

# Women Writers' Meet

## Experience & Expression

*A Cultural Event to Celebrate  
Women's Lives, Women's Words  
Through Dialogue & Discussion  
on the subject*

Writing the Self Writing Stories





Aditi Desai



Menka Shivdasani



Puthiyamaadhavi



Sudha Arora



Anjali Purohit



Girija Shastry



Yenghkom Indira



Tulasi Venugopal



Ashalata Ramble



Ambai



Gita Naik



Shyamala Madhav



Urmila Pawar



Savita Damle



Dhamaganthi



Pushpa Mehta



Sushama Deshpande



Padmaja Narayanan



# Experience & Expression

A Cultural Event to Celebrate  
Women's Lives, Women's Words

Through Dialogue & Discussion on the Subject

*Writing the Self, Writing Stories*

ORGANISED BY



(Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women)

DATE: 20 TO 23rd March 2015

VENUE: CLUB NEEMBADA, KARJAT, MUMBAI

Project Support: Ministry of Culture, Sahitya Akademi

## Planning a Writers' Meet

Experience and Expression, a Writers' Meet organised by SPARROW and supported by Ministry of Culture and Sahitya Akademi to celebrate women's lives and women's words through dialogue and discussion on the subject, *Writing the Self, Writing Stories* took place from 20<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2015 at Club Neembada, Karjat.

The writers' meets SPARROW organises are different from the usual. These meets or camps as we like to call them are planned as cultural events where writers do not read papers but dialogue in groups of two or three with a facilitator enabling the dialogue. Time and space is also provided for extended interaction and dialogues beyond the scheduled time during the day, in the evenings. We carefully choose films to screen along with stories and poems to be read. The screening of the films is followed by interaction and comments and further sharing of experiences. The event is also considered an archival project for material generated from the event like photographs and recorded narratives is archived in SPARROW for future consultation and dissemination.

The methodology of creating conversations among people is a SPARROW method to break hierarchies among writers and dissolve tensions of interacting with one another and generate a camaraderie that would open up dialogues. So the Meet was planned as a different kind of a cultural event that combined many aspects of expression and linking with it a process of sharing, learning, communication and creative archiving. This open method allows sharing and learning at various levels and is a participative method of working,

generation of material and innovative archiving. It is also a method that combines several aspects and unifies them as a talking, listening, viewing and sharing experience.

For the Experience and Expression Writers' Meet like the other writers' meets we had organised earlier, we had planned to choose the participants from various regions and languages through a process of consultation with SPARROW language consultants. The selection was to be made on the basis of contributions, ideas for exchange and creative participation of the participants. The 25 participants were to be those for whom experiential writing is an important aspect of expression. But some aspects of this plan had to be toned down due to the fact that the funds we received did not allow ambitious plans of inviting writers from all over India as we could not pay for their travel. We decided to invite various Indian language writers and playwrights in and around Mumbai. When we sat down to make a list of the writers we realised that we could invite 25 writers from many languages, from within Mumbai and around. That cheered us up. We could invite writers from Hindi, Tamil, Marathi, Gujarati, and English. Just when we were finalising the writers we remembered that Manipuri writer Yengkhom Indira's daughter Ireni Akoijam lives in Mumbai and that Yengkhom Indira does visit her daughter every year. She was contacted and we were lucky that she was planning to visit her daughter and she agreed to come for the meet. We were also lucky that Sahitya Akademi decided to grant a small amount which we could use for cash expenses. So we could invite two Tamil writers from Chennai and one Manipuri writer from Imphal. The number of writers who finally confirmed that they would be there definitely was eighteen.

## The Writers

The writers attending the Meet were: Sudha Arora (Hindi writer), Urmila Pawar, Ashalata Kamble and Savita Damle (Marathi Writers), Menka Shivdasani and Anjali Purohit (English Writers), Tulasi Venugopal, Girija Shastri and Shyamala Madhav (Kannada Writers), Puthiyamaadhavi, Padmaja Narayanan, Dhamayanathi and Ambai (Tamil Writers), Pushpa Mehta and Gita Naik (Gujarati Writers), Yengkhom Indira (Manipuri Writer) and playwrights and theatre artistes, Sushama Deshpande and Aditi Desai.

### Hindi Writer: Sudha Arora

**Sudha Arora** has a post-graduate degree in Hindi from Calcutta University. She taught in two degree colleges in Calcutta from 1969 to 1971. From 1993 to 1999 she was affiliated with the women's organisation, HELP. Sudha's first story was published in 1965. Her forte is considered the short story genre. But apart from stories she has also written many poems, radio scripts, articles and has edited books including two volumes of SPARROW books. Her short story collections and poetry collections are an important part of the Hindi literary world. She has more than eleven short story collections. Her poetry volumes include, *Rachenge Hum Sajha Itihas*, *Kam se Kam Ek Darwaza*. *Yahi Kahi Tha Ghar* is her much appreciated novel. As an attempt to bring world literature to Hindi she began the venture Vasundhara which is both a publishing house and a beautiful book store. She has been awarded by the Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sanstan, Priya Darshini Academy, Maharashtra Hindi Sahitya Akademi and Bharat Nirman and has also received the Women Achiever's Award.

### Marathi Writer: Ashalata Kamble

Activist and well-known writer **Ashalata Kamble** works as a lecturer in Pendharkar College, Dombivali, Mumbai. She has several books to her credit like *Bahinabainchi Kavita: Ek Aakalan* (second edition) *Samarth Striyancha Itihas*, *Yashodharechi Lek* (poetry) *Aamachi Aai*, *Pravas Aamha Doghancha* (Shabdankan/ Wording). She has won several awards for her work like Dr. Ambedkar international award from Canada, Prabhakar Padhye critics award from Konkan Sahitya Parishad, Maharashtra, Wamandada Kardak award from Darpan Sanskrutik Manch, Kankavali, Maharashtra, Savitribai Phule-Fatima Sheikh award from Shikshak Bharati, Maharashtra, Mahila Kasturi Bhushan award from Dainik Pudhari, Maharashtra

### Marathi Writer: Savita Damle

**Savita Damle** is a writer, poet and translator in Marathi. She has a graduate degree in Commerce and a Diploma in journalism. She was working with State Bank of India till Sept, 2013 but has voluntarily left her job to pursue her passion in writing. She has written the biography of well known Marathi singer, Sulochanabai Chavan. She has translated various books for renowned Marathi publishers like Rajhans Prakashan, Manovikas Prakashan, Diamond Publications, Granthali, Popular Prakashan and for Sahitya Akademi. Some of her translations have been critically applauded namely her translation of Tamil stories of Ambai and recent work *Jerusalem- Ik Charitra Katha*. She also writes to several newspapers. She has brought out two poetry collections: 1) *Chalale Mee Sangatine* (Music album with the same name has also been produced based on some of the poems from this collection. These songs have been sung by Sadhana Sargam and Vaishali Samant. These songs have also been approved for Akashwani Broadcast.) 2) *Pakharanchi Shala*: poetry collection for children. She has received a prestigious literary award from Apte Vachan Mandir, Ichalkaranji for best translation in 2013 for her book, *Mana Gange Chya Katahavar*.

### Marathi Writer: Urmila Pawar

**Urmila Pawar** writes in Marathi and her stories are based on Dalit experiences of living, working and existing. Many of her stories are derived from the pain, agony and difficulties of living as a woman and as a Dalit. The frank and direct manner of her story-telling and earthy language she uses in her stories has made her a controversial writer in Marathi. But there is more to Urmila Pawar than just the controversies raised by her stories. Urmila's stories, translations and other works have come out as several collections like *Sahave Bot*, *Udan* (Translation of stories depicting Buddhist philosophy from Hindi in to Marathi), *Amhihi Itihas Ghadavla* (A book of women's contribution to Ambedkarite movement) *Chauthi Bhint*, *Don Ekankika* and *Aydaan* (Autobiography) to mention a few. Her autobiography *Aaydan* has been translated into Hindi and is published in English as *The Weave of My Life* and has received very good notices. Her work has been recognised with several awards like: Sahitya Sanskriti Mandal Maharashtra Rajya Puraskar for *Sahave Bot*, 1989, Asmitadarsh Puraskar for *Sahave Bot*, Aurangabad, 1989, Shakuntala Neme Puraskar for *Chauthi Bhint*, Mumbai, 1992, V.C. Gujar Puraskar for short story as a form of literature by Kokan Marathi Sahitya Parishad, Maharashtra, 1995, Priyadarshani Academy Award for Autobiography *Aydaan*, Mumbai, 2004, Padmashri Vikhe Patil Puraskar for autobiography *Aydaan*, Pravarna Nagar, 2004, Matoshri Bhimabai Ambedkar Puraskar, Satara, for Literature, 2004, Maharashtra Foundation Granth Puraskar for *Aydaan*, 2004, Dalit Mitra Award Maharashtra 2000-2006, Soi (West Bengal Women Writers' Association) Sammaan 2013, Bodhivardhana Award, Bangalore, 2014, Dalit Mitra Puraskar, Maharashtra & Hirkani Visesh Sanman, 2015. Urmila Pawar is active in many literary associations dealing with Dalit writing.

### English Writer: Menka Shivdasani

**Menka Shivdasani** has three collections of poetry, *Nirvana at Ten Rupees*, (XAL-Praxis, 1990), *Stet* (Sampark, 2001) and most recently, *Safe House* (Poetrywala, 2015). She is also co-translator of *Freedom and Fissures*, an anthology of Sindhi Partition poetry, published by the Sahitya Akademi in 1998. She recently edited an anthology of contemporary Indian poetry for [www.bigbridge.org](http://www.bigbridge.org) and a second edition is forthcoming. An anthology of women's writing that she edited, which forms part of a series being brought out by Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women (SPARROW), was released in 2014. Menka's poems have appeared in several publications, both in India and elsewhere. These include *Poetry Review* (London), *Poetry Wales*, *Fulcrum* (USA), *Many Mountains Moving* (USA), *ARC* (Canada), *Literature Alive* (New Writing from India and Britain) and the *Seminary Ridge Review* (Gettysburg). Her work has also appeared in anthologies such as *We Speak in Changing Languages* (a Sahitya Akademi anthology), the *Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets*, and the *Harper Collins Book of English Poetry*. Her poem, *An Atheist's Confessions*, has been included in the S.Y.B.A. English textbook, *Indian Literature in English: An Anthology*, published in 2012. An active organiser of various literary events, Menka is Mumbai coordinator for the global 100 Thousand Poets for Change movement. In 1986, she played a key role in setting up the Poetry Circle in Mumbai. Menka's career as a journalist includes ten books as co-author/ editor, three of which were released by the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

### English Writer: Anjali Purohit

**Anjali Purohit** is an artist and a writer based in Mumbai. She writes fiction and poetry. Her writing has appeared in several anthologies both online and in print. Her short story "Bitter Harvest" was a winner in the Commonwealth Short Story Competition 2008-09. Her book *Ragi-Ragini: Chronicles from Aji's Kitchen* was published by Yoda Press in 2012. She is also an artist who has been exhibiting for over fifteen years. Her painting 'Early Morning at the Irani' won the first prize for Maharashtra awarded by the AIFACS during the National '60 Years of Art in Independent India'. She also participates in cultural interventions that bring together the various arts on a single platform to hold conversation about a common theme.

### ***Kannada Writer: Tulasi Venugopal***

**Tulasi Venugopal** is an M.A. in Kannada literature. She has been associated with SPARROW as a Kannada language coordinator. Her short-story collections are *Munjavige Kaadavalu*, 1993. *Jugalbandi* (along with K. T. Venugopal), 2005. Her poetry collection entitled *Putagala Madhyadalondu Navilugari*, was published in 1999. She co-edited 2 Kannada volumes of SPARROW based on SPARROW workshops. She has received Sir M. Vishweshwarayya Sahitya Prashasti award (*Munjavige Kaadavalu*) Vardhamana Udayonmukha Sahitya Prashasti award (*Munjavige Kaadavalu*) and G.S. Shivarudrappa award (*Putagala Madhyadalondu Navilugari*).

### ***Kannada Writer: Girija Shastry***

**Girija Shastry** has a Master's degree in Kannada and English and has a Ph.D. in Kannada (*Modern Kannada Short Stories- A Feminist Approach*) from the University of Mumbai. She has been a researcher for the past many years. She has edited many books and has held editorial positions. She has given many endowment lectures and her articles are part of many important anthologies and her articles regularly appear in important journals and newspapers. She has also organised several seminars and workshops and was associated with the film on Akkamahadevi, *Scribbles on Akka* produced by Majlis. She is also founder member & Vice president of Mumbelaku Kannada Balaga, a Publication Trust, Founder member & convener of Srujana, Mumbai Women Writers' Association, Founder member of Kannada Samskrutika Kendra, Kalyan, and Grand Patron, Kalyana Karnataka Sangha. Her publications include research monographs and essays and articles with an article entitled "*Mauna moggeyanodedu*" being selected for Anthology of Best Essays by Karnataka Sahitya Akademi, 2003. Two poetry collections entitled *Hennobbala Dani* by Kannada Sahitya Prakashana, Mumbai and *Pustaka Mattu Navilugari* by Abhinava Prakashana, Bangalore were brought out in 1995 and 2012. On the anvil are some collections of articles and a book on eco-activist Lalitamma entitled *Sanjivana*. She has won several awards for her works including Harihara Sri award for *Hennobbala Dani*, 1996, Sankaramma award for best poems, 1987 and 1991, Sushila Shetty Smarak award for poems and G.S.S Award for Poetry collection *Pustaka Mattu Navilugari* from Shimoga Karnataka Sangha, 2013.

### ***Kannada Writer: Shyamala Madhav***

**Shyamala Madhav** belongs to Mangalore and had her college education there. Her first story was written at the age of 11 and "Amritha Varshini", a memoir on her grandmother was published in the magazine *Belli* in the year, 1971. This was followed by other stories, articles and translations and editorial positions. Shyamala held the post of President of Srijana, Mumbai Kannada Writers' Association, for two years, successfully holding seminars, book-releases, and workshops, in collaboration with the Anuvada Academy, Bangalore. Her published works include several translations like Raia Manzurul Amin's *Alampanah*, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Retired DYSP Ramayya Rai's autobiography *My Days in Police*, Parts of Will Durant's *The Story of Civilization* and MR Pai's *Uncommon Common Man*. Awaiting publication is her translation of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. In 2003 Shyamala published *Sathsanchaya*, a memoir on her father and their family heritage, published by Guddemane Prakashana. In 2014 was published her biography of Ramachandra Uchila entitled *Vasthavavaadada Sahithi: Ramachandra Uchila*, published by Kanthavara Kannada Sangha. In 2009 a short story collection *Aa Loka* was published by Sumukha Prakashana, Bangalore. Her translation of *Gone with the Wind* won the Sahitya Akademi award in 2005 for best translation and it also won the H V Savithramma Dattinidhi Award, 2005, from the Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha, for the best translation of 2004. She has also been felicitated by Mumbai University and other organisations for her work in literature.

### *Tamil Writer: Puthiyamaadhavi*

**Puthiyamaadhavi** is the pen name of Mallika, who began to write in 2000. She has a postgraduate degree in Tamil from Madurai University and has also done certificate courses in feminism and social service. She lives in Navi Mumbai and her house has become the central place for Tamil Literary activities in Mumbai. Puthiyamaadhavi worked in HSBC for many years and took voluntary retirement in 2004 to concentrate on her writing and other activities. She is a prolific writer and has published thirteen books so far which include five collections of poems, four short story collections, two books of essays and two books of literary criticism. Puthiyamaadhavi's poems and stories have received appreciation and recognition. Kalai Ilakkiya Mandram, Tamil Nadu, chose one of her poems as the best poem and Tamil Neyam Group in Coimbatore chose her short stories as the best. Her short story collection, *Minsara Vandikal* was chosen as the best short story collection by Periyar Tamilar Peravai and her short story collection, *Puthiya Aarambangal* won the best short story book award given by Manalveedu Literary Association. In 2006, she won the Shirpi award for her poetry collection *Nizalkalai Thedi*. Recently she got an award for her short story collection *Penn Vazipadu* from Senthamizh Arakkattalai set up in memory of late writer Jeyanthan. Puthiyamaadhavi's stories have been translated into Malayalam and German and she herself has translated into Tamil, poems from other Indian languages through English. Her translation into Tamil of well-known Marathi writer Kavita Mahajan's poems, is in the press. She is the founder member of Maharashtra Tamil Writers' Association and she remains active as the joint secretary of Tamil Intellectual Forum in Mumbai. She is also a blogger and her blogs are followed by many people interested in Tamil literature and literary criticism and Dravidian politics. Her blogs are: [www.puthiyamaadhavi.blogspot.Com](http://www.puthiyamaadhavi.blogspot.Com) and [www.puthiyamaadhavi.wordpress.com](http://www.puthiyamaadhavi.wordpress.com)

### *Tamil Writer: Padmaja Narayanan*

**Padmaja** works in a senior position in State Bank of India at Chennai. She is basically a chemistry student and did her MSc in Chemistry and trained to be a teacher with a BED degree. She incidentally joined a bank and became a CAIIB (Certified Associate of the Indian Institute of Bankers). She says this about herself: Instinctively a literary person; a sariphile (loves saris to the core); sleeps amidst books; loves good vegetarian food. She has tried learning a bit of music and dance and has acted in some plays just for the fun of it. She has published two books of poems and a book in translation which have received good notices. She says she is waiting for someone to call her a poet but many have already called her so. Her photographs during various literary functions posted on her Facebook page are proof of her popularity. She says she was a depressed soul once... but that she has since "levitated" and that she wants to live every single moment and that has sworn not to complain. She lives with her daughter who makes her life more meaningful and is happy about the fact that she is her best and first friend.

### *Tamil Writer: Dhamayanthi*

**Dhamayanthi** belongs to Tirunelveli and she was born into a family of teachers. She has a post-graduate degree in literature. She made friends with houses filled with books and with people from a very young age. She began to write from her High School days. She writes stories in popular magazines which introduce the readers to a different genre of literature. She has been working as a media person for the past twelve years in radio and FM, has produced and directed documentaries for TV channels. She is also a script writer and a lyricist. Her inspiration in literature is Emily Dickinson and she will be bringing out a collection of Emily Dickinson's poems very soon. She has published six short story collections, a novella and a novel so far. She has said that her stories are translations of the silence she carries within herself. She lives in Chennai.

### *Tamil Writer: Ambai*

**Ambai** is a historian and a creative writer who writes about love, relationships, quests and journeys in the Tamil region and elsewhere. Her real name is C S Lakshmi. She has been an independent researcher in Women's Studies for the last forty-two years. She has a PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and has several books and articles to her credit. She has been writing from the age of 16 and is a well-known writer in Tamil. Her stories have been translated in three volumes entitled *A Purple Sea, In a Forest, a Deer, Fish in a Dwindling Lake*. The second book shared the Hutch-Crossword award for translated fiction. She received the Pudumaipiththan memorial lifetime achievement award for her contribution to literature from the US Tamil cultural organisation Vilakku in 2005. She was awarded the Lifetime Literary Achievement Award of Tamil Literary Garden, University of Toronto, Canada, for the year 2008. She was awarded the Kalaignyar Mu. Karunanidhi Porkizi award for fiction awarded by the Booksellers and Publishers' Association of South India in the Chennai book fair, January 2011. The University of Madras awarded her for excellence in literature in the centenary celebrations of the International Women's Day in March 2011. She is currently the Director of SPARROW (Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women). She lives in Mumbai with her filmmaker friend Vishnu Mathur, who also happens to be her husband, in a small third-floor flat with a view of the sea, along with her nineteen-year-old foster daughter Khintu and her two little brothers Krishna and Sonu who brighten up her life.

### *Manipuri Writer: Yengkhom Indira*

**Yengkhom Indira** belongs to Manipur. She graduated from Guwahati University and did her BT in the same university. She retired as Deputy Inspector of Schools (Government of Manipur) in February, 2002. Indira began to write from a very young age. Though many of her writings got published during her school and college days in school/college magazines and other periodicals, she started devoting her full time to writing after her retirement from government service. So far, she has published 8 books. Apart from writing, Yengkhom Indira takes keen interest in acting and drama. She worked as programme compere for women and children programmes of All India Radio, Imphal during the year 1964-65. After getting through the AIR drama audition she participated in One-act-plays and Short plays. Indira's works have received a lot of recognition. Her short story 'Kanglaba Chenghi Mayal' was selected in the 10th Standard Elementary Manipuri syllabus by the Board of Secondary Education Manipur in the year 2008. The story is also being made as a Manipuri film by the same title and slated to be released shortly. She is associated with many reputed Sahitya associations like Manipur Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, Leimarol Khorjeikol (LEIKOL), Writers' Forum, Manipur, Manipur Sahitya Samiti, Thoubal and Sea Waves. She received Dr. Ambedkar fellowship Award in 2004 and Priyosakhi Ningshing Mana in 2009.

### *Gujarati Writer: Pushpa Mehta Parikh*

**Pushpa Mehta Parikh** has done her Sahitya Ratna in Hindi and also has a degree in Gujarati literature. She is a blend poet who blends different forms like ghazal and bhakti poetry in her poems. She is also a story writer and a freelance journalist. She is actively associated with Gujarati and Hindi literature programmes. Her first ghazal collection *Tu Kahe Toh* was published in 1998 under the banner of Mithibai College, Mumbai. In 2010, she published another ghazal collection *Man Puche Mane* under the banner of Mumbai Maharashtra Rajya Gujarati Sahitya Akademi which received the first prize. She has also received many awards and prizes for short stories, ghazals, poems, etc during the years 1995-2014. A novel entitled *Ashrut Shruti* is soon going to be printed by Mumbai Maharashtra Rajya Gujarati Sahitya Akademi.

### ***Gujarati Writer: Gita Naik***

**Professor Gita Bharat Naik** has done her MA (Hons) in Gujarati and Sanskrit from University of Mumbai. She retired as Head of Gujarati Department, Elphinstone College, Mumbai. She was Publisher and Editor of *Gadyaparva*, a journal of creative prose and short stories from 1988 to 2008. She has edited books of Gujarati short stories. Her book of creative essays entitled *Electric Train* was published in 2009. Her poems have been translated into Indian languages and French and a poetry collection is due for publication. She is also a short-story writer. In 1988, she set up the publishing house Shahacharya Prakashan and since 2013, she is publisher and editor of *Shahcharya Varshiki*, an annual journal of creative writing. She has also been conducting Sahacharya Writers' workshop for the last 25 years. She has also conducted translation workshops. *Gadhyaparva* received eight consecutive awards from Katha Foundation, Delhi during her editorship. She produced a documentary film on Dr Suresh Joshi, an eminent writer and critic of Gujarati literature. The Short film in Gujarati entitled *Mallika* which has been widely acclaimed at Indian as well as International film festivals is based on her short story.

### ***Playwright and Theatre Artiste : Sushama Deshpande***

**Sushama Deshpande** has a post-graduate degree in Sociology and a graduate degree in journalism. She has worked as a journalist and has written and continues to write columns and articles for journals and newspapers. She has obtained theatre training under Amol and Chitra Palekar, Satyadev Dube and Augusto Boal. She is the proprietor of *Anjor Communications*, an organisation working in the media field for last 25 years. Under this banner have been made numerous documentary films as well as slideshows, on issues like Women and Health, superstitious beliefs amongst people regarding religion, women and social status and women and politics. She has been working with rural women through the NGO Ramleela Sarvajanik Nyas. She has written and acted in several one-woman performances. Well-known among them are *Vhay mi Savitri Bai Phule*, on Savitribai Phule, *Tichya Aaichi Goshta Arthat Mazya Athavanincha Phad*, on Tamasha artistes and *Gandhi mala bhetle* (Gandhi Met Me). She has conducted several workshops in India and abroad. She has also directed and continues to direct plays on different subjects like life of sex workers, history of women's movement, women saint poets, painters and writers and homosexuality for organisations like Sangram and Vamp Sangali in which there are actors from a community like the sex workers, Stree Mukti Sanghatana and Awishkar. Sushama has been honoured for her theatre work with several awards. She received the Savitribai Phule Puraskar by the Government of Maharashtra which is given to a person who has done outstanding work in the field of women's education, women's issues. The Maharashtra Foundation Puraskar as Playwright for *Baya Dar Ughad* in 2011, Zee Gaurav Puraskar for writing the script *Chitragoshti* in 2012, Padmashree Daya Pawar Puraskar 2012, Ekapatri ( One-person Performance) Kalasanman Puraskar in 2013 and the writer's award from Natyaparishad Sakha, Pune, for *Baya Daar Ughad*.

### ***Playwright and Theatre Artiste : Aditi Desai***

**Aditi Desai** has pursued a theatre career from childhood under the guidance of eminent theatre person and her father Jashwant Thaker. Currently she is associated with Jashwant Thaker Memorial foundation as its director. She has worked as a freelance media person, consultant, filmmaker and a theatre trainer. Her key areas of interest are, theatre work, video film making, development of popular educational material, offering training in gender and theatre, developing media and campaign strategies. She has directed 18 plays so far and made 21 video documentaries. She started her career as an actress playing the main role in more than 35 classical plays written by eminent playwrights and later progressed to mainstream and experimental theatre. Later she pioneered street theatre performances on women's issues in Ahmedabad. She has also worked in films. She uses Augusto Boal's techniques from The Theatre of the Oppressed and combines them with local forms in her training programmes in the rural and tribal areas. Her play *Rai No Darpan Rai* got the critics award. Her last two plays, *Kasturba* and *Akoopar* got 5 Transmedia awards (Best play, best Director, Best writer, Best actor, Best supporting actress). She was awarded the Ladli Media Award 2015, for her work on women's issues in theatre. Her documentary *Rangbhoomi na Kalakar*, on her father and eminent theatre person, Jashwant Thaker, won an award.

## Organising the Meet

The Meet was to be organised in a way where meals were provided in a common dining room and shared living rooms were provided. The Meet was not designed as an event where people would talk sitting around a table. It was more in the nature of designed conversations where writers narrated their life experiences and their writing career, read their



stories and poems and also viewed films. For this kind of a Meet we needed not a seminar room but a place where we could all stay together for all the three days. The budget did not allow us to take an entire resort like we had done once at Kashid or have the Meet in a huge campus like Adishakti in Pondicherry which we had done two years ago. The search for a place which would suit us began at this point. A few places around Mumbai were located on the web and also some institutions within Mumbai were approached. Nothing really worked according to our plans or budget. That is when we located Club Neembada at Karjat. It belonged to actor Rameshwari and her husband Deepak Seth. The first visit to Club Neembada was heartening for it had enough space for all of us although more than two persons had to be accommodated in the rooms. In the large rooms four people could be easily put up. And there was a large hall where the SPARROW team could be comfortable, with C S Lakshmi in

a room next to the hall. There was a huge terrace where a stage could be built and a large dining and sitting room where the daily sessions could go on. And what was more, there was a swimming pool! And Deepak Seth and Rameshwari listened to all our demands (considering we had a limited budget we did have many demands!) patiently and agreed to do it all within our budget. We came back triumphant after taking a few photographs of the place.

SPARROW also prepares reading material for the participants giving translations of stories and poems and details of films to be screened along with bio-notes of the writers. So the furious work of preparing flex boards, posters, choosing texts, translation, editing and finalising the reading material and the other details began almost immediately after our return from Karjat.

We also prepared a detailed programme schedule which included morning walks, games to relax, personal narratives, reading out stories and poems, screening of films, late night discussion sessions with hot chocolate, enactment of a play and enough time for fun in the pool and a jam session on the last day.



Pooja, Pradeep and C S Lakshmi went a day earlier to prepare the rooms and the space. We had asked a wedding pandal-maker to construct a 10ft.x10ft. stage on the terrace. He got very enthusiastic and built a stage like they do in rural weddings with a satin screen and velvet strings and silver paper decorations. The stage was all set for the bride and the groom! We told him gently that no marriage was going to take place and that what we really wanted was a dark blue or black screen in the background. He looked disappointed when we removed the shiny stuff and put them around trees. But we had to keep the satin screen for the entire village did not have dark blue or black screens or cloth we could use as screens. So white satin screen it was. But when the writers arrived and we put up the projector and the large screen on



the terrace and screened *Malathamma* film, the writers got so engrossed in the film that the gaudy white satin screen was ignored and later forgotten. Only Aditi Desai and Sushama Deshpande had some mild heart attacks looking at it as they were professional theatre persons but they were polite enough not to mention it.



We had designed, thanks to Manik Sonkar, colourful, huge flex boards. We had been to Club Neembada once but on reaching there realised that what we really needed were not 6ft.x4ft. flex boards that we had taken but some 20ft.x20ft. flex boards actually! Undaunted we put up all the boards, put strings and strings of lights on the trees, pasted posters on individual writers on the walls of the meeting hall and made the place look celebratory. We displayed SPARROW publications and the books of all the writers and the club looked all set for the meet with a very inviting swimming pool to relax in between. Rameshwari and Deepak Seth had carefully planned everything the way we had discussed with them. Rameshwari joined us on the first day and everyone had a great time chatting with her.

So Club Neembada was where eighteen writers gathered along with the SPARROW team. As we always do, we put

up different language writers in one room and as always, it worked! On 20<sup>th</sup> everyone arrived from Mumbai.

## Stories, Tears, Laughter, Songs and Dance

*Malathamma* set the tone for the Meet. In the two days that followed the writers spoke about their life, their writing and discussed how writing happens while watching the film on Sumathi Murthy, songs from the film *Anuradha* (*Hai re woh din kyon na aye* and *Kaise din beete kaise beeti ratiyan*) and a film on Manipuri writer Binodini. They also



spent time jumping into the swimming pool, walking in the mornings and playing games. They say a way to a man's heart is through his stomach. While organising writers' meets SPARROW has realised that the way to appreciate good literature and good writers is also through enjoying good food! So the writers combined literature with food and enjoyed eating hot samosas, puris, pav bhajis, alu bondas, pakodas, parathas, dal, rice, paneer mattar, kadi, biryanis, chicken curry, fish fry, halwas, gulab jameons, ice cream, fruits and salads not to speak of gallons of buttermilk and lemon juice, watermelon juice, and the usual tea and coffee. While eating we also listened to Dhamayanthi's lyrics set





to music for a film, sung by Shreya Ghoshal and Savita Damle's poems set to music. Part of the play *Aaydan*, based on Marathi writer Urmila Pawar's life was performed for 45 minutes thanks to Sushama Deshpande and her team and was a fitting end to the three-day discussion and dialogue.

The jam session on the last day was a big hit. Even those who never thought they could dance joined in and it became a wild, crazy and fun session. At one point everyone began to sway their hands in a flying gesture and called it a SPARROW movement in dance and they did look like they were flying.

The SPARROW team worked hard to make the event a success and also had fun in the pool, playing games and chatting through the night. We have received heartwarming letters from the writers all of whom are insisting that SPARROW Writers' Meet must become an annual affair! Maybe it will in time, and still remain the intimate, warm and meaningful meet it has been designed as.



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