.

R: How did he teach you all those things? Is it after you got children? Thereafter did you start this profession?

PH: Yes.

R: Where was this Keshava Doctor staying? Is it near to your place?

PH: It was nearby and for some period I stayed at his place itself. I used to go along with him to assist.

R: Later you began to go on your own.

PH: Yes. On my own I started working.

Tulasi Venugopal [TV]: Are your matrimonial house and maternal house in the same village?

PH: Yes. I am married in the same village.

TV: Would you please tell your age?

PH: My dear, my age may be over hundred....

TV: During that time how many houses were situated around your house?

PH: There were many houses. Ours is same house.

TV: Were there buses running from village to village?

PH: Buses were less. No. No. buses at all. No doctors were available. Our Urdu Dakane (a dispensary run by a Hakim) it

also started later. He was the only doctor for our village.

TV: Then whose help did people take during delivery time?

PH: Then I myself used to help in delivery. For example, I went from one house to another... each family used to have at least four to five women and I was the one whom they used to call for delivery. At any time, late night also they used to come to call and I used to attend to them late in the night also.

TV: There was no electricity in those days, isn't it?

PH: Nothing—No light, no electricity, everything came later.

TV: Okay. To go from one house to the other you had to walk miles in the dark also. How did you manage that?

PH: Yes. I was strong enough at that time. (Laughs) I went to distant places by jeep. People used to bring jeep—those who came from faraway places.

TV: That is in recent times, isn't it? But prior to jeep or any vehicles came to village, how did you manage?

PH: I just went walking...(Laughs)

TV: Have you faced any objections from your family members for this kind of odd working hours?

PH: No; never. My family members never ever utter a word when I go for midwife duty.

TV: Who were all there in your family?

PH: First there was my mother, grandfather...Then my maternal uncle and children as well.

TV: How about the house you were married into?

PH: There was nobody, only mother and son.

TV: Do you remember your mother-in-law's name?

PH: Yes. My mother-in-law's name is Akku. My father-in-law had died.

R: Your mother-in-law did not to object to your profession?

PH: No, no. No one has ever objected. And this... I was also called for helping cattle to deliver. When the calf finds it difficult to find its way out, I guide. And flush out the placenta etc.

R: How exactly did you do it?

PH: I put a hand in and try to make its way out.

R: At that time was there any medicine for avoiding infection?

PH: Normally medicine is given after the umbilical cord is cut.

R: How exactly did you do the delivery?

PH: As I said, when a calf finds it difficult to find its way out, if it is lying crosswise [in the womb] also, at that time I turn it

into the correct position and pull it out. Similarly, while delivering the child also I used to do all this with my hand.

R: Yes, sometimes legs come out instead of head. Can you explain a little about that? How did you deal with that?

PH: Sometimes legs come out; a leg of the child and sometimes the umbilical cord is wound around the child.

R: Yes

PH: In such cases I used to carefully remove that. And if the leg comes out, slowly... I pull it out and bring it out. A little bit of pushing and then I take it out

R: How will you come to know that the child is tied with its umbilical cord?

PH: I come to know. Umbilical cord does sometimes go around the baby.

R: And do you remember the hardest delivery work which you have done? Do you remember?

PH: Oh! Some cases are very difficult.

R: Did you have difficult cases?

PH: Some babies although they give a lot of trouble, came out smoothly.

R: There was no problem at all?

PH: No, no. Wherever I went, there were no problems, by the grace of god. In this year also, my grandson's wife delivered at home.

R: Okay. Was that work also done by you?

PH: Yes. A girl baby.

Other lady: Only she can do this work. She is alone in this village who knows this work and she goes to faraway places also.

R: Okay.

Other Lady: Her daughter had twins. Daughter's daughter. Of the twins, one child came out. The other child did not come out. But she succeeded in that also. She could do that. The child had died in the womb. She put her hand inside and somehow she took out the other child which had died in the womb.

R: Do you remember this, Amma?

PH: What?

R: Just now what she said about you, regarding twins. Can you tell us something about it?

PH: Regarding twins. It was I who did the delivery work.

R: Okay.

PH: Twins. I did the delivery work. Now he is big. He is my

grandson....

R: Sometimes while removing the placenta... did it cause any [infection]?

PH: No, no. Nothing. Till today. Not a single [time]. Nobody's [body] was damaged. No one has suffered due to that.

R: Okay.

PH: I have done 1500 deliveries.

R: Is it?

PH: Of that [1500] no one has suffered from any trouble. Not a single complaint I have had. No one has come with a complaint about pain saying, "It is paining here, it is paining there." Nothing.

R: Okay.

PH: Now how did Parvati go through that incident?

R: What is that? Please do tell us about that. Who is Parvati?

PH: Parvati?

R: Who is she?

PH: She is the wife of Shivanna.

R: Now you tell us about it. What happened? How did it happen?

PH: What happened on that day, should I say? She was [experienced], not innocent. She was resident of Phalathirtha. Her child was not coming out. When I started pushing from the front side, I got the leg of the child. If I had pulled it what would happen, can you imagine? I pushed it in and when I got the head of the child I caught it. She delivered a boy easily. Now he is a youngster.

R: When Brahmins invited you to do the delivery work, where did they make arrangements for the delivery? Not inside their house, isn't it?

PH: It was inside the house only. In a room.

R: In a room? At that time were they allowing you to go inside? Generally Brahmins...

PH: When it was necessary we used to go anywhere.

Rohini: Only at the time of delivery. Otherwise they did not allow you to go inside, isn't it?

PH: (Laughs) Nowadays people are not going up to the Gunda. (the section of the house where they worship God). But other parts of the house everyone goes. Nowadays they allow...

R: Now I am talking about earlier days. In those days...

PH: Those days were quite different.

R: . To all the Brahmins' houses...you went.

PH: I was going everywhere.

R: You spoke earlier about scheduled caste people. How many such houses did you visit? I mean how many houses did you go to for delivery work.

PH: To the houses of scheduled caste people?

R: Yes.

PH: I used to go daily to their houses. Nowadays I am not going.

R: Did you go to the houses of Muslims?

PH: I have been to the houses of Muslims also.

R: Christian houses?

PH: No Christians were there.

R: No Christians were there, is it?

PH: Yes, yes. They are not in Baayaar.

R: In the earlier days did women shout and cry much at the time of delivery? Is there any difference between women then and now? Nowadays women cry a lot at the time of delivery.

PH: Nowadays women make more noise. In the earlier days also women used to cry out. But we used to console them. (Laughs)

R: How did you console them?

PH: I used to say, "Enough, don't cry my child, don't cry, don't shout, don't shout. Soon you will get relief, don't make a noise."

R: Some women get pain for two or three days...

PH: Pain can remain like that...

R: When they have pain for long, how did you console them?

PH: I consoled them by touching them, touching their body...

Rohini: Is there anything to apply? Any external medicine?

PH: Oil is applied. Apply oil and give them herbal decoction.

R: Okay, it is like that.

PH: Suitable decoction; cool things.

R: Which oil?

PH: Apply coconut oil.

R: Coconut oil?

PH: Yes, yes.

R: Decoction of what?

PH: Decoction. Whatever is cool. Made with cumin (jeera) and fenugreek (methi) seeds. Cucumber seeds are cool for the body; it should be given after grinding. Thereafter, only decoction must be given.

R: Okay, okay. Do you yourself prepare all those things?

PH: Generally cucumbers are always at home. Cumin (jeera) mixed with fresh milk [is given]. If this decoction is given then automatically pain will reduce after sometime.

R: Pain will come down, is it?

PH: Yes.

R: Apart from this, do you also give tambuli (decoction made from a variety of greens)?

PH: We used to give.

R: Which kind of tambuli?

PH: Kadpadeyi...(bitter greens)

R: What?

PH: The vein of kadpadeyi should be removed and along with ginger that should be given.

Rohini: Okay. Okay.

PH: There is also talitappu (greens).

R: Talitappu?

PH: Decoction of talitappu is also a good medicine. Should grind it and give only the juice; it is also a good medicine.

R: Is it?

PH: It should be crushed and put in coconut water.

R: All these medicines are prior to delivery. Not after the delivery, is it?

PH: Yes. After delivery, there is no medicine. Nothing.

R: These are all prior to delivery?

PH: While pain starts; before delivery... These medicines are given for the child to come out smoothly. Thereafter, bitter decoction...

R: When is that given?

PH: After delivery. After delivery, bitter decoction should be given.

R: Okay. Will you please tell us, which decoction?

PH: Kajarvadi. With saffron etc. A decoction is prepared... One vegetable and decoction (properly boiled) should be given.

Other lady: Immediately after the delivery, so that the poison is not absorbed, hair [the braid of the woman delivering] should be put into the mouth and also a coin (¼ paise) made of bronze [metal].

PH: A bronze coin should be put into the mouth of the mother if the umbilical cord, does not come out. This will help to give her a vomiting sensation. At that time [with the pressure of that sensation], the umbilical cord slowly slips out.

R: If the umbilical cord doesn't come out, in that case we should do this, is it?

PH: They should feel like vomiting... Vomiting sensation is important.

R: ¼ paise bronze coin, is it?

PH: Nowadays we rarely put a coin in the mouth. Sometimes, we give immediately after delivery also.

R: So that poison does not spread all over the body.

PH: Yes, poison should not spread all over the body and also we give bitter medicine; before that we give the [bronze] coin to keep it in the mouth. Not for swallowing! (Laughs)

R: Bronze coin. In the earlier days it was in use. Nowadays it is not in use.

PH: Yes.

R: Why should the mother keep the coin in the mouth?

PH: Till we give the bitter medicine, she should keep it in her mouth so that the poison does not spread in the body.

R: After removing the coin from the mouth, you give bitter medicine, made of what?

PH: Neem leaves and kajira (black jeera or cumin) together should be ground and black jaggery, saffron, 4 or 5 seeds of black pepper should be added to that while grinding and decoction must be prepared. This decoction should be given.

R: Do you prepare this decoction?

PH: No. Their family members prepare.

R: Now after the delivery, as per your direction, they should give, is it?

PH: Yes.

R: After the delivery, what next?

PH: Next work is related to the child, like cleaning the child.

R: Immediately after the delivery, sometimes the child does not cry.

PH: It takes a little time, thereafter we should breathe hard and quickly on the crown of the head (topmost part of the head or skull). At that time, it starts crying.

R: People say the child sometimes swallows unwanted stuff.

PH: That is swallowing phlegm.

R: That should be removed, isn't it?

PH: That should be removed by putting fingers into the mouth. It comes out, and the remaining part subsequently comes out without any effort.

R: You were doing this delivery work. How were you paid for that?

PH: At that time?

R: Yes.

PH: They used to give a coconut, little rice and ten rupees. I never demanded anything nor did I insist at any time for a particular amount to be paid. All were poor. Therefore I used to forgive everybody. Sometimes they used to give three or four jaggery pieces, sometimes two pieces of jaggery, 1 kg rice, coconut etc..

R: In a month approximately, how many deliveries did you attend?

PH: Do you think it was just one or two a month? Sometimes it was more than that.

R: Two or three in a month?

PH: On some days I remember, I did not get time to sit at home. No one was there. No doctor.

R: Some women are barren... No issues for them. Is there any medicine for such women?

PH: No, I don't give medicine for childless women.

R: You only give medicine to the woman after delivery; only that you give. What kind of medicine you used give?

PH: Medicine like mustard seeds, pepper, ajwain (oregano), coriander seeds and fenugreek mixed together...

R: Did you prepare and give it?

PH: I used to also prepare. I used to mix them, dry fry them powder and make them into small round balls and I also used to add garlic to it.

Rohini: Do you remember on which day which medicine

to be given ? First day and second day and so on?

PH: Yes. On the first day bitter medicine is given and it continues for the next 6 days.

R: After that?

PH: On the seventh day Banal (an indigenous medicine) is given.

R: Which medicine is to be given on the first day?

PH: Ajwain (oregano) and ajwain's juice along with the meals. And mustard seeds, pepper, little black pepper, a bit of garlic, fenugreek should be ground and this uncooked medicine should be given for three days.

R: After three days ?

PH: Jaggery, after that the powdered medicine that I mentioned before, made into small round balls...

R: After that?

PH: After that coconut can be eaten, after 16 days; till then only medicine.

R: You can also use lotus leaves, they say, isn't it ?

PH: That is on the third day.

R: On the third day do you prepare a curry of that leaf?

PH: Yes. In case there is stomach ache, that pain will stop....

R: Amma, you have been felicitated in this village recently isn't it?

PH: Yes. (Laughs)

R: What do they give for felicitation?

PH: First they give you a shawl. Garland you and in a big plate they keep fruits like apples, bananas. They gave all this. They give speeches also! ...

— Transcribed and translated by GP Kusum

This is just the
BEGINNING of a
 larger project we
 plan to do on
WOMEN and
HEALING traditions.

Tiptoeing Towards Spirituality

My participation in the Traditional Science and Technologies of India Conference organised by Patriotic and People Oriented Science and Technology Foundation in Chennai in 1995 only confirmed what I was tending to believe for many years, namely, modern science while contributing a great deal to daily comfort, still didn't have the answers to a whole lot of questions besetting the mind, especially as regards to health care.

At one of the small group discussions in the Conference, there was this elderly woman from Tamil Nadu who had worked as a midwife for decades. She was describing in Tamil how she would deal with premature infants and I had the pleasure of translating for her.

She would take two freshly woven cane baskets. In one she would gather fresh, steaming warm cow dung. On this she would place the other basket filled with un-ginned cotton. The infant would be placed on this cotton and covered. The cow dung regularly changed would provide a source of sustained heat. Predictably there were horrified exclamations from the audience, which included doctors. Wasn't this dangerous? What about staphylococcus infections? What about tetanus?

The lady could only say she hadn't lost any infants in her many decades of work. I suggested that we could do outcome analysis to see if the method was as safe or safer than the incubators used in hospitals.

Similarly, neonatal jaundice was addressed by sunning the infants. Now however, they are placed in light-boxes, and their burns, etc come to light only when there is hand-wringing exposure in the media.

Currently, there is concerted effort on the part of the government to route all birth cases to hospitals. This is supposed to bring down the shamefully high rates of maternal and infant mortality in the country. But both these indices are the outcome of complex set of factors, not the least of which is maternal nutrition. Research has shown that maternal height positively correlates with infant health; that is shorter the mother, greater the chances of sickly babies. What hospital birthing could escalate is increased use of drugs, antibiotics and vaccinations—none of which elevate health levels as much as appropriate food, clean drinking water and sanitation.¹

Also in 1995, I visited the Tabor Divine Retreat Ashram in Kalyan, close to Mumbai.

This is a Christian facility that provides retreats of varying duration. Here I got to hear from a paramedical from Hyderabad, who had come to Mumbai to treat her uterine cancer. She was to undergo an operation (if I remember right at Tata Memorial Hospital) but not finding the anesthetist of her choice, visited the Tabor Ashram instead.

Here during intense prayer she experienced a deep gripping pain and started to bleed profusely. She felt as if she was giving birth. Subsequently, in Mumbai tests showed that she was cancer-free.

She claimed she had given birth to her cancer.

Women, feminism and spirituality

In 2000, I published *Health Care, Earth Care: Interrogating Health and Health Policy in India*. This work was sponsored by the Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT University, Mumbai.² Spirituality as the bedrock of human endeavour and the need for it in agricultural production and in health care was critiqued by feminists.

This issue of whether feminism had space for spirituality has been debated with considerable vigour in women's groups. Since the boundaries of spirituality and organised religion merged and blurred in so many ways, and because historically organised religion had oppressed women in myriad ways there was considerable resistance to including spirituality as a component of feminism.

Also, many activists have had searing experiences of the devastation of the anti-Sikh riots following Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination, and of the aftermath of the destruction of Babri Masjid to say nothing of the way religious sanction was claimed for myriad acts of omission and commission. So these women were resolute in their opposition to spirituality as an ideology that could impact women's situation positively.

I was somewhat disappointed that within most women's groups there did not appear to be an all-embracing view of health arrived at by vaulting over disciplinary boundaries and perceiving health as an outcome of ethical production and consumption systems. In my work as activist, I encapsulate this perspective in a presentation on **Ethical Eating**, which deals with the nutrition of the mind-body-spirit complex and expands on the need for 5 kinds of rest—**physiological** rest promoted by eating locally sourced culturally and seasonally appropriate food; **physical** rest promoted by regular exercise; **social** rest by eating ethically, that is, not depriving or displacing any under-privileged groups of people; **mental** rest as an outcome of meditation; and lastly **spiritual** rest by connecting to the web of creation, that is by nurturing the Relational Self.

Practical personal spirituality

In April 1998 I joined the basic Art of Living course and subsequently the advanced course in April 2003. I repeated this course in December 2009 in Mumbai, and in Bangalore, Pune and Gujarat. I also did the Blessing Course, the Sahaj meditation course as well that on Ayurvedic cooking. I am now consistent with the practices of sadhana (self education and praxis), seva (service) and satsang (group singing).

In 2006, I decided to study the Art of Living claims for healing as well as those made by the Brahma Kumaris and the Meherbaba Ashram. I was familiar with the last two and have many friends within these groups. My research was again sponsored by

Research Centre for Women's Studies and published in 2012.³

Additionally I included Nichiren Buddhism chanting, Muslim traditional healing, Charismatic Healing of the Catholic Church, as well as secular modalities such as pranic healing, reiki, crystal healing and the like.

The narratives of the women I met in the course of the study and my own comments on issues of health policy are taken from my book *The Self Healing the Self*, unless otherwise specified.

All the healers I met with continually stressed the desirability of that state of mind captured variously by the



terms *samarpan*, *shunyata*, empty mind, letting go, *kenosis* and the like. I liked the Buddhist formulation of emptiness as being full of freedom because everything else has been removed. It is spacious for all boundaries have been dropped. But for me, my college level science studies, my feminist activism, my engagement with civic issues, all emphasised my need to analyse, to solve problems, to *do* rather than to *be*. And I'm hardly the only one.

But as I progressed, I assimilated this truth, that if psychological work helps us find ourselves, spiritual work takes a further step, helping us let go of Ourselves—thus opening up space for creativity and service.

In *Health Care, Earth Care* I had noted then that there could be two approaches to health care. In one we could accept the Western or modern paradigm, where the body is viewed as a machine, prone to breakdown due to various causes. It can be attacked from the outside (infected), it can wear out in parts (degenerate, age), it can undergo trauma due to accidents and wars. Health care then entails antibiotics, vaccination, organ replacements, surgery, hospitals and specialists.

In the second approach, common to many Eastern systems the body is seen as home to a spirit, a life force that is elusive and unquantifiable. This entity has vast, innate healing capacities. To facilitate this capacity, we need optimal

nutrition, harmonious relationships and engagement in fulfilling work. In these systems death would not always be seen as failure, either on part of the client or the healers.

Health policy would then emphasise decentralised access to a variety of fresh foods and medicinal plants, as well as the safeguarding of local, natural resources and livelihoods. Local health traditions would retain their significance.

The globalisation project into which India has meshed, essentially denies and denudes the human spirit. We no longer see the sacredness of the earth and its resources and of our own humanity.

The narratives that follow illustrate one factor important in multi-cultural India—that when it comes to health care boundaries of religion and class fall away. Most of my respondents have expanded outside their birth religions, many practice syncretism.



In collecting material for this study I worked as participant-observer. For instance in the Mt. Abu CAD camp, I would get up at 4 am, get to the meditation hall by 4.30 am, follow the exercise, food and meditation schedule, appear for the small group discussions—in short do everything the participants did, except take drugs. Similarly, I attended the Catholic church Inner Healing Retreat over one Easter weekend, underwent 6 sessions of hypnotherapy, one each of pranic healing, crystal healing, reiki, multi-modality healing. For Muslim traditional healing I was only a participant.

Secondly I have not included any narrative not backed up by medical records to show that the disease condition existed in the first place, and that following the intervention by any non-medical modality, it was resolved to the satisfaction of patient and doctor.

Hema Ramani : Breathing for cancer

The Art of Living breathing technique, Sudarshan Kriya has been studied by many researchers. One such is Dr. Vinod Kocchupillai, from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, who made a presentation in Mumbai in March this year. She noted that the

study of the activity of NK cells showed cancer remission.

At this event I met Ms. Hema Ramani, who explained how her cancer went into remission following Sudarshan Kriya practices. She had read a paper by Dr Kochupillai which described antioxidant defense in Sudarshan Kriya practices. She felt encouraged to continue with the practice. Ms. Ramani had cancer of the tongue and later of the lymph nodes. No chemotherapy or radiation was prescribed for her—she is consistent with her breathing practices, and reads spiritual material. A senior living alone, she is cheerful and positive.

Vanitha Bheda - Muslim Traditional Healing

Peerzada Abid Quadri's family have practised traditional Muslim healing for 150 years. His son Shaqueer, now about 30 years old, is in training.

Quadri explains that all ailments that afflict mankind are described in the Quran, and all treatments too are to be found there. The technique of selecting a treatment is very simple. Quadri's assistants light a bunch of joss sticks and place these in front of the patient. Then they call upon various Muslim saints to help. The patient goes into a trance-like state, and in a high pitched voice, with much swaying starts to describe her ailment. Once the diagnosis has been made, she is called into the inner room where Quadri sits with black strings, coloured water, and an abbreviated Quran. The patient opens this book and at random places her finger on a verse, which the healer copies out in his elegant hand. This scrap of paper is made into a locket and worn, or dissolved into the orange water and drunk. Sometimes it may be burnt and the ashes stirred into water and drunk. Thus the healer's emphatic healing intentions are conveyed into the patient's body though the selection of the verse is made by the patient.

Does the technique work? Vanitha Bheda, my informant and guide, assures me that it does, striking through all boundaries of gender, class and religion.

Vanitha herself claims to have been a victim of black magic brought about by jealous relatives. Her husband is a tailor of women's garments and owns a small store not far from Qadri's house. Thefts, business slow down, regular illnesses—all beset the Bhedas for almost two years. Vanitha noted that even the name board of the shop became blackish in colour. She began visiting Qadri at the insistence of a friend, though she and her family had been observing Qadri's clients walk past their store for many years. Slowly the family health started to improve, and the business began to pick up. Vanitha claims that the shop board had improved in colour too. I made a point to look it up on my way back, and indeed it looked quite blackened.

Hard to say though if this was not due to pollution or bad paint.

Vanitha now volunteers her time with Qadri, helping with the chanting and guiding new clients.

I asked Qadri Saheb if men and women sought his help for the same sort of difficulties. It appeared that women were largely

concerned about domestic situations—childlessness, or sonlessness, more specifically, delayed marriages, intra-family tensions.

Charismatic Healing: Donna and Brendon

Some Catholic Churches offer Charismatic Healing. This type of healing may involve laying on of hands, much as in Reiki as well as "speaking in tongues"—that is, uttering words in no known language, said to be angels speaking.

At St. Pius' Church in Mulund, a suburb of Mumbai, Charismatic Healer Father Rufus Pereira was the parish priest. He passed away in London a few months ago.

Donna lost her first son after 11 days. That had been a normal pregnancy, and Donna delivered at the Holy Family Hospital in Bandra in Mumbai. On the 9th day the child developed fever and was put in the ICU, and died there on the 11th day.

Subsequently, Donna continued working though she kept falling sick. She even saw a psychiatrist. Later she developed severe stomach pain. This was diagnosed as due to gall stones and she underwent an operation at Bombay Hospital.

She had also conceived by that time, and was advised abortion, by several gynecologists, since the child could have mental retardation due to the drugs given during the operation.

There was family opposition to continuing the pregnancy, though Donna's mother was fully supportive. She went so far as to say that she would bring up the retarded child, and if he felt that way, Donna's husband could remarry. Donna and her mother accepted the pregnancy as God's plan. In the 8th month, Donna was admitted to Bombay Hospital with bleeding. Her gynecologist, Dr Pai said that the baby's movements had stopped and that he could no longer hear a fetal heart beat.

At that point she thought of Fr. Rufus. She went from the house of her in-laws in Marine Lines to Bandra to her mother's house. Fr. Rufus came the following morning. He prayed for only a few minutes and went to attend a phone call. Donna was dismayed. She felt Fr. Rufus was not with her. At this point she felt extremely ill, her neck would not hold up. She calmed down a little and felt as if a ball of fire was rolling down her legs. She felt the baby move and heard its heart beat.

Next day, at the hospital, the doctor said the baby was normal. Donna did not share all this with the in-laws. On 8th September while Donna was preparing to travel to Mount Mary for the annual fair, the baby was born normally. There was no doctor, and the nurse on duty had to cut the umbilical cord, which was wrapped around the baby's neck, and choking it.

Post partum, Donna bled severely for 8 hours. On the 11th day the baby turned blue. Mindful of what had happened to the first child, Donna had kept her husband home. The child was rushed to hospital with Donna and the others praying continuously. At the hospital the child was declared normal. This child Brendon is a 5th grade student at St. Stanislaus High School in Bandra. He is bright and active and far from exhibiting any mental retardation, he is a

scholarship holder.

Donna's second child is a girl, Clarissa, now 4 years old. At 3 months of age she developed a glandular infection near the shoulder. The doctors suggested an operation, but the family preferred to fast and pray. The gland burst on its own, oozing blood and water.

Dr R K Anand, pediatrician and 3 others at Jaslok Hospital examined the child and declared that the gland swelling had cleared with no remnants inside. At a conference in 2002, in this same hospital, the doctors declared that it was a miracle.

Khadija Saifuddin Attari and Rajyoga meditation

The Brahma Kumaris headquartered in Mt. Abu in Rajasthan are conducting a longitudinal study into the effects of Rajyoga Meditation on cardiac disease. The Mt. Abu Open Heart Trial is now in its 15th year. The basic premise is that the soul-mind-body complex has to be treated simultaneously in order to achieve regression of cardiac disease.

The Brahma Kumaris state that the heart which is not open is a diseased heart.

In addition to the drugs prescribed for heart conditions, patients attending the regular camps are encouraged to eat a low fat vegetarian diet, exercise regularly and to do rajyoga meditation every day. The patients enrolled in the study have a minimum of 3 artery blocks, each of at least 90%. Thus they are candidates for surgery, but through this programme they are able to regress their disease without surgical intervention.

All patients are taught to meditate. At the end of the camp there are 6 exit interviews, where patients can clear their doubts about drugs, exercise, diet, psychological concerns, lifestyle issues and of course, meditation. Attendees are all accompanied by their spouses.

Khadija accompanied her husband to the camp. The Attaris live near Bhuleshwar, in Central Mumbai, a middle-aged couple with 2 daughters and 2 grandsons. They appeared to be serene and helpful, interacting kindly with first-timers at the CAD camp.

In April 2004, on a visit to Palanpur, a town close by, Khadija and her husband were encouraged to visit Shantivan. Here they met the CAD programme staff, and were so impressed by the loving kindness they encountered there, that they joined the programme immediately. In all they have attended 4 programmes, and hope to go again in September 2006, to attend the World Congress on Clinical and Preventive Cardiology (WCCPC 2006). The Conference is being organised by former participants of the CAD programme, called Dilwaale (literally "the large-hearted").

Khadija was appreciative of the programme staff who, she said served them with love. Her husband has thrived on the protocol, losing weight and gaining energy. Khadija firmly encourages him to stay on the diet, keeping a wary eye on him even at wedding feasts. Over the years, his drug costs have gone down, from Rs. 1200 per month to the current Rs.400 or so. Did they find it

difficult to accept the kind of theology followed by the Brahma Kumaris? We see no clash, comments Khadija. We do namaaz regularly and also observe Ramzan. Every morning Attari walks over to the Brahma Kumari centre at Bhuleswar to hear the murli, and often shares the contents with her.

Shireen Kharras: chanting for a brain aneurysm

Nicheren Buddhist practices are simple. Chanting is the keystone. This practice is thought to help every individual to reach her or his highest potential. Nam Myoho Renge Kyo is chanted every day for at least 15 minutes.

In 1988, **Shireen Kharras** suffered a brain aneurysm. She chose to leave home late for work that day and so this medical emergency took place at home. She was admitted to Parsi General Hospital and shifted after 10 days to Hinduja Hospital.

Since 1983 Shireen under the guidance of her mother had been chanting. Even to get the perfect medical help, one needs assistance. The Boddhisatva of Medicine King was activated by the chanting. The Boddhisatvas are forces of the environment that are present in everyone and are activated by chanting. They come to aid and support.

Shireen was operated upon by Dr A K Jha, neurosurgeon who had returned to India after 8 years of speciality practice in UK. Shireen had exhibited no previous symptoms, except for the odd work related tension. Her recovery was rapid and she took the post-operative medicine only for 15 days. Following this, she had spinal problems for which she sought acupuncture and magnet treatment. Today at 60+ she remains active as ever and continues to chant. I got the best possible medical care, she said laughing, but for that to happen, you need to chant!

Zarina Mesmin and the Ocean of Love

Mehrabad, which is some 30 minutes away from Ahmednagar city, is home to the Samadhi of Meherbaba, known as the Ocean of Love. Many healers who are his devotees, appear to dialogue with him, and under this guidance achieve healing of even intractable cases.

Zarina is a bank employee, now 56 years of age. Her troubles began in 1992, when she underwent a hysterectomy. This was in December of that year. By mistake oxygen was fed into her oesophagus resulting in some 28 strictures. For three days after the operation continuously, Zarina dreamt of Shridi Sai Baba, and Lord Ganesh, though she and her family were strict Zorastrians. At this juncture she met Kashmiri Elavia, a medium, who practised automatic writing. Kashmiri told her that Sai Baba was her personal spiritual guide.

Zarina could eat no solids at all, and grew so thin and haggard that most in her neighbourhood could not recognise her. At the bank, colleagues pitched in to share her workload, aware that the job and the income were so important to her. Zarina is a single

mother supporting aged parents. The next 6 years saw her visiting all the major hospitals in Mumbai, such as Harkisondas, Tilak General in Sion, Parsi General Hospital, Hinduja, Bhatia Hospital and Tata Memorial, to no avail. A food-pipe bypass was suggested, and Zarina and her family considered this option seriously.

Finally she consulted with a neighbour, her mother's contemporary, **Vera Ksheshwala**. This lady is supposedly in touch with Meher Baba, the saint known as The Ocean of Love and had a reputation as a healer. It took six years for Zarina to heal. Every year she would be told by Baba through Vera that the next March would see her healed. Finally one day while packing her son's school lunch box, she heard a voice urging her to eat the buttered bread, which she had longed for. So strong was this feeling that she took a tentative bite, and then another till the slice was eaten. Thereafter her progress was quick.

Later she asked Vera why Baba had promised her a recovery every year. Vera explained that had she been told at the outset that the process would take six years, she would have been disheartened, and would have ceased to struggle as she did.

Zarina never went back to hospital for the suggested food pipe by-pass.

Shahnaz: Hypnosis and a clash of beliefs

One of four siblings, Shahnaz had always been ambiguous about motherhood. Not particularly fond of children, she and her husband had been definite about parenthood. They did not plan to have any children. But at the threshold of their careers, Shahnaz discovered she was pregnant. She couldn't contemplate abortion—as a child she had seen her mother go through the mental trauma of an abortion. Career plans had to be reworked drastically to fit in a child. The marriage went through a rough phase with neither Shahnaz nor her husband able to adjust their media jobs successfully. After a year of push and pull and mental stress, Shahnaz decided to quit her job to be a full-time mother.

Always troubled by PMS and painful periods, Shahnaz found the symptoms worsening. A gynecologist had diagnosed her condition as endometriosis and had suggested birth control pills. After three years of being on the pills, the symptoms didn't seem any less and there were other side effects. Her daughter who frequently got urticaria had responded to homeopathy. Shahnaz decided to try it for her own condition. The homeopath she went to was also a hypno-therapist. At his suggestion, Shahnaz reluctantly agreed to a few sessions.

At first resistant to hypnosis, she gradually found herself responding to the treatment. With the therapist's help she explored her attitudes towards motherhood and focussed on dealing with them as well as healing her endometriosis. After five sessions of therapy, her pain reduced by 95%. Interestingly, to my other colleagues on this project, Shahnaz described a past life regression with the same hypno-therapist which had a profound effect on her. She saw herself in 1832 (this date flashed on her consciousness) a child widow entering into a relationship that resulted in a child

that she had to give away.

Knowing this, I repeatedly asked if she had undergone regression, but she refused to comment on this. A practising Muslim, belief in reincarnation is anathema to her.

From Scientism to Holism

Much of the resistance to traditional healing comes from notions of what is scientific method, which is equated with inductive-deductive logic. In medicine this translates to "validating" a drug or modality through the gold standard of randomised, double-blinded placebo-controlled trials. This is not the platform for the debate of what constitutes scientific method and what comprises scientism. It is enough to say the authentic scientific method provides ample room for the simultaneous existence of many realities and many methods of knowing those realities.

The narrative below describes one woman's movement away from scientism to holism.

Dr C M Vani spent four years working in the pharmaceutical industry. After schooling, she took a 3-year course in Human Biology at All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi. She followed this with a MSc degree in biotechnology from Madurai University and a PhD from Center for Biotechnology, JNU in New Delhi, where she worked on protein refolding efficiency. From 1999 to 2000, Vani did her postdoctoral at NIST, Maryland, USA in protein genomics. She worked in the R & D Biotechnology division of two pharmaceutical companies Torrent and Intas based at Ahmedabad. At Intas as the head of the analytical division for almost 2 years she was involved in the production of recombinant proteins using technology from abroad. Their product was 99.9% pure, as good as that from USA. This compound though was known to inherently have many side effects when used as drug in humans. Vani was uneasy with this drug and many others which had the potential to cause more harm than good. Though a mainstream biologist deeply immersed in inductive-deductive logic and the gold standard of drug testing, Vani was always attracted to homeopathy and other so-called alternative healing modalities which cannot be evaluated by the gold standard. While in the US she attended a lunch seminar on acupressure, organised by Dr Robert Rifkin a chiropractor. She was surprised to find that Dr Rifkin was a devotee of the Beas Radhaswami sect. In Mumbai she did an introductory course in acupressure with Dr Dhiren Gala. She learnt acupuncture from Dr Sunita Kapur in Delhi. Here she was also able to get insight into clinical aspects of acupuncture. Vani's mother had experienced diminishing vision for almost 30 years. She is suffering from Uveitis. No cause was ever established for this condition. One prognosis was that the eyes would sink completely into their sockets and she would thus be blind. For almost one year, Vani's mother was treated with acupuncture. On the first day itself, the eyes came half way up in the sockets and during the course of the treatment she could slowly distinguish movements and colours. To date she continues pressing the relevant points and uses only eye drops.

Vani has had encouraging results with acupressure and

acupuncture with people experiencing a variety of ailments.

As a devoted practitioner of Sahaj Marg of Shri Ram Chandra Mission, Vani prays silently before touching a client, seeking His Grace and asking for healing power to pour through her fingers.

Commenting on her experiences with Dr Sunita Kapur, Vani recalled that a small boy, four years old, was brought in for treatment. He had been in a road accident which left him severely disabled. An expert acupuncturist who was visiting from Singapore examined the boy and declared that nothing much could be done for him. Yet with only four days of treatment with Dr Kapur the boy was running all over the clinic.

His sight was partially restored too, though he could not distinguish colours. Dr Kapur felt it was a miracle, but attributed it all to God's grace. She also remarked that when she used her fingers to insert a needle, instead of a hollow glass tube to direct it into the skin, she could better gauge her healing efforts. Her fingers were an indispensable diagnostic and treatment aid.

Today Dr. Vani practises acupressure full time.

To return to the issue of feminism and spirituality, in 2007, the Urgent Action Fund for Human Rights published *What's the Point of the Revolution if We Can't Dance* by Jane Barry with Jelena Djordjevic which describes barriers and breakpoints in activism from the perspective of activists themselves. Based on over 100 interviews with activists around the world, this report reveals the resilience and creativity of women human rights defenders, as well as the unspoken consequences of their work.

The authors' comments on spirituality are interesting. To them, spirituality is feeding the soul; it sustains all of us and takes us back to our deepest beliefs and values, to the source of our passion and commitment. "Spirituality is sustainability, because sustainability is about being able to do the work we love, while still feeling full and happy in every part of our lives. It's about feeling safe, feeling connected, feeling recognised, respected, and valued for who we are, as much as for what we do. They quote the activists they have interviewed who assert that "We'll never have peace unless people have peace within themselves. To really bring about significant change, people have to go within themselves and find peace."

I'm so glad feminists have brought the S word out of the closet. And the work of quantum physicists and mathematicians has shown that science is tiptoeing towards spirituality.

I have just one reservation—if we consider traditional Indian thought, the scientist is that one who has overcome the six prejudices of Kama, Krodha, Lobha, Moh, Madh and Matsarya.

Such a person is spiritually advanced, whose work benefits all of creation. Thus spirituality is built into the scientific process itself—no one needs to tiptoe anywhere.

— Prabha Krishnan

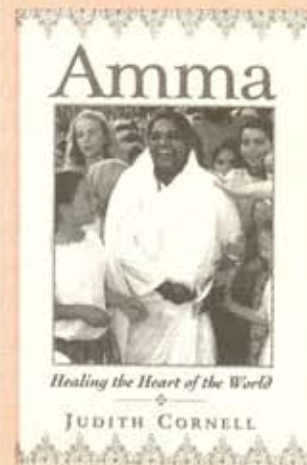
End notes

¹ 78 babies die in 7 months in Thane hosp[ital]. *DNA* August 17, 2012, page 1. Mumbai edition.

² Health Care, Earth Care: Interrogating Health and Health Policy in India. 2000. Kolkatta, Earthcare Books.

Etreat ³ The Self Healing the Self: Narratives of Women in Paradoxical Healing. 2011, Reasearch Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT University, Mumbai.

Biography of the "Hugging Saint"



Amma

Healing the Heart of the World

Author: Judith Cornell

Publisher: William Morrow

Number of pages: 271

Price: \$ 24

This biography of Mata Amritanandamayi, known all over the world as the "hugging saint," is written by an internationally acclaimed speaker, seminar leader and researcher.

"Amma" was born in a fishing village as the daughter of Sugunanandan, a fisherman, and his wife Damayanti. She was named Sudhamani by her parents. Sudhamani's parents and grandparents were devout worshippers of Krishna. Many strange stories are told about Sudhamani's birth and early childhood. Before her birth, her mother had vivid dreams of gods and goddesses. She saw Krishna in regal attire smiling at her. She saw the goddess Kali in the same manner. And finally, she dreamt that she had given birth to Lord Krishna.

When Sudhamani was born, her mother had an easy delivery. The baby did not cry, her skin was dark blue (Lord Krishna and Goddess Kali are portrayed as having blue or blue-black skin), her legs were locked in a lotus posture, and she smiled benevolently at her mother. Later, when she was only six months old, she stood up and started walking, and started talking fluently soon after. And when she was only two years, she started praying and singing in praise of Krishna, without being taught.

It is surprising that despite all these indications that she was an extraordinary child, the religious parents subjected her to harsh treatment and abuses as she grew up. They even stopped her schooling and made her work as a domestic servant.

Her own sufferings gave Sudhamani a desire to console others who suffer. "I realise my purpose is to console, to personally wipe away tears through selfless love, compassion and service," she explained later. She set out on a mission to heal people's inner hurts by hugging them. Her inclusive compassion and willingness to hug people of all kinds and races is remarkable. This is in stark contrast with the caste system and untouchability in India and the communal divide and racial discriminations widely practised in different parts of the world. Amma has also revolutionised Hindu temple worship by breaking tradition and installing women priests in some of her temples.

Probably targeting Western "Christian" readers, the author has pointed out several "Christians" who were blessed by Amma. And Amma is reported to have said that the greatest sacrifice Christ performed was to live in the midst of ordinary people, finally "transforming them into God." This idea actually clashes with biblical teaching. According to Christian belief, every human will retain their personhood, distinct from the Creator, even while living blissfully with God.

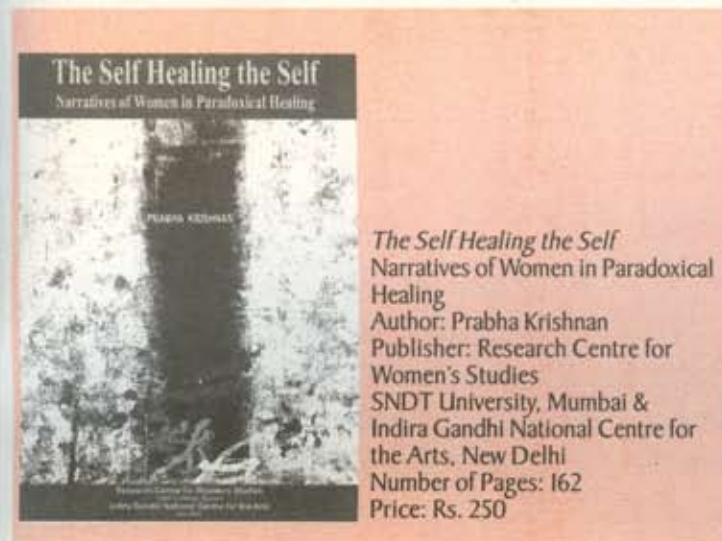
After certain spiritual experiences, the village people came to believe that Amma was possessed by Krishna, and later by the Divine Mother. She is said to have performed several miracles, including curing a leper. She has set up a hospital, built houses for the poor and built ashrams and temples in several places.

The author equates Amma to the Dark-Faced Mother of Europe's tradition, the Black Madonna of Roman Catholics, Tara of the Buddhists, and Sara or Kali of the Gypsies. These figures also relate to the ancient Dark Mothers: Artemis of Ephesus, the Roman goddess Ceres, and the Egyptian goddess Isis. Many European followers experience Amma as the Dark Mother. Indians believe that she is an incarnation of Mother Kali. Throughout the book she is repeatedly called "Holy Mother."

This deeply religious book makes an interesting read as the narration of Amma's life and teachings are interspersed with explanations of Hindu traditions and symbols.

—Malsawmi Jacob

Towards Holistic Healing



Most religions believe that humans are composed of more than the body. Flesh, blood and bones are only a small part of a human being. And there is a strong connection between the spirit, the mind and the body. But much of the prevailing health care system is concerned only with the body.

In this book, *The Self Healing the Self*, Prabha Krishnan raises critical questions about present day health care and healing systems and delves into paradoxical healing practices that offer alternatives.

Book Review

"Every illness has a spiritual dimension" she asserts, "Diabetes, for instance, is said to be the physical manifestation of responsibilities undertaken or shared unwillingly." Citing another researcher, she states that healing begins with repair of wounded emotions.

In the first chapter, Krishnan shows the contrast in healthcare between the Western and the Eastern systems. She writes that the Western or modern paradigm views the body as a machine, prone to break down. Healthcare then employs antibiotics, vaccination, surgery etc. In the Eastern systems the body is viewed as a home to a spirit, a life force that is elusive and unquantifiable, and that has innate healing capacities. Thus for facilitating healing we need nutrition, harmonious relationships and fulfilling work.

Drawing from the viewpoint of feminism, the author critiques the prevailing scientific method in the treatment of disease. She argues, as other feminist writers have done, that the scientific method that currently dominates research is reductionist and based on so called objectivity, which in fact does not really exist. Having observed the shortcomings of the western medical system, she went on to explore various spiritual groups—like Art of Living, Meher Baba Ashram and the Brahma Kumaris—besides other healers, to study a non-drug approach to health.

The findings are interesting. Some people seem to have been helped even by a dubious E-Guru who claims to have spiritual powers of healing. There is the practical traditional Muslim healer who solves people's problems with verses from the Koran tied into amulets. The patients claim that they are really helped. They are so convinced that they come back when they have other problems. Two patients the author interviewed were healed of critical illnesses through the prayers of a Catholic priest.

Shantivan in Rajasthan is a large complex of Brahma Kumaris group. They practise Rajyoga Meditation, in which the practitioners seek to see themselves as points of light radiating energy. The group runs several public facilities including hospitals, where Rajyoga meditation is used as part of medical care. A sect of Buddhism called Nicheren Buddhism teaches the Lotus Sutra that involves a belief that chanting can change life conditions. Persons from non-Buddhist religions have vouched for the effectiveness of the chant. Meher Baba, the saint of Mehrabad was credited with a number of healing miracles during his life time. A variety of modes, such as hypnotherapy, spirit guides, crystal healing, aromatherapy, reiki, pranic healing and others are also used by healers, through which patients interviewed by the researcher claim to have been cured of their illnesses.

The author believes that paradoxical healing methods are applicable to public health and that integrative medicine should be affirmed, but the systems should be strictly monitored.

Though research based, the book may be best labeled as spirituality on account of its philosophical stand. And though academic, it is quite readable and the subject is of interest for the general public.

—Malsawmi Jacob

An Urdu Poet: Shafeeq Fatima Shera

17 May 1930– August 13, 2012



Shafeeq Fatima Shera, well known and much anthologised Urdu poet, passed away on August 13, 2012 at age 82 in Hyderabad. She was given Ghalib Award in 2007.

Though her father was a Master's degree holder, he did not allow his daughter to go to school because he believed that Western education would destroy her creativity. So she was taught Persian by her mother and Arabic by a tutor at home. She also acquired knowledge of Quranic exegesis and Islamic traditions. However, after the Partition she got a Master's degree in Urdu.

During their stay in Aurangabad she also picked up Hindi, Marathi and Dakkani and her grounding in Persian and Arabic combined with her knowledge of the Quran added depth to her poetry and provided a unique flavour to her language.

Shafeeq's poems and interview are included in SPARROW's anthology *Sweeping the Front Yard: Poems and Stories of Women* in English, Malayalam, Telugu and Urdu.

– Malsawmi Jacob

A Tabla Maestro: Aban Mistry

1940– September 30, 2012



Aban Mistry, a musician and scholar, known as the first woman solo tabla player in India, passed away in Mumbai on 30th September evening. She was 72.

Mistry was initiated into classical vocal music by her aunt at the age of four, and later took to the tabla. A disciple of Pt Laxmanrao Bodas and Keki Jijina, she also learnt the sitar and Kathak dance.

She was not only an exceptional tabla player, but a researcher on percussion as well. She wrote three books—*Pakhawaj and Tabla: History, Schools and Traditions*, *Tablé ki bandishein* and *The Contribution of Parsis to Indian Classical Music*. Her book on the tabla and the pakhawaj took her ten years of research, and experts say it will remain an invaluable reference book for generations of students.

– 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 2 copies of the book.

Book Release



C S Lakshmi & Dr Vrinda Nabar

Sweeping the Front Yard, an anthology of women writers published by SPARROW was launched at Kitab Khana, Fort, on 28th September, 2012. This is the third in a series of five volumes to be published by SPARROW with the support of Prince Claus Fund. This volume contains selected works of writers from Malayalam, Urdu, Telugu and English, along with interviews of the writers.

The launch took place at a function of poetry reading titled Poets for Peace: Women's Voices, a chapter of a global movement called 100 Thousand Poets for Change curated by poet Menka Shivdasani.

Dr C S Lakshmi, Director of SPARROW spoke a few words about working on the book. Dr Vrinda Nabar, noted writer and former Chair of English at the University of Bombay, released the book. The editor, Sampurna Chatterji, gave a talk on her experiences of editing the volume. Anitha Thampi, one of the Malayalam writers included in the anthology, read her poems.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Hearty Congratulations to Sudha Arora, Suryabala, Achala Nagar and Leena Mehendale for winning Rajiya Stree Hindi Sevi Samman award given by Maharashtra Sahitya Academy! The Award function was held in Indian Merchants Chamber on 14th September 2012 in a packed hall in the presence of eminent professors and Hindi, Urdu and Marathi writers and poets.



Sudhaji, we are proud of you!