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[Editor's Note]

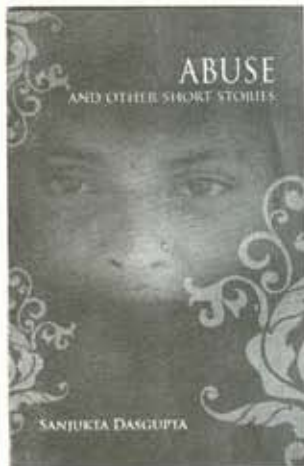
This is our second newsletter in the Silver Jubilee year which will last till December this year. In the pages inside can be seen details of the Silver Jubilee Celebratory programme CONVERSATIONS which we have been holding from January onwards on the last Saturday of every month. We held conversations with some extraordinary women and our media partners Parivadini have been uploading them on YouTube.

We have chosen some books that we have been enjoying reading, for reviews in this newsletter. The autobiography of Parvatibai Bhor came to us when a friend of SPARROW was cleaning her shelf and found this moving autobiography in Marathi and thought it belonged to SPARROW. Sanjukta Dasgupta's stories are set in the middle-class Bengali society and sensitively deal with the theme of gender abuse within the patriarchal family. The four Tamil books from Sri Lanka reveal the diasporic world of women dealing with memories of a lost land, lost childhoods and lost relationships.

The homage section in this newsletter weighed heavy on our hearts for a while for women artists and pioneer women we admired and somehow thought would always be there for us, passed away in this period. We know that lives lived to the full must always be celebrated and as Padmavati Saligram told her student, one should sweeten one's mouth with a piece of jaggery when such people pass away. We did sweeten our mouths for most of these wonderful women who have brought joy and colour to our life but the death of Athiyur Vijaya, who fought for justice for thirteen years after being raped by policemen, did bring tears to our eyes. Our homage to her is a gesture of support to all those women who have fought and continue to fight for justice against violence.

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

Abuse and Other Short Stories
Sanjukta Dasgupta



Book details:
Abuse and Other Short Stories.
Author: Sanjukta Dasgupta.
Publisher: Dasgupta & Co.,
Kolkata: 2013, (Pages: 147)
(Price: Rs. 150)

The title story in Sanjukta Dasgupta's collection, *Abuse and Other Short Stories*, almost a case study rather than a work of fiction, is about an underage girl, Malati, a client of MITALI, an NGO whose goal is to "Support, Educate, and Empower the Helpless." Sadly, Malati's story of abuse is an all-too-familiar one, in which her mother had died after childbirth and her alcoholic father remarried and raped her while drunk one night when her stepmother was away. When she became pregnant he hastily arranged her marriage to a much older man, with promises of a large cash dowry, and her new husband began torturing her, first verbally, then physically, after she gave birth to a stillborn baby girl and her father failed to come up with the money. It was then that Malati came to the story's framing character Preetilata, founder of MITALI, for help. Preetilata advocated successfully on the young woman's behalf. As a result of MITALI's efforts, Malati's father paid a dowry to her husband and her husband became kinder to her. He even agreed to support her strong desire to appear for at least her Madhyamik (or middle-school) exams; and although he remained opposed to Malati's dream of going further in her studies to become a schoolteacher, Preetilata continued to encourage her to do so.

Although it is clear that Preetilata and her organisation offer some much-needed support to Malati (and other young women like her), they cannot change her basic circumstances, that of a dependent who must abase herself before her husband for every concession. While MITALI mediates between Malati's father and husband to obtain the dowry payment, Malati "work[s] around the clock as cook, as nurse to his ailing parents. . . attending to every household duty, uncomplainingly." Her husband only agrees to her sitting for the exam after she has begged him repeatedly and promised to "obey [him] in everything" (6).

In my view the most interesting aspect of this title story, and one that could have been developed further, is the

ethical question it raises about Preetilata's motives and the light it sheds on her own domestic situation. We learn that Preetilata runs MITALI on an all-volunteer basis out of her own home, but only because her own businessman-husband tolerates it in the interests of "domestic harmony." Although she gets a great deal of satisfaction from this work, her family members are "amused by her seriousness" (p.1). For them, her value derives from the family days when she prepares gourmet meals "for her family of three fussy men." Like Malati, she must wait on her husband hand and foot to earn concessions from him, and, like Malati, she must coax men—her husband's business contacts—for their financial support.

Although there is no doubt that Preetilata is a caring, empathetic person and a good listener, the third-person narrator informs the reader that she cannot help feeling mildly disturbed by the "'feel good' factor" produced in her by "eavesdropping on a stranger's grief." As she feels the "narcotic drug of power," she wonders whether she is "do[ing] the right thing for the wrong reason" (p.2). At the end of the story, as a grateful Malati lowers her head to her benefactor's feet, "Preetilata-di" sighs with a sense of satisfaction and feels that "she [is] the Goddess Durga." In closing, however, the narrator reminds us that, however she might feel, "her family. . . look[s] upon her as Goddess Lakshmi" (p.6).

The authenticity of Malati's story and those of the other women—and men—featured in this collection is underscored by author Sanjukta Dasgupta's academic credentials and scholarly publications, especially her role as Managing Editor of *FAMILIES: A Journal of Representations*, Co-editor of *The Indian Family in Transition* (SAGE XXX), and Co-author of *Media, Gender, and Popular Culture in India: Tracking Change and Continuity* (SAGE, 2011). While Malati's abuse is physical and the marks of it are evident on her body, many of the other women are economically privileged and their abuse is much more subtle; nonetheless it is abuse, and these stories demonstrate this fact, even as they show how gender abuse takes new, subtler forms in contemporary globalized society.

The collection's most dominant themes, within the overarching theme of gender abuse within the patriarchal family (exemplified by stories such as "Break" and "Mrs. Duttaray") are women's struggles to speak and act in their own and their children's interests ("Rage", "Touch") the changing lives of aging middle-class parents as their children increasingly emigrate and settle abroad ("The Gift", "Play at Dusk"), and the changing forms taken by gender-unjust institutions such as dowry in the current neoliberal stage of globalization ("The American Dream", "Fun", "A Fairy Tale of the New Millennium"). Overall, Dasgupta's stories demonstrate that while women, including professional women, may be able to find small spaces of empowerment, they often compromise and accept their limited choices within the framework of patriarchal power ("Dear Diary", "Touch", "Selfish", "Compulsory", "Rebuff").

Occasionally a story will depart from social realism and take a flight into fancy, as in “A Fairy Tale of the New Millennium,” in which two women from different class backgrounds move in with each other to raise one woman’s dark-skinned daughter, who has been rejected by her marital family) and “Compulsory”, in which, whether a pending marriage is a “love” or “arranged” match, whether the women are uneducated or professional, the dowry demands are essentially the same, based upon greed. These two women also move in with each other, calling on their parents to cancel the wedding plans and put the money earmarked for the dowry in their name. In this latter, less fanciful story, they are universally criticized as “stingy,” given that they both have jobs and could have helped their parents meet the dowry demands. Somehow society always seems to blame the prospective brides, instead of falling upon the groom’s family for their greedy demands.

One of the stories in the collection addresses the suffocating institution of heterosexual marriage for homosexual men. In “A Room of His Own” (Dasgupta continually makes direct or indirect references to works by British writers such as Virginia Woolf and Jane Austen), compulsory heterosexuality entraps Raja, the perfectly obedient Bengali son. His aggressively ambitious wife drives him to achieve, insists on an English-only education for their children, and makes all the decisions for the family. His only resistance is to spend large amounts of time in the bathroom, and, when a house is being built for the family, to insist on a bathroom of his own, with a TV viewing area in it. Alarmed, his wife re-purposes this planned bathroom as a puja room while Raja is away on a work trip. As the story closes, we learn that Raja now spends a lot of time at work with the director of his office. Their respective wives accept this, reasoning that “this intimacy between their husbands is a thousand times better or at least safer than the ignominious mess of tackling other women” (p.135).

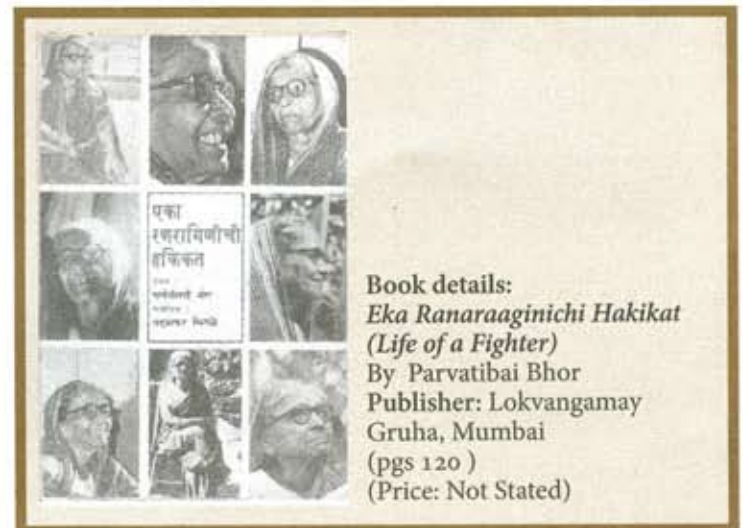
Abuse and Other Short Stories is set in the middle-class Bengali society that the author knows best, but has a much wider resonance. However, it is sometimes difficult to locate the stories in time, especially when they have obviously been written over a considerable period and, along with email and internet chat rooms, refer to now-dated practices such as STD phone calls. I found the failure to indicate the dates of original publication problematic because it made it difficult for the reader to correlate changing social practices and institutions with changing communications media and economic conditions.

This rich collection ends with two pieces that are quite different in theme and content from the rest and that seem very personal. “Unsung” is a non-fiction story set in 1925, under British colonialism and tells the story of the musician Hariprasanna Das, who worked with much more well-known figures like Pankaj Mullick and Hemanta Mukherjee. The gentle “Mastermoshai” never attains the success or recognition merited by his musical brilliance,

and while Hemanta Mukherjee helps to support him and his family as he ekes out a living by giving music lessons to largely untalented students. One is left with the distinct impression that the author or a member of her family was one of those students. Similarly, the final story, “The Way to Go”, appears to be a tribute to the author’s own father, although it is not explicitly labelled as such. It features a loving father—“a freedom-fighter” and “a caste-conscious Marxist” born to an illiterate mother—who, inspired by Nehru, named his daughter Indira despite his mother’s wishes that she be named Saraswati. He sends his daughter to an English-medium convent school despite the family’s concerns that she will “become a Christian and a misfit.” When she begins writing and publishing poems in English, and people berate them as “insults to the mother-tongue” (p.146), her father takes her a side, saying, “The Goddess of Learning, Saraswati, is a secular Goddess. Ignore the politics of language.” The story, and Dasgupta’s collection, closes with the sentence, “Indira knew that with such a father she could never go wrong” (p.147): perhaps an assertion of the author’s own culturally rooted secular politics and, as a professor of English, an indication of the roots of her views on the politics of language.

—Josna Rege
Worcester State University

Eka Ranaraaginichi Hakikat (Life of a Fighter) By Parvatibai Bhor



It looks like every book finally finds its destined place. Recently SPARROW received a book published in 1977. This book has travelled through two or three homes and has finally come to the SPARROW archives after one of SPARROW’s friends found the book while clearing up her bookshelves. It is an autobiography in Marathi, of the political activist, Parvatibai Bhor. The book carries black and white photographs of Parvatibai Bhor in her several

moods on the cover page. It is very different from the books published in the eighties, when most biographies in Marathi were by or on film actresses or wives of famous people.

Parvatibai Bhor was born in Mumbai in 1908. She studied only up to the Second Standard, and was married at the age of 9 into a very conservative Hindu family. At the age of 21, she was already a mother of three. There were many restrictions on her as a woman, and it was a continuous struggle for her to live a life following her own convictions in matters very close to her heart like the alleviation of the suffering of the working class people around her.

They were living in the Lalbaugh-Parel mill area which was the centre of political activities. She was witness to mill workers' strikes, several political leaders participating in either workers' movements or the national movement and several other activities. She was not satisfied standing on the sidelines and developed an urge to participate. But she knew her family and her husband who was very suspicious by nature, would not support her. She went on a hunger strike, and her husband reluctantly agreed to her participation. Her first contribution to "the cause" was to start weaving khadi at home, but she soon realised that mill

workers and other people in the lower rung of society, had greater and more acute problems. She was impressed with the Communist ideology and their struggle for people of the lower class and she started helping the mill workers. She helped them during their several strikes. During World War II especially, when common people found it difficult to even get rations, she collected money for their welfare. Her work for mill workers continued even after Independence. She protested against mill owners and their decisions, and even went to jail. Because of her hard work she received a life membership in the Communist Party.

Parvatibai Bhor has written this memoir at the age of 69. It is not just a personal memoir, but a picture of the political and social history of Mumbai of that period when she was active. The mill workers' struggle and the freedom movement come alive in her memoir with poignant details. She comes out as a person with a deep commitment and a dedicated Party worker who triumphed over the opposition of her own family to her activities. This is a very inspiring autobiography from the heart, told in a simple direct manner. It deserves to be translated into English and other Indian languages.

—Sharmila Sontakke

Silent Springs and Memories of Childhood: Four Books from Sri Lankan Women Writers



Tamil Book:
Sakasakkaari Patriyavai
(About a Woman who Dared) Poems by Thanya
Published by Vadali, Chennai, 2014, 64 pages. Price: Rs.50



Tamil Book:
Sunakkithu... (It Smarts...) Short stories by Nirupa
Published by Equality Graphics, Colombo, 2005, 132 pages. Price: Not stated



Tamil Book:
Acchaappillai (Good Child) Some Thoughts on Refuge, Tamils and Bringing Up Children
Published by Equality Graphics, Colombo, 2005, 132 pages. Price: Not stated



Tamil Book:
Olikkaatha Ilavenil (Silent Spring) Poems compiled by Thanya and Pratheeba Thillainathan
Published by Vadali, Chennai, 2009, 172 pages. Price: Rs.135

Except for the book *Saakaskkaari Patriyavai*, the other books were published a few years ago. However, when seen together, we find that books from Sri Lankan women writers bring with them memories of a lost land, of relationships cut short by war and death and of childhoods shrouded in memories of a life steeped in agriculture and rural wonders and nightmares. All these books evoke the pain and agony of a land caught in civil war and of love, affection and laughter which also become a part of it even though they are fleeting moments. It is necessary to write about these books because such memories belong to all times and not just the times when they were written.

Olikkaatha Ilavenil (Silent Spring) whose title is borrowed from the environmental science book *Silent Spring* written by Rachel Carson, is a compilation of poems written by diasporic women writers who talk about their present life through past experiences. There have been other poetry collections of women poets from Sri Lanka. Prateeba Thillainathan says in her introduction that women choosing poetry to express themselves instead of other forms of expression do so because of the limited time and space that women have for such an activity. That is the reason why this collection shaped by the violence and loneliness of our present times, is also a poetry collection, she says. She says if women could come out of their feelings of guilt and burdens and accept this book as a gift, if this could enliven women who have become bitter and have refused to write, the purpose of the book would have been served.

The dedication page has a small poem by Krishanthi Ratnaraja (1973-1995), a young poet who is no more. The poem says:

*Here, my love for nature
A pleasant evening scene
Imaginings of life's course
In the future
Have remained unwritten*

That short poem captures the spirit of the entire book. Nivedha writes in one of her poems:

*... There will be a day for me
In the light of the full moon
Amidst the murmurs of the coconut trees
Smelling the sweet fragrance
Of unripe lemons...
In an open dwelling with thatched roof
On a cot with gunny bags
I shall sleep fully stretching myself
Not just you
But nobody else will be able to
Question me about it*

Reading the lines, we are able to capture images of a life without freedom. Or when Anar says that the gaze of flowers gets dimmed in the twilight but that their dreams

wander in the wind like her poems, we get drawn into those unrealised dreams. And the poems of Aziyal, Jeba, Thamizini, Sharanya, Vasanthi, Monica, Durga, Maithili, Kausala, Indira, Darshini, Thanya, Pratheeba, Yasodhara and Reji take us through women's life, diasporic families and life and about nation and wartimes, make us a part of the love and longing and trauma that are part of their lives. Reji writes in one of her poems:

*Don't look for the colour of my blood
I too will be gone one day
My blood, like yours,
Is red, my friend*

Those lines are enough to give us the whole picture. We don't need detailed explanations for those four lines. And the last lines of Reji saying they would shout to stop wars so long as their voices fall on some ears are resounding echoes of the multiple voices in the book. And as Pratheeba Thillainathan says in her introduction, until the possibilities of writing "a pleasant evening scene" and "imaginings of life's course in the future" this book would remain as a record of a period in history.

Sunaikkithu and *Acchaapillai* by Nirupa are two extremely interesting books. I met Nirupa in a meeting in Toronto and she gave me her two books. I finished reading the two books while commuting from Andheri to Dahisar in the local train. The stories in *Sunaikkithu* then are life seen through the eyes of a small girl. As you read the book images of an agricultural life with all kinds of scarcities, parents immersed and struggling with this life, a tired mother ever ready to beat up the child, a neighbourhood woman who is battered by her husband every day and hits back one day, an "elder brother" from next door who sexually harasses the child regularly, efforts to extract some money from the mother by sprinkling water on the threshold and sweeping the garden clean, crushes of young girls and worrying about coming of age and the consequent restrictions on movements take shape in one's mind. Amidst all this the little girl is able to enjoy the flowers and the song of the koyal and wonder who buys white saris for ghosts. The stories are almost autobiographical with family photographs of children and other aspects of an agricultural life. Amidst all these soothing images of the cow and the hens, how the little girl sees violence as a part of her growing up and how she accepts it as a part of her being a girl is a disturbing element woven into the stories and long after one finishes the book this keeps nagging one's mind and that is the success of the story teller.

Acchaapillai of Nirupa is about the life of diasporas and their efforts to hold on to what they think is their culture and tradition and how it affects relationships within the family, both between wife and husband and also between parents and children. It is a sensitively written book and reflects the conflicts of living in an alien culture and the generational differences among the diasporas in perceiving the foreign culture they are living in.

In the book of poems, *Sakasakkaari Patriyavai*, Thanya writes a brilliant introduction of how these poems were written and why she is publishing them. She says her teenage years were spent in a country which made her feel alienated and yet this is where she learnt to dream, struggle and be free. She says that these poems are about the daring acts of women, who despite loneliness, frustration and boredom were still willing to drink each moment to its full. She says that when she looks at these poems now she can see an imbalanced mind. She feels alienated from them. She can see a woman who is totally different from her in these poems. This woman is talking about the stories, people whom she met, friends and love of those days. But these people and love no longer exist. In the twelve years following the writing of these poems the women of these poems and the reasons for writing them no more exist, she says. By printing these poems of those days she would like to relieve herself of those times. But she cannot dismiss the role of poetry in life. She says even though the poems speak of getting lost, they still remain the point of expanding spaces of life and life's search.

The book is dedicated to a young poet who cannot write anymore and a young girl who loved him. The first two-line introductory poem to the first section of poems called "Let it Happen, Even if it is for You" itself tells us the journey of these poems.

*Life is at that long distance
Where even breath cannot reach*

With those lines begins the first section.

There are nineteen poems in this section; each one about days that weigh heavy and love that refuses to go away from the mind. It is there in the mind like a nagging pain, like a wound that refuses to heal. It hurts but it also keeps alive memories. Lines like *Loneliness that comes with time/suppressed passion/like a child who does not know to write/moves the pen* and *In your soft bed/I float/get absorbed, freeze/and move away* and *For a girl/ who wants to achieve/ love, hate and confidence/ nothing is natural* capture the essence of this section. The second section "A City Without You" begins with the lines:

*A heaven
Disintegrated by structures
You can
Never regain*

It has four very poignant poems. The third section "I Did Not Think So Those Days" begins with the lines:

*Where are you, my love
In burnt buildings
In lost cultures
Where is your life
Hidden?
I told
The tireless sea
And wet winds
About unforgettable memories of you
With them came blowing
Memories of
You
Your body
Your nation*

This section has fourteen poems all of which speak of being lost in an alien land continuously feeding oneself with memories of love, longing and desire not knowing if one has overcome them or haunted by them. The last section "In the End" begin with the lines:

*The search for functioning
Fill like fresh snow
The empty spaces of the soul*

The section has fourteen poems. They tell stories of what it is to continue with one's life with questions about what love is and if love exists and will exist despite what one is. These lines in a poem reflect this feeling:...

*With confusion/ with imbalance/ with
no guilt/with no restraints/with no
stopping/with no responsibilities/when*

*I find such a life/will you be there/just to share love?/beyond
questions/beyond accusations/ knowing what I lack/can you
still love me?*

The last lines of the last poem, sum up what can be called this lonely journey in a strange land carrying memories of a life that was in another land, another time:

*...Aged
A grandmother
I live
Within lines and wrinkles
And grey hair
Crossing decades
With endless youth*

The book is illustrated by Living Smile Vidya, a transgender, who is a theatre activist and who appreciates literature.

—C S Lakshmi



Broken Palmyra Leaves

I went to Vizhupuram to meet the women in Thirukoviloor who had been raped by policemen. Professor Kalyani took us there. In situations when such interviews have to be done, I have always felt uncomfortable and tense. There is also a feeling of guilt when one wonders what would actually come out of such interviews. The women I met behaved normally but they also seemed to be timid by nature. Friends who had come along with me told me that meeting Vijaya may add to the interviews. Next day morning we went to Athiyur. The road to Athiyur was lined with trees but I was feeling numb.

Huts in that north Tamil Nadu village had roofs thatched with Palmyra leaves. At the street corner Vijaya was standing with her elder brother. She looked very happy seeing Professor Kalyani. Her brother offered to pick up the camera stand and other equipments.

Vijaya hugged me casually and took me in and asked me to be seated. "Start shooting after a cup of tea," she said and held my hand warmly. When she held my hands tightly I could feel the coolness of someone who had just had a bath. She was asked to sit at the entrance of her small house for the documentary. I was hesitant to ask her to speak. Professor Kalyani was talking to her when we were having our tea. It is possible he had told her something about what we were there for. Vijaya looked at me and smiled drily. There was a neem tree on her right and there was the statue of a virgin goddess next to it. Beside the statue was an earthen lamp that seemed to have just gone off.

"Tell me..."

"About what Vijaya?"

"Tell me when to speak."

"Hm..."

She began to speak. There was no tremour in her voice nor did tears gather in her eyes at any point. "I was sleeping soundly when they came. They said it was a case of theft. Then they asked me to get into the jeep. When it neared the mountains, they stopped the jeep, pulled me out and misbehaved with me. I was a small girl... I screamed and pleaded... but no... they did not let me go..."

"What happened later was even worse... the judge came. He questioned me standing near that pond. There were so many people around. 'Where did they touch you first? Who touched you first? Who touched your breast first?' Such vulgar questions. I came back running and made a paste of oleander seeds and drank it..."

There were palmyra leaves all over the floor. She took one of them and folded it and broke it. Slowly. A bit angrily. And then fast. And then very fast. She cleared her throat and said: It was *Aiya* (referring to Professor Kalyani) who guided me and showed me the way. "Tell me, does death solve anything?"

he told me. Then we made a petition that enquiries should not be made in all kinds of places. Then it was the petition court, compensation. They kept asking for adjournments. They were policemen after all. Their names and photos were never published anywhere. But everyone knew me.

I did get married. But it did not work out. Too many problems. I came here to stay close to my brother's house. The compensation money got over very fast. What can I say? But I am happy. What else can one do?

Her brother was drunk by then and was blabbering incoherently. Vijaya seemed a bit embarrassed and looked at me and pursed her lips in a helpless gesture. We spent the entire afternoon with her. Every now and then, after speaking two or three sentences she would casually hold my hands. In the evening we went to the mountain area where she had been raped and her life had been destroyed... It was a mountain of unusual white stones. A friend who had come along said that such mountains were historically important. I laughed to myself. When that programme was broadcast I retained that part where she had torn the palmyra leaves. I am unable to get over that even now.

I got a text message from Professor Kalyani about Vijaya's death last month. I was at a live broadcast then. I came out to drink some water.

"What can I say? But I am happy. What else can one do?" Vijaya's voice seemed to echo.

I felt as if there were broken palmyra leaves all around me on the floor. While reading this even you may hear the sound of a palmyra leaf being broken...

—Dhamayanthi Nizhal
Tamil Writer and Media Professional

No homages are paid for the many raped children, girls and women who die almost every day. They become news items sometimes sensationalised and sometimes merely mentioned, but mostly forgotten. We thought writing a note on Vijaya, a rape survivor who fought for justice all her life and who passed away sometime back, will speak about our concern for the many who have passed away unwritten and also extend our support to all women who are fighting for justice in many different ways.

SPARROW SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATION PROGRAMME CONVERSATIONS

We began the CONVERSATIONS programme to celebrate SPARROW completing 25 years. From January 2014 to March 2014 three conversation events were held under this programme. From May onwards SPARROW collaborated with Research Centre for Women's Studies in organising the programme at the Mini Auditorium, SNDT University, Juhu Campus, except for the month of June.

The FOURTH CONVERSATION with Purvadhanashree, a Bharatanatyam and Vilasini Natyam exponent and Ranjana Dave, an Odissi dancer was held on 26th April this year. It turned out to be an interesting conversation. Both of them spoke about their gurus, their dance form and what it meant to them. They spoke about the sociological and traditional aspects of dance and mentioned the Maharis, the temple dancers of Orissa, the Kalavanthalus of Andhra Pradesh and the Devadasis of Tamil Nadu and spoke about their own interest in looking at tradition and contextualising it in order to understand it. Interspersed with demonstrations of their art form and its body movements, the conversation was able to cover many areas of the different dance forms and the different ways of teaching and learning dance and the changing content of dance. Both of them felt that they were still exploring the many different possibilities of viewing their own styles of dancing creatively and being open to dialogues to collaborate, reflect and explore ideas that inform their creative practice in multi-disciplinary ways.

In the FIFTH CONVERSATION held on 31st May 2014 we decided to screen a film of conversations with five transgender women. In the film *Degham* which was screened that day, Revathi, Kalki, Aasha Bharathi, Priya Babu and Narthaki Nataraj spoke to C S Lakshmi about the transgender experience and the complexities of the body.

The SIXTH CONVERSATION, held on 28th June, with the renowned Odissi dance exponent Jhelum Paranjape, became a wonderful event of an artiste sharing her life and work. Jhelum Paranjape began with her being named after a river in Punjab and ended with her narrating the experience of dancing in an old chapel in Goa and her latest dance composition Maeri on motherhood in which she and her son Bunkim collaborated. The conversation lasted for two and a half hours but all of us felt it could go on the whole night like some of those music festivals and folk performances which last through the night. Jhelum Paranjape kept the audience enthralled with various anecdotes from her life, her learning experience with Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra and her performing experiences. And whenever Jhelum could not find a word to say something her beautiful eyes expressed it all. The conversation flowed smoothly like the flow of a river and all of us could immerse ourselves in it and come out feeling refreshed and rejuvenated. No need to go looking for far away rivers to bathe in for Jhelum is close by!

The SEVENTH CONVERSATION was held on 26th July. It was a much-awaited one because it was a conversation

with well-known Tamil and Sindhi writers Puthiyamaadhavi and Vimmi Sadarangani. It was a conversation that brought out so many different aspects of life, identity and expression. Vimmi spoke about what it was to be a Sindhi writer, how she became one and how her mother supported her writing. She spoke movingly about her visit to Sindh and how she was received by the people there. She also spoke about her short-lived marriage, and how her mother came and took her away and told her she should not be with people who did not appreciate her writing. Puthiyamaadhavi spoke with passion about growing up with a father who was an ardent follower of Periyar and the Dravidian movement and how she herself was influenced by him and the books that she read which were in their house. She spoke about Dalit writing and her views on it and how she always retained the space for writing in her life for it meant everything to her. Asked how she managed to write with a job in a bank and marriage and family, she jocularly replied that actually she managed to work and keep her marriage only because she continued to write. It was writing that enabled her to do everything that she did.

The EIGHTH CONVERSATIONS programme was another screening event when we screened two films on Shahjehan Aapa and Sathyarani Chaddha. We felt that conversations with two women who fought against dowry needed to be known for they had passed away quietly after a lifetime of active work against dowry. There was a need to listen to them.

The NINTH CONVERSATION held on September 27th was an extremely lively one. It was a conversation with Kalyanee Mulay, a young actor from the National School of Drama. She has worked with and learnt from eminent theatre directors/performance makers from home and abroad such as Pt. Satyadev Dubey, Satish Alekar, Dr Anuradha Kapur, Robin Das, Tripurari Sharma, Annie Ruth, Sara Matchett and many others. She has done a course in Kutiyattam from the renowned guru G Venu. Kalyanee spoke about her search for something that would mean a lifelong commitment and the various roads she took to reach it. Whatever she did her heart told her she wanted something else. She got into television and got many awards and finally she went to NSD and realised that is what she wanted to do in life—be an actor and a performer. She told us about the work she did with various directors and what those performances meant to her and how she performed in the play *Unseen*, where she explored the female body and its various bindings and marks. She performed a short piece from an ongoing work which was again an exploration into the mysteries of the body. Asked if she would go back to television she said she did not know, for an actor also has to survive and added laughing that she had recently done an ad for Horlicks.

—C S Lakshmi



Dr C S Lakshmi with Purvadhanashree and Ranjana Dave



Purvadhanashree and Ranjana Dave demonstrating similarities in Odissi and Vilasini Natyam



Dr C S Lakshmi with Jhelum Paranjape



Dr C S Lakshmi with Vimmi Sadarangani and Puthiyamaadhavi



Dr C S Lakshmi with Kalyanee Mulay



SPARROW team with Jhelum Paranjape, Dr C S Lakshmi, Dr Divya Pandey, Sudha Arora and Vishnu Mathur

Our Silver Jubilee Celebration Programme CONVERSATIONS can be viewed online on YouTube through Parivadini Channel, our social media partner.

Book Launch



Jhelum Paranjape is releasing the book with Menka Shivdasani and C S Lakshmi



Puthiyamaadhavi reading some of the poems



Anjali Purohit reading the translation of the poems



Sudha Arora reading some of the poems



SPARROW's fourth volume *If the Roof Leaks, Let it Leak...* edited by Menka Shivdasani, in the series of five volumes with interviews and works of 87 writers from 23 languages, was launched on 26th September 2014 by the renowned dancer Jhelum Paranjape at the Kitab Khana as a part of the 100 Thousand Poets for Change event organised by Menka Shivdasani. Sudha Arora, Puthiyamaadhavi, Anjali Purohit and Menka Shivdasani read out some of the poems from the present volume and the previous volumes, in the original language and their English translation. Sudha Arora and Puthiyamaadhavi also read out their own poems. Menka, Anjali, Sudha and Puthiyamaadhavi made the occasion a joyous and memorable one.

Menka had also taken the volume with her to Singapore at the Asia-Pacific Writers Conference and the book was launched there on July 17th by Shantha Ratii, an internationally acclaimed Kuchupidi dancer, and was well appreciated by everyone who attended it. It was a full house at the Earshot cafe.

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...

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

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* and *Sweeping the Front yard* were published earlier. They included interviews, poems and stories of Kannada, Tamil, Konkani, Tulu, Assamese, Bengali, Garo, Manipuri, Mizo, English, Malayalam, Telugu and Urdu writers.

The fourth volume contains selected works and interviews of writers from Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi, Maithili, Santhali and Dogri.

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

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

~ I Am ~

Manjit Tiwana

I am
the wailing cry
of the setting sun,
the feel of the new dawn.
I am a looking glass
framed in silence,
a witness to your
torments.
I am
a magic trick of God,
my mother's talisman,
my father's false vow,
my unwelcome life.
I am
the door of a sand castle,
the blind window of dreams.
I am sunk deep in the black sea,
the dream of a pearl

locked in shell.
I am
the scream of birds
dislodged from ruined sand homes.
I am the furrow of the boat,
fast sinking in the gale.
I am
the Kurukshetra field
for the unending battle
between my inner truth,
and the outer.

Translated by B M Razdan from the original
Punjabi *Main*.

(Poem taken from the Volume
IF THE ROOF LEAKS, LET IT LEAK...)

The First Lady Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mumbai: Dr Mehroo Bengalee (1930-May 21, 2014)



Dr Mehroo Bengalee passed away at the age of 84. It is difficult to be an educationist and earn the respect of both students and others in our country. And to be a fearless educationist is even more difficult. But women like Dr Mehroo Bengalee who are dedicated to education take up such challenges boldly. She was Vice-Chancellor of Mumbai University from 1986 to '92 but before that she taught in St Xavier's College and many of her books are prescribed by colleges. With a degree in economics and a post-graduate degree psychology she served the cause of higher education as a person committed to higher education. She brought dignity and respect to her position and functioned as an educationist whom no one could fault. She was a former trustee of the Bombay Parsee Panchayat and the founder member of the National Minorities' Commission.



A Voice that Set a Trend: Jayalakshmi (1932- May 26, 2014)



Jayalakshmi of the Radha Jayalakshmi duo passed away in May. She was 82. Jayalakshmi and Radha were trendsetters in the Carnatic music world after Brinda-Mukta of the Veenai Dhanammal school of music. Like the Alathur Brothers among the male artists, Radha-Jayalakshmi were the first women performers to become extremely popular. Coincidentally, like the Alathur Brothers, Radha and Jayalakshmi were not siblings. They were cousins and they grew up together in Chennai and started performing in their early teens. They belong to the G N Balasubramaniam (GNB) school of music. Having trained by GNB's prime disciple T R Balasubramaniam, the influence of the great master GNB was quite evident in their performances. Legendary violinist T Chowdiah would jokingly refer to them as "GNB in a sari"! Jayalakshmi, blessed with a dexterous voice, was famous for her effortless *raga* delineation studded with stunning fast-paced phrases called *brigas*. The duo reached their peak in the late sixties and seventies and performed all over the country. While they had almost stopped giving live performances in this millennium, their recordings at their peak are much sought after even by present day students. They received the Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 1981.

Jayalakshmi, with her resonant voice, sang in many Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada films. Her first film song

was for the film *Ithu Nijama* in 1948 when she was just sixteen under the music direction of S Balachander. From 1948 to 1971, Jayalakshmi sang many noteworthy film songs composed by doyens such as S M Subbiah Naidu, G Ramanathan, Viswanathan-Ramamoorthy, Chittoor V Nagaiah, K V Mahadevan, S V Venkatraman, Adepalli Rama Rao, G Govindrajulu Naidu, T G Lingappa, Vedha and Kunnakudi Vaidyanathan. Some of her songs like *Andru ododi vandhu uyir koduthai* in *Manam Pol Mangalyam* (1953) composed by A Rama Rao and *Singara paingkiliye pesu* which she sang with A M Raja for the film *Manohara* (1954) composed by S V Venkatraman were very popular in the fifties. Another song of hers which was equally popular in the fifties was *Vennilavum vaanum pole* in the film *Kalyanam Panniyum Brahmachari* (1954) composed by T G Lingappa. The present generation of music lovers remember her more for an extraordinarily beautiful song she sang for the film *Motor Sundaram Pillai* (1966) *Maname Muruganin mayilvahanam* composed by M S Viswanathan. Priya Sisters, the duo who are popular now, were groomed by Jayalakshmi and Radha. Musicians like Jayalakshmi don't really leave this world for one of their songs is always resonating in some part of the world being heard by some ardent music lover.

—Lalitharam Ramachandran



A life dedicated to Music: Dhondutai Kulkarni (July 23, 1927-June 1, 2014)



The Jaipur-Atrauli gharana was founded by the legendary classical singer Alladiya Khan. Dhondutai Kulkarni belongs to that gharana and is probably the last legend of that gharana. I had heard Dhondutai Kulkarni on records but when I met her many years ago I realised how humble a true artiste could be. For her, music was simply something she could not live without and that was nothing to brag about. She told me about her father and his love for music and how he wanted Natthan Khan, the nephew of Alladiya Khan to teach her and when he refused to teach her, he thought of asking a friend to learn from him who could then teach Dhondutai. Natthan Khan finally relented to teach her. She later learnt from Bhurji Khan, the son of Alladiya Khan, who was a court singer in Kolhapur. She recalled how she learnt music from Kesarbai Kerkar and how her father never thought twice about giving up everything in Kolhapur and moving to Mumbai so that she could learn from Kesarbai Kerkar. Dhondutai lived a quiet life in the style of her music and her life and her music, in a way, came alive to those who are not part of the classical music world, in the book *The Music Room* by Namita Devidayal. To me Dhondutai's music

is like an inward journey which carries you along even if you are not a musical person and then, when you are most unprepared, it pulls you in like quicksand. And like her music, she only had to smile to make you feel comfortable and at home. I did not meet her after my book *The Singer and The Song* was done but she and her music were there in my life. And her music will remain for me and others like me despite her passing away at the age of 87. She breathed music for 82 years of her life and when her breath mingled with the breeze it must have been one of those deeply passionate performances of hers.



A "Laadli" All Her Life: Zohra Sehgal (April 27, 1912-July 10, 2014)



Zohra lived a long life and she lived it on her terms. With a career spanning dance, theatre and films, she remained young at heart and energetic with a sense of humour and laughter that was infectious. I met her many years ago to interview her for a book of mine on dance and dancers. She gave me an appointment but told

me that she was a dancer a long time ago and that she was more of a theatre actress and a film actor. Zohra Sehgal had begun her career as a dancer in Uday Shankar's troupe and later became a member of Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). She enjoyed the many stage performances she did and while talking to me could easily go from one mood to another. Then she would look at me with a twinkle in her eyes and say, "See, I told you I am an actress, not a dancer." She acted in the early films *Dharti Ke Lal* and *Neecha Nagar* produced by IPTA and later in many other films like *Hum dil De Chuke Sanam*, *Cheeni Kum*, *Dil Se*. Her last film was Sanjay Leela Bansali's *Saawariya*. She also acted in English language films like *Bend it like Beckham*. She was a Padma Vibhushan awardee and much loved by the film fraternity and art lovers. Two very interesting books have been written on her; one by Joan Erdman and another by her daughter Kiran Sehgal. Zohra Sehgal did not get the government flat she had asked for till the end, but now she is in a limitless space that belongs to all.



A Woman Named Victory: Athiyur Vijaya (1976-July 11, 2014)



Many rape survivors live to continue their life overcoming the trauma or learning to live with it. But many also die. Like Nirbhaya who has now become a global symbol for violence against women. Athiyur Vijaya was also a rape survivor but she was different. Her rape brought attention to the inhuman treatment

being meted out to scheduled tribes. On the night of 29th July 1993, under the pretext of indentifying a suspect who was hiding in a farm, six policemen attached to the Pondicherry Grand Bazaar Police Station took Vijaya and her parents in a police van to Puducherry and on the way, in Vellamai village, she was gang-raped by the six policemen. Her parents filed a case and Athiyur Vijaya fought for justice for 13 years after which, in 2006, a Villupuram District Court awarded life imprisonment to all six policemen and dismissed them from service. But they were given bail, within three months, when they appealed the verdict at the Madras High Court. In 2008, all the six were acquitted.

Vijaya's valiant fight for justice became reason for many prominent movements like Scheduled Tribe Protection Movement (STPM) founded by Prabha Kalvimani. Professor Kalyanai, co-ordinator of The Pazangudi Irular Padhukappu Sangam and some human rights organisations had all along supported her and continued to support her even after the final verdict. But Vijaya's family members deserted her once the final verdict came and she was all alone struggling to survive and make a decent living. She moved to live with her brother later. She never really recovered from the trauma and had been ailing and on 11th July she was found dead in her house. Vijaya's fight for justice failed, her family abandoned her, she lost her entire years of youth fighting against the violence inflicted on her body by six men who got away with it all. What an irony that she was named Vijaya—victory! But coming to think of it, maybe she was victorious in proving that rape survivors, merely because they belong to scheduled tribes, don't succumb to temptations of out of court settlements; their fight for justice is not just for themselves but the greater cause of human rights.

(See article *Broken Palmyra Leaves* by Dhamayanthi Nizhal on page: 07)



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a visual, a film or a song which you think must be
documented in SPARROW. For reviews please send
two copies of the book.

Memories with a Piece of Jaggery: Padmavati Shaligram (Gokhale) (1918-July 20, 2014)



Padmavati Shaligram (Gokhale) was one of the early pioneers who paved the way for women from non-professional families to take up music. She began performing from the age of thirteen. She learnt music from the age of ten from Bapurao and Wamanrao Shaligram and from her uncle Govindbua Shaligram who was a student of the legendary musician, Ustad Alladiya Khan. Although known as a musician from the Jaipur-Atrauli gharana, a gharana founded by Alladiya Khan, she blended it with elements of Kirana Khayal and Patiala Thumri. She also acted and sang in films in the thirties and forties. She was famous for her very fast taans sung in an electrifying speed. She was a strong and assertive woman and it is said that her music was sweet but that her tongue was very rude! She continued to sing even when she was old and frail and the quality of her singing remained the same. It is said that at the 13th Sangeet Sammelan held from Novemebr 11-13 in 2005 in Kolkata, which was the platinum jubilee year of her career, she had to be helped on to the stage but she stunned the audience with her clear voice and her vigour and energy. She got a standing ovation which did not surprise her much.

She was the top ranking performer of the All India Radio. She received many awards including Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 1988, the highest award for arts awarded by the government of India. She also got the Kalidas Award for the year 1994-95 and the award from Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya Mandal.

Her student Kedar Naphade, a harmonium player, has paid her a rich tribute in his harmonium page. He says that she transformed him from a diligent student into a lifelong seeker of musical divinity. He also says that what made her music unique was among other things, the "unorthodox assimilation of the voice production techniques and semi-classical singing of the great Begum Akhtar."

Padmavati lived a long life and passed away at the age of 96. Kedar Naphade says that in one his last conversations with her, she told him that when someone passes on after a complete and full life, one should not grieve. In fact there is an old traditional Indian custom, that after the final rites for such a person, one should sweeten one's mouth with a piece of jaggery, she told him. One does not really need a piece of jaggery but one only has to listen to one of her recordings to remember the sweetness of her life and her music.



A Life in Girnar: Sushilarani Patel (October 20, 1918- July 24, 2014)



Sushilarani belonged to a Chitrapur Saraswath Brahmin family of North Karnataka. Music was her passion from her childhood. After completing her MA and LT with a first class she came to Bombay in 1942 to become a journalist. This is where she met Baburao Patel in whose film *Draupadi* she acted and sang. It was this film that launched her singing career. She married Baburao Patel who was not keen on her acting. So Sushilarani began to pursue classical music seriously learning from Mogubai Kurdikar, Alladiya Khan and Sundarabai Jadhav, one of the first musicians to record music for All India Radio in the thirties. She lived with her famous husband Baburao Patel, editor of *Filmindia* magazine, in Girnar, the home they built in 1952, with its rich library and a hall where several musicians have performed. She trained students here and the bungalow became the hub for several cultural activities.

Sushilarani took up law at the age of 59 and got a law degree when she was 61 passing with a first class. She also practised as a homeopathic doctor. Several awards came her way like the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award and the Maharashtra Rajya Sanskritik Puraskar, among others. She has also been on the music advisory board, on the censor board as a panel member for six years and a board member for two terms. After Baburao Patel's death she continued to remain active in the Shiv Sangeethanjali they had both set up in 1961 to find and encourage young talents in music. Although Sushilarani was also a lawyer, journalist and a doctor, her heart was in music. Her death at the age of 96, marks the end of an era of multi-talented women who left the security of their homes to find themselves and make their life meaningful



A High Flying Swing: Smita Talwalkar (September 5, 1954-August 6, 2014)



Smita Talwalkar's name is linked in everyone's memory with *Unch Maaza Zoka* (My Swing Goes High), a television serial based on Ramabai Ranade's life. Smita was a television newsreader for many years before she became an actor, producer and director. *Kalat Nakalat* (1989), the first film produced by her under the banner of Asmita Chandra, directed by Kanchan Nayak, was adjudged the best Marathi feature film at the 37th National Film Awards. Smita Talwalkar played some very memorable roles in films like in *Chalukat Raja* (1991) where she played the role of a childhood friend of a mentally challenged boy.

Under this banner she produced 6 films and 25 television serials. Many of her productions dealt with social issues like old age and sexual violence. She also got into direction in 1991, with her film *Sawat Mazhi Ladki* which won the Maharashtra State Film Award. She acted in many plays and also produced many plays. Smita also ran an acting school, Asmita Chitra Academy which trains several students in various fields of media. It is sad when cancer claims such an active person at such a young age. 59 is very often the age when women take up new routes in their life. The institutions she has set up will certainly continue to carry out her work and her dreams.



A Forever Endless Story: U R Ananthamurthy (December 21 1932- August 22, 2014)



A short story collection of U R Ananthamurthy is titled *Endhendu Mugiyadha Kathe* (A Forever Endless Story) and many of his admirers like me felt that he was endless too for his personality exuded such cheer even when he was ailing. SPARROW released its two Kannada volumes in the year 2002

in Bengaluru and we wanted Ananthamurthy to release the books. We had heard that he had had a heart operation and were wondering if he would agree. He readily agreed and said, "There are no more sparrows in Bengaluru and so this sparrow is most welcome." As a writer and a person, Ananthamurthy was most encouraging of younger writers. He had an astute understanding of life, politics and literature and remained a person who did not make any compromises on his literary and political stands all his life. He has left behind his words for us as a testimony of what a person can do with words in a lifetime.



Death of an Artist: Netra Sathe (May 31, 1937- August 23, 2014)



Netra Sathe lived in Kalyan, Mumbai, and her home became the place from where emerged many different cultural activities that she initiated. She was the daughter of the renowned artist, late K R Ketkar. Her husband was the well-known sculptor, S D Sathe. Netra did her advanced course in painting from

J J School of Arts. She was not just a painter. She was an actor, singer, writer, director and dancer. Her play *Niyati* won an award and she also won the award for acting and

directing the play. She played the central role of Gandhari in the play *Andha Yug*. She wrote one-act plays, dance-dramas, tableaux and skits apart from regular articles in magazines and newspapers on painting. She has published several books and her book *Vasundhara*, a dance ballet in Marathi, received a lot of attention and was so popular that it was translated into Hindi. She was also a costume designer among other things, and worked with the legendary Dr Shriram Lagoo, and designed the costumes for the Marathi play, *Vishnugupta Chanakyache*. She was also associated with the Dinkar Sangeet Vidyalay in Kalyan, as its principal. For all her work for which she made the suburb of Kalyan famous she received the Kalyan Gaurav Puraskar in 1980 from Kalyan Mahanagarpalika.

She has held more than 50 painting exhibitions in the US, UK and Russia. She was one of the earliest painters in India to discover cold ceramics for painting. Cold ceramics are ceramics not fired in a kiln. This is an interesting type of art where a mixture of ceramic and chalk powder is pasted with glue to form a dough, which is then applied onto the support to create an embossed effect. Application can be with a knife, cone or even hand. Layers are added and when sufficient thickness is attained, it is allowed to dry and finished with sand paper. This is then covered with proprietary varnishes and painted over with oils or acrylics. Netra was the first painter who experimented with polyester resin as a medium of painting. It is a material used in the production of commercial products like sunmica. While the material is transparent, normally it becomes opaque when colours are used on it. Netra worked against this opacity and devised a process by which the material retained its transparency despite the adding of colours. This gave a 3D effect to the paintings. Netra began this experiment as early as 1972. Her favourite subject for painting was portrait painting. Despite her busy life, she set aside time to mentor her niece Manjusha Rajyadaksha in painting. Netra lived a life rich in all aspects of art, as rich as the bright colours of her paintings.



A Lifetime in Choreography: Maya Rao (May 2, 1928- September 1, 2014)



When I was a student in Delhi in the late sixties, my hostel was close to Bharatiya Kala Kendra which is now known as National Institute of Kathak Dance and I had friends learning Kathak there and there was no one who did not know Maya Rao. I had also seen some of her performances. I had the opportunity

to meet her much later in the nineties for my book on dance and dancers. I met her in Malleswaram, Bangalore, not very far from my house, and realised that I had all along lived very close to a legend in dance without being aware of it. Maya Rao set up her school for teaching Kathak dance, National

institute of Kathak and Choreography (NIKC), only in 1987. Until then Bharata Natyam was the classical dance popular among young girls in Bangalore who wanted to learn dance. It was Maya Rao who brought Kathak to Bangalore.

Speaking to her was a rare experience of watching an artiste recreating her life and work for you with such vivid details that one became part of her journey. She spoke about learning music, for girls were not encouraged to learn dance by her orthodox father. It was watching a performance by Uday Shankar troupe that changed his mind and Maya along with her two sisters, began to learn Kathak from Sohanlal of the Jaipur gharana. She also trained under Guru Sunder Prasad, also of the Jaipur gharana. She later learnt from Shambu Maharaj of the Lucknow gharana when she got a scholarship. She pursued her passion for dance along with her studies and with family responsibilities that she had to take up when her father died in 1946 when she was just 17.

In 1960, she was selected for the USSR Cultural Scholarship in Choreography to study for her Master's in Choreography. Upon her return from Russia in 1964, with the help of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, then Vice Chairperson of Sangeet Natak Akademi, she started the Natya Institute of Choreography in Delhi under the aegis of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh. She lived in Delhi for many years after that. It was much later that she came to Bangalore at the invitation of the then Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde and set up NIKC. From 1987 to 1990, as chairperson of Karnataka Sangeet Nritya Academy, state academy for music and dance, she began the trend for national performing arts festivals in heritage monuments. Known for her dance ballets, she was given the Sangeet Natak Akademi award for Creative dance and Choreography in 1989. Many other prestigious awards were conferred on her by the government of Karnataka. In December 2011, the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi announced the "Tagore Ratna" awards. Along with several veterans such as Kalanidhi Narayanan, Maya Rao received her Tagore Akademi Ratna award in a glittering ceremony at the Music Academy in 2012. Maya Rao also received the lifetime achievement award for her contribution to dance and choreography at the Epic Women Conference curated by Anita Ratnam in 2012.

Maya Rao remained active till the end as consultant choreographer in her institute and also in the branch of NIKC, Natya and Stem Dance Kampani, started by her daughter Madhu Natraj, also a well-known choreographer. In July 2014, her autobiography, *Maya Rao—A Lifetime in Choreography* was released by playwright Girish Karnad in July 2014. Epic women don't really die; they live on having sown the seeds for many like them. Many stories, many songs, many dances and many ballets will continue to happen and in all of them there will be Maya Rao somewhere.



A Life Spent in Translation: S Krishnamoorthy (1929-September 7, 2014)



I came to know Su Krishnamoorthy, as he was referred to in Tamil, a few years ago when an event was going to be held in Mumbai and the organisers wanted to know if anyone from Tamil Nadu had done work on Tagore. I was introduced to Su Krishnamoorthy and consider myself very fortunate to have met someone

who had spent all his life translating from Bengali to Tamil and from Tamil to Bengali. When I went to Kolkata I went to his house to meet him and he gave me his autobiography among other books. I realised that he was not just a translator but a scholar and a creative writer himself. The book carries a list of his published works and I was amazed to know that he knew Hindi, Sanskrit and Bengali apart from Tamil and that he had done his Master's in English literature. He had translated from Tamil to English and Bengali and from Bengali to Tamil, from Hindi to Tamil almost all the major contemporary fiction. He had also translated non-fiction from English to Tamil. He had translated *Silappadhikaram*, the Tamil epic into English and Bengali and had translated *Thirukkural* into Bengali. He had also published two short story collections of his own. He had an amazing record of having published more than sixty books in translation. In an interview that he gave in August 2010 to *Vadaku Vaasal*, a Tamil magazine, he says that if one were to keep all his writings starting with his very first published story, they would not fit into one room! His translations into Tamil of the autobiographies of Maithreyi Devi, Jaya Mitra and Kamala Das Gupta and the stories of Mahasweta Devi interested me a great deal and he spoke at length about his translating experiences.

He has won several awards including the Sahitya Akademi award in 1991 for *Rakta Bonya*, a translation into Bengali of Indira Parthasarathy's *Kurudhippunal* in Tamil. After his retirement as Assistant Accounts Officer in Subordinate Accounts Service (which comes under the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India), and the loss of his wife, he had worked tirelessly and physical ailments began to haunt him every now and then. But he never gave up. Krishnamoorthy had recently moved to Chennai to live with his daughter and during my last trip to Chennai in August, I went and met him and he was full of cheer although he was in the hospital for a minor ailment. His death on 7th September came as a shock for it was most unexpected and laughing and joking with him all of us around him that day had forgotten that he was 85 and not in the best of health. To find a multi-lingual person like him to bring literature of Bengal to Tamil Nadu and take Tamil literature to Bengal, is going to be impossible. The only way to recognise his contribution would be to reprint all his translations from Bengali to Tamil.