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newsletter

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MERI CHRISTMAS

End of the year, Leelaji, our ex-maid says, 'Bhaiya ji, kitne hi raja aur runk aaye aur gaye. Sushaasan ki koi guarantee nahi hai. Par Christmas har saal aayegi. Sabhi Bhaiyo aur Behnon ko meri taraf se Christmas ki Mubarakbad zaroor dena! Aur haan, Happy New Year! Yeh lo mera cooker wala cake'

(Brother, how many kings and paupers have come and gone. No one can guarantee good governance. But Christmas comes every year. Please wish all brothers and sisters a Merry Christmas from my side. And also, Happy New Year. Here is my pressure cooker cake!)

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[Editor's Note]

This issue of SNL brings you Season's Greetings and wishes everyone a very happy new year with Lakshmi Karunakaran's cartoon.

This issue has reviews of some excellent books we managed to read. Four of them are autobiographies that tell us how women write about their lived lives. Another book on Sarala Devi is an attempt to recover lost women's history. We also have an article on Irom Sharmila and her unique struggle.

The homages section in this SNL took us the longest time to do because from Fridina K Marak to Jayalalitha it covered an entire range of women and men who were writers, artists, activists, academics and politicians. This homage section is the section we learn most from every time we do a newsletter. It not only gives us information and knowledge but it also gives us directions for future archival work.

We have a supplement along with this SNL, with excerpts from interviews with Sukhwant Kaur Mann and Mahasweta Devi. We are hoping to add an oral history supplement with every issue of SNL from now onwards.

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

Memory and Recall: Stories Women Write About Their Life



Kamala Ramaswamy, *Nenjil Olirum Chudar* (Flame in the Heart), Kalachuvadu, Nagercoil, 2011.



Kondapalli Kotesvaramma, *Aalarra Paalam* (Unpeopled Bridge), Translated from Telugu *Nirjana Varadhi* by Gowri Kirubanandan, Kalachuvadu, Nagercoil, 2015. 270 pages (with her articles and stories).



Latchumi Amma, *Latchumi Ennum Payani* (A Traveller Named Latchumi), Maithri Books, Chennai, 2015.



Muthammal Palanisamy, *Naadu Vittu Naadu* (Shore to Shore), Thamizhini, Chennai, 2012 (Second edition). 288 pages.

The four books chosen here are not exactly for a review but more to understand why some women have written about their life in recent times. Two of them, Latchumi Amma and Kondapalli Kotesvaramma, have been part of the Left movement. Muthammal Palanisamy belongs to a Tamil family from a village in Coimbatore, which went to the rubber plantations of Malaysia to seek a better life. She wrote her book in English in fact, and later translated it herself into Tamil. Kamala Ramaswamy, is the wife of Sundara Ramaswamy (Su Ra as he was known), a well-known Tamil writer who passed away some years ago.

The four books talk of lives lived in very different ways but all of them felt that it was important to record their life and their times. Although Kamala Ramaswamy writes her book more as a memoir recalling her life with her famous husband, she is also writing an autobiography of a different kind, for more than fifty years of her life were spent with her husband. She says that she began to write about her young life at the instance of her husband who told her to write ten or fifteen pages promising that he would go through them. But that was never to be. He passed away without seeing what she had written. She says that encouraged by others who knew him and were writers, she decided to complete what she had begun. She says she can't reach the heights of her husband's writing but that she has tried to write it

in her own way. "With a heavy heart and with tears when I wrote this, I felt the heaviness in my heart reduce as I continued to write." For Kamala this book was an attempt to come to terms with not only Sundara Ramaswamy's death but with the realisation that despite loving children and grandchildren, her loneliness, sorrow and longing would end only with her own death and that she would have to deal with it all her life.

Kamala says that Su Ra and she were not compatible in terms of height. She was very short and he was very tall. There were also other things that could have worked against them for while she was a young and healthy person Su Ra himself had been a sickly child and had health problems. But Kamala says they were of one mind and that they had hardly any difference of opinion on any matter. As years went by they became extremely close to each other and Kamala being short and Su Ra being not all that healthy became matters of no importance which according to her, "just melted away in the blowing wind." She says that she had contributed a great deal to his life but her own life got its meaning only from living with him. Kamala writes the memories of her personal life but it is also a life lived during a certain time and context. While detailing aspects of her family life she also writes about the literary times of a region and how this was a constant factor both in her life and her relationship with her husband.

Muthammal Palanisamy says that she was very fond of listening to stories as a child. Not fiction but real life stories which her grandmother and grandfather would tell them. Later she began to tell those stories to her children. And whenever her family got together they would talk about their family stories. And there was one thing they constantly spoke about and that was how before the First World War their father, as a young boy, came as a labourer to Malaysia. That story would always bring tears to their eyes for it was a story of how thousands of people left their families and children with dreams in their heart to make it big in Malaysia, and went as labourers to work in the rubber plantations. There were many British colonies in Asia but the rubber plantation owners preferred South Indians especially the Tamils for they were considered humble, obedient, loyal and with no confidence in themselves and most suited to work as labourers in the rubber plantations. In 1887, Sir Frederick Weld, who was governor of various British colonies had said of the Tamils that they were peaceful and that it would be very easy to enslave them and that it would be good to increase their numbers. In the ships the people were treated like cattle. There was only low grade rice and some watery lentils. One had to stand in a queue with a plate in hand during every meal. Once her father stood in the queue a second time for he was still hungry. The person serving the food smelled his hand and hit him on the head with a flat wooden spoon. And as punishment, he was not given food in the night. Her father bore all this and came to Malaysia and struggled to somehow make a life for himself. That was a story by itself and that was the story that they would recall time and again and become emotional. Once, her younger brother Dr Ramasamy told her that there was no point just talking about these things and that she must write about it. Her children also encouraged her and she wrote her first English book *Shore to Shore* in 2003.

While Muthammal is trying to tell the story of her family and her own life, the life of generations of rubber plantation workers and the difficult course their life took and the struggles of their own children also get told along with her own family story. The life, customs, rituals, gods, songs, games, family quarrels, love and marriage in a little village in Coimbatore and that of the Vellalars of that village, also slowly gets told along with this story. Muthammal herself got educated and was a school teacher and later married the son of a tyrannical rubber plantation manager Robert Charles Grant who had almost killed her father at one time. The son was a totally different person and a friend of her brothers. Her marriage to him almost reads like a fairy tale where the cruel king's handsome prince ends up marrying the beautiful girl of a serf. Beginning with the story of a

young boy who faced innumerable hardships to that of his daughter marrying someone from a different race, the story of Muthammal's life covers the history of the life of Tamils in the rubber plantations of Malaysia. But Muthammal is too practical a person to end it in a fairy tale marriage. She talks about her own married life and her children and her life in Malaysia and she says that the entire story is not one of wonderful people who struggled and succeeded but a story of a lot of people who had their own shortcomings and drawbacks. Her paternal grandfather was a murderer. Her maternal grandfather had been jailed for a crime. Her mother was not the legally married wife of her father. Her father's first wife was an innocent one who had given up her husband to another woman. Her father was short tempered and vengeful. So many such negative factors can be spoken about but Muthammal says, "Whatever it is, I am of their blood. The path they have laid is the one we have taken."

Muthammal's three-year-old granddaughter once asked her, "Aatha, where would you go when you die? What would happen to you when they burn you?" She wrote a song in reply and that is the eternal song she would like to leave behind.

*Aatha, where would you go when you die?
 What would you become when your body is burnt?
 The empty body would go out
 The life would remain in the house
 Why are you worried about body being burnt?
 I will remain within you as your life
 I will be the salt in the food you eat
 I will be beside you when you sleep
 I will be part of what you see
 I will be there in dream and reality
 I will be the earth you tread on
 I will be constantly your loving companion
 I will hold you if you stumble
 I will question you if you go wrong
 I will be part of your laughter
 I will be the sound of the bangles on your little hands
 I will hold you tight if you cry
 I will be the fire to burn your problems
 I will come as a spirit in the wind
 I will be close when you call out "Aatha"
 I will be a fellow traveler to all of you
 In your life's journey*

The blurb of the autobiography by Letchumi Amma who calls herself a traveller, makes it clear that this is not her personal story and that her book is a mirror that reflects lives of women who have lived their lives with men who have dedicated their lives

to a cause and committed themselves to live in the public sphere. Not many books have been written on women who have taken on family responsibilities and have worked to keep the family going and also stood by their husbands and taken care of them while the husbands have worked hard to keep their political Party commitments. This book has been written to deal with this lacuna.

In an excellent introduction V Geetha talks of why such books with a feminist perspective that talk about the lives of women in politics in many different roles are important. She says that there is very little documentation of "how a particular politics affected not only the personal lives of women but also the families and the social spaces they occupied, the changes brought about in the process and how women faced these changes..." She also says that androcentric history cannot be countered by just celebrating women's lives or by just talking about what it means to be a woman and the politics of the body. What should be taken into account is how women's lives are lived, the manner in which they disturb the dividing lines between politics and family life. The way women's lives approach societal spaces and aspects like marriage, family and relationships beyond caste that form a part of such political lives has to be identified.

Letchumi's life is proof that truth is stranger than fiction. Born into a poverty-stricken family with a useless father, she educates herself with the help of others in her village and later she takes up a job in a banian company and joins the CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions). The CITU members tell her that the Party would arrange for her marriage and take care of her life. She leaves home where she feels she is neither welcome nor needed. Before leaving she wonders if she would have the heart to leave her beautiful little village but the general indifference of her family drives her to leave and she keeps thinking of a line in the night: Change if you can, or regret it. She writes it with a piece of charcoal on the wall of her house and leaves. The Party makes her stay in the houses of many comrades and finally decides on a partner for her. He is a committed member of the Party and gives her a poem which says that they would be together like the hammer and sickle in the communist symbol and be like a double barrelled gun and make India red. Her marriage takes place in secrecy for it is during the Emergency period and the police is on the lookout for her husband. They exchange garlands and there is a speech and the content of the speech is that her husband is the treasure of the Party and that it is her duty to protect and take care of this treasure and live with him without creating any obstacles in the work of the movement. But when she reaches his village after sometime she realises that there would be no way her husband would either take care of her for he had

even abandoned his own family responsibilities. With that begins a life of ups and downs which she faces practically alone. Her husband is practically non-existent throughout all her struggles. Her deliveries happen without him. How she admits herself in the hospital for her second delivery is heartrending although she writes it in a matter-of-fact manner. She takes her three-year-old naughty son and takes the help of a helpful auto driver who is still nursing a hangover, and goes to the hospital and remembers to stop the auto on the way to buy some comic books for her son so that he can be playing with the books while she goes in for her delivery. And there was no way she could avoid this child for after her first son she has undergone several abortions to avoid another child. And she gives birth to her daughter.

Many comrades and their families come and help her throughout her life but there is no description of her ever spending a loving moment with her politically committed husband. At one point she does not have decent clothes to wear and her blouse is so worn out that she has to cover herself constantly while she is in Chennai for a programme. One of the leaders of the Party, Maithili Sivaraman, notices it and asks another Party member to go with her and buy her four saris and readymade blouses. At one point she gives up her banian company job on the insistence of her husband. After this she does so many different jobs to earn a living and run the household. She starts going to a gunny bag factory to stitch gunny bags and later she buys a grinder to do a business of preparing dosa batter for people around including for hotels and then she gets into the business of buying milk packets wholesale and selling them on retail delivering them to people's houses. Then she starts another enterprise of buying saris in bulk from Chennai and selling them door to door in Thanjavur and yet another enterprise of making and selling ready to use crispies that are eaten with meals. At one point she begins making idli chilli powder (it is so touching that she names the packets Mangalam Idli Powder after her daughter who dies of cancer) and then goes on to the business of buying plates made of areca nut bark wholesale and selling them to hotels and other places and even works as a salesgirl in an ayurvedic shop. One loses count of the number of jobs she does to feed her children and herself. There are times when there is nothing in the house to eat and she starves but somehow manages to pawn or sell something and prepare food. Her husband seems oblivious to all these struggles for he is a full time Party member and is committed to the work he is doing. She has to find help to take care of her child so that she can go to work and when her children fall ill or she herself falls ill many comrades and other women come to help her but she is alone in charting the course of her life. Once she tells

her husband there is no rice in the house and that there is nothing else either. He says he will send something and leaves the house but promptly forgets it on going out. After a long time another friend comes and immediately brings all the groceries and vegetables so that she can cook a meal. On coming back her husband rebukes her for taking help from others. Her husband keeps up this very strict adherence to his principles throughout. Once both of them are travelling by bus from Chennai to come back to Thanjavur along with two other comrades and her husband buys a ticket only for himself and tells her he can't buy one for her because he can't spend the Party money on her. She asks the other comrade to buy the ticket for her. The bus stops at a place and she and the other two friends get off to have a drink while the husband sits in the bus. Even while they are having a cold drink the bus takes off and the husband does not stop the bus. They run after the bus and get in. She realises that her husband was angry because she had had a cold drink manufactured by a multi-national company. She remarks at a point that when men get appreciated or recognised in the Party for their work it often goes to their head and after that they never take up family responsibilities or go to work in their own agricultural fields. It is the women who have to bear the burden of the family.

She has to change houses practically throughout her life and wherever she goes to stay, there is a water problem and the problem of toilets. In most places she gets together with women and solves the problems. Not only has she to run her household she also has to take care of the guests who come home to eat. She sees to it that her child is put in school and her younger child who falls sick is taken to Chennai and her husband accompanies her this time and many comrades come forward to help them but the child dies. She gets out of the Communist Party at one time and later starts working with the Tamil Nationalist group but throughout all this she helps so many other women find their way and get jobs or solve other problems in the neighbourhood. She works with scavenging workers and learns about their problems. She also marches with other women to fight for rights and fight against injustices. Her son grows up and takes up a job and he also becomes politically active.

In her narration Letchumi talks of so many who come forward to help her and are like her sisters, brothers, sons and parents. The friends she mentions in Chennai are all people one knows as activists who go out of their way to help many in distress. But two names really stand out. Mannar Mannan and his wife Anamma who stand by her throughout, and Regina. Mannar Mannan and his wife become her parents and when her little son falls ill with diarrhoea, Mannar Mannan just picks him up and in rain and thunderstorm decides to go to the hospital. The child

keeps soiling his hand and the cloth in which he is covered but he does not mind it one bit. Anamma and Letchumi follow him in that rainy night. Their bus driver manages to avert an accident and drives the bus into the fields. They take shelter in various houses in that village. Mannar Mannan gets them some biscuits to eat. But the child is sleeping peacefully wrapped in Anamma's dupatta and he has stopped purging. "Look at my grandson sleeping," says Anamma and Mannar Mannan joins her in admiring him. Regina is a young woman in Letchumi's neighbourhood. Her younger sister has already got married and left home and her mother is extremely obese and sick and Regina takes care of her doing whatever odd jobs she can get. Once when she does not get any job and has to prepare food for the day, she goes to a saloon and cuts her long, luxurious hair and gets paid for that. Letchumi requests her to take care of her child. She tells her that she has a job and so she can earn for both the families if only Regina would cook and take care of the child. Letchumi works overtime often to earn for two families. Once she comes late because the bus is not on time and has forgotten to give money to Regina to buy milk powder for the child. As she reaches home she wonders how Regina would have dealt with a hungry, crying child. But the ingenious Regina has tackled the problem very well. She tells Letchumi that she had given him her breast and while he was sucking it and before he could realise there was no milk in it and spit out, she had quickly warmed up the milk for him. Letchumi is stunned to hear this.

Over time Letchumi gets over her anger towards her mother who had told Letchumi when she had said she was leaving home, "Only when you leave will I get over the curse that has taken hold of my life." She nurses her mother towards the end of her life and is there beside her when she dies. Before dying her mother folds her hands above her head as if thanking her for all that she has done and also seeking forgiveness for all that she herself had not done. Letchumi says she learnt from her husband not to be vengeful or nurse resentments. And that is why maybe she comes back after leaving the house, once out of disgust when she is asked to even wash the clothes of a young girl, who is staying in their house so she can go to college. Letchumi has to do it at night after working the whole day. She leaves the house and takes the bus thinking she will go to Pondicherry but then goes elsewhere and later is persuaded by a comrade to come back home. And when she ends the story of her life we see that there is no resentment or regret in her even though there may be sadness and some unshed tears.

Letchumi ends her book narrating the stories of women who have been oppressed by men and then talks about a protest she takes part in. It is a protest against people from other states coming and doing business in Tamil Nadu and

a group of women and men organise a protest against the Malayali jewellery company Joyalukkas. All of them are arrested but the ten women are let off while the men are taken to the Trichi Central jail. They leave their watches, rings and cell phones with her for safekeeping. When she comes home there is no one at home. At midnight the cell phones begin to ring in various tunes and she does not know how to put off all of them for there are more than hundred of them. She locks them in a cupboard but in the morning at five she is woken up with the shout, "Salute to Mother Earth!" She wakes up with a start only to realise that it was the alarm tone of a mobile that had been left outside. She locks it in the cupboard. She ends saying, "Similarly one locks within the mind some things one cannot talk about, I thought. Happiness does not last; sorrows are not forgotten."

If Letchumi's story is that of a woman whose husband was a committed full time Party worker, Kondapalli Kotesvamma's life is about a life that has been part of the freedom movement, left movement and the Naxalite movement. Kondapalli Kotesvamma was a young widow who married the legendary leader Kondapalli Seetharamaiah and has been an active participant in the movement he was part of. At the age of 90 when she is asked to write her life she still feels that her life is full of tears and that she may not be able to put those damp words onto paper but her grandchildren and close friends persuade her to write. When we read it we realise why she spoke of tears, for at every turning point of her life tears await her. Marriage, love, work, children, being away from her children and living alone, stubbornly standing on her own feet and never failing to keep her self respect, are what characterises her life and in the times she lived in and even now, such a life cannot be led without tears.

As a young girl Kotesvamma lived in a household frequented by leaders of the freedom movement and learnt songs of the movement which she often sang on the stage and won prizes. She goes for a meeting which Gandhi addressed and at the end of it removes some of her jewels and donates them to him. She comes home literally floating with joy but her mother scolds her for being so impulsive but her father tells her she has done the right thing. She hears some chance remarks by some of her classmates and realises that she is a child widow. She refuses to go to school after 8th Standard but soon well-wishers and friends of her family who are Gandhians and social reformers advise her father to get her remarried. Her father is hesitant because it would have meant being excommunicated from his caste. But her mother is firmly for her remarriage. After much hesitation, her father agrees to the proposal after her younger brother's marriage takes place. The young person proposed

was Kondapalli Seetharamaiah from a landed family like theirs but from a different category of their own caste and it was at that time not considered proper for people from two different sects to marry. But the marriage finally takes place and, as Volga says in her introduction, although it is an arranged marriage which progressive friends and her parents fix, it is Kotesvamma's decision finally to agree to the marriage. Even as a young girl, she seems to have had clear views about what she wants from life. With the marriage began a life that brought Kotesvamma into the heart of Left politics with Seetharamaiah to inspire and also respect and love her.

Apart from meetings and discussions with other women who have become a part of the history of the Left movement like Thabi Rajamma, Dr Achamamba and others, there are many years of living in different safe dens when the leaders go underground, carrying weapons secretly and daring to communicate secretly and carrying out orders. There are the times when she becomes an important artiste in the Praja Natya Mandali and also those times when she has to go to jail. There is also the time during the period when he goes underground and she is in a den which Seetharamaiah visits every now and then and she becomes pregnant. There is no way she could keep the child and it is not safe to take her to a doctor for abortion. They give her some spurious local medicines and she has a miscarriage but the bleeding does not stop and she becomes very weak even to walk about. It is one of the young male comrades who is with her who washes her clothes and finally a doctor comes dressed as someone who has come to invite her for an auspicious function and examines her and says that had she come an hour later Kotesvamma's life could not have been saved. During the time underground, comrades also have vasectomy done so that children won't be a problem but these decisions are not taken in consultation with their wives. After so many years of underground life and being on the move finally Seetharamaiah comes home and asks her if she would take care of a woman who has done a lot for the Communist movement and who needs to be taken care of along with her two children as she does not keep good health. Kotesvamma readily agrees. He constantly asks her if she is being taken proper care of and later that lady decides to stay separately and takes her children along.

Seetharamaiah begins to stay at that woman's place more often and at one point Kotesvamma asks him what she should tell people when they ask why he is spending so much time there and how she should run the household. He tells her that the other woman was a revolutionary leader and that she was suspecting him unnecessarily and that he had given her dignity by marrying her although she was a widow and that had he wanted he too could have suspected

her. Something breaks within her and she wonders if he was the same Seetharamaiah who had told her in the early days of marriage that he would like to lose himself in her eyes. After a few days he comes one night and packs his things and puts them in a lorry and tells her that he would be taking care of his son and she should take care of the daughter. The son is put in a hostel and after a while the daughter also joins him for educational purposes. Kotesvaramma is left with her widowed mother and has now to take care of her future. And just like their marriage the Communist Party is also breaking up into two. Kotesvaramma is unable to choose one of them and decides to be loyal to all the friends she knew and worked with.

She realises that she needs to qualify herself to get a job and decides to do the Matric course offered by Andhra Mahila Sabha and realises that outside the Party also there are good human beings who want to work for people and care for people like Durgabai Deshmukh and Sugunamani of Andhra Mahila Sabha. The two years in Andhra Mahila Sabha make her a writer and also a radio drama artiste. She later takes up the job of a warden in a college. Her mother runs her household. Her son comes to live with the grandmother but he has already joined his father's politics of extremism. And one day he disappears and the police says he has committed suicide but everyone knows he has been killed. Her daughter Karuna, marries a fellow doctor as a student and completes her medical studies despite having two children. Just when everything is going right her husband dies and later she takes up the job he had to take in the Middle East and her children grow up with Kotesvaramma's mother Anjamma. The daughter returns and her father's friends and colleagues begin to come home. Kotesvaramma has retired and also come to stay with the daughter. But Seetharamaiah's friends treat her and her mother with disdain. Kotesvaramma learns to swallow these insults. When her mother starts ailing and tells her she must die before Karuna does something to herself, she asks her who would wipe her tears if she were to die. Her mother tells Kotesvaramma that maybe she has been born to shed tears all her life. Soon after Kotesvaramma's mother dies and Anjamma who spent all her life taking care of so many comrades leaves thousand rupees each for the two groups of the Communist Party, from her savings. But Kotesvaramma's tears cannot yet stop for Karuna commits suicide due to depression.

Kotesvaramma now has her two granddaughters who are grown up and lead their own lives. She hears news of her husband not being well and that he has developed differences with his People's War group. He is also put in jail. Some of his friends come and tell her that he would like to meet her but she says, "Is it enough if he wants to

see me? Mustn't I also feel like seeing him? I cannot come." But when he is released from jail her granddaughter Sudha and her husband bring home an ailing Seetharamaiah. Although he is in the house she does not attend to him or go and see him. One of his friends tells her that he would very much like to see her. Kotesvaramma tells him: "I don't feel like seeing him. Even if the Manu Sastra notion that a woman must support her husband whatever suffering she undergoes had been imprinted on my mind, communists like you are supposed to tell me it is wrong and stop me; you are supposed to rebuke him for being unjust to the oppressed womankind. That you ask me to stand by him sounds very funny to me." But they persuade her to go and see him. When he sees her he begins to weep. And she tells him, "Why do you cry? I have cried so much for you, for your children, for food and for a partner that my eyes have gone dry. But there seems to be tears left in your eyes." In reply Seetharamaiah weeps aloud. Their meeting takes place during day time thirty-six years after his leaving her at midnight.

She does not attend to him but whenever he would ask for her she would go up and see him. Towards the end he also gets dementia and Kotesvaramma decides to stay in an old people's home. She returns to see the lifeless body of Seetharamaiah and her entire life flashes before her. When she is asked to garland him she can hear his voice singing aloud on May Day in 1940, "Our red flag, it must fly, it must fly..." She also remembers the song of Dasari Krishnamachari:

A new era where there is no starvation

How far is it?

A time when there is no famine and no hunger

When will it come?

Blood that has to be shed for human welfare

How much is it?

Unwritten epics in the wounded mind of the poet

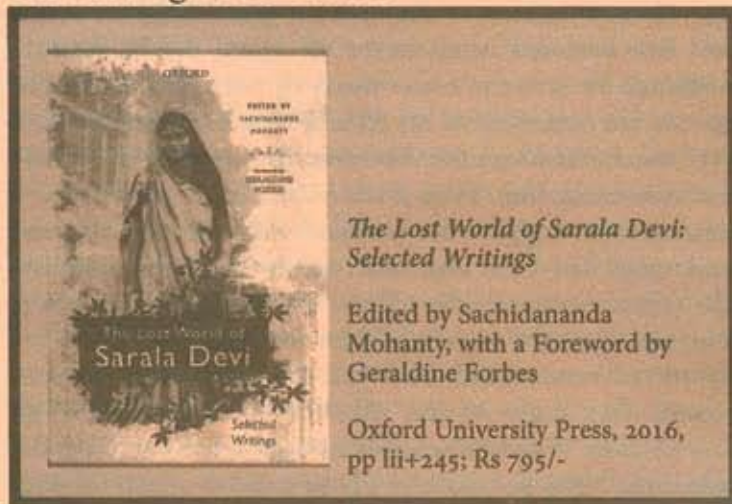
Are countless

She then returns to the old people's home to be on her own until her granddaughter insists on her coming home and brings her home permanently in 2010. A poet friend Someswar tells her: "Kotesvaramma who, in her life, was a support, a bridge, to her mother's generation of the past and to her children's generation that is the future, has now no one on both sides. She has become a bridge with no people, a *nirjana varadhi*." And Kotesvaramma decides to make that the title of her autobiography for everyone who has travelled with her has passed away and she alone has remained.

—C S Lakshmi



Recovering Lost Worlds



In the Introduction to his earlier book on Odia women writers, *Early Women's Writings in Orissa, 1898-1950: A Lost Tradition* (Sage, 2005) Sachidananda Mohanty mentions a discussion with Susie Tharu in which he expresses his dissatisfaction with the content of Odia writing in their *Women Writing in India* – (1991). Susie Tharu's reply was "Well, people like you should be doing this kind of work." The result: his consistent explorations into Odia culture, society, women activists and writers, particularly those who made their most significant contributions in pre-independence India. Women, whom he refers to as 'literary domestics' because they combined literary work and social commitments with their domestic responsibilities, since there was no way in which they could abdicate their domestic responsibilities.

He also refers to them as 'Rebati's daughters', so named after the protagonist of Fakir Mohan Senapati's pioneering novel in Odisha, *Rebati*, in which she "displays a forbidden desire for learning," and "marks the beginning of a new tradition and heralds a new breed of women who learnt to write and created a literature of their own in Orissa." Some of the Rebati's daughters he identified in his earlier book are: Kokila Devi, Reba Ray, Sailabala Das, Narmada Kar, Pratibha Devi, Kuntala Kumari Sabat, Sita Devi Khadagna, Bidyut Prabha, and Sarala Devi. Women who came from educated families, were fortunate enough to be educated themselves, who held responsible public positions and who worked tirelessly to further the cause of Odia women's education. He adds, "In their relentless and agonising search for meaning in life and literature, in their defiance of patriarchal orthodoxy and received wisdom, they helped build an alternate tradition of aesthetics and politics in Orissa. Like the proto-typical Rebati, they strove steadfastly after knowledge and identity and formed a sisterhood of rare distinction".

It is significant that both the books, *Early Women's Writings*

in Orissa, 1898-1950: *A Lost Tradition* and *The Lost World of Sarala Devi: Selected Writings* (2016), which can be seen as companion volumes, use the word 'lost' in a very crucial manner, to draw attention to the fact that the life, the work and the writings of most of these women have only recently been added to the public domain; in fact, much of this work is still outside the discourse of Indian feminist historiography, as Geraldine Forbes points out in her introduction to the Sarala Devi book: Citing the essay, *Nariri Dabi*, published in Odia in 1934, Geraldine Forbes says, that it is "...written by an Odia woman whose name has been omitted from feminist histories and anthologies of women writing in India." She adds, "Reading Sarala Devi's writings and learning of her activism one is amazed at what she accomplished and chagrined that historians—including me—are only learning about her in the twenty-first century."

Retrieving this 'lost world' is the passion which inspires Sachidananda Mohanty because he believes that the history of the freedom struggle and Indian feminist discourse will remain incomplete without a record of the voices of women, particularly Odia women and women writing in the regional languages of India. The first English essay to be published on Sarala Devi was Mohanty's own 'Saraladevi, The Biplababi of Orissa' in *Manushi* in 1998—twelve years after her death in near-anonymity in 1986. In his comprehensive introduction to the volume under review, he has regretted the shortage of primary material because much of Sarala Devi's work in Odia, too, is out of print and not much research has been done on her. Just three full length books about her are available in Odia, V Rajendra Raju's *Mahiyasai Sarala (Sarala, the Great Woman, 1995)*, Banaja Devi's *Alibha Anala Shikha: Sarala (Sarala, the Ever Burning Flame, 1999)* and Ajay Kumar Mishra's *Sarala Devi (2009)*.

Sachidananda Mohanty's book seeks to redress this appalling neglect of a writer who, as he says, "was a Gandhian feminist and a critical modernist who eschewed exclusive binaries between the home and the public space, the sacred and the secular." Daughter of Basudeva Kanungo and Padmavati Devi, she was brought up and educated by her uncle, Balamukunda Kunungo and her aunt Hemanta Kumari Devi. Married at the age of 14 to Bhagirathi Mohapatra, she was drawn into the national freedom struggle, when both of them attended the 35th session of the Indian National Congress in 1920 and came under the influence of Gandhiji. Inspired by him, the couple established 'Alakashram' on the banks of the Alaka river at Jagatsinghpur, and it soon became the hub of nationalist activities. As a freedom fighter she was active in the Non-Cooperation Movement in Odisha and was imprisoned for six months at Vellore for her participation in the Salt Satyagraha in 1930; here she came in contact with other illustrious women freedom fighters

from other regions like Durgabai Deshmukh, Rukmini Laxmipathi and Kamaladevi Chhatopadhyaya. In the 1950s she associated herself closely with the Bhoodan Movement of Vinoba Bhave. However, post independence, Sarala Devi was marginalised in the INC, though she continued to be active in social and political life in Odisha. Mohanty suggests that the neglect of Sarala Devi as a writer could be due to her political marginalisation: because while women like Durgabai Deshmukh, Amrit Kaur, Vijaylakshmi Pandit and Sucheta Kripalani were absorbed in public service in independent India, many others like Sarala Devi were ignored.

He seeks to present her work through her writings in this well researched book with translations of her work by a team of competent, contemporary scholars: her feminism finds representation in eight essays and a letter in the first section called 'Literary Feminisms.' Her wide-ranging knowledge is evident in the biographies she wrote, sampled in the next section, 'Sisterhood for Empowerment'; three sections are devoted to her literature and writing on literature: 'Writing for Children' 'Art and National Life' and 'Literature and Religion/Spirituality'; especially delightful are her stories for children written in the fantasy and magic mode; and her recreation of religious and spiritual texts in Odia (*Katha Ramayan: Adya Kanda, Tulasi Das: A Play and Mahabharata*) provide a link to the passion she has for the dissemination of Odia culture and her zeal for its resurgence.

Sachidananda Mohanty locates Sarala Devi's feminism in her advocacy of women's education, the need for women to have control over their own bodies and access to public space and places it within the larger framework of the freedom movement and social transformation, and the cultural and political honour of Odia. In the very first essay, 'The Rights of Women' (1934) she takes an overview of the situation of women in various cultures across time and nations, before narrowing it down to the Indian situation. She is strong and boldly indicts "the pathetic condition of women in Hindu society' and the role of religion and scriptures which "have always looked upon women with suspicion... [and promoted] the view that women, by nature are disloyal, unchaste and destructive." Given women's complete banishment from the public sphere and their relegation to the deep recesses of the home, she says, "Little wonder, then, that whenever we are reminded of women, our attention is drawn to the dark corners of the house." These are radical and progressive ideas which challenge the status quo and the traditional roles ascribed to women; but Mohanty also points out that after independence, Sarala Devi took a rather regressive stand regarding a particular kind of education for women, linking education with their domestic, particularly, maternal responsibilities: "Women should get the education

that would train them to be good mothers, good citizens, and become self reliant. Today's girl students do not realise that they bear the future of India in their wombs." This kind of contradictory stand, instead of taking away from the total value of her work should actually inspire scholars to relate her changing opinions to the conditions in which she spoke and to her own mental evolution. Because this is the same woman who, in the words of Geraldine Forbes, "censured a society that defined work by gender, denied a woman the right to her body, treasured the double standard as religious doctrine, and used law to render women powerless."

One of the most interesting pieces in the book is Sarala Devi's letter to her husband from Vellore Jail. Written originally in English (the only English writing of hers that is represented) it narrates in a light-hearted manner and matter-of-fact tone the daily routine of life in the prison and presents her instructions to her husband about how to take care of their young son in her absence. What is striking about the letter is the complete confidence with which she writes, without a shade of diffidence; clearly, it shows a woman who is completely in control:

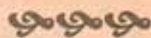
"I would like you to very much keep him under your special care and see that he receives at this early age the best possible training, as a child's future always depends upon the manners and environments in which it is brought up. Since I am away from home and shall not be back for another period of six months, the responsibility of bringing up our only child rests on your shoulder alone. Before I went away, you made me understand that you would send the little Tikun to the Alakashram. If you have not done so, kindly send him as early as you can. Let me also suggest you that it would be better if you could also reside in the ashram along with the child so that he might not feel lonely."

This letter connects very well her explorations in her essay 'The Role of Women in the Freedom Struggle.' She mentions that women became a part of the freedom movement, inspired initially, by Annie Besant and then by Gandhiji. In her two essays included in 'Gandhian Vision', she speaks with near reverence about his role in shaping the destiny of Indian women: "If someone were to document the process of the awakening of women during the period from 1921 to 1947, he would give Mahatma Gandhi the credit for whatever progress women made in the fields of education and women's development. "All the pioneers in the women's movement have been shaped by his inspiring example. At the root of whatever these women do lie Gandhi's thoughts, ideas, and work. For this reason he would always be revered as the great mentor of the women of India." About her personal equation with him, she says, "Gandhiji brought about a total regeneration of myself and infused into me new notions, a new world vision, and new

thoughts and actions. He unfolded the hundred petals of the lotus in my heart and lighted the flame of revolution within me." About his death, she says, "Gandhiji left and took along with him truth and non-violence from the national character." This is noteworthy because almost all women writers of this generation speak of Gandhiji with various degrees of veneration; there are differences of opinion, but the tremendous respect he commands in this generation is common to them all—whether it is Sarala Devi from Odisha or Anees Kidwai in her book *Azadi Ki Chaon Mein (In Freedom's Shade)* or Dhiruben Patel or Saroop Dhruv from Gujarat. [Courtesy the interviews with both these writers at SPARROW, which are to be published in the forthcoming fifth volume of women writers, *Building a Boat on Hilltops To Sail the Oceans*].

Sachidananda Mohanty has, with great responsibility and conscientiousness, brought to life, the writing and work of this iconic woman, especially since she has been relegated to the shadows in the past sixty years. That he has accessed primary sources, photographs and archival material to piece together forgotten histories, extensively translated much of her work into English himself, and motivated a team of translators to revisit her work in the 21st century, will ensure that her contribution is, at least, understood by the current and future generations. With just four pictures from the Sarala Devi Estates and the essays, stories, play and novel excerpts that have been included, the image of Sarala Devi looms large. This is a work that will truly inspire many more scholars and writers to go deeper into the lives and times of not only Sarala Devi, but the sisterhood forged by 'Rebati's daughters'!

—Charanjeet Kaur



SPARROW CONGRATULATES
ALL 2016 SUMMER OLYMPICS WINNERS

P V Sindhu (Badminton player, first Indian woman to win an Olympic silver medal)

Sakshi Malik (Indian freestyle wrestler, first Indian female wrestler to win a medal at the Olympics and the fourth female Olympic medalist from the country)

Dipa Karmakar (Artistic gymnast. She is the first Indian female gymnast ever to compete in the Olympics and the first Indian gymnast to do so in 52 years. She attained 4th position in Women's Vault Gymnastics event of Rio Olympics 2016)

Salt Dolls And Big Cities



I, the Salt Doll
(*Mee Mithaach Baahuli*)
Vandana Mishra
Translated from the Marathi by
Jerry Pinto
Publisher: Speaking Tiger,
New Delhi
Pages: 221

Vandana Mishra was born Sushila Lotlikar, in Bombay in 1927, into a Saraswat Brahmin family; but tragically her father died when she was about two. Sushila's brave mother, Lakshmibai decided 'to place her faith in the city' and fend for herself and her three little children, rather than go live with her conservative, unsympathetic brother in her ancestral house in the Konkan. Her father's ex-employer was responsible for putting them up rent-free in Lakshmi chawl which he owned, and also for getting her mother trained as a nurse.

In the book, Sushila describes the life and journey first, of the Lotlikars as they strive to make ends meet, and then her own individual career on the stage. But the book is hardly doom and gloom, or full of melodrama. It's written in a matter-of-fact way without self-pity or bitterness or dwelling on misery. There's much delight taken in the simple pleasures of family life, the strong bonds of friendship with the neighbours in the chawls they lived in and the support of teachers and other mentors. Sushila recounts with humour many anecdotes about her home and school life and training in music, the books she read, the music she listened to and the games she played. Sushila recalls the lyrics of the bhajans her mother sang, and so many other songs and plot lines from the plays and films of her time. She speaks without pretension of her love for music, both classical and popular.

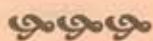
It's not just the story of Sushila and her family, but the story of the city of Bombay, as Mumbai was then called. History buffs will enjoy the history of Bombay in the '30s and thereafter, and accounts of the minutiae of chawl life. Interacting with people from different socio-economic and religious backgrounds, she takes a keen interest in everyone she comes into contact with. No quirk or mannerism of a neighbour or teacher or colleague or street vendor escapes her observant eye. We are introduced to so many people of different classes and backgrounds.

Sushila recalls the past with serenity, without bitterness or self-pity. Even such a horrific tragedy such as an acid attack on her mother, which had her hospitalised for three months

and rendered her unable to work for a couple of years, was faced with equanimity. Without her mother's salary to run the household, Sushila had to give up her education. She joined the Little Theatre Group run by Parshwanath (Dada) Altekar who with other contemporaries like Mama Warerkar wanted to revolutionise Marathi theatre, which still had men playing women's roles. She was given a sound theatrical education and started acting in Marathi theatre. For economic reasons, Sushila moved to Gujarati theatre, to the Shree Deshi Natak Samaj and then, also to Marwadi theatre. She has written in the book, the lyrics of many of the songs she had sung in all these languages. She started doing very well and became quite prosperous for a time. Towards the end of her memoirs, Sushila writes of her happy marriage to her co-worker in the theatre, Pandit Jayadeo Mishraji, (with which her name changed to Vandana Mishra), and about her decision to give up acting and later on to take it up again.

The book also highlights many women of talent of the time whose names and legacy may have been forgotten today. The writer rarely speaks ill of anyone but is not above making a wry comment on some silliness or pomposity. Without trying to impose her views on anyone, she does let us know her opinions about a few things, with good sense of humour. Translated by Jerry Pinto, *I, the Salt Doll*, is very readable, the prose is clear and lucid and very enjoyable. Reading this book is just like listening to a favourite aunt talk about her life.

—Priya D'Souza



SPARROW CONGRATULATES ALL HIRAKARNI AWARD 2016 WINNERS

- Dr Sandhya Purecha (A traditional Bharatnatyam dancer)
- Mumtaz Sheikh (Mumbai based activist and founder of the Right to Pee campaign)
- Shabana Sheikh (First Muslim woman Police officer from male dominated village of Ahmednager)
- Dr. Madhavi Khode Chavre (Nagpur's additional tribal commissioner, IAS officer and gynaecologist)
- Wahbiz Bharucha (India's Rugby women's team captain)
- Suman More (Chosen to speak at the international Labour Organisation conference held at Geneva)
- Priyanka Mohite (The third youngest Indian and the second Maharashtrian to scale Mount Everest)
- Usha Madavi (Protected 5 acres of jungle area from the forest and land Mafia)

The Unique Protest of Irom Sharmila Devi



How does honey taste after not having tasted anything for 5757 days? After being nasal-fed through a tube for nearly 16 years? How does it feel to walk out free after being imprisoned in a hospital for all those years, while life passes by? And then having to come back to the prison, because you have nowhere to stay, being turned away by the very people whose cause you have been championing? Ask Irom Sharmila Devi, the gentle 'iron lady' of Manipur, who recently broke 'the world's longest hunger strike,' fighting violence with non-violence.

She was fasting in her fight against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). This Act is operative in the North Eastern states affected by insurgency movement, and also in Jammu and Kashmir. Under it, the security forces have the right to shoot to kill suspected militants or to arrest them without warrants. Taking advantage of this law, members of the forces have repeatedly committed horrendous crimes with impunity. Extra-judicial killings and crimes against women, particularly sexual harassment, committed by armed forces is rampant. And they are in no fear of being prosecuted.

An Assam Rifles battalion allegedly killed 10 civilians waiting for a bus in Malom village near Imphal on November 2, 2000. The victims included a 62-year-old woman, a 70-year-old man and 18-year-old Sinam Chandramani, a 1988 National Bravery Award winner. The incident came to be known as 'Malom Massacre.' Sharmila started her fast three days later, demanding the repeal of AFSPA.

Recently, the Supreme Court judgment questioned the immunity enjoyed by the security personnel under AFSPA against criminal action in disturbed areas. It gave hope that crimes committed under the cover of AFSPA could be investigated and justice won for more than 1500 deaths in Manipur.

Irom Sharmila ended her fast exactly a month after this development. Earlier, when she was accused of trying to commit suicide by fasting, she had responded, 'I love my life.' Over those years, she had come to realize that her aim was not going to be fulfilled through the method she used in protest. Perhaps a change of tactic was needed. 'I will

join politics and my fight will continue,' she said. She also indicated she was in love and wished to get married.

The responses to her decision to resume her life? Angry Meira Paibis (the mothers' group of Manipur) who had attended court proceedings protested outside the courtroom, saying they were heartbroken with Sharmila's decision. 'We have stood by her for so many years. And now it has come to this—we have had to live to see this day,' said Ima S Mamon. And some insurgent groups have even threatened to kill her if she marries an outsider or contests polls.

How different from the outcome of some other historic fasts in our country! When Gandhiji fasted for three days in the interest of mill workers in February, 1918, it resulted in an arbitration on their behalf. In 1932 September, he fasted six days against awarding separate electorates and separate reservation of seats for the depressed classes. As a result, Ambedkar gave up his demand and the British Government withdrew the clauses against which he protested. He again fasted for 6 days in 1948 January for restoration of Hindu-Muslim communal peace. This resulted in a large number of important politicians and leaders of communal bodies agreeing to a joint plan for restoration of normal life.

When Anna Hazare, Gandhian activist, fasted for nine days, the historic Lokpal Bill was passed in December, 2013. This anti-corruption bill had been waiting for 46 years before its enactment. The 76-year-old crusader then ended his fast accepting a glass of coconut water from two little children. He and his supporters celebrated the passing of the Bill for which they had campaigned relentlessly for years, at his village in Maharashtra.

There is no such triumph for Sharmila. When she began her fast back in 2000, she had said, 'I will take rice from my mother's hand the day that AFSPA is removed.' That day has

not dawned yet. So she cannot have a celebration, or be reunited with her mother.

After ending her fast, she went to Keishampat colony in Imphal, planning to spend a few days at a doctor's house while thinking of her next step. But the residents of the colony turned their former icon away. She was then taken to ISKCON temple complex, where she expressed a desire to stay. But the temple refused to take care of her.

It looks like she has been deserted by the people. It seems her supporters only wanted her as an icon, a symbol for a cause. They refuse to admit their 'iron lady' is made of flesh and blood too, that she is also a human with feelings and desires. So used to seeing her with the feeding tube stuck to her nose, they can't accept the new image of her without it. They're not happy with a normal human Sharmila. This is what happens when someone is put up on an unreasonable pedestal.

Sharmila told her interviewers, 'I don't like being identified as a goddess. I am a human being and want to be treated as such. I have emotions, feelings and desires just like everyone else. Why would you isolate me with that identification? I feel very sad... I also want to share my emotions.... People here want to see me with the tube. They want to keep me as a symbol of their fight—just a symbol without any emotions, without feelings.'

In any case, giving up fasting does not mean giving up the fight. Sharmila has said she wants to become the Chief Minister of Manipur and work at removing AFSPA. Why not? One technique has not worked, why shouldn't she think of another? Her plan to stand for Assembly elections is also a form of resistance.

Sharmila must be given a chance to live her life according to her choice. Perhaps she will think up another unique means of protest.

—Malsawmi Jacob



SPARROW Literary Award 2016

SPARROW Literary Award, instituted by R Thyagarajan, Founder, Shriram Group, was organised in collaboration with the Research Centre for Women's Studies (RCWS) SNTD Women's University, on 10 December 2016, at the Mini Auditorium of the Juhu Campus of the University. This year the awards were for translation from an Indian language to Tamil and for translation from a foreign language to Tamil.

Eminent Tulu writer, Dr Suneetha Shetty gave away the awards to Kulachal M Yoosuf for his translations from Malayalam to Tamil, Gowri Kirubanandan, for her translations from Telugu to Tamil and Payani (Sridharan Madhusudhanan) for his translations from Chinese to Tamil. The well attended literary evening concluded with a very enjoyable music session by Reshma Gidh.

SPARROW congratulates the awardees and thanks them and Dr Suneeta Shetty for their gracious presence at the function. SNL 36 will feature a full length account of the awards function, with photos and other interesting glimpses.

Madam Fridina: Fridina K Marak (1934 - March 18, 2016)



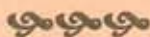
Fridina Koknal Marak, a respected figure among Garos, had many facets to her personality. One of the earliest graduates from among Garos, she walked many different paths in her life as a nurse, educationist, poet, dramatist, media person, script writer, singer and composer and most importantly a social worker and

also a politician. Fridina was married to Somendra Kumar, a barrister from Kolkata, and her entire life was dedicated to keeping the Garo culture alive. She had indefatigable will and strength to do so many different things but she also had the humility not to hanker after limelight. She led a quiet life dedicated to preserving her mother-tongue Garo, its literature and culture. She chose to write in A.chik Ku, the Garo language.

Her contribution to Garo literature and her efforts to promote it bore fruit when Garo language was made a subject at graduation level. She is the founder member of Durama College, Tura, and also the Government Girls' Higher Secondary School. She was instrumental in forming many women's organisations. Apart from this, as a part of her efforts to protect Garo culture and literature, she formed the Garo Socio Cultural Club, Garo Graduates' Union and became a founding member of Garo Literature and Cultural Society, Shillong. She was also a member of Sangeet Natak Academy, Assam All India Radio-North Eastern Region and Meghalaya Arts and Cultural Board. Her life was many years of untiring work. Under the Assam Education Service, she worked for five years during 1960-65 at Government Multi Purpose School, Tura. From 1965-77 she worked as a Field Publicity Officer under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India and was a member in the Meghalaya Public Service Commission from 1978-84. She was also the member of the Meghalaya Bank Recruiting Board in 1985. From 1989-91, she served as chairperson of the Meghalaya Handloom and Handicraft Development Corporation.

Everyone lovingly referred to her and called her 'Madam Fridina'. Although she never sought any recognition, she was given a special Kurangma Award by the Achik Music Society in 2002 for her contribution towards music and in 2007, she was felicitated by the West Garo Hills District Administration for her achievements in so many fields. How she managed to do all this in eight decades of life is something that belongs only to mythology. Fridina's life seems like a Garo mythology to be narrated to many Indian children as a night time story. Those who are part of such mythologies never die. They live happily ever after as characters who never fail to touch the hearts of children and adults who get to know them through songs, pictures and stories.

—C S Lakshmi



The Glamour and the Grease: Pratyusha Banerjee (August 10, 1991- April 1, 2016)



Pratyusha Banerjee's short, tragic life has a feeling of déjà vu about it. Hailed for her portrayal of the young protagonist, Anandi, in the immensely popular TV serial, *Balika Vadhu*, moving on to *Jhalak DikhlaJa(5)*, *Big Boss 7* and *Power Couple*, she hangs herself in her apartment and dies of asphyxia. Hers is a story that begins at

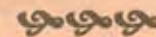
Jamshedpur and ends with her suicide in a Mumbai suburb, all within just six years—2010 to 2016.

The aftermath of the tragedy is no less haunting: trivialisation, as when actor Rakhi Sawant makes the insensitive comment that ceiling fans need to be banned to prevent such suicides; sensationalism in the voyeuristic recounting of lurid details of the stormy, exploitative relationship with the boyfriend, and reports of the unwanted pregnancy; brash e-intrusions as when the friends of another victim, Shikha Joshi, videotape her dying statement after she has slit her throat, instead of rushing her to a hospital. Pratyusha's parents—Shankar and Soma Banerjee—are convinced that it is murder, not suicide; Rahul Raj Singh's parents' allegations are that they are crying murder to get hold of her insurance money. It gets murkier by the day. The end, in her case, is not really the end. As in the case of Shikha Joshi, Viveka Babajee, Nafisa Joseph and Jiah Khan before her.

Pratyusha's life and suicide follow a predictable trajectory—a young middle or lower middle class girl from a small or big town in India, harbouring dreams of making it big in the glamorous world of the movies or television, ventures into showbiz in the metros, with or without the support of family/ friends, gets sucked into a world which promises wealth, fame, love and a so-called exciting lifestyle, but which soon slides into abusive relationships, compromises, mounting, unmanageable expenses, acute loneliness, alcoholism, drugs, depression, bewilderment and loss of self esteem.

Questions that remain, and which raise their heads at every such death, are hardly resolved. Suicides—whether of farmers, students, struggling media persons or anyone else for that matter—are a cry for help, and at a time when sensitivity to mental health issues is growing, the move to decriminalise suicide attempts is welcome. But it is not enough. Every case like Pratyusha's has much in common with other similar cases; but each case also has its own individual angst. Far greater efforts and much more sensitivity is required to build a humane understanding of the issues that drive people like Pratyusha over the edge.

—Charanjeet Kaur



A Freedom Fighter at Eighteen: Poornima Arvind Pakvasa (October 5, 1913-April 25, 2016)



Most references to Poornima Pakvasa mention that she is the daughter-in-law of Mangaldas Pakvasa, one of the first five governors of India and that she is the mother of the famous dancer Sonal Mansingh and that she was herself a Manipuri dancer who also learnt music and that in Dangs district in Gujarat she is called the

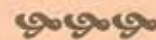
Didi of Dangs and how she set up Shaktidal in 1956 for the education of women and how it was transformed in 1969 into the Ritambhara Vishva Vidyapeeth, a full fledged residential school and college at Saputara and her tireless efforts for education for tribal girls and her Padma Bhushan award in 2004. But what makes her extraordinary is the way she was brought up as a young girl.

She was born into a family of freedom fighters and has recorded in a speech that she met Gandhi at the age of eight and often sat on his lap and played with him. It will be nice here to see how Poornima born in 1913 was as a young girl and what she made of her life before the age of 18 when she got married to Arvind Pakvasa. The seeds for everything else she has done in her long life, were sown in those eighteen years. In a speech she gave in 1971 at the Ritambhara Vishva Vidyapeeth, she speaks about her early years. Apart from saying how she met Gandhiji she also says that she was brought up in a free and uninhibited atmosphere. Her father used to bring together his kids and the kids of the neighbourhood and organise games for them and teach them exercises. As a family they also travelled a lot. In 1930 a summer camp was organised for physical training of women at Amreli in Saurashtra and she was sent there. Those in the camp were taught lathi, lezim, dagger-throwing, self-defence, yogasana, taught to make slivers out of cotton, spinning and took part in parades. There were seventy women in the camp and she was asked to be the captain and in the final test she stood first.

Like her father and uncle she was sent to the military college at Amreli and later learnt aircraft flying at Nagpur. Later when she took part in the Salt Satyagraha they had to carry bags of heavy salt collected during the Satyagraha and go from village to village. At times they had unpleasant encounters with mischief mongers and ruffians in some villages. Poornima decided to carry a small dagger tucked at her waist and prayed to goddess Bhavani that the dagger must never taste blood. She hid it inside so no one would know but with the dagger she felt strong enough to defend herself and her group. Since she got up early in the morning she could hide the dagger and no one knew about it. But one day she got up a little late and everyone came to know and there were discussions that this was against the spirit of non-violence that Bapu preached. She herself felt that there was nothing wrong in defending oneself. Before others could

complain to Bapu she went to Bapu when he came to Rajkot and placed the dagger before him and explained to him why she had to take it. Bapu had a good laugh and patted her on her back and told her, "I prefer the violence of the brave to the non-violence of the cowards..." and also told her that to be truly his daughter she should teach this to all the girls of India. When she was in jail with many women leaders including Kasturba Gandhi she taught them all self-defence and dagger-throwing with wooden sticks cut out of trees although her teaching Kasturba English is mentioned more often. And that is how self-defence and physical discipline along with spiritual and cultural education became the mission of her Vidyapeeth. In her long life of 103 years Poornima Pakvasa packed a full schedule of work but we know why that was possible because, like many women of her times who associated themselves with Gandhi she had a mind of her own even as a teenager. Such women have become rare and we must thank and salute Poornima Pakvasa for being with us for 103 years.

—C S Lakshmi



Translation As an Act of Love: Lakshmi Holmström ((June 1, 1935-May 6, 2016)



Lakshmi Holmstrom lived in Norwich and was married to the well-known social anthropologist Mark Holmstrom. It was only late in life that Lakshmi took up translation and the last twenty-five years of her life were spent introducing the works of many Tamil writers to the English-knowing readers both in India and abroad.

Her translations of fiction of contemporary Tamil writers like Mauni, Pudumaipithan, Sundara Tamasamy, Imaiyam and Salma and contemporary Tamil poets from both India and Sri Lanka were meticulously done works which won her many awards and accolades. But to Lakshmi translation was not just a literary activity. Apart from the fact that she enjoyed translating, she felt a deep commitment to promoting contemporary Tamil writing and to bringing them to the world literary sphere. Her love for not only Tamil literature but South Asian Literature in general was the reason for her becoming one of the founder trustees of SALIDAA (South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive). For her commitment to translation she was given the Life Time Achievement Iyal award of the Tamil Literary Garden, Toronto. She was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 2011 in honour of her services to literature. She did not give up her translation commitments until the very end. When she passed away she had almost completed doing the proofs of the second print of *Beasts of Burden*, a novel of Imaiyam. There are many translators but there are only few who would make it their lifetime's commitment to a language they love. Lakshmi was one of those few.

—C S Lakshmi

The 'Begum' of Women's Awakening: Nurjahan Begum (June 4, 1925 - May 23, 2016)



On her 90th birthday in June last year, Nurjahan Begum, the Editor and publisher of *Begum*, the pioneer weekly magazine for Bengali Muslim women, published from Bangla Desh or East Pakistan as it was then known regretted the fact that no one—neither the government, nor the Bangla Academy nor the National

Museum of Bangla Desh had bothered to preserve a copy of the inaugural issue which had appeared on 29 July 1947, priced at Rs2/-, with a photograph of the vanguard Bangla feminist—Begum Rokeya—on its cover. The only copy she possessed, she said, was termite infested. At the time of her death in May this year she had been associated with the magazine for 69 years. From the age of 22, when its founder-editor, Begum Sufia Kamal and its founder her father, Mohammed Nasiruudin, entrusted her with the responsibility, she devoted herself whole heartedly to nurturing it into a forum that contributed to the awakening of women in the Indian subcontinent.

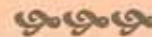
Early exposure to the printed word and the influence of stalwarts in literature, social reform and education like Kazi Nazrul Islam, Abul Mansur Ahmad, Kazi Motahar Hossain and Ibrahim Khan, contributed to her intellectual growth. Her father's progressive, almost revolutionary approach to women's role in society ensured that she was surrounded by books and picturesque magazines like *National Geographic*, from which little 'Nuri' learnt her journalistic ropes. Her mother, Fatima Begum, though more conservative, initiated her into Bangla writing. It is said that the process of her liberation began when her father got rid of her long hair and large nose-pin, in defiance of social customs of the day, and much to the disapproval of Fatima Begum. Her education at the Sakhawat Memorial School, under the tutelage of Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, opened up the world of education and feminist thought to her. Impressed with her intelligence and academic progress, her grandmother changed her name to Nurjahan Begum. She was married to fellow journalist Rokonzaman Khan and became a mother of two daughters.

From Chalitatali village of Chandpur district, where she was born in 1925, growing up surrounded by issues of her father's monthly magazine, *Shawgat*, working for it from her childhood itself in small ways, Nurjahan Begum has been witness to major events of the subcontinent—the freedom movement, Partition, formation of Bangla Desh, civil strife, along with changes in printing technology; she had to shift the office of the magazine from one country to the other, and she continued to work for it with grit and determination even as it turned from a weekly to a monthly and its readership dwindled over the years. Not one to be deterred, she would say, 'There will always be problems we will have to face.

There will always be religious conflicts, social bindings and people trying to hold us back. We can lie low for a while, but ultimately, we have to move forward. It's the only way to go.' Unfortunately about a year before her death, the circulation of *Begum* had fallen from 22,000 in the 1970s to a mere 400. In fact she had to sell some of her landed property to bring out the Eid Special issue in 2015.

Begum had a broad range and perspective, publishing articles on women's awakening, combating superstition, portraits of ostracised rural women, family planning, and letters by women writing in from distant villages. Though Nurjahan Begum herself has not written much, she has consistently encouraged women from all walks of life to write for her, thus building the consciousness of women about vital issues and spreading awareness. The award of the 'Begum Rokya Padak' in 1997 and the 'Ekushey Padak' in 2011, are a fitting tributes to her work.

—Charanjeet Kaur



A Voice That Never Flinched: Trupti Shah (September 27, 1962- May 26, 2016)



Trupti Shah was known to everyone in the women's movement as someone whose voice would always be raised for victims of any kind of injustice. She was referred to as a women's rights activist and environmentalist but Trupti was much more than that. Inspired by her parents, Thakor-

bhai Shah and Suryakanta, especially her father who was a Marxist-Trotskyite trade unionist, Trupti's concerns were not limited to just women's issues. They extended to many areas of justice for human beings which included issues related to environment, caste, human rights, labour and communal conflicts. Although an economist by training, since 1984 Trupti's name was mainly associated with Sahyar Stree Sangatan in Vadodara and 'Manthan' which provided vocational skills to young people. She was involved with the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) and the Paryavaran Suraksha Samiti (PPP). Hers was one of the voices raised against the Statue of Unity, a 182m tall statue which will be the world's tallest bronze statue, dedicated to Sardar Patel being built near the Sardar Sarovar dam in Gujarat, because the project did not have environment clearance despite covering a large area of land although it was a construction on a massive scale on the wetlands of river Narmada which was within 10 km distance of the Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary which is notified under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. She had also joined hands with her activist-husband Rohit Prajapati, in his protest against the Garudeshwar Weir project which was proposed

as part of the plans to turn downstream areas of Narmada into a tourist spot and the recent Vishwamitri Riverfront Development project, criticising them for their environment violations, neglect of livelihood issues and the damages being caused by these projects. Trupti lost her battle with lung cancer and died at the very young age of 54. With her death we have lost a strong voice both in the women's movement and other movements which involve lives of people and their rights to live and their civil liberties.

—C S Lakshmi



Shantata! Sulabha Chiranidret Ahet: Sulabha Deshpande (1937-June 4, 2016)



Sulabha Deshpande was a very remarkable actress in many ways. Her career began in the sixties and continued till the end. A month before her final exit when I met her she told me, 'There is some tumour in the pancreas. At times it pains a lot. That is why I have reduced my shooting schedule to only two days a

week. The character I play in the TV serial has been shown unwell during the time I was operated for the tumour. Now that I am fine the character is back in action.' I understood that the artiste in her would continue to be active, tumour or no tumour. In fact, she wanted to learn music again from me even when she was practically bed ridden. Incidentally I began my music teaching career with Sulabha long back in 1974. I did not know how to play the harmonium. It was Sulabha who showed me the finger movements for the harmonium.

Her role as Leela Benare in *Shantata Court Chalu Ahe* written by Vijay Tendulkar (based on a 1956 novel, *Die Panne* (Traps) by Swiss playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt, directed by Arvind Deshpande and performed first in 1968 and later made into a film in 1971, directed by Satyadev Dubey) won accolades from audiences, intellectuals and critics. She was completely involved in acting on stage and yet she wanted to learn classical music.

This is the manner in which the Kamerkar sisters and brothers—eleven of them—were socialised. Their father, Bhau Kamerkar, was working in the HMV recording company. Bhau used to enjoy treating the musicians with meals at home. These were personal invitations extended to artistes and were not parties like in the present times but more warm exchanges made possible in a cordial, familial atmosphere. It gave an opportunity to the children to meet

the artistes at close quarters and interact with them. Along with musicians, theatre actors also visited the family often. Maybe those meetings influenced them to think in terms of dedication to arts without paying much heed to material gains. The huge living room and the terrace of the third floor became the best place for rehearsals of plays. They did not have to look for actors from outside. Often the entire cast for plays existed in the family itself. The three elder sisters Prema, Lalita and Sulabha and younger brothers Chandrashekhar and Ashok easily and naturally became part of the stage and the stage became part of their life. But among the siblings, Sulabha stood out as an actress as it became her full time profession.

Sulabha began her life as a teacher in Chhabildas Boys High School & Junior College at Dadar. During her time in the school in the fifties, she once approached Vijay Tendulkar to write some plays for the students to perform. And this led to a lifetime commitment to theatre. Tendulkar, Vijaya Mehta, Shriram Lagoo and Arvind Deshpande were the pioneers of the experimental theatre movement of the sixties and seventies and Sulabha also got drawn into the movement. Subsequently she married Arvind Deshpande and in 1971, she and Arvind Deshpande co-founded Awishkar, a theatre group which had a professional children's wing, Chandrashala which trained children in theatre and Chandrashala fulfilled in many ways the dream of her father Bhau Kamerkar who wanted to start a children's theatre group. She and her husband also founded Rangayan, a theatre group that became a very significant part of Marathi theatre.

As an actress she was known for films of a different genre like *Bhumika* (1977), *Gaman* (1978), *Arvind Desai Ki Ajeeb Dastan* (1978) and *Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyon Aata Hai* (1980), as well as some popular films. She also acted in some TV serials in more recent times. *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe*, *Sakharam Binder*, *Baba Harvale Aahet* are some of the plays for which she is remembered. Her expressive eyes and intense acting made her a special actor to work with. I remember late actor Amrish Puri often said, 'Sulabha inspires one to become serious and intense. It is special to be on stage with her.'

Sulabha's house was open to many struggling actors as much as it was to friends and admirers. Many awards came her way like Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Hindi-Marathi theatre acting (1987) *Tanveer Sanman* (2010), Nanasahab Phatak Puraskar, Ganpatrao Joshi Puraskar, Vasantrao Kanetkar Puraskar, Kusumagraj Puraskar, Rangabhoomi Jeevan Gaurav Puraskar and Sarvashrestha Kalagaurav Puraskar by Sanskruti Kaladarpan.

One would always miss her sensitive creative presence as a friend, as an actor and as an individual full of warmth. She was someone one always aspired to be.

—Neela Bhagwat

The Sound of Music from Bengaluru: Aruna Sunderlal (1939-June 23, 2016)



When Aruna Sunderlal passed away on 23rd of June at the age of 77 this year, it was not big news. As someone who had grown up in Bengaluru Malleswaram area whose sabhas concentrated on Carnatic and Hindustani music, I knew practically nothing about Aruna Sunderlal, about her Bangalore School of Music

or about the successful East-West encounters in music that she organised. It is a pity that I got to know about Aruna Sunderlal, only after reading Veejay Sai's tribute to her. In his tribute in News Minute he not only calls her "South India's godmother of Western classical music" but also says that if Bengaluru can boast of a community of western classical artistes and audiences, the credit must go to Aruna Sunderlal.

Aruna was born in Delhi in 1939. She studied in Auckland House in Shimla and later went to Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow and to Christian Medical College in Ludhiana for her higher studies. In 1958 she married Rajinder Phillips Sunderlal, Member of the ITC Tobacco Board. The famous German vocalist Margarita Schack and Herbert von Brauer of the State Academy of Music in Berlin trained her as a classical singer. She also went to the Guildhall School of Music in London for further training where Esther Hulbert was her teacher. Aruna was India's first professionally qualified Mezzo Soprano singer.

The school that she started in Bengaluru, functioned from her own home for 22 years and it was started with just three students. In 2008, she built a 12,000 sq feet building in R T Nagar equipped with classrooms, recording studios and an auditorium with help from her own trustees, board members and music lovers. Over 9,500 students trained in formal music have passed out of her school. Apart from formal training BSM also had an outreach programme which has contributed to the lives of over 5,500 underprivileged, physically challenged children through formal music education.

It is a great loss to me as an archivist of women's history that I did not know about her and it is a great loss to SPARROW as an archives that we have not documented her life and work. When SPARROW was established, a well-known historian asked me, 'Don't you think an archives limited to women will lack depth? How much can you document about women?' When great women like Aruna Sunderlal pass away I realise there is so much more to document, so much more to archive and even when we do this to the best of our abilities, we may still have not covered the entire history of women, their life, work and their place in our national history.

—C S Lakshmi



Ritu Chakra, Cycle of Seasons: Veena Sahasrabuddhe (September 14, 1948-June 29, 2016)

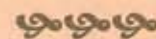


There was a time when days began with Veena Saharabuddhe's songs of seasons and ended with them. Her voice was not only captivating but had a way of lingering at the back of one's mind even after one had put off the music system. She belonged to the Gwalior gharana but she also borrowed from Jaipur and Kirana

gharanas freely. She learnt from her father Shankar Shripad Bodas, a student of Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar. Later her brother Kashinath Shankar Bodas became her guru. She was also mentored by Balwantraai Bhatt, Pandit Vasant Thakar, and Pandit Gajananrao Joshi.

She first took part in a national competition for artists under 25 conducted by All India Radio and won the prize in the music category. She has a Bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance, Sanskrit and English Literature from Kanpur but music became her life and she kept it as an integral part of life throughout. Many awards came her way like the Uttar Pradesh Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1993) and the National Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (2013). She once said in a conversation that doing housework or cooking did not mean going away from music; even while making rotis one can think of complicated *taan* or a new composition. The greatest sadness was that she was stricken with Parkinson's. And now she has lost her battle with it. But she would always be there for those who loved her music as part of the cycle of seasons.

—C S Lakshmi



Rising Tall Above the Academic World: R C Dhere (1930-July 1, 2016)



Ramchandra Chintaman Dhere passed away at the age of 86. An extraordinarily gifted scholarly genius who studied the very complex cultural legacy of ancient and medieval Maharashtra, Dhere wrote with a boldness and sureness that is difficult to achieve when one is constrained by the straightjacket of Western disciplinary frameworks.

Without his intervention, many aspects of Maharashtra's cultural history would have perhaps remained completely inaccessible to modern scholarship. His lifelong research into areas ranging from the myriad folk deities and the countless religious sects of Maharashtra to little-known texts of saint literature and *sthalpuranas*, opened up a wealth of

materials and resources to modern scholars. In retrospect, it is understandable how crucial his decision to function from outside the academic systems was to his journey. It ensured that he remained uninhibited and unconstrained by all the counter-productive systemic pressures that plague the academic world not just in India but also in the supposedly advanced West. Decorated by some fifty awards and honours during the course of his life, Dhere rose tall above the academic world. It seems like a miracle that such a sustained stream of path-breaking research work could come from outside the academia and at the same time, it is very humbling to find that no restless ambition seems to inform it. All that he claims is that he is preparing the ground for future, more able researchers.

While he was not at all a non-believer, he succeeded in maintaining the distinguishing line between the discourse of faith and the discourse of scholarship. Several larger debates ranging from the racial composition of the northern and southern India or the historical war of turf among Shaivite, Shakta and Vaishnavite religious traditions, or between Buddhism and Vaidik Hinduism to the language-based division of the states in post-independence India have been placed in a completely new perspective by Dhere's extensive research work. It is to his credit that he never, not even unwittingly, adapted his research to the requirements of these larger contemporary debates and did not allow it to get politicised—despite the propensity of Maharashtrian politics for high-jacking intellectual materials, to which several other quite earnest scholars of history have fallen prey from time to time.

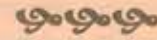
Without sacrificing scholarly methodology and without having to jump to comforting conclusions, his work consistently pointed towards the fact of the intimate and extensive interconnectedness of the cultural traditions within the Indian continent. The Maharashtra that we understand from his body of work extends seamlessly into Andhra, Karnataka, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat and flows beyond. The same may be said for the Hinduism that we understand from his work. It flows effortlessly into other religious traditions that have found a home in the Indian subcontinent. His book on the Muslim saint poets of the Bhakti tradition is but a small example of the conviction pervading all his work that the cultural traditions in the Indian subcontinent are, in reality, a continuum that renders geographical and social boundaries inconsequential. Similarly, his celebrated work *Lajjagauri* which examines the tradition of the worship of the goddess of fertility leaves one marvelling at the unfathomable capacity within the traditional to contain the modern.

The website www.rcdhere.com will enable scholars to explore the complete range and depth of RCDhere's work and vision. Assiduously examining the opinions of Indian and Western scholars on various matters related to his research areas, in the light of his own new research, Dhere sought to establish the authenticity of various historical facts. As a result, today his findings and discussions are consulted by scholars of Maharashtra the world over. The wider scholarly community is just beginning to understand the relevance

of Dhere's contribution, or, to put it more appropriately, of Dhere's *yogadaan* (the giving of the best and the purest in one's Self) to the world of knowledge. His book on Vitthal has been translated into English by Ann Feldhaus as *The Rise of a Folk God: Vitthal of Pandharpur* and into Kannada (apart from three more books) by Chandrakant Pokale. In fact, a comprehensive translation programme that makes Dhere available into other languages is much-needed for a fuller harvest of the rich cultural insights of this rare genius.

Thanks to the literary charm of his style and the magical feature of lyrical grace in his works, post-independence generations of Marathi readers have not been alienated from hard-core cultural research, yet. His books are widely read and have enjoyed reprints after reprints. He has left behind a formidable legacy of over a hundred such books that will engage both, the serious cultural historian of Maharashtra, as well as the ordinary reader of Maharashtra.

—Prachi Gurjarpadhye



A Life Dedicated to Marathi : Vasundhara Pendse-Naik (1946-July 15, 2016)



In times when knowing one's mother tongue or any Indian language has become a rare phenomenon the loss of a person who dedicated her life to the growth of a language is indeed great. That Vasundhara Pendse-Naik was the wife of former cricketer Sudhir Naik was only one of the facts of her life but not her only identity. She was

a veteran Sanskrit scholar who devoted her life to making Marathi language a language that people would love to read and write in. Although she was a university topper in Sanskrit in her graduation course and later did a Master's in Sanskrit, when she completed a journalism course at Bhavan's College, she joined the Marathi daily *Loksatta* as an Assistant Editor although she had an offer to teach at Wilson College. Within a short time she became the editor of Marathi magazine *Lok Prabha* and spent twelve years giving the magazine a new face and a new direction. She also presented popular programmes in Doordarshan like *Amrut Manthan*. She was later chairperson of Akhil Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad and was also the director of State Marathi Language Institute. Vasundhara Pendse-Naik will be remembered by all those who love Marathi language and want to see it flourish as a language.

—C S Lakshmi



Kabhi Tanhaiyon Mein Hamari Yaad Aayegi: Mubarak Begum (1936-July 18, 2016)



In the 1955 version of *Devdas*, Mubarak Begum sang in her haunting voice “*Woh na aayenge palat kar*” and it became a song of those times. In 1961 for the film *Hamari Yaad Aayegi* of Kidar Sharma she sang another number which again was a sad song people have not forgotten—“*Kabhi tanhaiyon mein*

hamari yaad aayegi.” Although Mubarak Begum gave public performances and sang ghazals and also Na’at, poetry that specifically praises the Prophet Muhammad, her name has been associated with these two songs she sang for Hindi films.

Her career as a performer began with light music recitals at the All India Radio. In 1949, she did playback singing in the Hindi film *Aaiye*. Indo-Pakistani composer and music director Nashad, also known as Shauket Haideri, gave Mubarak Begum her first break. Mubarak Begum belonged to Rajasthan and was from Sujangarh in Churu district. She settled down in Mumbai after her marriage to Sheikh and after many successful years her life was reduced to one of abject poverty like many other once famous film artistes. Javed Akhtar and Sunil Dutt got her a roof above her head in Jogeshwari and she got a paltry pension of Rs.700 per month. In a tribute to her it would be nice to romanticise her life with the songs she sang for Hindi films but a piece Seetal R Iyer, Programme Director, Radio Farishta, wrote in 2009 would tell us more about how artistes like Mubarak Begum live and die.

Seetal Iyer writes that she was eager to meet her in her house although Mubarak Begum had told them they could meet at a restaurant. But her house and its state shocked Seetal for not only did it show in what penury Mubarak Begum lived but also how tough her life was since she had to support a 40-year-old daughter stricken with Parkinson’s. Mubarak Begum told her she had many fans but what was the point of having so many fans? Later at Kailash Parbat restaurant Mubarak Begum sang for her a few paragraphs of her famous song stealing glances now and then to see if anyone recognised her. As they walked out of the restaurant Mubarak Begum asked her “*Yeh kulfī jo abhi maine khaayi, bahut mehngī hogī na?*” (This kulfī I had just now would be very expensive, isn’t it?) It should be that question that should haunt many of us although it would be much easier to write in a tribute that just like her famous song *kabhi tanhaiyon mein hamari yaad aayegi*, we will also remember her voice in our lonely moments. That is how we would rather remember fallen stars of popular Hindi or other language films for it takes away our guilt and saves our conscience. And RIP is the easiest thing to write.

—C S Lakshmi



‘Not Now, Not Ever’: Arundhati Ghose (November 25, 1939-July 25, 2016)



This steely statement made by the high profile Indian diplomat, Arundhati Ghose on 8 August 1998 at the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, has almost become the signature tune of India’s firm stand on the CTBT. As a far sighted and perspicacious foreign affairs analyst, she had been quick to see that the

CTBT was discriminatory in nature and loaded heavily against nations who did not then have nuclear capability, while at the same time, offering no impetus for disarmament to those nations which already had nuclear weapons. Her end came in July 2016 after more than a 40-year career in Foreign Service.

The endearing tributes paid to her by diplomats, who cut their diplomatic teeth working with her are near adulatory, pointing to the tremendous mentoring capacity she had. Satyabhrrata Pal, calls her a legend, and is quick to add that she herself would not have approved of what to her would smack of ‘cant, hyperbole and flattery’; he is quick to add that ‘it simply is the truth’—that she is a legend. Navtej Sarna’s tribute is equally awe-filled, in which he emphasises her no-nonsense patriotism and integrity: he says, “The only wealth she respected was that of the intellect. Professional integrity was her calling card. She had no personal agenda whatsoever, no desire to please, no eye to ingratiate. All she thought of and worked for was the good of the country. And if anybody dared to slight India, she would turn to us, the admiring boys sitting behind her and say—“I am going to give him what for.” And boy, she did.’

Images of the suave Arundhati Ghose, Chukku ma’am, as she was fondly called, in her silk saris, her capacity to work indefatigably on just coffee and cigarettes for hours on end, her tough negotiating abilities, led her to dominate the Indian diplomatic scene for decades. Till today, Bangladesh remembers her with warmth due to her active support to the then government-in-exile of Bangladesh, headed by Tajuddin Ahmed and set up at Mujibnagar in 1971; the Bangladesh government bestowed the Friends of Liberation War Award on her on 27 March 2012 in recognition of her work and support.

She brought rare grace, dignity and integrity to all the important assignments that came her way—CTBT, liaison officer-in-charge for the Bangla Desh interim government, UPSC, member of the UN Secretary General’s Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, Member from India to the Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, member of the Executive Council of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, and member of Task Force on non-proliferation and Disarmament set up by the Ministry of External Affairs.

Personal tragedy struck with the loss of her nephew, Sanjay Ghose (a rural development activist, who has made a sterling contribution to community health and developmental media), to militant violence in Assam in 1997. Being at the forefront of India's foreign policy for decades and her association with the Bangladesh war gave her deep insights into the nature of war, and she emerged as a crusader for nonviolence.

An intensely private person, there are hardly any details available of Arundhati Ghose's personal life. Even at the time of her death by cancer in July this year, she held on to her own private space and refused to make her illness public knowledge. In the words of Satyabrata Pal, 'Like many others who were so fond of her, I was told, [were] told not to tell others and above all not to let her know that we knew. So we knew for some time that she was dying, leaving this life as she had lived it, on her terms... [leaving behind a legacy] of integrity, of moral courage, of uncompromising intellectual honesty.'

—Charanjeet Kaur



The 'Devi' at Doordarshan: Luku Sanyal (1941 to August 7, 2016)



When one thinks of TV news in the 1970s and 1980s, the images of graceful men and women, with impeccable diction, pronunciation, and clipped accents rise in the mind—in English it would be Gerson da Cunha, Partap Sharma, Nirmala Manthan, Gitanjali Iyer, Dolly Thakore, and of course, Luku Sanyal, the first English

newsreader at Doordarshan, Mumbai. Her poise, her dignified presence, bass voice and large bindi, are fresh in the minds of those who watched her as she reported momentous events like the death of Begum Akhtar and the arrest of Indira Gandhi after her defeat in the General Elections in 1977. Coming from a cultural and academic background, the daughter of Pahari Sanyal and Meera Devi was also a beloved Professor of English, associated at various points in her career with premier educational institutes like KC (Kishinchand Chellaram) College, MMK (Mithiram Motiram Kundnani) College and RD (Rishi Dayaram) National College.

Luku Sanyal was born in Kolkatta in around 1941; she received training in Bharatnatayam and Kathak from an early age, and she started doing plays at All India Radio, Kolkatta, when she was just 13. She was offered a role by Satyajit Ray in *Devi*, which she declined because of her interest in academics. After completing her post-graduation in English Literature at the University of Mumbai, Luku Sanyal set out on a study tour to England. Her success as a voice-over artist and dubbing for commercials, writing the script for TV news and cultural programmes and her first ever interview with the West Indies film maker Harbance Kumar paved the way to a fulfilling career as TV news anchor and she emerged as one of the most prominent

faces of TV news in English for about two decades. She has written the script for the award winning *Anand Bhawan* for which Partap Sharma did the voice-over. In one of her rare interviews, she reminisces: 'I was nervous as hell and still recall the cameraman Ajit Naik's advice to me—"Remember that people who love you are watching you. Speak like you're speaking with them." My first TV appearance was on February 5, 1974 and my father died on February 10.'

When Rinki Bhattacharya, the daughter of Bimal Roy and wife of Basu Bhattacharya, came out strongly about domestic violence in her documentary *Char Divari*, Luku Sanyal was among the women who spoke up about this issue because she herself had faced trauma in a difficult marriage. Pain and sorrow once again cast shadows on her in 2011 when she lost her daughter Mona Swami to cancer. When she passed away at the age of 75 in a hospital at Andheri in August 2016, one of her former students summed up her erudition and cultural impact in her tribute, 'It is like a library has burned down.' Luku is survived by her daughter, Shona Sanyal.

—Charanjeet Kaur



A Light Dies: Jyothi Lakshmi (November 2, 1948-August 8, 2016)

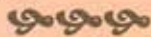


With Jyothi, light, in her name Jyothi Lakshmi became the glamour quotient of Tamil films in the early seventies, as a dancing star, although she has also done character roles. She worked in more than 300 films made in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam. Jyothi Lakshmi was the eldest daughter of yesteryear actress

S P L Dhanalakshmi. Dhanalakshmi was the aunt of actress T R Rajakumari who was considered the first glamour star of Tamil films. In fact, the story goes that the famous director K Subramaniam discovered T R Rajakumari when he visited Dhanalakshmi's house. But the truth is that Jyothi Lakshmi and her more famous cousin T R Rajakumari were born into a family of musicians and were so talented that in the first Hindi make of *Devdas* directed by Pramatesh Barua with K L Saigal and Jamuna Barua, released in 1936, T R Rajakumari had done the role of Chandramukhi although it was in *Kacha Devayani* released in 1941 that she really became a star. Jyothi Lakshmi came from such a family of talented artistes. Her debut film was *Periya Idaththup Penn* (Daughter of a Wealthy family, 1963) directed by T R Ramanna. There is an early morning scene in the film where she and Manimala would go singing holding pots on their hips, to bathe and wash clothes and bring water from the pond. In between the song M G R, the hero of the film, would come dragging his bullocks to give them a wash in the pond, and join them in the song. Jyothi Lakshmi looks so refreshingly innocent and attractive in this song. It is one of my favourite songs. In the film *Poovum Pottum* (Flower and Vermillion, 1968)

directed by Dada Mirasi, she played the character role of a gullible girl who falls in love with a cheat and dies in the end. She did play such roles but is remembered more for her glamour queen image. In fact, in the film *Galatta Kalyanam* (A Fun Marriage, 1968) directed by C V Rajendran she and Jayalalitha acted as sisters and in the titles her name and that of Jayalitha would lead the names of other actresses like Sachu, Manorama and Senthamarai. But in the very next year when *Adimai Penn* (Slave girl, 1969) directed by K Shankar was released the heroine was Jayalalitha and she, as heroines deserve, got a separate title card and Jyothi Lakshmi's name figured as one among the hordes of other junior actresses who worked in the film. Her film career did not pick up like that of Jayalalitha with whom she had shared equal credit just the previous year. Time does not treat everyone equally and is kinder to some people. Jyothi Lakshmi's sister Jayamalini is also known as a glamour girl and so also her daughter Jyothi Meena. Jyothi Lakshmi was ailing with cancer and passed away quietly.

—Jeevasundari Balan



The 'Earthy Tones': Gurdial Singh (January 10, 1933- August 16, 2016)



When the well-known translator and scholar of Gurdial Singh's work, Rana Nayar, chose to call his translation of fourteen of his short stories *Earthy Tones*, he was focussing on his radical use of the Malwai dialect of the Malwa region of Punjab, his portrayal of the rusticity, the feudal society, and marginalised men

and women of Punjab in his impressive *oeuvre* of novels, short stories, a two volume autobiography and plays, which, put a finger on the pulse and nerve-centre of the 'wretched of the earth' in Punjab. Far from the images of boisterous, celebratory bhangra dances, green fields of plenty of Punjab that inhabit the popular imagination and give it a romantic tinge, Gurdial Singh was one of the first writers to persistently draw attention to the grim and grainy side of the state and the culture: the feudal exploitation of the poorest of the poor, the move to a capitalist system, which brings no solace, the usurpation of the lands of the Dalits, their futile migration to nearby towns in search of employment, the hopelessness and helplessness of the situation—it is a dark picture that he paints; one in which redemption hardly figures.

Son of a carpenter, Jagat Singh and a housewife, Nihal Kaur, of village Bhaini Fateh near Jaitu Mandi, Gurdial Singh began his career as a carpenter at the age of 13, as per tradition. It was a school master, Madan Mohan Sharma, at a middle school at Jaito which Gurdial attended, who persuaded him to take his education seriously. The family background of the *trakhaans* (as carpenters are traditionally known in Punjab) had no place for this kind of education, and it must have taken a great deal of skilful persuasion to get the consent of his father to continue Gurdial's education. For education of a son would mean one hand less for work in the poverty

stricken family. However, he completed his matriculation, did well at *Gyani* [a government-run teacher training course in Punjabi] and took up a job as a school teacher in 1954. An early marriage at the age of 14 to Balwant Kaur brought with it more family responsibilities. Later, he completed his BA and MA, overcoming the hostility of his conditions. He worked at a lecturer of Punjabi at Government Brajindra College, Faridkot, and retired as a Professor of Punjabi from Punjabi University, Patiala. His last days were spent at his village near Jaito.

His first short story, 'Bhaganwale' (The Ones Favoured by Destiny), published in the prestigious magazine of his time *Panj Darya*, published by the well-known writer Mohan Singh, opened the doors of a literary career for him. Soon his work appeared in the iconic *Preetlari*, edited by Gurbaksh Singh, and he came to be accepted as a major rising star of Punjabi literature. His first novel *Marhi da Deva* (*The Last Flicker*) in 1967 (made into a film with the same name by Surinder Singh, starring Deepti Naval and Raj Babbar) has been acknowledged as the first major Punjabi novel to bring the Dalit experience to mainstream writing. Needless to say, he has been honoured by the most significant awards for literature: the Sahitya Akademi for his novel *Adh Chanan Raat* (*The Night of the Half Moon*) in 1975, the Soviet Lland Nehru Award in 1986, the Bhai Veer Singh Fiction Award in 1992, the Shiromani Sahitkar Award in 1992. In 1999, he shared the highest literary award in India, the Bharaitya Jnanpith, with the noted Hindi writer, Nirmal Verma.

No doubt that the contribution of Gurdial Singh to Punjabi literature is well recognised; and he lived to see one of his most scathing novels *Anhe Ghode da Daan* (*Alms for the Blind Horse*) made into a hard-hitting, yet lyrical film by Gurbinder Singh in 2011. A film which premiered and won accolades at the Venice International Film Festival, won the special jury award at Abu Dhabi and received the National Awards for best direction, cinematography, and best Punjabi film. No doubt that he has been well awarded. No doubt that rich tributes have been offered to him for his simplicity, his innovative use of language, his deep insight into the brute realities of lower class and lower caste life in Punjab. But the reality is also that few beyond the Punjabi speaking world are aware of this contribution. Nationally and internationally, his fame in the academic and literary worlds in Canada, UK, Punjab and West Punjab, is unassailable. It is only through more dedicated translations that his work can reach a wider readership. More from Rana Nayar and more of Rana Nayars are required for this stupendous task. For translating Gurdial Singh is no easy job and it is very important for a translator to catch the cultural nuances of the language he uses because "his works have created a rupture in contemporary literature in the way he used language and form" in the words of Deshraj. Still, the true tribute to this prolific and path breaking writer would be the concerted effort of writers and translators to ensure greater visibility to his writing.

—Charanjeet Kaur

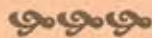
Mokala Shwas: Anuradha Vaidya (July 9, 1944-August 24, 2016)



Anuradha Vidya is a much acclaimed award winning Marathi writer of short stories, poems, novels and children's stories. She was born in Latur and graduated from the Marathwada University. She was not only a prolific writer but also associated with organisations like Marathwada Sahitya Parishad

and Mahila Mandal in Aurangabad. One of her novels, *Chauphula* (Four Flowers) was made into a Marathi film, *Mokala Shwas* (Free Breath), directed by Kanchan Adhikari and received very good notices for its handling of the sensitive issue of female foeticide. She has been the recipient of many awards in recognition of the different genres of her writing. She received the Pune Theatre Academy Award in 1992 and in the same year also received the P K Atre Award for humour in writing. In 1993, she received the N S Phadke Sahitya Purashkar. Her illustrated children's story book *Gomaticha Gao* (Gomati's Village) received the NCERT Children's Book Award in 1993. She was also given a lifetime achievement award by Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad, Pune. Her book *Maajhi Chindhyanchi Bahuli* (My Rag Doll) published in 1966 is a verse-novel talking about adoption and was translated by her niece Shruti Nargundkar as *A Rag Doll After My Heart* and published by Zubaan in 2015. Anuradha leaves behind a large body of work to remember her.

—C S Lakshmi



One Who Walked Her Own Path: *Sandhya Rao (1954-August 27, 2016)*

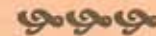


In the seventies in Bengaluru many of us were given to discussing films and literature. And we met often for film screenings or book discussions. Sandhya was a regular for all this. She took rather unusual decisions in her life and even while doing her graduation felt the education system did not give her what she wanted

and dropped out. That may have been the reason why she later educated her two daughters, Shruti and Shabari, very differently. She came to Delhi later and lived in Delhi after her marriage with Rahat Yusufi, a film-maker. She came to Mumbai when he was transferred to Films Division, Mumbai, and later was in Pune Film Institute campus when he taught there. Later she came to settle down in Bengaluru where her parents were and produced some documentary films with her husband and also thought in terms of setting up a women's organisation. Her marriage broke up but she continued to do whatever she believed in and did not let the breakup affect her or her two daughters. She was already

actively associated with Streelekha and Vimochana and Hengasara Hakkinna Sangha was started in 1994 and she continued to devote her time for its activities. She was also a society member of Centre for Budget and Policy Studies from 1998-2011. She was present in most feminist meetings and conferences, laughing, arguing, and joking and of course, smoking away. A decade ago she stepped down from her position in HHS to hand it over to younger people. She had health issues she made little of and remained someone who delighted in being a grandmother to three grandchildren and also someone who was always ready to look at issues critically and with a feminist perspective of her own. Three months before her demise she was diagnosed with Stage IV metastatic lung cancer and she took it in her stride like she did her earlier heart ailment and diabetes. A tribute to her by Meena Seshu and Laxmi Murthy says that she passed away peacefully "after a day spent with a friend, chatting, eating and having a good time." That is the way she would have liked to go looking death in the face and saying: Death, be not proud.

—C S Lakshmi



Lasya Priya: K Uma Rama Rao (July 4, 1938-August 27, 2016)



It was sometime in 2005 that Dr Uma Rama Rao visited SPARROW. Her sister Dr Rajyalakshmi Seth, director of Muvva Institute of Kuchipudi Dance in Mumbai, a Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam guru, choreographer, nattuvanar and research scholar, was working with SPARROW then and helping us with the Telugu material

we had. We took the opportunity to record an interview with Uma Rama Rao. Uma was named Uma Maheswari when she was born and began learning dance from the age of five. She learnt both Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam from gurus like Acharya PV Narasimha Rao, Padmasri Dr Nataraja Rama Krishna, Brahmasri Vedantam Lakshmi Narayana Sastri, Guru Pakkiriswami Pillai and Guru C R Acharya in Kuchipudi, Bharatanatyam and Ritual Dance traditions. She had many years of choreography and performances when she became senior lecturer at Sri Tyagaraja Government college of music and Dance in Hyderabad and she worked there from 1969 to 1988. Later she was an Associate Professor and headed the Department of Dacne in Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University, Hyderabad. She herself submitted a doctoral dissertation on Yakshagana Prabandhas composed in Telugu, by King Shaji, who ruled Tanjavur from 1684 to 1712 A.D and got her doctoral degree in 1994. In 1985 she founded the Lasya Priya Dance Academy in Hyderabad and became its director. For her exemplary work in dance Uma Rama Rao has received many awards from the government of Andhra Pradesh like Kala Neerajanam and Best Teacher award. In 2004 she received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award. Uma Rama Rao belongs to a rare family of dancers.

Her sisters Sumathy Kaushal and Rajyalakshmi Seth are also dancers, performers and teachers. Uma Rama Rao has left behind a lifetime work of a tradition of not only choreography and performance but also a tradition of teaching dance.

—C S Lakshmi



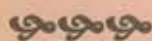
A Life Lived: Geetha Nathan (Jayaradha) (May 2, 1953-September 13, 2016)



I knew Jayaradha as a young girl in the early seventies when she was a sub-editor in the magazine *Gnanaradham*. She had written some poems and a few stories. There were times when she used to recite poems written by her during cycle rickshaw rides we used to take in Chennai. She married a person of

her choice when she was just 21 years old and became a mother almost immediately. She did not write much after that but she was working for a while with the magazine *Kanaiyazhi* which had shifted from Delhi to Chennai. I met her last year after some forty years and saw that she was a wholly changed person. She was a cancer survivor. But the rebel in her was still there and I found out she was active on Facebook as Geetha Nathan. She had a great following on FB. Life had not been easy for her but throughout she retained a sense of humour. She had become a great believer and in one of her posts done when she was in great pain because of Lymphedema, a post-cancer affliction, she wrote: *Even without any miracle of a small storm, an earthquake, a tsunami, a volcano, thunder, lightning and heavy rain, I still know your presence, my god!* She wanted to write a lot and do a lot in life but all that she could finally do was only share her immense love with everybody. She assessed her life in a post: *Life began with ignorance. Youth continued in half baked thoughts. Individuality was lost in compromise. Firmness of mind was lost in affection. Precious time was lost in nameless searches. Many experiences went past without being understood. After calculations and assessments done by others, relationships ended. But the mind learnt to live without complaints. At a time when the end of life that one somehow managed to live even though there was nothing in life that was what one wanted, is not far away, the mind is filled with a long sigh and a consoling immense peace.* Some writers die without writing much and we have to mourn their death also.

—C S Lakshmi



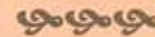
One Day in the Season of Rain: Rekha Sabnis (April 20, 1942 - September 25, 2016)



In the Mumbai theatre and cultural scene Rekha Sabnis was an icon. A Marathi article on her calls her a "ziddi mulgi" (stubborn woman). That she was. She did not do anything that she did not believe in. Creativity and not commerce mattered to her. While she kept her love for theatre alive throughout her life, she also

acted and was assistant director in what can be called parallel cinema. While *27 Down* (1974), *Bhumika* (1977), *Party* (1984) and *Daayra* (1996) are mentioned normally to mark her film career, what many of us of her generation remember her for is *Ashad Ka Ek Din* (One Day in the Season of Rain, 1971) of Mani Kaul. She literally carried the film on her shoulders. Apart from being an actor who was an important part of Satyadeo Dube's Theatre Unit, she was a Sanskrit scholar who had trained under the legendary Daji Bhatawadekar. She was a multifaceted personality who excelled in whatever she did. She translated Kiran Nagarkar's *Ravan* and *Eddie* into Marathi. She was one of the founder members of the experimental theatre group *Abhivyakti*. When Kiran Nagarkar's play *Bedtime Story* could not be performed for seventeen years due to censorship rules, Rekha Sabnis's *Abhivyakti* group and its director Achyut Deshingkar kept faith with the play through this long difficult period and finally succeeded in performing it in 1995. She had also directed a few plays like *Kundali Ani Kundalini*. She also actively encouraged youth movements like *Yuvak Biradari*, that worked towards nation building by combining the many different elements of the pluralistic character of the country. So the icon of Girgaum who was ailing for a while, died one day in the season of rain. In her own inimitable way, she became part of the rain.

—C S Lakshmi



Working to Combat Aids: Parmeshwar Godrej (1946-October 10, 2016)



Parmeshwar Godrej who passed away at the age of 70 was known as a philanthropist and one who functioned amidst high-powered people. She was married to Adi Godrej, the chairman of the Godrej Group. She had worked as an air hostess when she was young and was also part of the fashion world.

But what she will be remembered for is an important initiative she took up in 2004 to combat Aids. Called the Heroes Project, it was a project that was supported by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Clinton Global Initiative. The project was launched with Hollywood actor Richard Gere and was widely covered by the media.

—C S Lakshmi

Death of a Musical Legend:**Dr S A Kumari Durga****(June 1, 1940- November 19, 2016)**

Durga, a musicologist I admire and love, passed away on the night of 19th November. She is the founder of the Centre for Ethnomusicology based in Chennai. I had interviewed her for SPARROW year before last and we became good friends. She would ring me up once in a while and ask me to come for the December

music season so that we can go together and she can explain the musical nuances to me.

When I did homework on her before the interview I was interested in her mother Lalithabai who was a Harikatha artiste and disciple of Rajamanikkam Pillai. And Durga told me so much about her mother and her own musical journey. Durga began to learn music very early in her life from her own mother and then from Tirukkodikaval Venkatarama Iyer. Later she learnt from Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, Madurai Mani Iyer, T Viswanathan and Balamuralikrishna. She learnt Hindustani classical music from Ustad Mohammed Munnawar of Delhi. Durga specialised in studying voice culture at a time when not many were even thinking about it. She did her doctorate studies in Wesleyan University under the great T Viswanathan, fondly referred to as Viswa. She did excellent research on comparative study of Gregorian and Vedic chants.

Meeting her and talking to her taught me so much about not only music but about women like her for whom music is the breath of life. Surrounded by her cats in an old fashioned house in Mylapore which looked like it would tumble down anytime and that it was being held up only by her and her music, Durga was a legend. SPARROW will be publishing excerpts from the interview with her in its next newsletter. Adieu, Durga. Sorry that December season with you never happened. What was the hurry? You are only four years older than me.

—C S Lakshmi

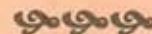
**A People's Poet: Inkulab****(1944-December 1, 2016)**

Inkulab was born Shahul Hameed but everyone knew him only as Inkulab. He was a follower of Periyar and an activist and a Communist with Marxist Leninist inclination. He retired as a professor of Tamil at the New College, Chennai. But it was as a poet and a writer that he was known. His poems espousing rationalism

of Periyar brought him much recognition. His poem

Kanmani Rajam, which talks about the moral bankruptcy of politicians, was prescribed in the school curriculum in the state. He was associated with the Vaanambadi poetry movement but his poems with their intensity and passion became people's poems. His angry poem *Manushangada Naanga Manushangada* (We Are Human beings, Human Beings We Are) that spoke about the massacre on 25 December 1968 of 44 women and children, the families of striking Dalit labourers in Keezhvenmani, became the freedom song of the Dalits. He was a dramatist who made it possible to bring Sangam literature to the contemporary stage and make it relevant for present times. His play *Avvai* turned the old Avvai into a young bard who freely moved about. All his plays—*Avvai*, *Manimegalai*, *Kurinjipaatu*, *Yaadum Nammoor* and *Palsaanteerey*—were directed by Mangai (Dr V Padma), Associate Professor of English at Stella Maris College. His body on his request will be donated to the Chengalpattu Medical College as he did not believe in religious rituals. Inkulab may be gone but the *Manushangada* song will always resound in the air whenever groups of activists would gather.

—C S Lakshmi

**A Woman Who Stood Alone: J Jayalalitha****(February 24, 1948-December 5, 2016)**

She could have been the academic she wanted to be but destiny dragged her into films for her mother, actress Sandhya, whose real name was Vedha, told her that there was no way she could go to college because the family coffers were empty and that she had to enter films like she herself had done. Jayalalitha had scored excellent

marks in her school and had a gold medal in all the subjects but she had to obey her mother. Having lost her father at the age of two, she only had her mother as her mentor and guide. Her entry into films, her relationship with Telugu actor Shoban Babu, her many films with the legendary MGR, her getting close to him, her entry into politics through MGR as the propaganda Secretary of AADMK and her tumultuous life thereafter is an open book known to everyone. She steered her political career through the mire of Tamil Nadu politics where an opposition did not flinch from referring to her as a prostitute and a mere danseuse and even went as far as humiliating her by physically attacking her right in the Legislative Assembly. She bore it all with grit and became a powerful leader, holding power to herself and enjoyed it when men prostrated before her seeking favours. There were many cases of corruption against her and she went to jail but still managed to be the Amma of many. Despite a coterie around her she was a lonely person and the 75 lonely days she spent in the hospital before her death probably symbolise her life.

—C S Lakshmi