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CONTENTS

Editor's Note

Article: Patriarchy, Women's Freedom and Capitalism &
The Official Emergency Continues—The Ordinance on Sexual Assault..... 3-7
— Kavita Krishnan & Pratiksha Baxi

Poem:

Apologies for being born a woman..... 7
— Nazreen Fazal

Events:

Ethiraj College and Pengal Sandippu—A Day of Deliberation on
Sexual Cultures and Sexual Violence..... 8
— A Mangai

Screening of a film & SPARROW participates in Bombay Book Fair

Book Review:

*Scripting the Change: Selected Writings of Anuradha Ghandhy &
Understanding Gandhi: Gandhians in Conversation with Fred Blum* 9-12
— Roshan G Shahani

Sons & Mothers:

Invisible Support & A Journey Through the Wind..... 13-17
— Perumal Murugan

Blasphemous Lines for Mother 17
— Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih

Homage:

Kamala Sadagopan, Sankaralingam Jagannathan,
Dr Lotika Sarkar, Seetha Doraiswamy & Sukumari 18-20
— C S Lakshmi

[Editor's Note]

There is a general impression that the Nirbhaya incident of Delhi has for the first time brought women from various walks of life to the streets protesting against rape and violence. But the truth is that violence has always been a part of women's life and it has been an issue that has been taken up by many women and women's organisations for the past so many years. The politics of violence has been such that every time a woman voiced it, she was somehow made to feel that it was something she had to live with; voicing it would mean "dishonour" to her and not to the perpetrator of violence. Whether it is domestic violence which includes battering, dowry deaths and marital rape or political violence in the public sphere where women's bodies are used as fields to destroy, to assert the power of a community or a caste or a group or officials in power or the army, violence has continued unabated despite protests and demands for justice.

Rape is not a new issue. It is an issue that refuses to die. Mathura, a young tribal girl from Chandrapur district of Maharashtra, went to the police station in 1972, to file a complaint against a missing husband and was raped by two policemen who were later acquitted. Mathura's case which came up for hearing in 1974 became later a part of the annals of Indian jurisprudence. With it began a whole new movement for reform in law. The rape law was amended

in 1983. In 1984, cruelty against women was made a crime. Dowry death was made an offence in 1986. It looked like armed with these laws women could face the future without any fear. But this has remained a futile hope.

Writing about the case of Anjana Mishra who was gang-raped in Cuttack because she dared to file a complaint against Inderjeet Roy, the Advocate General, Indra Jaising said in 1999, "The truth is that despite a range of new laws, the status of women has declined and the legal machinery must take a fair share of the blame." (*Indian Express*, January 20, 1999).

Tata Institute of Social Sciences brought out a report in 2001 on violence against women, which clearly concluded that violence still remains a serious issue to be tackled. Akshara in Mumbai has been working in multiple ways for the past sixteen years on gender justice specifically on violence against women. Alochana in Bangalore and Anweshi in Kerala have also been dealing with the issue of violence and making a concerted effort to bring to light the reality of the situation.

The Nirbhaya incident has only brought forth bitter memories of our continuing struggle. And with every incident arise the comments of "wise" men who tell women to behave telling them about Lakshman rekhas and Sitas. This issue of SNL has attempted to take stock of the discussions on the issue of violence after the Nirbhaya incident. Articles by Kavitha Krishnan and Pratiksha Baxi which appeared in <http://kafila.org/> have been reprinted. The two book reviews in the current issue also, in a certain sense, have to do with violence as a factor in the present times.

The death of a mother is something that affects the family whatever the age of the children. The mother-daughter relationship has been much celebrated and written about. Perumal Murugan is a well-known Tamil writer and has written some very sensitive novels about life and living in smaller towns in Tamil Nadu. Recently he wrote two articles on the death of his mother and his sense of loss and the caste factor which loomed large when decisions had to be taken about her cremation. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih lives in Shillong. He belongs to the Khasi tribe and writes poems and short fiction in both Khasi and English. In 2001 he wrote an unusual poem on his mother. The articles and the poem have been chosen for this SNL for a special section called Mothers and Sons.

Every SNL brings with it news of death of people who have lived life on their own terms and have thus contributed to our lives. In paying homage to them we remember them and celebrate their lives.

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

—CS Lakshmi



We congratulate Thokchom Ramani Devi for receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award of the second Times of India Social Impact Awards from the President of India, Pranab Mukherjee. Eighty-three-year-old Thokchom Ramani Leima received the award with four other women members namely Ak Janaki Leima, L Memchoubi Devi, Y Leirik Leima and M. Purnimashi Leima of Meira Paibi, the fearless group of women from Manipur. The award was shared with the Naga Mothers Association of Nagaland. The two groups have battled social evils like alcoholism and drug abuse, and spearheaded peace efforts in the insurgency-ridden region. The news of the award brings back happy memories of the days we spent with her making a film on her and her work.



We congratulate Shefalika Verma who is known as the 'Mahadevi of Maithili', for receiving the Sahitya Akedami award for the year 2012, for her autobiography *Kist-Kist Jeevan*. After meeting her at the Writers' Camp organised by SPARROW at Kashid Beach Resort in 2006, we were looking forward to her autobiography. We are happy it has won a prestigious award.

Congratulations!



<http://kafila.org/>

Patriarchy, Women's Freedom and Capitalism: Kavita Krishnan



Kavita Krishnan is Secretary of All India Progressive Womens Association (AIPWA)

(This article began as a rejoinder to Hindi columnist Raj Kishor [Vaam se dakshin tak ek hi tark, ('The same argument from Left to Right'), Rashtriya Sahara, January 13 2013], but it has also provided an occasion to address some common misconceptions about women's freedom and capitalism.)

When women demand 'freedom,' why does it immediately raise the spectre of 'licentiousness'? Why, in other words, is women's freedom automatically taken by many as equivalent with 'licence,' whereas the similar freedom on the part of men is never branded as 'licence'?

This question arose in my mind after reading a piece by Hindi columnist Raj Kishor. Raj Kishor's argument is that those—from Left leaders like I, to those whom he sees as representatives of the market—who are calling for women's freedom are 'consigning women into the fire of capitalism.' When he hears me use the word 'azaadi' (freedom) he calls such freedom 'utshrnkhalta' (literally 'unbridled-ness', or licentiousness). He says and I, and the capitalist market alike, are calling for women to be free to 'break all bounds of licentiousness' if they so choose. Of course, Raj Kishor anticipates my criticism of his use of the word 'utshrnkhalta', since he says that is a word that 'has feminists up in arms, demanding with red (infuriated) eyes the definition of 'utshrnkhalta'.

For the Mohan Bhagwats and Asarams and Vijayvargeeyas to speak of women's freedom as the crossing of moral 'lakshman rekhas' is no surprise. But when a progressive columnist like Raj Kishor speaks of 'crossing the limits of licentiousness' when he hears talk of women's freedom, it makes one pause: the more so, because he couches his opinion in terms of his opposition to capitalism, rather than a defence of hidebound Indian tradition or feudal values, to which he expresses his opposition. In other words, since the argument is couched in the 'left' vocabulary of anti-capitalism, it calls for a more detailed reply.

Raj Kishore asks if any thinking person can support the notion of women's freedom that has become the 'ideological fashion,' declaring that 'this latest edition of women's freedom is waving its flag in the air, and has set out to conquer India.' He quotes from a speech of mine (having called me a representative of 'revolution'), the lines demanding that we safeguard the freedom of a woman to access public spaces, at any time of day or night, alone or not, irrespective of what she wears. He then quotes actress Priyanka Chopra (whom he calls the representative of 'counter-revolution' or the capitalist market) saying that the political class cannot set limits on whether a woman will 'dent and paint' or have a boyfriend or dance on TV. Raj Kishor thinks 'licentiousness' when he hears such calls for freedom. But he misses the main point being made. Priyanka, I, and countless other girls on the streets with placards saying 'Don't teach us how to rape/ teach your sons not to rape' were saying, simply, that women's clothes or behaviour cannot be blamed for rape; and that women should be able to exercise choices and access public spaces on par with men—without having to fear sexual violence. Raj Kishor forgets that men can strip off their shirts, display six-pack abs, unzip their pants to relieve themselves on the street—without being told that such actions may 'invite' or 'provoke' sexual violence. Why, then, is it acceptable to tell women otherwise?

It is strange that Raj Kishor sees Priyanka Chopra—a woman who like most people in the world, earns her living in the capitalist market—as a representative of capitalism, instead of the rather more obvious representatives—the capitalists themselves! Do India's capitalists generally advocate freedom for women? Industrialist Naveen Jindal, also a ruling party MP from Haryana defended the 'new direction' given to society by khap panchayats (that pass diktats on same gotra and inter-caste marriages). Another leading industrialist Ashok Todi went to great lengths to break up his daughter's marriage with a Muslim man, resulting eventually in Rizwan-ur Rehman's suspicious death. The Indian variant of capitalism is known for its cozy coexistence with the abhorrent institution of caste (which itself is a pillar of Indian patriarchy). The garment industry in Tamil Nadu promotes a 'Sumangali' (a word that indicates auspicious married woman) scheme, under which young girls labour in conditions of bondage, to earn a one-time payment which, as the word 'Sumangali' indicates, is to be their dowry!

Raj Kishor says, "Women should kindly avoid roaming around draped in the robes of capitalist culture," saying that capitalism and the consumerist market 'denude' women in order to sell things, using women's bodies to 'incite kamukta (lust/sexuality)'. He, like many others, forgets that capitalism does not only denude women to sell things but the same capitalist/consumerist market also uses traditional orthodox



stereotypes about women to sell things. Are there not ads that sell life-insurance using the symbol of the sindoor—exploiting the traditional notions of women's dependence on husbands and the stigma of widowhood? AIPWA, some years ago, protested against an ad of a leading jewellery brand, that advertised bridal jewellery with the ad-line: "Ensure your daughter's safety in her marital home": a not-so-veiled reference to the threat of dowry killings! Many TV serials sponsored by big corporate and MNC media houses promote a variety of regressive, feudal-patriarchal values. The sexy item number isn't the only female commodity that the market sells: a woman in full bridal costume, head bowed demurely; or the traditional self-sacrificing 'ma' of Hindi films are also 'commodities' in the same market! Sexualisation of women's bodies does not necessarily involve 'denuding' them. Putting women in purdahs and overcoats (as the Puducherry government has recently tried to do with schoolgirls) also means that you are unable to see women as anything but sexualised bodies, requiring either to be revealed or covered up.

Raj Kishor says, "Let 'singers-dancers' (nachaiyyon-gavaiyyon) ply their trade, but why do other women nurture the culture of 'kamukta' (lust)?" To him, it is self-evident that the "beauties play the lucrative game of inciting lust in films, TV or beauty competitions, but the brunt of the perversities that are produced fall on girls from poor households." So, we have it again—this time from the pen of a prominent progressive columnist: the notion that sexual violence happens due to lust, which 'beauties' are responsible for 'inciting.' And again, we have the misogynistic disgust and contempt for 'nachaiyyon-gavaiyyon' and the 'sundaris' (beauties): in the same spirit as the Indian President's son referred to such women as 'dented and painted.' Raj Kishor does not seem to see that the problem lies in his gaze, not in women's bodies. The patriarchal gaze teaches us all to see and judge women on the basis of their sexualised bodies. We do not look at men in the same way. Male actors also display their bodies and sing and dance: how come they are not accused of 'inciting lust' and in turn, sexual violence? If 'kamukta' (lust) inevitably results in sexual violence, how come women's 'kamukta' (aroused by, say, Shah Rukh Khan or Salman Khan displaying their six-packs) does not make them violent towards men?

Raj Kishor quotes Gandhi's words, to the effect that if a girl can walk from Kashmir to Kanyakumari on foot and remain unmolested, only then will it prove that this country truly respects women. Raj Kishor says that for such a situation to be created, it is necessary that "women should shed the temptation to present themselves as sweets, in order to earn money or just freelance." When Raj Kishor calls women 'sweets', isn't he seeing women as objects of consumption?! And then, in the next sentence, he has the audacity to accuse women who demand freedom, of encouraging consumerism! Is Raj Kishor's sentiment any different from Vijayvargeeya's 'lakshman rekha' comment?! How many times must we repeat the obvious: that rape does not happen because women 'present themselves like sweets'; that rape is not an

expression of lust for women but of hatred for them; that rape is an assertion of patriarchal power, not of sexual desire? The threat of sexual violence is used to impose and reassert the patriarchal 'lakshman rekhas' over women. In this instance, Raj Kishor is telling women that they must avoid certain professions (acting, singing, dancing), or be charged with immorality and 'inciting' rape. Well, there is no profession in which women can avoid accusations of 'immorality'. Not long ago, Hindi novelist Maitreyee Pushpa was branded as 'chhinaal' (prostitute) by the Vice Chancellor of a central university, on the grounds that she writes about women's bodies and desire.

Is this correct to see every instance of sex or (female) nudity as 'obscenity' or 'objectification'? It is useful to recall how nudity in European art was discussed by Marxist art critic John Berger, in his book *Ways of Seeing*. He contrasts the hundreds of nude paintings where the woman's nudity is on display for the spectator-owner, with the few rare paintings where the woman's subjectivity, her will, intentions and feelings, and her relationship with the painter is so strongly felt that she and her exposed body are not objects on display. The question we need to ask about a film or a painting is not 'How much flesh does it expose?', but 'Does it allow us to see women—irrespective of whether they are clothed or not—as active subjects, rather than objects of consumption?'

It is a common mistake, even among many on the Left, to see and berate women's modernity and relative sexual freedom as symbols of capitalist and consumerist culture. It also needs to be stressed that capitalist exploitation of women involves much more than just 'denuding' women. It exploits women by profiting from their unpaid labour in the home; by paying them less than men for the same work at the job—and it is able to do all of this because of women's unfreedom as imposed by patriarchy. Resisting capitalism requires that we resist patriarchy to the hilt, not piecemeal or hesitantly, but lock, stock and barrel.

Capitalism, out of its own interests and compulsions, ushers in some relative freedoms for human beings. Workers who were serfs bound to a single lord's fields in feudal society, become free insofar as they are no longer bound to a single employer. Capitalism, while forced to allow these relative freedoms, ushers in a new mode of exploitation, for which the worker's freedom is a pre-condition. But the worker's freedom also creates unprecedented possibilities for the revolutionary transformation of society. In India, many workers are yet to enjoy even this degree of freedom; in rural India, many continue to remain in semi-bondage to landlords. While knowing full well the severe limitations of bourgeois/capitalist freedoms, do we not see the imperative need to end such semi-bondage and fight for and win those freedoms?

Similarly, capitalism does usher in somewhat greater economic and sexual freedom for women, while also ushering in new forms of exploitation. Even as we hold capitalism responsible for its commodification of women, and for the neglect of children and the elderly, we must demand, win, and defend each and every freedom that women can enjoy

[in a relative sense] in capitalism. Our critique of these bourgeois freedoms cannot be from a feudal, traditionalistic standpoint: rather it is from the vantage point of socialism. In other words, we critique these freedoms because each of them comes with continuing chains of economic inequality, domestic slavery, and new forms of exploitation; because women are not free enough, not because women are too free. And capitalism does not automatically bestow freedoms—most freedoms under capitalism (including the right of women to vote, or for equal wages) are won through hard struggles. It is significant that even in advanced capitalist societies today, sexual and reproductive freedoms are seldom conceded, and require hard struggle to be won. Even in the US, women's right to abort a foetus, and equal rights for same-sex partners, are virulently opposed by powerful forces. Even in these societies, the culture of blaming women for rape continues to thrive.

In India, ours is a society where women are denied the most basic freedoms: to be born, to be fed, to study, to work, to have control over property and money, to dress according to one's choice, to love, to choose a partner irrespective of caste or gender, to give birth to a girl-child, to control one's own reproduction and sexuality, to free oneself from abusive or unsatisfactory marriages, and to be free of the fear of violence. Women's fathers, brothers, husbands, families, control or coerce most of these decisions—and her defiance often results in violence and even death. Even the freedom not to be raped by one's husband is denied by our laws, which assume that when a woman marries, she loses her autonomy over her sexual choices, and her husband's rightful claim over her body becomes unquestionable. Is this not 'objectification'? The principle of democracy demands that women's autonomy be asserted and each of these freedoms won. The shackles cannot be tolerated or rationalised an instant more: and if saying so is seen as advocating 'utshnrkhalta' (literally, 'un-shackled-ness'), then so be it.



<http://kafila.org/>

The Official Emergency Continues—The Ordinance on Sexual Assault: Pratiksha Baxi



Pratiksha Baxi teaches at the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance at JNU

The reform of rape law, which was not a priority for more than two decades, seems more like a 20-20 match

now. The spectacle of judicial reform has all the elements of cinematic imagination built into it—violence, voyeurism, repression, tears, scandal, redemption and betrayal. We are all consumers and participants of this judicial spectacle. We veer between manic hope and dark despair as we are left conjecturing how this theatre of judicial reform will enact equality and dignity for survivors of sexual assault. The latest twist in the tale is the introduction of an ordinance, following the Justice Verma Committee (JVC) report.

We are told that the government decided to formulate an ordinance to address sexual violence as an emergency. Strangely enough the text of the ordinance has been kept a secret, other than the press release ostensibly released by the government, hence we can only comment on the series of statements made to the media. It is claimed that the JVC report informed this ordinance, which collates the "uncontroversial" elements in the JVC and the Criminal Law Amendment Bill 2012. The ordinance will become the law perhaps on Monday if the President signs it. Until the parliament meets, the ordinance will define sexual assault.

The government accepted the JVC's demand that their recommendations should be incorporated immediately as an ordinance. In fact Justice Verma on Times Now said that the non-controversial aspects of their recommendations should be immediately passed as an ordinance. To quote Justice Verma, "but there are many things which we have said which have been talked of for sometime and there are no two opinions. Now where is the difficulty in promulgating an ordinance to implement them straight away because that is not something which need to await a debate in the Parliament".

The self-construction of the JVC as a manifesto of the peoples' movements against sexual violence, including the women's movement and the positioning of the members of the JVC as "heroic" for having finished the report in 29 days should have signalled to us that an ordinance would be scripted as the outcome of this committee. So why are we surprised that there is an ordinance? And why critique the ordinance? Is it not reasonable that some of the elements of a progressive legislation should be enacted now such as the provisions on acid attack, stalking, voyeurism, and trafficking until a more comprehensive law can be crafted in the parliament? Why should an acid survivor not benefit from this new law—presuming that the state will spend enough money publicising the ordinance to every thana and hospital for three weeks?

One could argue that the opposition is not to recognising that sexual violence is an emergency that women experience everyday rather the important question is what is recognised as an emergency, and when.

1. In the ordinance, the retention of the marital rape exemption is not seen as an official declaration of permanent sexual emergency for married women.
2. The rape of women by security agencies, a state of permanent sexual emergency, continues to need sanction for prosecution from the government.
3. Those politicians charged with rape will continue to wield

- power to uphold states of sexual emergency for women.
4. Those who are in positions of power and authority to stop mass sexual violence suspend law to allow the unimaginable and targeted sexual and reproductive violence are not seen as criminally authoring and authorising states of sexual emergencies.
 5. The ordinance does not recognise the states of emergencies declared against young people who choose to marry against social norms of caste, community and religion.
 6. The ordinance does not recognise that each medical examination of a rape survivor is experienced as a re-rape; and that this is an emergency.
 7. The routinised violence on dalit women, such as stripping and parading especially of those who are punished for transgressing caste hierarchies is not seen as a state of emergency.

The ordinance ascribes blame to women for creating states of sexual emergencies when it proposes a gender-neutral sexual assault law implying that women, like men, sexually assault adult persons, including men in everyday contexts! It appears that the ordinance does not create an exception to make manifest that women do not rape men. Rather dishonestly the ordinance blames women for the sins of men—by positioning them as perpetrators of sexual assault of men in everyday contexts. This creates the possibility of further criminalising women's lives. There is proof of such criminalisation under existing laws, which are gender specific viz, perpetrators.

According to the Delhi government statistics on the profile of female prisoners in the Tihar Jail 'there is increase ... in rape cases by 2.47%'.

During 2011, as per NCRB statistics 766 women were arrested under s. 376 (rape) IPC, 1698 women arrested on the grounds of molestation (s. 354 IPC) and 193 women on grounds of sexual harassment (under s. 509 IPC). In 2011, 43 women inmates died, amongst whom eight women committed suicide in jail. Does the government have any explanation for why the police arrested more than 700 women under s. 376 IPC?

When women's groups oppose gender neutrality viz., including women as perpetrators, one predominant concern has been the manner in which the police misuse the law to criminalise women who transgress patriarchal norms. The JVC recognised this concern in amending the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, 2012.

However, the cabinet seems to have refused to take into account the growing statistics of arrests of women under s. 376 IPC. Nor do they seem to think that men will misuse this provision against women: because in legal discourse only women seem to misuse patriarchal laws against men!

It is evident that ordinance does not revise male laws from the point of view of survivors of sexual assault. Take the example of marital rape. For whom is marital rape controversial? Surely it is not controversial for women who experience sexual violence in marriage. But the men who draft laws smell the fear of those men who cannot be bothered whether their wives want to have sex with them.

Surely husbands must be given legal impunity if they sexually assault their wives, argues Abhishek Manu Singhvi, since wives will levy false cases against their husbands, and courts will be flooded with wives accusing husbands of rape. In other words, women who are married are treated as if they are pathological liars, and by implication are positioned as a "criminal type" intent on breaking up marriages on false accusations ranging from rape, domestic violence and dowry related harassment.

This argument is obviously ideological rather than sociological. It cannot be argued by anyone that women are less invested in marriage than men, given that patriarchy ensures that status and respectability of a woman in society derives from the fact of marriage. Women nurture their families, far more than men, be it their affinal or natal families. They look after the young and the old. They are dependent on their families economically, socially and politically. Women are told constantly to "adjust" to violent husbands perhaps since such men cannot be courageous to risk true love by surrendering their violent power.

Women have too much to lose if they levy false accusations of sexual assault against their husbands. Even mothers who file charges against husbands who rape their daughter are hounded in our courts, police stations and families for being bad wives, breaking up the family and threatening social order.

Further, there is no social or governmental support for women who would like to reject marriage. Single women, who are divorced, never married, or do not want to be married to men, are targeted by everyone in manifold ways. The mildest form of discrimination single women face is pity, or derision at not having their own family. The assumption that single women are "available" for male sexual experimentation, the lack of safety and the heightened vulnerability without the "protection" of a man, are all elements of enforced heterosexuality.

The government is petrified that the very suggestion that wives are autonomous will unravel the phallogocentric foundations of marriage—based as it is on violence or its threat. Wanting to cling on to the monopoly to rape their wives, these men who make our laws betray a strong attachment to colonial law. This is not surprising since women's bodies in enforced heterosexuality are colonised by the desires of husbands who enjoy rape. If those who script laws had been accepting of different models of masculinities, and understanding of pluralities of sexual experiences crafted by the experience of the joy of autonomy, they would not have expressed such panicked fear. They would have also deleted s. 377 IPC by way of an ordinance but then heterosexist men despise queer sexuality the most.

The cabinet does not need to conduct a national survey to realise that rape is a preferred mode of violence in marriage. They know that most often heterosexist men do not bother to be solicitous of the desires of their wives or pleasure them. Such heterosexist men do not wish to acknowledge that there are alternate ways of scripting sexual relationships, which are alive with autonomy, laughter and sexual creativity—

precisely because of mutual respect and admiration. If the men in positions of power had experienced such relationships, they would not feel threatened by legislating against the sexual colonisation of women's bodies by their husbands. The law distorts what marriage should mean for both men and women—freedom from violence, expression of love, sexual companionship, and a journey in profound friendship. Love obviously threatens social, legal and political orders far more radically than violent ways of extinguishing a woman's life.

The ordinance declares the continuance of those sexual emergencies in everyday and extraordinary context, which are central to patriarchal power. The spectacle of judicial reform is enacted to detract attention from such permanent states of emergency. Perhaps the Cabinet should clarify what it means by emergency in the first place, since it seems the ordinance, in its current form, embraces the idea of domesticating and even celebrating some forms of permanent sexual emergencies, over others. Nor does it take legislative labour to do away with the medicalization of consent via the two-finger test or insist on registration of FIRs irrespective of jurisdiction. This could have been done by executive or judicial decree. Unfortunately, the JVC is also complicit in the making of this spectacle of judicial reform by insisting on the model of 20/20 law reform, and demanding governmental recognition of its heroic labours, without truly understanding the deep structure of sovereign power, which has a necrophilic need for permanent states of sexual emergencies. No wonder the JVC is upset and we can only hope that their suffering makes a radical difference.

Apologies for being born a woman

I'd like to apologise
 For a crime so great
 That it demands punishment severe
 I am sorry
 For being born
 With the wrong chromosomes
 In my defence, I wasn't asked to choose
 'Would you like an XY or XX?'
 'My personal recommendation is XY,
 It's hot in the streets, I hear!'
 I apologise that my chest isn't flat
 And that my hips form curves
 I do understand that my body
 Invites attention,
 In fact, demands it!
 So sorry if I didn't take your crude passes
 With a demure smile
 But I know better now.

I apologise for my presence
 In the public space
 It must take a lot
 Not to pounce on me.
 So sorry that I provoke
 The caveman in you
 Every time I step outside.
 I apologise for demanding
 That my sister gets rights
 'cause, in the end she asked for it.
 After all, it was her fault

NAZREEN FAZAL

The Hindu, February 3, 2013

(I have been following the Delhi rape case closely. This poem I wrote after reading a woman's comment that Nirbhaya (not the real name of the victim) shouldn't have resisted the rapists and should've just given in to their attacks. I was appalled that a woman could say such a thing.)

The writer is a final-year student of Media and Communication studies.



Ethiraj College and Pengal Sandippu—A Day of Deliberation on Sexual Cultures and Sexual Violence: A Mangai



A Mangai teaches English Literature at Stella Maris College, Chennai, and is a theatre activist.

Pengal Sandippu, an independent feminist forum in Chennai, and the Centre for Women's Studies at Ethiraj College for Women hosted a day of discussion and deliberation on sexual violence and sexual cultures on Saturday, the 2nd of February, 2013. This came about as a result of conversations around the recent gang rape of a young woman in Delhi. The main purpose of this event was to highlight the idea that incidents of sexual violence cannot be seen as sporadic or isolated instances of gender violence, but as tools whereby a caste and class hierarchy is kept in place.

V Geetha, speaking on love and intimacy, suggested that the mobility that has been enjoyed both by young women, and the lower castes, in the last two decades has caused social anxiety. She also highlighted that intimacy is no longer seen as linear, progressing towards marriage, and could include live-in relationships and same-sex love. Further, within transgender communities, conceptions of intimacy and family tend to be defined very differently from normative ideas of the same. Sreejith and Anusha, two young activists also pitched in with comments on alternative gendered and sexual experiences.

Kalpna Karunakaran laid out the ways in which sexual violence becomes normalised as part of daily social life. She pointed out how women's sexual purity becomes enshrined as a virtue for the inheritance of wealth, and through this class structures are maintained. Similarly, caste is maintained by regulating women's sexuality through endogamous marriage. Rape during conflict, she pointed out, was not a sign of breakdown of law and order but systemic violence that is used to shame a community, where women are held to be bearers of its honour.

Sheelu Francis pointed out that while in urban areas caste may not be seen as a major factor in gender violence, the entitlement that upper-caste men feel to the bodies of Dalit women continues in villages. She also pointed out that rather than education, what was needed was movements of Dalit women, against this violence. Rape hence, is not an aberration from the norm, but in fact very much a part of the everyday life of women of lower-castes.

In her presentation, A Mangai used a clip from a popular song 'Clubbu le Mabbu le' by the group HiphopThamizha to show how misogyny and the humiliation of women is trivialized within a rhetoric of boyish fun. Using other clips from Tamil films, Mangai also pointed out how these films

in fact represent the anxiety, previously mentioned, around women's mobility.

Prema Revati used a set of photographs to show how the ideal image of the woman is constructed in the media. She suggested that women are shown, if not as glamorous, as mothers and wives, or as feminine consumers. Women are taught to look at themselves as others would look at them.

Geeta Ramaseshan brought in her experience as an advocate, and said that while asking for statutory level changes, it is also important to look at how laws are interpreted for specific cases and how precedents are built. She also spoke about the gendered nature of law as an institution and reiterated that a lot of nuances around sexual cultures lay in the everyday practices of the law and not in the analysis of statutory texts alone.

SCREENING OF A SPARROW FILM

Every now and then **SPARROW** receives requests from various groups to screen films produced by SPARROW. The Jyeshtha Nagarik Mitra Parivar is a group of senior citizens who like to stay connected with issues, especially women's issues. On March 29, 2013, SPARROW's film on Vithabai, a tamasha artiste, was screened for this group. It was well received and a good discussion followed the screening.

SPARROW PARTICIPATED IN BOMBAY BOOK FAIR!

SPARROW participated in the Bombay Book Fair organised by Spandan at the New Hiranandani Foundation School Ground, Hiranandani, Powai from 13th April 2013 to 21st April 2013. The book fair helped us to reach people through SPARROW publications and films. It was a good experience to meet people and introduce them to SPARROW's work and activities.



Scripting the Change: Selected Writings of Anuradha Ghandhy



Book Details :

Scripting the Change: Selected Writings of Anuradha Ghandhy
Ed Anand Teltumde Shoma Sen
On behalf of Anuradha Ghandhy Memorial Committee
(Pgs 480, priced Rs 350)

One has almost begun to dread the coming of March 8—which is not far away at the time of writing—for, International Women’s Day has become a celebration by, of, and for celebrities. However, “far from the unseeing eyes of the media, far from the flash and glitter of TV cameras”, March 8 has been celebrated differently.

Anuradha Ghandhy—a senior Maoist activist, whose untimely death has been mourned by family, friends, fellow activists and of course the tribals she worked with—takes us “deep into the forests and plains of central India, to the backward regions of Andhra Pradesh and up in the hills among tribals” where celebrating March 8 meant women and children marching through villages in Bastar and other remote regions, to demand schooling, blocking roads to protest against innumerable rape cases, against rampant economic exploitation. If there have been changes wrought in these regions, it has been in large measure thanks to the ideology and activism of men and women like Anuradha, often hunted down as Maoist-terrorists.

Among the articles included in this anthology, “The Revolutionary Women’s Movement in India” foregrounds the peasant movements in the tribal regions of central Bihar, Andhra, Jharkhand, and Maharashtra. One of the first issues that the movement confronted was the feudal privileges over the wives and daughters of field labourers, especially of the Dalits. The movements also played a major role in taking up the issue of wages and the economic exploitation of labourers. Women ploughed the land, cut the harvest, toiled at home, but were not permitted even to step onto the threshing floor or the granary. In every sense of the term, women could not reap the harvest of their hard labour. Their participation in traditional rituals was restricted, so was their role in community decision-making matters. Sexual exploitation by contractors, forest officials, and the police was of course notoriously well known. What perhaps was not well known was Anuradha’s relentless work in those regions, especially among the Gond tribes. In the late 90s, and throughout the famine of ’97, this revolutionary was working amongst the affected and was deeply involved with the organisation, KAMS (Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan) and with the

women in the guerilla detachments. Many young girls, as she mentions, left the relative safety of home and family, to join the guerilla movement. She mentions the martyred deaths of women whose names we would never have known—“there was Rathakka, the housewife from AP who died at the sentry post while defending her comrades, Emashwari ... who died at her post during a raid on a police station, young Raje who died of a snakebite, Swaroopa who died giving a heroic fight in an encounter.” And then there was Anuradha.

A committed Maoist-Leninist, Anuradha was nevertheless aware of the anomalies within the revolutionary movement; she admitted to the fact that women were under patriarchal constraints within the movement, and therefore their exploitation was double-fold; thus the need to create the consciousness that “women need revolution and the revolution needs women.” Contained within the selection of essays is one devoted to the expressions of the Bastar women of their woes as well as their fighting spirit that beckons them to throw off their shackles :

You give birth to girls and boys, but your name is nowhere sister,
The store is full of paddy, but girls cannot get it sister.
At a tender age they are married sister,
If she says she won't go, they beat her sister.....
But then a cry rents the air....
The land and sky are equal, women and men are equal
.....
The red flower, sister, is flowering
Let us follow the path of the red flower and struggle.
.....
I will go forward toward a red dawn

Most of us feel uncomfortable at the very mention of terms like ‘Naxalite’, ‘Maoist’, ‘guerilla tactics’—they conjure up scenes of violence and of untold horror. In this context I would want to mention the response of students to Mahasweta Devi’s *Draupadi*. They reacted to the violence in the short story more so because Dopdi, the Naxal tribal, meets violence with violence, wherein the author refuses to arouse pity as much as she does terror. Moreover, the narrative raises the question—who is the perpetrator of the violence? In such narratives, fictional or real, the traditional helpless victim’s metamorphosis into an avenging figure must be viewed as an act not only of courage but of political commitment which a pacifist attitude would deem violent. Women like Anuradha have followed the trail of tribals like Dopdi; such a person could never have remained a liberal activist, working within the framework of the law. Further, her work, by which I mean her activism as much as her writing (which stems from and is intrinsically linked to her activism,) questions what constitutes violence, what constitutes the law.

Hence Anuradha’s assertion, which comes in the wake of the Gujarat pogrom, that the State was “one of the greatest perpetrators of violence against women.” “Changes in the Rape Law” (March 2003) points to this irony. The essay

opens with the callous statement of a prominent politician—“there’s nothing new about women being raped. It’s been happening for years.” The individual politician’s statement, made in Parliament in the wake of the Gujarat carnage represents the voice of the State machinery; significantly, the same politician, in another context, had thundered (also in Parliament,) that a rapist must be shot dead.

The changes in the rape law that Anuradha advocates, is relevant not only in the aftermath of recent happenings—in fact, one would want to emphasise that it should always be considered relevant because undoubtedly “it has been happening for years” but it has also been accepted for years especially in war zones and in tribal territories, through mythical, historical and contemporary times. Against populist notions of crime and punishment and the awarding of the death penalty, she had pointed out that the higher the punishment awarded, the fewer would be the cases of conviction. She also voiced the apprehension that there would be greater chances of the rape victim being murdered, since the penalty for both was death. A more complex reason, she was quick to point out, was that linking the act of rape with the act of murder, was to reinforce the feudal view that a woman raped was as good as dead—that she had now nothing to live for. A decade has gone by since she wrote this piece, speaking vehemently for attitudinal changes on part of sections of the state, the judiciary, the armed and police forces, the media and the mindset of the public. The Law would be purely cosmetic unless there was “a revolutionary change in society and people’s thinking.” One wonders how many more decades will pass us by, before such an eventuality. The essay “Fascism, Fundamentalism and Patriarchy” published in the aftermath of the Gujarat violence of 2003, is, similarly a savage indictment of the rise of violence and patriarchal forces in Gujarat in the global context of neo-liberal policies. It looks at the need for strengthening democratic forces in society as a way of breaking the feudal mindset that underpins patriarchy, implicit in disturbing instances of violence.

One agrees with the editors that the essay, “Philosophical Trends in the Feminist Movement”, originally in booklet form (March 2004) moves beyond textbook information about the histories of the women’s movements in the west as well as in India, although even at that level, it is a comprehensive analysis of the various movements. As always, Anuradha’s theoretical understanding is grounded in ideological activism. As Arundati Roy suggests in her Foreword to the book, it would seem as though Anuradha as writer was seeking the path that she felt she must follow as activist, rejecting what to her seemed detrimental to a revolutionary stance. “Anuradha tries to tell us (and herself) why she became a Marxist-Leninist and not a liberal activist, or a radical feminist, or an eco-feminist or an Ambedkarite.” Anu argues against an autonomous women’s movement because patriarchy could not be de-linked from capitalism, imperialism and feudalism all of which were, in fact, reproducing patriarchal structures. The bourgeois approach also segregated the peasantry and working class women

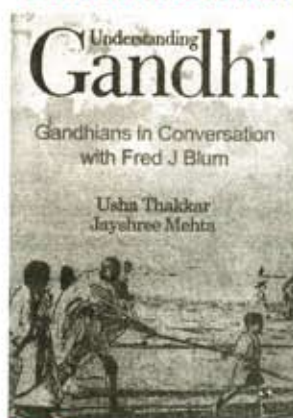
from the privileged middle classes.

Scripting the Change seems a very appropriate title to the assorted collection of Anuradha’s writings. She has been responsible, however, not only for writing passionately about the need for change. Both she and Kobad Gandhi and many others whose names might forever remain hidden from the pages of history, have been responsible for changing people’s lives and attitudes; they have, as it were, “changed the script.”

Anuradha followed “the path of the red flower”.... “towards a red dawn.” It was not an easy path—physically, intellectually, emotionally—through deep jungles and impenetrable forests, far away from the accustomed comforts and easy familiarity of our lives. “She was different...” says Arundati Roy, echoing the voices of all who knew her. And yet, this revolutionary was never distant or unapproachable. To end on a personal note—even more than admiration, I felt and still feel deep affection for Anu. The face that appears before me is exactly like the photograph on the back cover of the book—a beaming smile, twinkling eyes behind large glasses, one long plait (which I remember my children used to love to unravel.) She was a good friend, a warm host, a welcome visitor and a helpful neighbour—one whom you could approach, as you could Kobad, even in the middle of the darkest and rainiest of nights, as I had once done, and be sure that help was near at hand Our paths have diverged—both of them have taken the one less travelled by and that has made all the difference.

—Roshan G Shahani

Understanding Gandhi : Gandhians in Conversation with Fred Blum



Book Details:
Understanding Gandhi : Gandhians in Conversation with Fred Blum
 Usha Thakkar, Jayshree Mehta
 (Pgs 551, priced Rs 550)

The genesis of this recent book (2011) is as interesting as are its contents. Comprising of six selected interviews from the twenty odd ones that Fred Blum had held with various Gandhians, Usha Thakkar mentions how she came across Fred Blum’s name in a footnote to an essay on Gandhi by Lord Bhikhu Parekh. This footnote led to the re-discovery of rich archival material, hitherto unpublished. Of equal archival interest is the included life-sketch by Arna Blum about Blum’s traumatic years in Nazi Germany, his escape to America, his academic positions at the University of Minnesota, his involvement there, with the Social Science Program of which he was co-chairman, and his commitment to Gandhian thought, which brought him to India for several

conferences, including one at the invitation of Jayaprakash Narayan (1965-66). In “the stimulating context” of these various meetings Blum devised his ‘Gandhi Interview Project’ interviewing “as many of the outstanding men and women who had personally worked with Gandhiji.”

Blum’s interviews with this diverse group of Gandhians, ranging from the politically astute Acharya Kripalani to the spiritually inclined Raihana Tyabji, reveal, as the Introduction points out, the many-faceted, even the contradictory aspects of the Mahatma’s personality that drew people to him. Simultaneously, albeit unintentionally, the interviewees reveal their own complex personalities, as they grappled with the man they had so venerated. These interviews were held four decades ago, (70s-80s) and deal with the time-frame of the 30s and 40s—a further four decades back in time. Both the interviewer and interviewees are dead and gone, yet the illusion of the speaking voice remains throughout the interviews, with their doubts, fears, struggles, hopes, all vested in Gandhi and in the Freedom Movement.

Importantly, the image of a young, idealistic India is conjured up for the young contemporary readers belonging to an older, more cynical India, readers who are ‘listening’ to people they have heard about but not ‘heard’ in the true sense of the word, even as these Gandhians strive and seek out through Gandhi an India of their making. As for the septuagenarians and octogenarians today, these narratives would rekindle memories of the national struggle and of its dark underbelly, Partition.

The men and women, peopling this book—J B Kiplani, Raihana Tyabji, Dada Dharmadhikari, Sushila Nayar, Jhaver Patel, Sucheta Kripalani—all come from varied backgrounds, which itself becomes a pointer to the appeal that this Man for all Seasons had inspired. As Professor Parekh remarks in the Foreword, Gandhi’s ability to reach out to an entire gamut of people made him enjoy the loyalty and support “of both the Left and the Right, the intellectuals and the masses, the Westernised as well as the traditionalist intellectuals, the conservatives as well as the radical masses, the industrialist and the workers, the landlords and the landless workers...” Hence, even as we discern the faith that the people in question expressed in Gandhi, we discern equally, their puzzlement, bewilderment, even exasperation with Gandhi’s ways. Various issues, dear to Gandhi’s heart, issues which were histories in the making are discussed through these interviews—satyagraha, ahimsa, khadi, swadeshi and brahmacharya. For the most part, these concepts are not dealt with in the abstract; rather, because they were live issues of the time, they reappear as issues hotly debated, coldly observed, blindly followed, angrily rejected. They hold for the reader, all the exciting immediacy of the contemporary moment. At the same time, the book, viewed in its totality, offers hindsight into Gandhi the statesman, the leader, the spiritualist as well as of course, Gandhi the man; of course, total understanding would be impossible, let alone desirable.

While Churchill’s derogatory remarks on Gandhi—“the

half-naked fakir” are notoriously well-known, the narrators in question express their own comments, some openly adulatory, others more enigmatic. Thus Kripalani observes that Gandhi was “a somewhat eccentric specimen of an England-returned educated Indian.” If he thought Gandhi “curious”, even “quixotic,” Raihana Tyabji could never forget the dramatic entry of Tagore and Gandhi to the Tyabji house. While Tagore was to her, “beauty incarnate,” Gandhi “the little man “with his “utter unselfconsciousness” was to make a life-long impression on her. Raihana’s father, himself a devout follower, had nonetheless dubbed Gandhi “that Kathiawadi Darzi.” Raihana, coming from an aristocratic family, for whom privacy was crucial, yet found herself following the “Pied Piper of Hamlyn” to Sevagram ashram, with a chamber-pot atop the tonga “like a throne.”

Raihana had her own reservations about many of Gandhi’s precepts. As the years passed, she believed less and less in “the rigidity of non-violence,” believing that non-violence on the physical plane, could lead to violence on the mental plane. Likewise, although she preferred a single existence herself, she disagreed with Gandhi’s concept of brahmacharya, stating, “to me marriage is a very sacred thing.” It would be interesting to ‘hear’ what the Kripalanis had to say on the matter of brahmacharya. Kripalani distinguishes between brahmacharya and celibacy, suggesting that one could observe conjugality and yet be considered a brahmachari as long as one regulated one’s life in worldly matters. In a more personal way, Sucheta argued with Gandhi when he voiced his disapproval of their proposed marriage. He thought he would lose both workers—her retort—he would gain two! Equally nuanced are the views of Dada Dharmadhikari. While he was attracted by Gandhi’s commitment to Truth, this intellectual disagreed with him on many counts as for example, Gandhi’s insistence on the boycott of British education, his belief that women were less prone to violence than men, that the country-dweller was more moral than the city-dweller.

Other interesting insights follow as one peruses through the narratives. Dr Sushila Nayar’s recall is far less critical. She remembers sitting on Gandhi’s knees as a child as also her first visit to Sabarmati Ashram. But it is her graphic recall of the Noakhali experience that reveals her total trust in Gandhi, for, it was under Gandhi’s advice that that the young doctor went unaccompanied by any bodyguard into the heart of the village to nurse the sick and heal the traumatized women. Gandhi realized with his astuteness that her trust in them would win their trust in turn. In Jhaver Patel, another interviewee, we see the antithesis of Dharmadhikari. Patel answered Gandhi’s call to quit conventional studies and devoted himself with the rural poor. Responding to Blum’s question whether violence was inherent in Gandhi, he felt that it was his vehemence and obduracy that incurred this criticism among his detractors.

At the outset of his conversation with Sushila Nayar, Blum makes a couple of interesting comments about his project, which, in retrospect, seems fraught with significance. He remarks that earlier he had thought he would write a

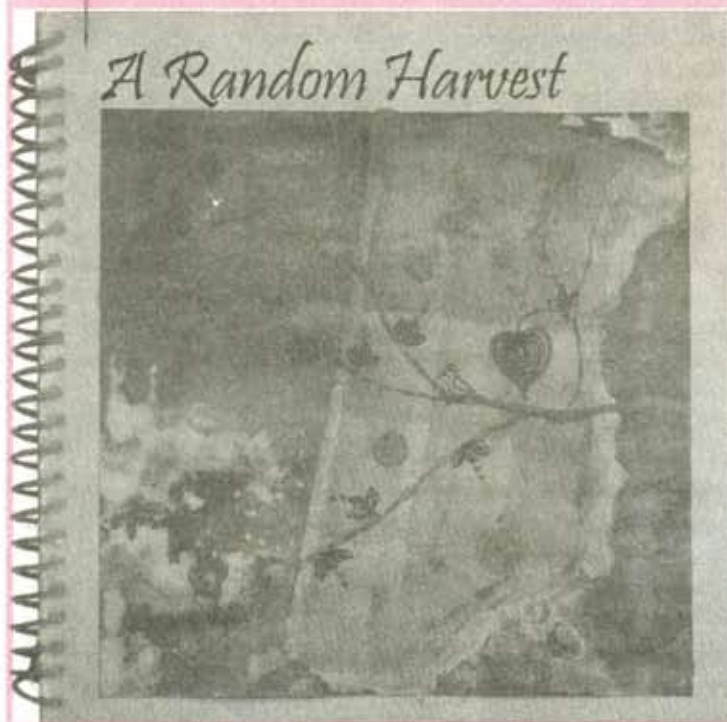
book based on these interviews but decided “it was too big a job for me... [for that] you would have to live in India for 10 years.” The other comment —“I think Gandhiji is very important for us in the West, particularly in the future. To me he belongs to the future rather than to the past.”

On the first count, Blum’s initial hope has found fruition through the publication of the text in question. The concluding words of Arna Blum’s biographical note, says as much—“He would have been delighted to know that

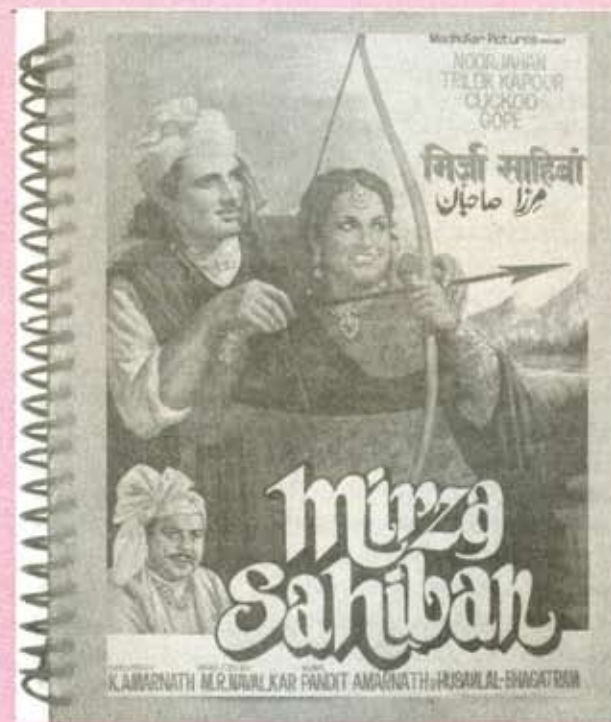
this book will carry forward the Gandhian message he so passionately cared about...” On the second count, however, one pauses—optimistically, ruefully. Gandhi’s principles of non-violence, of Satyagrah, have brought freedoms to peoples in different parts of the world. It has also brought with it a brand of gandhians, gandhism and gandhigiri which is a sad travesty of what the Mahatma had stood for.

—Roshan G Shahani

Forthcoming E-books



A Random Harvest is a random collection of drawings/sketches/collages by women painters who supported the Art Raffle organised by SPARROW in 2010. The sketches/drawings/collages are inspired by or reflections of two poems SPARROW gave them which in our view, exemplified joy and sorrow and in a sense highlighted women’s life and experiences that SPARROW, as a women’s archives, has been documenting over the years.



In the early years of Indian cinema the posters were hand painted. With the advent of digital technology hand painted posters have almost become extinct. SPARROW has a good collection of hand painted posters. So we decided to bring out an e-book entitled **Painted Posters**.

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Invisible Support



My mother died on 2nd December 2012 at 7-20 a.m. She was born the second daughter of Marigounder and Papayi who belonged to Chanarpalayam which was close to Thiruchengodu city and married Perumal, the son of Ramasamy and Pavayi who were farmers from Koottappalli which was just three miles away, lived and experienced the sufferings of an ordinary woman and ended her life as one. As if the struggles she faced all her life were not enough, at the end of her life she

was afflicted with Parkinson's and suffered immensely for a few years and finally she was liberated from it all. While the details of her death can be stated with no doubts, her birth details cannot be mentioned with such clarity. One can't even give approximate details. But one can presume.

When Amma got married she must have been sixteen or seventeen. A year later she was in the family way. In those days people did not go to hospitals for deliveries. Even a day after her waters broke the child did not make its way out. She could not bear the pain. Then they took pity on her and took her to Thiruchengodu Government hospital in a bullock cart. The child had died in the womb. Amma was saved and brought back. It was her first child and it was a boy. She always felt the remorse that had she be taken to the hospital on time her first child could have been saved. I believe she had not even seen the face of that child. Two years after that my elder brother was born. Everyone thought that she would be able to have only one child. But despite such forebodings I was born after four years. Amma was maybe twenty-five then. I am forty-six now. So Amma must be 71 now. She must have been born in 1940 or 1941.

The month of her birth can be guesseed by her name. Her name was Perumayi. Only those born in the month of Purattasi (September 17th to October 16th) were given that name. My father was also born in the same month and his name was Perumal. Their names Perumal and Perumayi matched to perfection. My father was a terrible drunkard. But they lived in harmony not just in their perfectly matching names but in many other ways too. They were very close to each other. Amma used to call him 'Payaa'. Appan used to call her 'Pilla' or 'Peruma'. Despite all the efforts made to save him, father could not be saved for alcohol had completely destroyed his liver. He died some twenty-five years ago. Amma was a person on her own since then. Her world revolved around her family which comprised of my elder brother and me. Our welfare was her only goal and she did everything to achieve that.

She had lost her mother even before she became conscious of the world. She had an elder sister. Both of them were cared for by their Ammayi (their mother's mother). My Appuchi (grandfather) did not marry again for some reason. He used

to run a load-carrying cart then. He used to go away with his cart on most of the days. Periyamma and Amma grew up freely running around and playing. They got a childhood space that today's children cannot dream of. They used to swim in the step-well till their eyes got red. Their hair turned brown and looked unkempt like the dried up leaves of the palm tree. There were many other games they played. Amma even knew how to play rummy. She used to compete with my children to play cards. She knew all the tricks of the dice game. It was not possible for me to give up my love for a game of dice—a love inherited from Amma. I can give up everything to sit for a game of dice. When I played against my father Amma used to teach me the trick of rolling the dice. Amma could not read and write. She had never gone to school. But she had learnt the numbers somehow. She knew how to read the calendar and the watch. She was an expert in mental arithmetic. Not a paisa would be lost in income and expenditure calculations.

Appuchi sent Amma to work in an accountant's house in Thiruchengodu just so that she would not waste her time running about here and there. She worked there for a few years staying with them and later on an everyday basis. She used to say that they treated her well. Since she was a motherless child she used to say that she learnt she learnt to do household work with responsibility only in their house. Later she also did the job of carrying water for the Thiruchengodu hotels. She was a city woman in her young days but after marriage became entirely a village woman.

She was the first daughter-in-law of a large farming family which did dry land cultivation. She had to work hard at home and in the fields throughout day and night. After I was born my parents set up their own home. I never saw Amma resting even for a minute. There was no question of postponing any work. Nor would she shirk doing any kind of work. The work must be done the moment she thought of it. She took care of goats, cows, buffaloes and also the farming activities all on her own. My father had a soda shop; so he was not interested in farming as such. Everything was done by Amma. She knew how to do all the farming jobs thoroughly. In 1995 she met with an accident. Amma was making a rick with peanut creepers in our rocky fields. Amma was an expert in making beautiful rounded ricks in a way that not a drop of rain water could get in. Amma was atop making the rick and my elder brother was passing on the creepers from below. She finished making the rick and spread dry coconut fronds to make a roof and just as she was getting down she slipped on a frond and fell headlong on the rock. Although there were no serious visible injuries she had severely hurt her spine resulting in a spinal concussion and was bed-ridden for a month in the hospital. It took her six more months to recover fully. With her will power she came out of this and slowly began to do her usual routine of work. Amma knew how to water the fields using the apparatus for draining water from the well; she could plough the fields and also drive the cart. In my young days I did not see my mother sleeping ever. No one knew when she woke up and when she slept. On rare occasions if she rested in the afternoons I

would begin to worry and become anxious wondering if she was unwell. Amma meant movement.

I was totally a mother's boy, shy and lacking courage. So my father's rough methods of treating people did not find favour with me. I liked Amma's protective ways. Till I was fifteen I used to sleep next to Amma. I could not sleep until I literally curled myself into her stomach or placed my legs on hers, hugging her tight. If I had to visit the toilet at night my mother had to come with me. When I turned fifteen it was Amma who put a separate cot next to her saying, "Hereafter you must sleep by yourself" and trained me to sleep on my own. I was very adamant about going to school only if she came with me up to the school. The school was three miles away but she came every day to drop me at school. The boys teased me about it. But still I could not give up the need for my mother. Later she made it a habit to come from our house which was deep within the fields and leave me on the main road. She would then stand there on the road till I disappeared from her sight. The image of her watching me standing by the road flanked by lush tamarind trees is still carefully preserved in my heart.

Amma taught me many things patiently. If someone even so much as mentioned going to the step-well to swim I would run and hide myself. Appan once just threw me into the well. I had not got over the fear that had created. Amma encouraged me and took me to step-wells not frequented by people and slowly taught me swimming. In a few days I developed enough courage to hold on to the wooden plank made from drumstick tree and swim. After that I went with others to swim. But still Amma would sit on the steps of the well or above the well watching me. This went on till I became an adept at swimming. One of the images still embedded in my mind is one of Amma sitting on her haunches above the well watching me without shifting her eyes.

It was Amma who taught me cycling. Boys of my age group had already learnt it. Although I was nine I was afraid to ride a bike. My elder brother had learnt it when he was just six. When Appan, Annan and other boys teased me, I used to feel like crying. Amma did not know how to ride a bike but she knew how to push the bike. In those days the Thiruchengodu-Erode Road used to be quite empty. Once in an hour or so some vehicle went past. In sunny afternoons and moonlit nights I rode the bike monkey pedalling while Amma held the bike. I would have been the only person who learnt to ride a bike without getting hurt even once. Thanks to Amma. Whatever I think I have learnt I can feel Amma behind every single thing.

Bus journeys did not agree with me. The smell of diesel made me vomit. Amma avoided bus journeys for my sake and made it a habit to walk wherever she had to go. I was ten when I came down with fever but I was obstinate about not taking the bus to the hospital. Amma walked five miles to the hospital carrying me on her back. Appan used to go to Palani every month on the day when Karthikai, the third star of the twenty-seven stars, considered sacred to Lord Murugan, dominated. Amma took all the precautions to check my vomiting and sent me with Appan to Palani.

Finally it was Amma who made it possible for me to travel by bus.

I have also got from Amma the habit of reflecting deeply on matters. She used to think about a particular thing again and again from many angles. But still she was anxious about the future and feared that something might go wrong. She had only experienced deaths and losses in her life: losing her mother when still a child, not being cared for by the father, losing her husband at the young age of forty, her first child dying in the womb, an elder son who should have taken responsibilities of the family committing suicide due to debts, losing her land and her house and Appan squandering all that she had earned. So she could not sleep peacefully. The slightest of noise would wake her up. She would wake up screaming "Aa...h" or "Aiyo..." "Why are you waking up as if something has caught fire, Amma?" I would ask her. But even I am like her in my ways of sleeping and waking up.

Amma did not know how to destroy things. Her nature was to create things and shape things. She has left for our family whatever she could create. It is twenty-five years since my father's death. All these days she did everything for us so that we did not feel the loss of a father. I still feel guilty about having sucked my mother's blood for a few years for my higher studies. She hid many things from me so that I could study without feeling deprived of anything. When an ancestral house and a piece of land had to be sold she felt great sorrow. And the trouble she took to replace what was lost was also great.

Amma was always afraid of anything new. She would try to avoid it. But once its working was explained to her she easily understood how to handle it. When gas stoves came into vogue Amma was very scared about using one. But when she was told how to use one she learnt it very easily. When she was alone in our native place I had bought her a cell phone. She managed to use it. She was very fond of the radio, T V and films. She knew enough about films to recognise the various actors. She was not very devotional. Once in a way she prayed to Kariya Kaliyamman, our family goddess. And that was all.

We had a soda shop in a theatre. Many boys who worked there used to come home. Many of my college mates came home and stayed over occasionally. After I became a college lecturer, students came regularly to my house. So Amma had got over her caste prejudices. She spoke freely with everyone. She never behaved in a way that hurt anyone who came home. She never refused food to anyone. But caste obviously never left her entirely. Deep in her mind, there was that hold that caste had which I saw towards her last days when she was not quite conscious.

I was her only hope in life. So my marriage came as a great shock to her. I had an inter-caste marriage of my choice. Amma refused to attend my marriage. Not only did she not come for the marriage, she also sold off all the cattle in the house and stayed put in the house for a few days. She wanted to make a thali, the sacred thread, of seven sovereigns of gold. I vehemently refused saying, "When you don't want to come for the marriage, where is the need for you to buy

the thali?" My marriage was the only time when I totally disagreed with my mother. More than the caste factor, Amma's fear was that I may leave her. Maybe she had many dreams of my marriage. She must have dreamt of a rich girl from the same caste and a grand marriage. More than the shattering of her dreams was the fear that she was losing her only hope in life. I took care to assuage her fears. After that she began to care for my family. And like always, she stood by me in all matters. She never asked me once why I chose to marry this way. She even visited my father-in-law a couple of times. Had they not been so far away her relationship with my wife's family would have been a stronger one. Her love for my children was no less than her love for my brother's children. In her last days she surprised me by the affection she showed towards my wife.

I have felt my mother's eyes following me all the time. The eyes of a mother following a child learning to walk. As a child when I had learnt to walk, I would walk a while holding my mother's hand and then push it away and hop and walk. There were times when I ran and stopped and smiled at her victoriously. There were also times when I fell down and looked at her sadly. Amma was always there as my support to pat me, lift me, hug me and console me. She will be so even in future—an invisible support.

—Perumal Murugan

*Translated from the Tamil Thondrath Thunai,
Kalachuvadu, January 2013.*

A Journey Through the Wind

My mother died on 2nd December 2012. We knew six months before that she may not last long. I thought she may live at the most for a year more. Even friends and relatives who had visited felt the same way. We differed only in terms of surmising how long she would live. Even then a few of them asked, "Where are you going to 'keep' Amma?" 'Keep' is the term used in common parlance in this region for burying or cremating. It is common practice to point out to a place and say that so and so was 'kept' there. I could not immediately decide on where Amma would be kept. I was hesitant about deciding on this matter right away. I also had a moral dilemma about discussing this matter while a person was still alive. I felt tormented by these feelings. But at a point it had to be decided.

At present I am a resident of Namakkal city. My native place is Thiruchengodu which is forty miles away. Not Thiruchengodu proper but Kootappalli which fell within the municipal limits of Thiruchengodu. The general belief is that wherever one dies one's body must be kept in one's native place and that only that will bring rest to the soul. Additional considerations for doing it in one's native place are that it made it convenient for relatives and others to pay their last respects and to perform all the necessary rituals.

I have lost many in my life till now. The deaths of Appuchi (maternal grandfather), Thatha (paternal grandfather), Appan, Paatti (paternal grandmother) and Annan happened one after the other with short intervals. Appuchi was kept in the Kootappalli cremation ground. But my father wanted to keep my Thatha in our own land and so that was done. Appan would often roll on Thatha's grave and weep or even sleep there whenever he was drunk. Within a year Appan too passed away. Many commented that since he used to lie on his father's grave his father took him away soon. So we decided not to keep Appan in our land and took him to the cremation ground of the village. Paatti and Annan's final resting place was also the same. When I say cremation ground of the village what I mean is the cremation ground that belonged exclusively to the Gounder caste.

At present a lot of progress has taken place in Kootappalli. Since it falls within a municipal limit, apartments built by the Housing Board have come up. Big cities that have emerged along with this process have completely linked the village with the city. Earlier it was said that our village was five miles away from the city. But now it has become a part of Thiruchengodu. Located on the highway between Thiruchengodu and Erode and considered an ideal place for living, Kootappalli has become a very popular place. The moment I say that I belong to Kootappalli someone or the other would say that he has a relative there. I listen quietly because it would be difficult to explain to him the Kootappalli I am referring to.

Although the distance between the village and the city has been practically wiped out, the village has retained its individuality in two matters. The first is the temple. The second is the cremation ground. The Housing Board residents and others put up a lot of struggle regarding this. But nothing changed. Under the We, for Ourselves programme they have built a compound wall around the cremation ground and protected it along with a platform for burning and also a stone pillared structure. Till the present time they have allowed no intermingling of castes and have kept it exclusively for themselves. My relatives wanted my mother to be kept there. There was no way a place won't be given for my mother there. No one could refuse because I have been paying the tax for the village temple without fail. In the village we stay closer to a village called Ayyakkaundanpalayam. It is not our native place but we have been paying tax for the temple of that village too. That village also has a cremation ground. Those in that village also cannot deny the space.

I have bought a house in Namakkal and live there. My house is in an area which is part of a village called Kondichettipatti. All along it was under the village panchayat which was the local self government unit there. When I bought the house in 2005 and began to live there those in that street had enquired about my caste. They had asked one of my colleagues in the college who resided in the same street. They did not mind my being from any caste but they were hoping I was not a Dalit. My colleague had also asked many in the college about this but it was not easy to find out which caste I belonged to.

I live in Namakkal district but I don't belong there. I was a newcomer to that region. I moved freely with many different people but I had not linked myself with any caste-based group in the teachers' association. This is why my colleague was not able to identify my caste. Since many students who thronged around me were Dalits some people had told him that I was a Dalit. But he had no strong proof to confirm the fact. There was a teacher in our college who could use several devious methods to find out someone's caste. He was a Gounder. He set a trap for me. Nothing elaborate. He asked if a bride could be found for the son of a relative around our native place. So one could not avoid talking about caste.

When Kongu Velala Gounders discuss marriage the first thing they would discuss would be the specific group-belonging. If both the parties belonged to the same group they would be related in a way they could not marry. If they belonged to different groups then it was a marriageable relationship. So in accordance to this practice I enquired which group the boy belonged to. The conversation went on and I replied to questions like which group I belonged to and which was my temple and I walked into the trap very easily. The trap door was shut immediately and I was caught in the cage of caste. So my caste was ascertained through him and the street now knew about it. But they still had doubts.

My wife wears a nose-ring. It is a small single-stone nose-ring. The Gounders of this region do not wear nose-rings. Caste is normally ascertained through attire and jewels, through accents in speech, facial features and body structure and the rituals observed. My wife's nose-ring put our caste to question. Even after confirming our caste some of them asked why my wife was wearing a nose-ring. If a person loses two or three children one after the other, there was the custom of piercing the nose of the next child, if it is a girl, and naming it Kuppayi. I had mentioned it to some people. But even then they were not satisfied. They said that even if the nose is pierced for such reasons the nose-ring is removed later; that was the custom among Gounders. Only the hole would remain and the nose-ring would not be worn; only other castes wear nose-rings they argued. Many people hesitated to move closely with us till they were clear about our caste. Somehow we were accepted finally in that street. I could then understand how painful such a situation would be for a Dalit. Even if one lives in such suburban areas the clutches of caste remain. After the street acceptance there was the problem of village acceptance.

Village acceptance involved the temple and the cremation ground mentioned before. Every year in the month of Masi (13th February to 13th March; the 11th month of the traditional calendar) some ten fifteen people from the village would come with a note book to the street. They would explain that there would be a temple festival and that a certain amount of tax had to be paid by the house owners and tenants. The tax had to be paid. Till today I don't even know where the temple is. But I have been paying the tax for some seven or eight years. What would they do if the tax was not paid? It was understood that they would not

permit entry into the village cremation ground. Here also the village cremation ground belonged to the Gounders. If one wanted space there one had to be a Gounder or be from other backward castes. They never collected tax from Dalits because they would acquire rights if they paid the tax. A cremation ground on one side of the lake is well maintained even here. Like all villages in this village also the Dalits had a separate cremation ground. Whenever I walked along the cremation ground the thought that I was paying an annual tax for a place there would cross my mind.

Thus I was paying taxes in three places and reserving a place in the cremation ground. So long as she was keeping good health my mother stayed alone in our native place. It was only towards the last one year that she stayed with us in Namakkal. Once during a regular conversation I asked her as if jocularly, "Tell me, Amma, where should I keep you?" Amma replied indifferently: Keep me anywhere. Which street does a dead body belong to? She knew that there was a confirmed reservation in three different places. She used to ask me angrily why I was paying taxes in three different villages. I used to respond, "Okay, tell me where I should stop paying." She thought about it and said, "What is the point of opposing the village? Let it be. It is for god, after all. It is okay if you pay. Tomorrow if I die, a cremation ground will be needed to keep me, isn't it?" I was a little upset that despite knowing all this she did not specify where she would like to be kept. If one could choose one's own final resting there would be no problems.

I had to think seriously about the place for my mother when I was forced into that situation. I decided it would be Namakkal. I took that decision because I thought choosing the place where one lived would make it easier to perform the rituals after death. I had also considered donating her body to the medical college. My father-in-law and mother-in-law had donated their bodies this way. An NGO called Uthavum Ullangal had taken the responsibility to take their bodies with all due respect, to the CMC Hospital at Raya Velur. The way that NGO carried out its responsibilities satisfied all the relatives. Namakkal did not have an organisation like that.

Ayya Na Pa Ramasamy is a collector of rare books in Namakkal and his family had signed a document saying their bodies would be donated to the Mohan Kumaramangalam Government Hospital at Salem. A few months ago Ayya's wife passed away. The hospital made no arrangements to take the body away. They had to take a lot of trouble to reach the body there. Ayya was very upset about the way the hospital administration had behaved. After hearing about that experience I gave up the idea of donating Amma's body.

Although I was paying the temple tax, for some reason I was not keen on keeping my mother in the Kondippatti village cremation ground. It was under the control of a particular caste and I would have to go and request permission from people not known to me. Moreover, I passed that way every day on my way to college and it would keep reminding me of Amma. So I decided against it. Namakkal Municipality had a cremation ground. It was a common one for all castes and religions. But it was a garbage dump and gutter water

ran through it. Anyone seeing it would not want one's final resting place to be that. Life has its own problems but must there be so many problems even after death?

All these thoughts were running through my mind when the young son of a colleague of mine at the college died of blood cancer. I went for the cremation of that little child and that is when I saw the electric crematorium. It had been newly set up. It was very beautifully maintained with trees and plants and I felt that that was the right place to be after death. So I decided that for Amma it would be the electric crematorium.

It was a common place for all and beyond all castes and religions. But no one could claim even six-foot space there. Within an hour the body is burnt and it gets contained in your palm. The body melts into space as smoke. I sent Amma away in this manner through the wind. Amma was one who lived without knowing anything about the outside world; let her now see all the worlds and be happy. Those who come late to offer condolences ask me where I have kept Amma. I point to my heart. They laugh thinking I am joking. The space in the electric crematorium cannot be claimed by any caste. So where else could I have kept Amma except my heart? Maybe I could say she is where the winds blow.

—Perumal Murugan

Translated from the Tamil Katru Vazip Payanam, Puthiya Ezuththu, February, 2013.

Blasphemous Lines for Mother

R. K. Narayan is dead.
Tonight he sits pensive
in his bamboo chair
talking of a "very rare soul".

Suddenly seized by a desire
to vivisect his own "very rare soul"
from end to end, he proclaims:

My mother is more "plain-dealing",
more "truth-telling" than Narayan's.
My mother is retired, toothless, diabetic,
and bedevilled by headaches and a blinding cataract.
In short, she is a cantankerous old woman.

I remember the time when she was a cantankerous young woman. When she took an afternoon nap, she was tigerish: "You sons of a vagina!" she would snarl, "you won't even let me rest for a moment, sons of a fiend! Come here sons of a beast! If I get you I'll lame you! I'll maim you! ... Sons of a louse! You feed on the flesh that breeds you! Make a sound again when I sleep and I'll thrash you till you howl like a dog! You irresponsible nitwits! How will I play the numbers if I don't get a good

dream?" How will I feed you, sons of a lowbred?"

And this fiery salvo would come hurtling with wooden stools, iron tongs and bronze blowers, as we ran for our lives and she gave chase with canes and firewood, her hair flying loose, her eyes inflamed and her tongue lashing with a mad rage. And we being but children would never learn anything except becoming experts at dodging her unconventional weapons.

I remember how, having no daughter, she would make me wash her blood-stained rags. Refusal was out of the question. So, always I would pick them with sticks and pestle them in an old iron bucket till the water cleared. But mind you, all this on the sly. Seeing me not using my hands would be lethal.

Those days in Cherra we never knew what a toilet was. We never had a septic tank or a service latrine. We simply did our job in our sacred groves.² But sometimes my mother would do her job in a trash can. Then it would fall on me to ferry the cargo to a sacred grove. Refusal was out of the question. So, always I would sprinkle ash upon it, top it with betel-nut peels and things and do my best to avoid nosy neighbours and playmates. Those who have seen Kamal Hasan in Pushpak will understand my stratagems.

I could cite a thousand and one things to demonstrate how cantankerously rare my mother is. And I decline to tell you anything good about her. I'm not a Narayan and I decline to tell you how she suffered when my bibulous father was alive; or how she suffered when he died; or how she suffered rearing her two sons and her dead sister's toddlers in the proper way. There's only one thing commendable I will admit about her: if she had married again and not been the cantankerous woman that she is, I probably would not be standing here reading this poem today.

¹Archery gambling. Some people would buy a number based on the interpretation of their dreams.

²Community forests, prohibited through sanctification, found in almost every village in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya.

—Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih

Family as Her Field : Kamala Sadagopan (5 September 1935-14 November 2012)



Well-known writer Kamala Sadagopan passed away on 14 November 2012 at the age of 77. Kamala began to write at the age of 16 secretly and wrote her first story on the back page of a calendar sheet and sent it to *Vijaya Vikatan*. At a very

young age, she became the joint editor of *Jaganmohini*, the women's magazine that was started by the legendary writer and freedom fighter, Vai Mu Kodainayaki Ammal.

The story of her marriage reads like a story. At a young age her marriage was fixed with a clerk in a shipping company. Later her husband told her sheepishly that he was actually a writer for films known as Chitralaya Gopu. Then began a wonderful collaboration between the two.

Her stories revolved around the family and its complexities in relationships, communication and love. She has also written plays and musical dramas. Her writing was recognised in many ways. Her novel *Kadhavu* (Door) won the Narayanaswami Iyer prize of *Kalaimagal*. This novel about a new bride and the marital family relationships she inherits was very well received. It became so popular that she was known as *Kadhavu* Kamala. Her novel *Padigal* (Steps) won the prize for the best novel from the Tamil Nadu government in 1981 and she was honoured by the then Chief Minister M G Ramachandran. Many of her stories were made into films and teleserials and her novels were prescribed for university students. She was also a journalist and a social worker. Kamala was generous with her praise for other writers which endeared her to many of her contemporaries.

As a young person she had played an active role in Mahatmaji Seva Sangam and in fact, was idealistic enough to want to remain single and dedicate herself to social work. Although persuaded to marry, she lived a simple life and never bought gold in her lifetime. In 1955 she attended the Avadi session of the AICC as a delegate. She addressed the World Tamil Conference held in Calcutta and made an evocative speech. In 1978 she became Assistant Editor of *Mangayar Malar* and served in that capacity till the magazine was taken over by *Kalki*.

Her last story was sent to *Kalaimagal* Diwali issue but she went into a coma soon after. She opened her eyes after a month only to ask if the Diwali issue was out. When she was told it was not yet on the stands she smiled and closed her eyes. She died the day after Diwali after living a life the way she chose to live, along with a large family of children and grandchildren.

A Life Dedicated to the Poor: Sankaralingam Jagannathan

(6 October 1914-12 February 2013)

S Jagannathan, the Gandhian activist, passed away at the age of 98 on 12 February 2013. When people like Jagannathan



pass away, one does not mourn just a person but a generation of people who lived and worked as Gandhians and dedicated their lives to working for the poor. Jagannathan, along with his wife Krishnammal, carried the Gandhian legacy into the 21st century and tirelessly

worked towards social justice for Dalits, the landless, and those victimised by greedy the landlords and multinational corporations.

Jagannathan belonged to a rich family. In 1930 he gave up his college studies in response to Gandhi's call for non-cooperation and disobedience. He joined the Quit India Movement in 1942. He spent three and a half years in jail before India gained its independence in 1947. His work as a campaigner for the poor had already begun to have an impact during this time.

Jagannathan met Krishnammal, who was born into a poor Dalit family which had educated her despite poverty, when both of them were active members of the Sarvodaya movement. Both of them married in 1950, having decided only to marry in independent India.

From 1950 to 1952 Jagannathan was with Vinoba Bhave in North India on his Bhoodhan Padayatra, appealing to landlords to give one sixth of their land to the landless. He returned to Tamil Nadu and started the Bhoodhan Movement and till 1968 he and Krishnammal worked as a part of Vinoba Bhave's Gramdan Movement. As much of the land gifted under the movement was infertile, Jagannathan started in 1968 the Association of Sarva Seva Farmers (ASSEFA) and he remained its chairman till 1993. Basing its thought and action on Gandhian philosophy, ASSEFA became an effective non-governmental development institution.

It was the incident at Kizvenmani, Thanjavur, in 1968, where 42 landless women and children were brutally burnt that made Jagannathan and Krishnammal to turn their attention to land reform issues in Thanjavur. In 1981, Jagannathan and Krishnammal founded Land for the Tillers' Freedom (LAFTI). The purpose was to enable the landless to buy lands from willing landlords at a reasonable price and secure bank loans and work on the land cooperatively. Since then LAFTI has successfully worked towards giving land to more than 13,000 families apart from running village industries, offering computer training to the underprivileged, especially Dalit girls, setting up brick kilns, building houses and establishing fish farming. It was also active in the post-Tsunami relief activities. LAFTI has played a very important role since 1992, in protecting the coastal eco system by struggling against the prawn farms established by multinational companies.

Jagannathan has won many awards including the Jamnalal Bajaj award and was honoured with a Padmashri in 1989. Jagannathan and Krishnammal, referred to by many as Appa

and Amma, have been internationally recognised for their tireless work for the landless and the underprivileged but the Right Livelihood Award in 2008 given to both of them mentioned that they are known as 'India's soul' and no other description would have suited them more. Jagannathan would always remain in the work being carried out by thousands of women and men he has inspired.

Remembering Lotikadi: Dr Lotika Sarkar (4 January 1923-23 February 2013)



There was no way someone who was part of the women's movement in the eighties would not have been touched by Lotika Sarkar, who was Lotikadi to us, and her personality. When one thinks of her there are several images that come to mind:

of her sitting with Vina Mazumdar in a cloud of smoke, smoking with a long cigarette holder, her erudite speeches in meetings, her kind face when a younger person tried to get expansive with her, her sitting at a table and working without once lifting her head, her quiet dignity and her firm and determined manner of speaking when she had to put forth her ideas. All of us knew who she was and her achievements but were never afraid to talk to her. We held her in awe but we also took liberties with her.

Lotika Sarkar has many firsts to her credit. She was the first Indian woman to graduate with a doctorate from Cambridge and to take a professorship at the Delhi University. Young Lotika Sarkar was the first woman lecturer in the Faculty of Law. And as her student and friend Usha Ramanathan says, at a time when rape was an unmentionable word, she shocked the department by teaching rape and its legal connotations to her students. She was one of the signatories of the open letter to the Chief Justice of India which opened the doors to reforms of rape laws in the eighties. She was also among those who assumed leadership in exposing the practice of female foeticide through amniotic fluid tests. She was one of the founding members of Centre for Women's Development Studies and was one of the authors of the Towards Equality report of 1974, on the Status of Women in India. As she told many of us later many times, for her and others, it was not just a report, it was a learning experience for the committee travelled all over India talking to women from all walks of life, understanding them, their lives, their experiences and their needs. Many of us knew her through the report first before we met her.

Lotika Sarkar passed away at the age of 90. In these days of self-promotion and ruthless ambition, she has left for us the legacy of not only hard work and commitment but also grace, dignity and humility. It is a legacy we need to carry forward.

Waves of Music: Seetha Doraiswamy (27 January 1926-14 March 2013)



Seetha Doraiswamy was affectionately called Paatti (grandmother) and Madisar Mami (Aunt in a nine-yard sari). She used to play the jalatharangam (literally water waves), a rare instrument played with porcelain cups filled water and struck with bamboo sticks. She was honoured with a Kalaimamani by the Tamil Nadu government in 2003 and

the citation states that she has tirelessly worked to save the rare instrument from extinction. It is not just that she kept this instrument alive but she also learnt and performed during times when women were not known to perform generally, leave alone playing an instrument as rare as the jalatharangam. While jalatharangam is the instrument she is known for she also played the veena, harmonium and another rare instrument called Balakokila, which is a smaller version of the Chitraveena.

Seetha was introduced to music very early in life. She learnt music from Kodaganallur Subbiah Bhagavathar and later under Gottuvadhyam vidhwan Seetharama Bhagavathar. When her parents shifted to Chennai, at the young age of ten she was enrolled into Professor Sambamurthy's Summer School of Music, the same school where D K Pattammal had also trained. When the time came for the students to opt for an instrument they had the choice of learning either gottuvadyam or jalatharangam. Seetha opted for jalatharangam maybe because she was fascinated at that young age by porcelain cups which seemed like vessels young girls used to play 'house', as she has said in an interview. But the teacher Ramaniah Chettiar wanted to test her. He set the cups to the raga Dheera sankaranabaranam and asked her how she would play Mayamalavagowla raga with that set up. Little Seetha told him all that had to be done was to increase the level of water in 'ri' and 'da'. She was, of course, accepted as his student.

Like many girls of her times Seetha got married at the age of 14. Her husband N Doraiswamy understood her love for music and encouraged her to join the course conducted by the Music Academy. She topped the class with a gold medal and was the youngest woman to be awarded the gold medal. Family life with eleven children kept her busy for many years. The loss of a son almost shattered her but she decided to come back to the water of life to sustain her. She was 41 when she returned to her porcelain cups and bamboo sticks.

Since then she has performed all over the world in many universities and in many schools. Even at the age of 83 she was travelling abroad and talking about jalatharangam. Writing about her performance in New York, the reviewer in *New York Times* talks about how she manages to produce gamakas of Carnatic music in an instrument which otherwise can produce only staccato sounds, by placing a small bowl inside a larger one and displacing some of the water into the larger bowl. She also produced tonal variations by using different types of sticks including plastic ones.

Seetha Doraiswamy lived a long life and gave many of her listeners water rides they cannot forget.

A Woman of Merit: Sukumari (6 October 1940-26 March 2013)



Sukumari means meritorious, sensitive. Sukumari, a film actress who primarily acted in Malayalam and Tamil films lived up to her name. She was the first cousin of the Travancore Sisters Lalitha, Padmini and Ragini. She entered the film world at the age of ten and has done many challenging roles. The total number of her films is presumed to be more than 2500. She was married to Tamil director A Bhimsingh and became a widow at the

young age of 30. She has won several prestigious awards for her acting and was awarded the Padma Shri in 2003. The Tamil Nadu government honoured her with the Kalaiselvam award in 1990 and the Kalaimamani award in 1991-92. She is remembered for many films but *Chattakari* (1974) later made as *Julie* (1975) in Hindi, for which she won the second best actress award from the Kerala State, is a film that all her fans remember.

Sukumari sustained injuries on 27 February 2013, while lighting the traditional lamp at a function in Chennai. She was subsequently admitted to a private hospital in Chennai and underwent plastic surgery. She was recovering when she suffered a heart attack and died on 26 March 2013. She would have been 73 in October. In her sixty-year film career she had become the mother figure in both Tamil Nadu and Kerala. She will be sorely missed by all her fans.

—CS Lakshmi

Forthcoming Publication

If the Roof Leaks, Let it Leak...

Poems and Stories of Women in
Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi, Maithili, Santhali and Dogri



Edited by
Menka Shivdasani

IF THE ROOF LEAKS, LET IT LEAK...

is the fourth of five volumes planned, with 87 writers from 23 languages of India. Three of them, *Hot is the Moon*, *Being Carried Far Away* & *Sweeping The Front Yard* were published earlier. This volume contains selected works and interviews of writers from Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi, Maithili, Santhali and Dogri.

HINDI writers include: Anamika, Mrinal Pande, Maitreyi Pushpa and Neelesh Raghuvanshi. **PUNJABI** writers include Deepinder, Manjit Tiwana, Nirupama Dutt and Sukhwant Kaur Mann. **SINDHI** writers include Indira Shabnam and Popati Hiranandani. **MAITHILI** and **SANTHALI** writers include Nirmala Putul and Shefalika Verma. **DOGRI** writers include Kanta Jamwal and Shakuntala Sharma.

The book is edited by well-known poet Menka Shivdasani. Three of her poems will also be included in this collection. Bharati Kapadia has done the drawings as in the other three volumes.

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.

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