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SPARROW Literary Award completes 5 years!

SPARROW supplement



SOUND & PICTURE ARCHIVES FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN



R Thyagarajan, Founder, Shriram Group, Chennai.



Kannan Sundaram
Editor and Publisher,
Kalachuvadu, A monthly alternative magazine on politics and culture
and Publisher, Kalachuvadu Publications



N Sukumaran,
Poet and Executive Editor,
Kalachuvadu literary magazine



Dr C S Lakshmi (Ambai)
Director, SPARROW

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The SPARROW LITERARY AWARD is instituted by R Thyagarajan, Founder, Shriram Group, Chennai. SPARROW has been giving literary awards from 2014 onwards. The panel of judges choosing these awards are Ambai, writer and Director, SPARROW, N Sukumaran, poet and Executive editor, Kalachuvadu, and Kannan Sundaram, Editor and Publisher, Kalachuvadu, a magazine on culture and politics and Publisher, Kalachuvadu Publications. The awards are meant for two Tamil writers and a non-Tamil writer.

In 2014, the awards were given for the category of fiction to a senior Tamil writer and a young male writer and to senior non-Tamil writer. The SPARROW-R Thyagarajan Literary Award 2014 went to **Su. Thamizhselvi** for her contribution to contemporary writing in Tamil, **KN Senthil** for being a writer of great talent and promise among the younger generation of Tamil writers and **Meghana Pethe** for her contribution to contemporary writing in Marathi.

In 2015, the category chosen for awards was poetry. **Anar**, a young Tamil poet from Sri Lanka, **Anandh**, a senior Tamil poet and a fiction writer and **Vimmi Sadarangani**, a Sindhi poet, were chosen for SPARROW-R Thyagarajan Literary Award 2015.

In 2016 the category chosen for awards was translation. Translations from one Indian language to another and direct translation from a foreign language (other than English) to Tamil were taken for consideration. The SPARROW-R Thyagarajan Literary Award 2016 went to **Gowri Kirubanandan**, for her translations from Telugu to Tamil, **Kulachal S M Yoosuf** for his translations from Malayalam to Tamil, and **Sridharan Madhusudhanan** (Payani) for his translations from Chinese to Tamil.

In 2017, the category of autobiography and biography was chosen for the award. The SPARROW-

R Thyagarajan Literary Award 2017 went to **Lakshmi M** for her autobiographical work *Latchumi Enum Payani* and **Stalin Rajangam** for his documentation and excellent biographical works on Dalit personalities in history whose life stories need to be documented. The non-Tamil writer award in 2017 was shared by two writers: **Kalyani Thakur Charal** for her autobiography *Ami Kano Charal Likhi* (Why Do I Write Charal) in Bengali and **Ashalata Kamble** for her biography of her mother in Marathi, *Aamachi Aai* (Our Mother).

In 2018, the SPARROW panel of judges decided to take up contribution to literature in general. Two awards are normally given for Tamil writers and one for a non-Tamil writer. This year for the first time we decided unanimously to award three Tamil writers and two non-Tamil writers. In Tamil, two awards for acknowledging and honouring writers who have been in the field for many years and one award for a younger writer for literary work done in the recent past. The SPARROW-R Thyagarajan Literary Award 2018 for Tamil went to **S Thenmozhi** for her excellent contribution to fiction and poetry and non-fictional work, **Ba Venkatesan** for the wonderful literary work he has done for the past many years both in terms of fiction and poetry and **S Senthilkumar** for the promising work he has done in fiction and poetry. This year the non-Tamil writer awards was shared by two writers: **Varsha Adalja**, a feminist novelist and playwright, who won the 1995 Sahitya Akademi Award for Gujarati language for her novel *Anasar*, who is also a dramatist who has acted and written several stage plays, screenplays and radio plays and **Aruna Dhere**, a Marathi writer, who has written over forty books in different genres including personal essays, short stories, novels, poems, travelogues, children's stories, bhakti literature, folk literature and social history.

The acceptance speeches of all the writers told us a lot about what it is to be a writer and also what writing is for a writer. This supplement is a collection of the acceptance speeches translated into English.

2014



SPARROW

Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women

Silver Jubilee Celebration Programme
FINALE EVENT

2014 SPARROW Literary Award

To

Su. Thamizhselvi, K N Senthil & Meghana Pethe

Well-known writer

Shanta Gokhale

Will give away the awards to the writers

Followed by

Silver Jubilee Celebratory Event with

Chief Guest

Dr Geraldine Forbes

&

Guests of Honour & Special Guests

SPARROW Trustees and Advisory Committee Members

&

Friends of SPARROW

For an evening of

Dance

By

Purvadhanshree

&

Bahina's World:

An Exploration of the life and work of Bahinabai Choudhary

By

Anjali Purohit

At the Mini Auditorium

S N D T Women's University, Sir Vithaldas Vidyavihar,
Juhu Tara Road, Santacruz (West), Mumbai 400049

Do come and join us in our celebration

(4:30 p.m. To 7:30 p.m.)

And also join us later for

High Tea

Admission by invitation

RSVP: Pooja: 09967337734 • Sharmila: 09867660354

SPARROW: 28280895/28965019 • E-mail: sparrow1988@gmail.com





Su. Thamizhselvi is a writer who has brought depth and strength to modern Tamil novel writing. The world and the women she creates in her stories are very different from those created by other feminist writers. She has created a special niche for herself in the Tamil novel genre where there are not many women.

Su. Thamizhselvi's novels are well-researched with carefully carried out field work. Her novels are women-centred and are about the lives and struggles of women in rural and semi-urban areas. As salt pan workers, goat herders, agricultural labourers, fisherwomen, garment factory workers or small-time businesswomen, her women struggle, succumb, succeed and move on. With a narrative style that is simple yet forceful with rare insight, Su. Thamizhselvi looks at human life from a woman's perspective with kindness and empathy.

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

All plants avail the light of the same sun, but the taste of their fruits is unique to each...

Su. Thamizhselvi

I am a young scion who has come in the tradition of women writers like Avvaiyar, Velliveethiyar, Vennikuyathiyar, Nachellaiyar, Karaikal Ammayar and Andal. I am happy to be receiving the award from SPARROW which has a great concern regarding women and speaking to you on this day. At this moment, we have to remind ourselves of a few facts of history. Women's literature which was at its peak during the Sangam period, gradually faded away. In the name of caste and gender, education was forbidden to women. Feminist debates emerged in the European continent in the 18th century and had an impact on the world. The consequences of this impact could be seen everywhere in our country including Tamil Nadu.

The invention of printing technology, arrival of Christian missionaries and the social work of personalities like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Periyar, Ambedkar, Jyothirao Phule made education accessible to women once again in the 19th century.

The next stage after education was women evolving as creative writers. Beginning with Vai. Mu. Kodhainayaki Ammal the women's movement has a long line of writers like Ambai, Va. Geetha, Mangai, Bama, Malathi Maithri and Kutti Revathi. The Tamil literary field has been enriched with poems, short stories, novels and reviews of women writers. I have come to speak here with the historical awareness that



I am also a small link in this literary chain.

Since I am basically from an agricultural area I have known about the various areas of work from my young days. This made me develop a concern for people who depend on salt cultivating fields, sea and grazing lands. Being a woman makes it easier for me to know the lives of these peripheral groups of people and the everyday life and the difficulties of women.

My literary concerns don't differentiate between women and men. My art evolves from my search for the meaning of life. I am constantly trying to know the sorrow, absurdity and purity of life through my writing. Other than that I have no particular intention to write about feminism as such.

All plants avail the light of the same sun, but the taste of their fruits is unique to each. I think that feminist leanings that can be found in my writing must have happened in a similar way.

As a woman, I can clearly feel the pain experienced by women. As someone who has held in her palms the tears of women, I am sensitive enough to understand the intensity and heat of those tears.

When the world, its politics and cultural institutions always look upon women as secondary people, how can I see this world, its politics and cultural values without criticism?

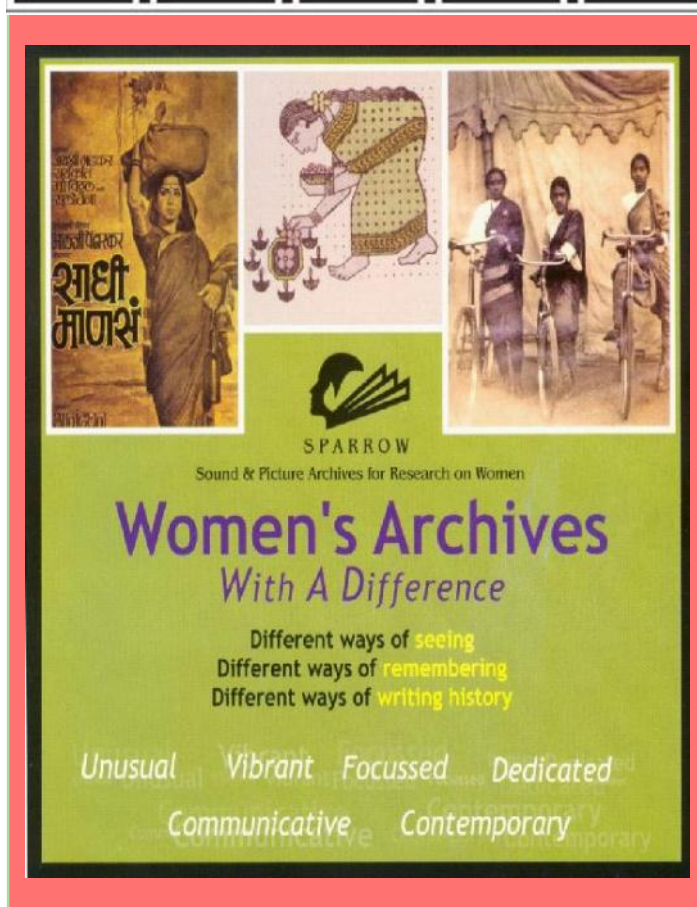
Isn't it natural that my inner feelings get reflected in my stories? What I want to create is a creative expression and not a concept or a theory. Writing is a beautiful dream to create a beautiful world. It is an attempt to dream of a world without gender discrimination, hierarchies, caste and racial discrimination, war, violence, ignorance, hunger and sickness. My writing has been an effort to enable human minds to create such a dream world.

Despite its tremendous growth, the media highlights only one part of the world. Even in this 21st century, a group of people live in those parts where its light does

not reach. Those in the centre do not know about the life and culture of these peripheral people. The direction of my writing is towards this area covered by darkness. This dark space includes women and also men. Again I would like to say that my writing is aimed at humanism. Contained in it are minute inner threads of gender, oppression, imperialism and globalisation. These are revelations that the reading of the stories must make possible.

In this literary journey of search, reaching and perplexity, this award, this hall, SPARROW and Ambai's love, all this will remain one of the greatest moments of my life.

My thanks to all of you.





KN Senthil is one of the most gifted Tamil writers of the 21st century known basically for his brilliant short stories. He is not a prolific writer and has established himself as a writer of a high calibre in the last decade since he has begun to write. His stories may be seen as an extension of the long history of Tamil short story writing and clearly reflect how much he has grasped the essence of the short stories written before his time.

K N Senthil's stories are about everyday life. His characters are ordinary people who face extraordinary situations in the course of their life. His stories are not didactic but attempt to perceive the complexities of life and individual ways of coping with them.

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Writing is a bird that does not obey its master...
K N Senthil



When I was nineteen I got accidentally introduced to the novel *J.J. Sila Kurippukal* by Sundara Ramsamy. At that time I did not realise what a good beginning that was. After I read all his works, started a correspondence with him and later met him in person, my dreams of writing grew. Reading his works opened the doors widely to modern literature. He sowed the seeds in me of creative writing. He was the one who impressed on my mind, the words, "there is no point doing something that has already been done and be recognised for that. It is better to fail doing something that has not been done before." I remember that teacher today on this occasion.

The person I consider my second teacher is poet Sukumaran. His perception of literature and his

appreciation to literature brought me very close to him. Sukumaran who has been writing poetry for more than thirty years is an important Tamil poet. What I learnt from him through conversations on literature have guided me and accompanied me on my literary journey. They will do so in future too. Today, standing here, I can feel the same closeness.

I salute both of them as a reader and as a fellow writer.

When a person tries to bring into words the dream that is like a glowing fire, isn't it natural for him to stumble and get mixed up about the struggles, joy, fatigue and vacillations that writing involves? Along with the usual comment that writing is exciting I would also like to place the comment that it is painful. There

is not much that person can do in literature who has no consciousness or ethics. Many look upon ethics as tomatoes growing in their backyard. I would like to remind you about the biblical sentence: "Those who suffer for justice are fortunate."

Writing is made possible through continuous practice but it is a bird that does not obey its master. It wants to measure the entire sky with its small wings. Not to look for food. But because this bird believes that wings are meant for searching with dreams for new places and that the joy of flying itself is that. Its great desire and struggle to look for different water bodies according to the seasons may look strange to ordinary birds merely looking for things fried by grandma [like in the crow story for children]. Moreover, despite many difficulties, it is a bird that refuses to fly low to pick at rice grains thrown on the roof. At the same time the bird must never forget that its nest is on the tree that is rooted in the soil for there are many experiences on the earth which are as exciting as flying in the sky. The range of its flying will depend on the experiences it absorbs within itself with sensitivity and the experiences it is able to grasp.

I am not content with the lone life that I am living. I want to move away from it and live many other lives. Literature is the way I have found for this. Contained in it are many lives. It is to live them all in one lifetime that I have entered the world of writing.

I believe that the reward of writing is reaching somewhere. An award is its recognised form. There are many new generation writers in Tamil who are working hard and are leaving their imprints on literature. I am happy to receive this award as one of them, on their behalf.

I thank the jury and the SPARROW organisation for this award.



SPARROW LITERARY AWARD 2014



C S Lakshmi, K N Senthil, Meghana Pethe, Shanta Gokhale and Su Thamizhselvi



Audience



Purvadhanashree performing



Meghana Pethe is considered a trendsetter in Marathi fiction writing. Her writing deals with human life and its contradictions and how women and men exist and deal with these contradictions and their never-ceasing attempts to find meaning in life. Her forthright and direct way of dealing with social issues and her sensitive and insightful portrayal of life in a language that is known both for its poetic quality and precision, Meghana Pethe is one of the most important writers we have in Marathi today.

She is also a poet and a journalist and was an active participant in Marathi theatre activities from 1982-1990.



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Writing is a lonely journey... Meghana Pethe

I will begin by thanking SPARROW and Lakshmi for conferring this honor on me to be the 'chosen one' for this award.

I have always believed that an award becomes an honour, only if you receive it without applying for it. One applies for scholarship or waiver of fees or even a flat from a government quota but not for literary awards... Ideally, awards are to be conferred upon a deserving person by an autonomous independent body comprising critics and connoisseurs.

I have always received awards without applying for them... except once...

The very first year after my very first book was published, I had unknowingly signed on a form sent by the publisher's office in a hurry without really

reading the full content ... It turned out that it was an application form for the Maharashtra State awards...

Later a reliable source revealed that I was not even considered for the award because the panel thought my book *Hans Akela* was vulgar and obscene...! I immediately realised that if life wants to save you from ignominy, it has many ingenious ways... and was very lucky to have kept my *daaman* spotless after that...

Though I received many awards afterwards, I was able to grasp the stark reality of the awards and why one is given or denied an award. Anyway it stopped being of much interest or concern to me... I realised that a good writer has to transcend the awards, as soon as possible...

A writer is lucky if he or she receives a guileless and

spontaneous compliment from sensitive and sensible contemporaries and this is the only award one should aspire for if at all..

Albeit, today, I would unhesitatingly announce without any embarrassment that I am very happy to receive this particular award. I am aware that happiness is not quite in fashion and is almost an outdated obsolete norm amongst the artists and intellectual fraternity alike, in this post or post post-modern era.

Nonetheless, I am happy, obviously because I am the first recipient of this award. The joy is almost equivalent to being the first love of a worthy lover and the honour of being the first has a sanctity which holds good even today, although some other sanctities have been rightly questioned and declared debatable as of now by women all over the world.

I am also happy for this award because of the person, who I guess has been instrumental in choosing me for it; I mean C S Lakshmi, alias Ambai. Not because she is a friend but because she is a writer. A celebrated writer felicitating another contemporary writer is the rarest of the rare occasions and I value it more than a *daad* by any other *deedaavar*. There is a reason for this. Only a writer knows that writing is really difficult. That sometimes writing is almost impossible. Only a writer knows how the journey is lonely and painful and how the process of writing is many a time excruciatingly boring. And of course, only a writer knows that absolutely nothing can compare the joy of being able to write exactly 'what' one always wants to write or exactly 'how' one wants to..

Lakshmi, I thank you and SPARROW once again and hope that this award proves to be a trigger for my second cycle as a writer which is likely to commence anytime now.

Thank you so much.



SPARROW LITERARY AWARD 2014



Anjali Purohit in her presentation *Bahina's World: An Exploration of the life and work of Bahinabai Choudhary*.



The entire SPARROW family including the SPARROW kids!!!!



SPARROW Team



SPARROW

Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women

SPARROW Literary Award 2015

(Instituted by R Thyagarajan, Shriram Investments)



To

Anandh, Anar & Vimmi Sadarangani

Well-known classical khayal singer of the Gwalior gharana

Neela Bhagwat

Will give away the awards to the writers

Followed by

An evening of music

Through the Looking Glass:

Songs of Soyarabai, Muktabai and Kanhopatra

By

Neela Bhagwat

An event held in collaboration with

Research Centre for Women's Studies (RCWS)

SNDT University, Juhu campus

At the Mini Auditorium

S N D T Women's University, Sir Vithaldas Vidyavihar,

Juhu Tara Road, Santacruz (West), Mumbai 400049

Do come and join us for an evening of celebration of literature and music

On 12th December 2015

(5.00 p.m. to 6.45 p.m.)

And also join us later for

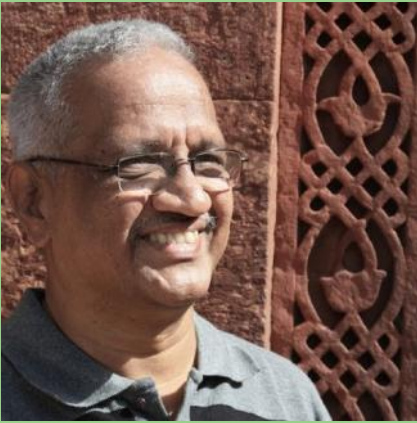
Tea and snacks

Do confirm your presence.

RSVP: Pooja: 09967337734, Sharmila: 09867660354

SPARROW: 28280895/28965019, E-mail: sparrow1988@gmail.com

2015



Anandh Krishna who writes as Anandh lives in Chennai. He has published two poetry collections, two novellas, and a collection of novellas and stories. Anandh's first poem was published in 1969 when he was just 18. His first story was published by none other than the literary stalwart Ka. Na. Subramanian in the journal *Gnanaratham*. Anandh writes poetry, short stories, novellas, essays and book reviews. Anandh had also a part in bringing out the literary journal *Zha* that published new poetry. He has translated into Tamil *De buitenkant van meneer Jules* (The Exterior of Mr. Jules) by Diane Broeckhoven, *KA* by Roberto Calasso, and *The Tale of the Unknown Island* by Jose Saramago. He has also published, *Kavithai Ennum Val Veechu* - a collection of 17 essays on poetry and *Kaala Veli Kaadu* - 14 essays on Time and Consciousness. His books have been published by Kalachuvadu Publications, Nagercoil and Virutcham, Chennai.

Anandh is a psychotherapist and is the founder of Alchedemy Consultants founded in 2006 for therapy and counselling, inner healing programmes and sessions on self-knowledge, touching the well-spring within... He is also the owner and founder of Heal the Heart founded in 2007.

Anandh has been married since 1978 and has two sons and a granddaughter.

“That which is in us, doesn't need to grow... it is complete, whole and perfect...” is how he would like to see an individual's self. As for himself he says: Life manifests spontaneously in me every moment with joy, love and clarity.



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Creative quest and delving into the depths...
Anandh

I am indeed delighted to be here with all of you on this happy occasion. I take this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts and reflections about poetry. In this context I also wish to look into my inner dynamics that determine the nature and quality of my poetry.

I grew up in an atmosphere of books, music and religion. My father, Shri Y R K Sarma, was an avid reader who was deeply interested in the Tamil literary movement of the 1960s. Many writers and poets were his close friends and they often visited our home. My mother, Smt. Rajeswari, was a good singer and was well versed in Carnatic music. She was also religious, not only conventionally, but also involved in some deep spiritual practices. We were taught many Sanskrit slokas and frequent pujas were common at our home. The festivals that we celebrated at home were a source of great joy. Krishna Jayanthi, for instance, virtually brought little Krishna into the home! His presence was fully felt all over the house. His footsteps were seen in the white impressions on the floor. The air vibrated with a soft light, filled with his cheerfulness and gaiety. Such was the air I breathed as a little boy. Some essence of it is still an integral part of me.

When I was about twelve years old, my father began taking me to literary meetings. I used to sit there, not understanding anything. But I later realised that I was unconsciously absorbing a lot of the discussions and even the controversies. Even at an early age, I could discern, what was serious literature and what was not!

Early in life, even in my pre-teens, I was reading books in both English and Tamil and around 14 years I started reading serious Tamil literary authors of the time. I read Thi. Janakiraman, Laa. Sa. Ramamirtham, Jayakanthan, Kaa. Naa. Su, and other such stalwarts during my middle teens. I have read Ambai's short story, *Amma oru kolai seythal*, when it was published in *Kachatathapara*. *Kachatathapara* was a magazine devoted entirely to serious modern literature.

My father was also a good singer although he had not

learnt music formally. He used to sing Bharathiar's songs with great passion. Hence as a little boy I became quite familiar with many of his songs.

My exposure to serious concepts about life and society created a deep churning in my mind. At the same time, I saw the various kinds of conflicts people around me were indulging in: my aunts and other relatives. I could see the meanness in the behaviour of many of my relatives and it was very painful for me. I saw that love was the casualty in the manipulations of the ego games they were playing with one another. I experienced a deep disillusionment around the end of my teenage.

Although externally I enjoyed the fun appropriate to that age, inwardly I was in deep turmoil. I questioned the accepted rules of relationships as they were taught to me. I had a strong feeling that understanding the processes of relationships was the clue to the resolution of all conflicts. I began reading history, science, philosophy and many other subjects apart from literature. Some of the authors were G I Gurdjieff, P D Ouspensky, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Carlos Castaneda, Rudolf Steiner, and Nisargadatta Maharaj. They led me to unfamiliar areas within myself. I became interested not only in the workings of the mind but also in the process of perception. I clearly saw the deep dissonance between what was told to me and what I was perceiving. I saw that most of what was told to me was shallow, hollow and false, and therefore not valid at all. It was during that time I became deeply fascinated with the phenomenon of time and its relation to experience, consciousness and awareness. As a result of all this explorations my whole belief system just caved in and collapsed. The world view given to me was no longer acceptable. It was as if I was given a map of a territory, and when I went there I discovered that the map had nothing to do with the place. Later when I started writing poetry I even wrote a poem about this. The poem goes like this:

*I have wandered all over the jungle
This map is of no use
I really know not where*

*In which tree
Will that flower bloom*

*There
On a branch of the tree
That will burst forth one day
From the seed
Of the fruit*

*Now hanging from the branch
Of that tree standing over there
The flower
Will one day bloom*

*Today
Cup a handful of water
From yonder stream
Drink and leave*

The collapse of the consensual collective world view resulted in the breaking down of the defenses normally available, and there arose in me two states of mind:

- 1) A feeling of total unbounded freedom and joy, and
- 2) Intense panic impacting the body, mind and soul.

These two, the sheer ecstasy and the deep dread, alternated throughout the day, for about a week and then started to subside slowly but surely. I even suspected whether I was going mad! However, I consoled myself that had I gone fully mad, I would not even have this question!

New insights began to spontaneously surface in my mind. I was a mute witness to what was happening and I didn't understand much of that at that time. This continued for a few weeks.

I began to read several books on psychology and epistemology in order to understand what was happening inside me. The model of Carl Jung and his concept of Collective Unconscious appealed to me. It evoked a deep curiosity in my young mind. I sensed that the key to the solution of my problem could be there in my own depths. I began observing my internal

processes with great attention. I diligently began to practise some exercises in awareness I found in a book. While on the one hand this led to some clarity, it also gave rise to a lot of confusion and new questions! For a period I began to withdraw from people and involved myself even more deeply in my internal processes.

I started keeping a journal, which I called 'My Abandoned Notebook.' I recorded my random thoughts, feelings, observations and responses in it. I was witnessing the constant conflict amongst the people around me. Even in the Tamil literary circle, I saw the same thing happening: groups, factions and individuals hurling insults at each other, in their attempts to put each other down.

All that I was going through during that period, the pain, the withdrawal, the loneliness, and the churning led me to a perception of the events happening around me in a particular way. This recorded all that in the journal I wrote the following lines during that time.

- o *This is today's scene of the ever present war;*
- o *In today's war, there are no two sides, as our side and the enemy's;*
- o *For each soldier, every other soldier is an enemy;*
- o *As soldiers are wearing full armour, covering their whole body, their faces are not visible;*
- o *Behind the ever-open eyes of the metallic helmet, the eyes of the soldiers remain closed;*
- o *As the eyes are closed, the war goes on incessantly, day and night;*
- o *As all the soldiers follow Ahimsa, their swords stay in their scabbards, fully rusted;*
- o *They all fight with their shields, without unsheathing their swords;*
- o *As soldiers die, new soldiers keep joining the war;*
- o *The new soldiers are not even aware of the use of the swords hanging by their*

- sides;
- o *Hitting with the shields also causes pain;*
 - o *Even then no one will use his sword to fight;*
 - o *Because, this is a war of Dharma; all are followers of Ahimsa.*

I had no idea of writing a poem. According to me, these lines were just some points that crossed my mind, which I noted down in my journal. One day, as I was walking along in the evening near my house in Madras, I happened to meet the Tamil poet Gnanakkoothan. We hadn't met for some time. He enquired about me. We spent some time together over a cup of coffee. I was carrying my journal in my hand. He asked me what it was. I told him. He opened it and flipped through the pages. When he came to the page where he found the above lines, he stopped. He read them slowly and said to me, "Copy these lines and send it to me. We will publish this in the forthcoming issue of *Kachatathapara*."

I told him that I did not mean thatw21 to be a poem. But I promised to see if I could do something to make it into a poem, although I had no idea what to do. He said, "Please don't do anything. It is perfect, just as it is. It is a perfect modern poem. Just send it" Thus began my journey in poetry. I had written my first poem even without knowing it!

At that time, as I was feeling very lonely, I created an imaginary personality and started writing imaginary conversations with the 'Unknown Friend', as I called him. I saw that some deep insights were flowing through this imagined personality while I wrote. He became the symbol of my deeper self. Many of my early poems were, in fact, dialogues between the deeper self and me. For instance,

*The difference between you and me
Is only one of measurement
Your centuries will pass
In a short while of mine
In my sky
In one wing-beat of a bird*

*Old age will arrive for you
You will calculate your footsteps
And say
Time has flown away*

*I will focus my sight
On the next wing-beat
Of the bird*

Here it is the larger self that is talking to the little self. Here is another sample of a dialogue from the little self to the larger self:

*Occasionally
When my flower-eyes
Drop to the ground
I become unable to see you*

*Grant me a boon
To enable me
To see you
Till I grow fresh flowers.*

Some people thought it was a love poem! In a way it is, isn't it?

It gradually emerged that my poetry fulfilled a function in me: it helped me connect with the deeper layers of the unconscious. There were things I felt I knew at a deeper level, which I was not aware of at the conscious level. Poetry helped me bridge the gap between the conscious and the unconscious mind. The images in poetry acted as a mirror in which the contents of the unconscious were reflected and therefore surfaced in consciousness. Most often, I had no idea of the import of a poem, which I have supposedly written. It would take some time before I could make the connection.

In course of time I have come to realise that understanding the dynamics of relationship is indeed the key to the resolution of human conflict. Relationship operates on three levels:

- 1) relationship with others and the world;

- 2) relationship with oneself, including one's thoughts, feelings and one's own mind; and
- 3) the relationship with the Unknown, the Beyond.

I can say that in a way this has led me to my present profession of psychotherapy.

This inner quest has taken me to other areas of creative self-expression, like short stories, novels and non-fiction. Apart from two volumes of poetry, I have published a volume of seventeen essays on poetics and another volume of fourteen essays on time and consciousness. A volume of poems on The Feminine is almost ready. I am also now writing a novel.

Thus my journey goes on, and so does my poetry... this journey has now brought me here before you. I am glad our paths have crossed and I am with all of you now.

I shall conclude my speech with a small poem that I wrote:

The time of waiting

*As I wait
For the next batch of flowers
Only the grass keep company*

*I choose my dreams
From the colours
Which the butterflies
Left unused*

*Even after the curtain is drawn
The idols stand naked*

*The time and place of our meeting
Has been decided long ago*

*The fresh flowers
Will bloom
Only amongst the blades of dry grass.*

I accept, with all humility, this award from SPARROW and I feel wonderful about it. Thank you.



SPARROW LITERARY AWARD 2015



Anandh, Vimmi Sadarangani & Anar



Chief guest Neela Bhagwat



SPARROW Family!



Anar is the pen name of Issath Rehana Mohammad Azeem. She hails from Sainthamaruthu in East Sri Lanka. She has been writing poetry in Tamil since the 1990s. Her works include four collections of poetry and a collection of Tamil folk songs.

Several of her poems have been translated into English and have appeared in journals that include *Beyond Borders-the SAARC Journal* (2008), *Talisman- A Journal of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* (2010) and *Tamil Woman's Poetry: A Current of Contemporary Voices* (2009, Sahitya Akademi).

Her poetry collection *Oviem Varaiyatha Thurikai* (Brush that Did Not Paint) published in 2004 won the Sri Lankan Government's Sahitya award and the north-east district government's Sahitya award. Her book *Enakkuk Kavithai Mukam* (Poetry is My Face) got her the Iyal award of Tamil Literary Garden, Toronto. She has also received the Vijay TV Excellence in the Field of Literature (Sigaram Thotta Pengal) Award.

Anar writes regularly on her blog, anarsrilanka.blogspot.com. She lives with her husband and son in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka at Sainthamaruthu.

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

All of us have same and different stories...
 Anar Issath Rehana



All of us may have same and different stories. They may be the proud and noble stories behind your great and admirable achievements. Coming from a Muslim village from the Eastern district of Sri Lanka and from a family that follows traditions and is orthodox in religion, I have a story of loneliness and struggle. To write simple poems I had to pass through such a tragic phase. All of you know that what you get after a struggle cannot be something negligible. When time snatched away my education half way through, my life began to run on the rough roads of the dark opposite direction. At that time the only treasure I had with me to retain my self confidence was my mother tongue Tamil

I began to write in the nineties. My village has seen many riots. It has passed through many political upheavals. So writing was a temporary escape for me to deceive myself. I did not think or plan that I will continue to write poems till the present times. Poetry was teaching me how to attain freedom within closed doors. New reasons arose for writing poems. The circus of death was happening all around. Even though what had to be written could not be written people were continuing to write.

Life and death were very close to each other then. At times they looked similar. Death was circling around like the roar of a helicopter. At the same time within

closed doors, filling my inner space were the magic insects of poetry. I was dreaming how to fill dreams within a scabbard meant for swords. Poetry is the language that describes language. It has the power to express our limitless dreams and fertile imagination. I want to talk about the sensitive feelings that lie between knowing and not knowing, the experience that exists between enjoyment and wounds and the music that connects the eyes and the heart. In other words, the language of fire that a person who is a woman is able to take underneath water.

Language is a kind of a wing. And poetry is a kind of freedom. So I granted myself that freedom. I began to fly with the wings of language. It can also be named love, passion, affection, nakedness, deception, body, truth, resistance, woman, dream and so on. My poetry is the proof of how my soul's awakened state suffered in the heat of truth.

The distance between where the society places women and where women desire to be in the society is dangerous. For a Muslim woman the fear that this danger creates has many levels and mysterious layers. Her religion begins with her hair and ends in her toes. In this world, before every woman who lives in all the directions of the universe and who has gone beyond differences of religion, colour and nation, there is a visible or hidden hurdle that she cannot go beyond. It appears not only as something glossed or carefully decorated but at times as a slash of a knife or a dried up scar that only a woman can feel, circling around her either as a continuing oppression or a force that propels her forward. What does a woman want to break with her dreams? What does she want to cross with her poetry? Answers to these questions can be found in her life.

The poetic mind functions without any conditions. There are long gaps between the structures, limits and rules in the society that bind us and artistic qualities. It is in this space of the gaps that creative art functions. It takes the form of God or Satan, whichever identity it desires. Not only that. It can be the fish hook, the fish and the water too..... To be many things at one time

or to be many separate things—that is the space where my poetry happens.

Although I reached poetry as a way of finding meaning to myself, to present my identity as a woman and to celebrate myself I want also to deal with poetry with the responsibility poetry has. Reading literature has played a huge part in refining my thoughts and expressing my talent in a style unique to me. Historical myths based on religion, traditions and folk songs had an impact on my beautiful childhood years.

The objective of my poetry is that there should be no difference between the facts that I live and that I write. I have the hope that one day my individual self would become indivisible in that manner. That is what my efforts are towards and the goal I desire from my poems. In other words....

A space where there is no difference between good and evil!

A space where there is no difference between man and woman!

A space where there is no difference between life and death!

I remember at this time, writers, literary journals and publisher friends who have played an important role in my growth as a writer. I consider this award given by SPARROW as an award given to the folk language of Eastern Sri Lanka. This meaningful award gives me emotional satisfaction. I would like to express my thanks to the panel of judges that has chosen me for this award, to the members of the SPARROW organisation that coordinated this event efficiently and for this opportunity given to meet writer Ambai. I would like to take leave of you offering my best wishes to artists from various fields who are here and to my fellow awardees Anandh and Vimmi.

Thank you





A young and dynamic poet, Vimmi Sadarangani is Associate Professor (Sindhi) at Tolani College of Arts and Science, Adipur (Kutch) from 1995 onwards. She did her PhD on *Anuwaad ki samasyaaein: Hindi tatha Sindhi ka paarasparik adhyayan'* (Problems of Translation: A Comparative Study of Hindi and Sindhi) from Gujarat University.

She is a prolific writer and has published thirteen books so far: three anthologies of poems, four books of children's literature and six books of learning Sindhi language and script. A collection of poems and another book on Sindhi language are in the press.

Vimmi has visited USA, Singapore and Hong Kong to teach Sindhi. She visited Sindh (Pakistan) as a member of a Writers' Delegation to participate in Shah, Sachal, Sami Peace Conference in December 2004 and has visited Sindh again in 2012 to participate in an International Conference on Shah Abdul Latif organised by Ministry of Culture, Sindh Govt.

She has received several prestigious awards like Gujarat Sindhi Sahitya Academi Award 1995, National Children Literature Award by NCERT in 1998-9 and National Award for outstanding contribution to Sindhi Literature from Sindhi Academy 2003-04.

Apart from writing Vimmi has also translated poems and short stories from Sindhi to Gujarati and Hindi and vice versa. She is also member, Sindhi Advisory Board, Sahitya Academy, Delhi (2007-2012).



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

A small bird was chirping inside me and it slowly turned into poetry... Vimmi Sadarangani

I have a long and deep association with birds. When I was a child my mother would lovingly call me 'my little bird'. I don't recall if this small bird was singing in rhythm or it was out of tune...but this small bird silently started chirping inside and it slowly took root in the form of poetry and over time was able to transfer it on paper. I feel poetry is like birds chirping...

when one feels one can chirp or be quiet... chirp when one feels like crying, chirp when one is happy, chirp when one is angry—whether anyone is listening or not, or anyone understands it or not, let the chirping be understood the way the listener wants and needs to. My poems have generally some reference to birds... sometimes building a nest, taking care of a

damaged nest, braving a storm or sometimes hiding something and looking for a safe place. Sometimes birds in my poems helplessly watch wings transform into four legs or search for a house without a door.

With this SPARROW my relationship is recent but it is one of great depth. I had a very pleasant first meeting with Lakshmi di during a literary gathering in Gangtok. While discussing about literature, society and women with Lakshmi di, I heard about SPARROW and learnt about it. I became curious and wanted to know more about its activities. My first visit to SPARROW was on my way back from Gangtok. During that visit, I met a few smiling hard at work birds in 'The Nest'. While visiting the Library and Sound & Picture Archives, I came across some outstanding publications of SPARROW. It was like a treasure trove. SPARROW and Lakshmi di guided me in the right direction in my research on 'Identity Journey of Sindhi Women' and I shall be forever obliged for that.

SPARROW does not see feminism in a narrow perspective but is trying to paint a picture of women on a global scale. SPARROW's efforts in introducing the unique Indian women's identity along with publishing Indian women writers' books in English and Hindi is an excellent platform for women writers in Indian languages. It helps Indian women writers to get exposure to the larger global audience. The 'SPARROW Literary Awards' is a very lovely and laudable attempt.

Sindhi literature started with the Sufi devotional compositions and then went through the tragedy of partition of India. Sindhi artists and writers have kept the language and cultural tradition alive while struggling with resettlement, livelihood and identity crisis. In spite of Sindhi being granted constitutional status, there is always a lurking danger of losing the identity of this linguistic minority community. The new generation of Sindhi community needs to preserve and further it.

I am glad and proud that my parents provided me the Sindhi language environment and always encouraged

me with books. My schooling was in Hindi medium and during High School I studied Sindhi language in Devnagari script. Inability to read Sindhi script limited my exposure to school text books but those books gave me exposure to the famous Sufi poets Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai and Sachal Sarmast. Mother wanted me to learn Sindhi script, but those curved lines and dots of the script scared me and I refused to learn Sindhi script. Once during vacation in college, my mother again attempted and took me to the script teaching class of Indian Institute of Sindhology. The ten day course of Sindhi script was a life changing event for me. I was a student of economics and used to write poems in Hindi but learning Sindhi script allowed me to see Sindhi language in a new light. The attachment and deep emotional connect with Sindhi literature allowed me to appreciate the invaluable treasure of my community, its literature and culture. I was fortunate to visit the land of my ancestors only because of being active in Sindhi Literature. Today Sindhi language, literature and culture is considered divided between this side of border and the other side, but the truth is that common language and literature has kept alive the bond between the common people, writers and artists of Hind and Sindh.

It is a great honour for me to receive this award from SPARROW and it will give fresh impetus to my creative journey. While accepting this award, I would like to convey my gratitude to my father Shri Ramachand Sadarangani, my mother Vidya Sadarangani, sister Bharati, Dr. Satish Rohra and all my teachers, friends and my colleagues at Tolani Vidya Mandir for their encouragement and support. Let me say a loving thank you to poetry too which is possible in spite of many fears; which is alive and keeps us alive.

'The Nest' of SPARROW has in its collection, stories, pictures, incidents, struggles and search for identity of many "birds" which introduce a new world to everyone. Once again, I would like to thank and congratulate the visionary Director of SPARROW Dr. C S Lakshmi for her powerful and clear thinking, SPARROW team's sincere hard work and cheerful aspirations.





SPARROW

Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women

SPARROW Literary Award 2016

(Instituted by R Thyagarajan, Founder, Shriram Group)



To

Kulachal M Yoosuf, Gowri Kirubanandan and Payani

Well-known Tulu writer

Dr Suneetha Shetty

Will give away the awards to the writers

Followed by

An Evening of music

By

Reshma Vinod Gidh

An event held in collaboration with
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SNDT University, Juhu campus

At the Mini Auditorium
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Do come and join us for an evening of celebration of literature and music
On 10th December 2016
(5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.)
And also join us later for
Tea and snacks

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2016



Kulachal M Yoosuf was born in Kulachal, a seaside town of Kanyakumari District, with six siblings. His education did not continue after the primary level and the family shifted to the nearby town, Nagercoil.

He began his life as a shop assistant in a grocery store and he later took up many jobs like running a grocery store, salesman for household goods bought in installments, agent for consumer goods, footpath vendor, sales representative and photographer and so on.

At present he works as a freelance editor and translator for various publishing houses. He lives in Nagercoil.



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

It was a time when anyone interested in cinema, drama, stories or poetry and similar artistic pursuits had to face ridicule.... As far as I knew, essayists and translators were never run down.... [This], in a way, led me to translation of literature. And later it became what I loved to do...

Kulachal S M Yoosuf

I am not a person who is normally interested or too eager to get awards. This is the state of maturity I have reached after many bitter experiences. In Tamil, like in English, this is known as a sour grapes attitude. When *Kalachuvadu* Kannan informed me about the award he also mentioned the names of the panel of judges. I depend on certain yardsticks to assess various things and where literature is concerned one of the yardsticks I use to estimate a writer or litterateur is to find out if the concerned person was ever associated with the Tamil writer Sundara Ramasamy for whom I have a great regard. Since the panel of judges fitted this yardstick I felt very happy. But along with it was the fear that I will be asked to sit on the stage and made to stand before a mike and give my acceptance speech. Kalachuvadu Kannan

knows that I normally forget all that I want to speak when I am before a mike. That is a bit of an exaggeration but is somewhat true. Kalachuvadu Kannan has been a witness to such events I participated in so I felt a bit relaxed that this would be taken care of. It was only after Ambai told me that I could read out what I have written that my stage fear, to some extent, left me.

I have come from the soil of Kanyakumari to Mumbai to receive this award and I would like to share in my acceptance speech just a few experiences that have connected my life with literature.

When I was young, I had a grocery store. I used to read fully all the old papers that came to the shop.

Very occasionally some books and magazines in Malayalam found their way to my shop and I used to keep them carefully aside—to read them after I learnt the language. Among these books were Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's novelettes, *My Grandfather Had an Elephant*, *Childhood Companion* and *Paththumma's Goat*. I used to regularly buy *Illustrated Weekly* and also save it carefully to read after I learnt English. Whenever exam answer papers came as waste paper to be disposed off I felt very happy as if I had found some treasure. There were enough things in those papers to keep me amused for days. I also regularly read, almost as they came in, the Tamil versions of magazines like *Soviet Land*, *Sputnik* and even *Unesco Courier*. For a while I read biographies of revolutionaries, all the books of any particular writer, translated books, history, poetry, psychology and spirituality without much discernment. It was my habit to choose a particular genre and read all the books that would come under it. The Central Library of Kanyakumari District and my grocery store were the two sources that gave impetus to my reading. My primary lessons in Malayalam were through film posters and headlines of newspapers. Once I could grasp the language I began to extend my reading to Malayalam. It was at this stage that I was introduced to another stage of literature through the book *JJ Some Jottings* by Sundara Ramasamy.

We were then living in the village Kocchapidaram in the Brahmin quarters called *agraham* where many communities stayed together. Our house was next to that of Mani Iyer, who was the president of the Therekalpudur Panchayat. It was an unusual world that one can't even dream of now. In a common backyard my Umma and the Iyeramma next door would sit and chat while cleaning fish and greens respectively. Janardhan Iyer who lived opposite would keep lamenting aloud in English about the fights he had with his loving wife. In between he would resort to some excellent Tamil poetry. He would quote the lines from *Vivekachinthamani*, a Tamil poetical work of verses that are didactic in nature, by an anonymous author. 'If a man is afflicted by unbearable poverty, he cannot face people; his tiger-like valour would diminish; he

would feel ashamed to face guests when they turn up; he would begin to be afraid of his wife even if she is like a flower creeper; it would force him to keep bad company; the world would insult him' he would quote, and ask my Vappa, 'Isn't it so, Sayibu?' Everyone knew that those who stood listening to him would have to listen to some snide abuses sooner or later, so Vappa would smile and move away. At nights I mostly slept in the Perumal temple hall or in the place where people got together to sing devotional songs, situated in the Nagercoil street where Acharis, who were basically goldsmiths or landlords, lived. A large part of my youth was spent in the Nagaramman temple, Perumal temple, and Mutharamman temple surroundings.

Like many I was also first inspired to write poetry. When I was very young I wrote some poetry for radio programmes. Later at the request of friends I began to write the statement of felicitations for newlyweds. To write the note of felicitations one needed to know only the names of gods and those of the bride and the groom. I have written many felicitations asking the groom and the bride to be like Rama and Sita. These felicitations would also contain words of advice to the bride. It was not considered proper to advise the groom! A man was after all one who just 'stepped on slush if it was on the way and washed himself if he found water.' Since there were no Muslims among my friends, I did not get opportunities to tell any bride to be like Fathima, the daughter of the Prophet. Other than this, my sending a short story to *Idhayam Pesugiradhu* magazine could be seen as my very first literary activity. They could have remained quiet if they did not want to publish it. But they wrote a letter saying they regretted not being able to publish it. The news of this letter somehow leaked out and I had to face a lot of ridicule. After that whenever I sent anything to a magazine I avoided writing my address! An essay and a story did get published. All this happened by the time I was twenty-five. After that for about twenty years I did not send anything to any magazine. I wonder how these magazines ran without my contributions!

It was a time when anyone interested in cinema, drama, stories or poetry and similar artistic pursuits

had to face ridicule. It was the kind of atmosphere where if anyone saw one holding a book or magazine under the arm or in the hand, people would tease that person saying, 'Looks like you are going to become another Miran Pillai or that mad hatter Gopal' Miran Pillai used to ride a cycle with a board advertising, 'Do you need dialogues to be written for a play or cinema? Kindly contact...'; he was a banana trader in the Vadaseri market. He was known for his temper so no one dared to tease him on his face. Gopal lived in the Ozukinaseri *agraharam*. So knowing that such ridicules and teasing in a way were aimed at me too, I kept my reading and writing a secret. Although I knew that short story and poetry were the best forms to express one's thoughts in an aesthetic manner, I was so afraid of being teased that I tried hard to be known as an essayist. As far as I knew, essayists and translators were never run down. Maybe they did not even know about the existence of such a class of people.

The unnecessary importance I gave to the mocking and ragging of others, in a way, led me to translation of literature. And later it became what I loved to do. I got a first-time opportunity to read a translated story in a literary meeting. Although the background of the story and the translation itself was greatly appreciated, one comment made me feel that the literary atmosphere was also not all that healthy. The comment was: 'The translator could never have understood the brilliantly written political background of the story. But the translation is very competently done.' That story was written with the Emergency period as its background. I, the translator, wore dhoti nicely washed in laundry blue and a shirt folded up to my elbow and a pair of Lunar chappals. How could such a person have an understanding about Emergency was the doubt of the gentleman who made the comment. I did not feel like explaining at that time that I knew all about Emergency politics and its impact on common people not only through newspapers but also by being a witness to it. I thought just because the literary atmosphere was not right I could not stop reading or writing. I could always tear up what I wrote.

My first translation of Basheer's novel *Memorial Stones*

was also written with the intention of it being torn off later. That was the time that I had got some orders from English medium schools for books and was in the business of putting these books together for them. In this connection I went to the Kalachuvadu book shop and it is that event that has brought me before you today.

I would like to conclude by once again expressing my heartfelt thanks to SPARROW and the panel of judges for choosing me for this award.



SPARROW LITERARY AWARD 2016



L to R Gowri Kirubanandan, Kulachal M Yoosuf, Dr C S Lakshmi (holding Payani's award) and Dr Suneetha Shetty



Chief guest Dr Suneetha Shetty addressing the gathering



Gowri Kirubanandan lives in Chennai. Before her marriage she lived in Andhra Pradesh and although her mother tongue is Tamil her entire education was in Telugu medium. She has a Bachelor's degree in Commerce. She began to translate stories from Telugu to Tamil and from Tamil to Telugu from 1995 onwards. She has translated fifty-four novels, six short story collections, four self improvement books and one autobiography from Telugu to Tamil. She has also published more than fifty translations in weekly, monthly and web

magazines. Eight translated novels are on their way to the press. She has translated from Tamil to Telugu some prominent writers and has published more than forty translated stories. She has translated for Sahitya Akademi the short stories of the well-known writer Ku Azhagirisamy. She is currently translating the novel of Prapanchan. She has won many awards including the Sahitya Akademi Award for her translation of Telugu writer Volga's book, the Shakti award from Tiruppur Lions' Club, special award from the Lekini group of Hyderabad and Shakti T K Krishnasamy award from the Gandhi Library, to mention a few.



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

I have learnt through experience that being honest to the original and maintaining the tone of the original author are the two basic requirements of translation...

Gowri Kirubanandan

Had anybody read my palm and predicted that I would become a translator, I would not have believed it. It has happened by chance. Looking back at my journey as a translator I cannot help looking at it with a sense of surprise and disbelief.

Though my mother tongue is Tamil, I had my formal education in Telugu medium, since my father was employed in Andhra Pradesh. It was Tamil at home and Telugu outside. Under those circumstances Telugu became as much a mother tongue to me as Tamil. So

long as I was in Andhra, my literary interest was confined to reading weeklies and novels in Telugu. My favourite writer was Yaddannapudi Sulochana Rani, who had started writing at the age of 16 and went on to write more than 70 novels. Her novels are such that they cannot be put down until you have read them fully. The characters in her novels seem like our own near and dear ones in the family.

On moving to Chennai in 1976 after my marriage, it was Tamil all around. A Telugu novel or a magazine

was rarely seen anywhere. I did not know how to find them either. There were no Telugu TV channels outside Andhra at that time. Unable to give up my habit of reading, I began to read Tamil magazines like *Anandavikatan*, *Kalki*, *Kumudham*, *Kalkandu* etc. My husband was transferred to Melatur (Thanjavur) and we were there for five years. Through the library there I got introduced to many Tamil works and became an avid reader of writers like Asokamiththiran, Jayakanthan, Indira Parthasarathi, Vaasanthi, Janakiraman and others.

Back in Chennai in 1991, I started borrowing my favourite Telugu books also apart from Tamil Novels from lending libraries. It was then that I got introduced to the works of Yandamuri Veerendranath and I began to look for his books to read. I was happy to have a book shelf of my own at home with both Tamil and Telugu books. I was happy to have a shelf at hand to pick up any book that I would want to read whenever I would feel like it.

I happened to read the translated works in Tamil of Yandamuri. Having read them in Telugu, I felt that the translation had not done justice to the original works. When I read his short story "*The Bet*", I thought that it may be a good idea to do it in Tamil. The seed for my being a translator was sown then. I wrote to him seeking his permission to translate his story. A noted writer like him surprised an ordinary reader like me by sending a letter the very next week giving me permission to translate. Not having written a full page in Tamil till then, I translated that story with enthusiasm (or was it being foolhardy?) It got published in *Kungumachimizh*. Excited I translated a few more short stories of Yandamuri and others, which were published in various magazines, including *Kanaiyazhi*, a literary magazine.

I completed the translation of Yandamuri's novel *Antharmukham* (Inward) but I had no idea how to get it published. It occurred to me to approach Alliance Publishers, for they published translated works. I wrote to them. Coincidentally, they were also contemplating publishing Yandamuri's works in Tamil

then. I was told to submit the manuscript. On 12th March 1997, I went with my husband and handed over the manuscript to them. On the third day itself they informed my husband at his office over the phone that they were ready to publish and asked us to come in person for further discussions. There was no telephone at home at that time, leave alone cellphones. When he gave me the news on his return from office I was floating in the air!!

Thus, without knowing any rules, grammar and nuances of translation, I became a translator. I have learnt through experience that being honest to the original and maintaining the tone of the original author are the two basic requirements of translation. I also understand that knowing two languages must include knowledge of idioms, phrases and culture of two languages and their regions.

While my translations of Yandamuri's works were continuing to be published, I sought permission from my childhood favourite Yaddanapudi Sulohchana Rani, to translate her novel, *Jeevana Tharangaalu* (The Ocean of Life). As it was a voluminous two-part novel, Yaddanapudi suggested that I should maybe try my hand at a less voluminous novel. When I told her that whenever I read that novel, I could hear the sound of equivalent Tamil words in the background in my mind, she gave me the go ahead. The novel has been published in Tamil with the title *Sangamam* (Confluence), which has now seen the second edition. D Kameswari writes with a conviction that apart from bringing to light the problems of women it was also necessary to find solutions for them. I am happy that I could bring two of her novels and a short story collection to the Tamil readers.

Volga is known as a progressive and feminist writer. In her writings she stresses the fact that in a patriarchal society women also have a role to play and that women must earn on their own. Her works have inspired and empowered many women. Starting with the translation of a fairly longer short story "*Thodu*" (Companion), which was received well, two of her novels and two short story collections including

Vimuktha (Liberation) have been translated by me and published by Bharathi Puthakalayam.

Vimuktha (*Meetchi* in Tamil) is a collection of stories of Ramayana, told from Sita's perspective. One of the stories is of Sita meeting Soorpanaka, while living in Valmiki's Ashram with Lava and Kusha. Although it is only the author's imagination, it brings out how two women, who are victims of circumstances, share their pain and gain the courage to face life. The original work *Vimuktha* got the 2015 Sahitya Akademi award for Telugu. Its translation *Meetchi* also earned the Translation Award for Tamil of the Sahitya Akademi the same year.

Along with this, I have also translated short stories of more than twenty Tamil writers like Asokamithiran, Jayakanthan, Indira Parthasarathi, Nanjil Nadan, Bama, Anuradha Ramanan, Vaasanthi, Sivasankari, Jeyanthan and Prapanchan into Telugu. Short stories of more than fifteen Telugu writers like Kavana Sharma, Vivina Murti, Varanasi Nagalaksmi, Srivalli Radhika, Avasarala Ramakrishna and Gorti Bramhanandam have also been brought to the Tamil readers by me.

Koteswaramma is the wife of Kondapalli Seetharamayya, the founder of Peoples War Group of Telangana. Kalachuvadu gave me the work of translating her autobiography *Nirjana Varadhi* (Unpeopled Bridge), which was written by her at the age of 90. It makes me proud that my translation of the book entitled *Alatra Palam* was released by Ambai in a literary event presided by Nanjil Nadan at Erode in July 2015. Incidentally, that was the first book release function for my book.

Ambai mentioned a few instances from the book during the release function. There were many instances which made severe impact on me while translating *Nirjana Varadhi*. The fact that Koteswaramma came to know only in school days that she was a child widow, her being attracted to the freedom movement in young days, getting involved with the revolutionary movement with her husband after her remarriage, the situations, challenges and troubles—while reading

about all this, an important period in the history of the nation gets revealed. I was also astonished to some extent that the needs of the movement were primary and that personal life of the activists was bound by the decisions of the movement. The Party decides that Koteswaramma should undergo abortion while she was underground. The abortion has to be done secretly and so proper medical care is not given and she becomes seriously ill. Since no one else is available a young man nurses her like a woman. Her husband separates from her because she asks him about his involvement with another woman. Both her son and daughter live with their father. Left by herself she completes her Matriculation and to stand on her own feet, works as a warden. She is not even invited for her daughter's marriage. What a tragic situation!

Many years later, Party elders inform her that a mentally and physically weakened Seetharamayya, wants to meet her. Koteswaramma asks them: He may want to see me. Should I also not want to see him? I was amazed by her personality when I read that part of the book. She could have had a better life, had she compromised. She maintains her self-respect and principles to this day. This book has been received well by the literati and critics. Although the sole reason for this is the life of Koteswaramma and the way she has recorded it, it has also brought me some recognition.

A collection of short stories of Ku. Alagirisamy, translated into Telugu by me, is to be released by Sahitya Akademi shortly. The ongoing project is translation of *Vanam Vasappadum* (The Sky Will Be Ours) by Prapanchan.

I remain grateful to my publishers and readers, who have been with me in this journey.

I once again thank SPARROW for having chosen me for the award.

Thank you one and all.





Payani is the pen name of Sridharan Madhusudhanan. He belongs to Chennai and is in the Indian Foreign Service. As a student, he was a student journalist in the Tamil magazine *Anandavikatan*. He belongs to the Aikya theatre group which has performed contemporary plays in Hong Kong and Tamil Nadu.

He has published some ten stories and some poems in magazines like *Kanaiyazhi*, *Ananadavikatan* and *Kalki*. He has written articles in English in educational journals, on lexicology and on the relationship between literature and nature.

He has a degree in science and is also trained in journalism, general management, human resource management, and business management.

He has learnt Chinese in Beijing. In connection with his work he has lived in Beijing and Hong Kong for nine years and was in the Indian Embassy Washington as the head of its Media, Information and Culture Division. He is currently posted in Taipei, Taiwan.



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

A translator is like a child trying to fill a bottle with water from the pond using its little palms—the grief of spilt water is indescribable...

Payani (Sridharan Madhusudhanan)

My sincere thanks to SPARROW.

Here, I only reiterate what I've said earlier in my books and in my speeches.

Any effort that highlights the importance of translation is worthy of support. It is more so in the case of translation between Chinese and Indian languages.

Translation between Chinese and Tamil involves many complexities. A person like me, with limited linguistic capabilities, operating in the translation field shows the gravity of the situation. My efforts spring from my desire to change the situation sooner rather than later.

One cannot adequately elaborate the intrinsic complexities of the task of translation. Essentially, translation demands an understanding of the origin of

languages. Translation is not about substituting one word of a language with another word in another language. To translate is to transfer the societal elements embedded in a sentence to another society using another sentence. This task is both impossible and essential. Hence translations are created with great desire and deep despair; with weariness and wild passion.

When Chinese literature is translated to Tamil language, it throws a bunch of challenges such as language structure, pronunciation and dealing with words pregnant with history and legends. The books I chose to translate enticed me with their beauty, literary quality, historical importance and possibilities of shared cultural experiences. I worked on these projects with the only hope that someone with better linguistic capabilities and literary sensibilities will translate these works later. I volunteer to be the ape in this essential literary evolution.

A translator is like a child trying to fill a bottle with water from the pond using its little palms—the grief of spilt water is indescribable.

In between all these, the SPARROW award is a breather.

Thanks to my publisher, readers and SPARROW.



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SPARROW LITERARY AWARD 2016



Performance by Reshma Gidh



Dr C S Lakshmi & Dr Putul Sathe



L to R Dr C S Lakshmi, Shyamala Madhav, Gowri Kirubanandan, Mithra Venkatraj, Dr Divya Pandey & Dr Suneetha Shetty

2017



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Urmila Pawar

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Lakshmi M belongs to Vallam in Thanjavur District. She has studied up to Eleventh. Born into a poor family she faced a lot of suffering in a loveless atmosphere. She left home and began to work in a factory.

She married Maniyarasan in a non-ritualistic marriage.

She has been an active participant in people's struggles organised by of Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Thamizh Thesiya Periyakkam (Tamil Nationalist Movement) and women's struggles. She is currently a central committee member of the women's wing of Thamizh Thesiya Periyakkam and

a member of the main Executive Committee of the Thamizh Thesiya Periyakkam.

She has written a story "Paaraiyai Udaitha Vidhai" (The Seed that Broke the Rock) on the Facebook and another story "Bhoomikku Vandha Vidivelli" (Morning Star that Came Down to Earth) and a few more stories of hers await publication. She has written ten stories for children and two more stories are in print.

Letchumi Ennum Payani, her autobiographical work, is her first major work which has received very good notices in the press.



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

...Happiness does not last; sorrows are never forgotten... Lakshmi

Latchumi Enum Payani (A Traveller Called Latchumi) is my first book. I suffered from immense loneliness in my childhood and marriage was a significant turning point in my life. I began reading books to deal with my loneliness. Whenever I had the time I used to rush to libraries. I read whatever I could lay my hands on.

Russian literature made me understand the life of struggle. Maxim Gorky and Tolstoy showed me the way. I was very disappointed that the women writers I read did not have any reference to women's liberation in their writings. By chance I read an interview of Ambai in *Kalachuvadu* magazine. That evoked many different feelings in me. Later I read her short story collection *Siragugal Muriyum* (Wings Get Broken). But I was not able to continue to read all that she wrote.

I had a hip fracture and had to be on bed for several months. Film Director Ram who is a friend of my son Senthamizhan had come to see me. He felt bad about my situation and told me before leaving, "Please write to forget your mental and physical pain. Write about your childhood, your public life and your struggles in the past and send it to me."

I felt consoled thinking that there was a way of reducing my heart's burden. I began to write, starting from my childhood. The date was 23rd February 2015. I wrote about my experiences and my suffering as a little girl. I thought that I must make myself Latchumi, the observer, when I go to my past and write about it.

Director Ram took what I had written and published it on his visual website. It was received very well. Many were moved by what I had experienced in my childhood. Many wrote tearful letters to me. I decided then that I will not write in future about my suffering in my younger days. I could not continue to write for the web. That got stopped there. After a gap I wrote some thirty more pages. I felt a bit shy to tell others that I have written something because I am not a writer. But I had the desire to write. In those thirty pages I had written about many other women I had associated with.

I stayed for a while with Amarantha. That was the first time I read out what I had written to Amarantha. Amarantha was thrilled about what I had written. "Latchumi, you have the ability to write. And your style is very different. Do write," she said encouragingly. Although I was involved with house work, work with regard to the movement and organised struggles and always on the run, many incidents continued to inspire me to write. I recalled my past and began to write slowly. When I could not avoid all the work I even went into hiding and wrote. But a doubt continued to haunt me: Am I writing properly or is Amarantha merely encouraging me to write to cheer me up?

I took part in a book release function in which Prema Revathi's poetry book was released. Ambai released the book and I formally received a copy of the book along with others. I met Ambai, whom I consider my guru, for the first time then. I showed what I had written to V Geetha, Prema Revathi and Mangai. I had written about 100 pages. V Geetha very enthusiastically told me, "Latchumi, you are very talented. There is the history of many women in this. No one knows about women who have dedicated their lives to the movement. This is the first such history." Mangai and Revathi praised my style of writing.

Amarantha asked me to continue to write. She said that whenever I finish writing the book she herself would publish it. But when I completed the book she had gone abroad on some work. I did not know what to do with my manuscript. I had also lost 40 pages of what I had written. The manuscript had to be taken care of like one would nurture a small child. With anxiety I rewrote those lost pages. At one point, I stopped writing:

"I decided to lock within my mind what could not be told. Happiness does not last; sorrows are never forgotten."

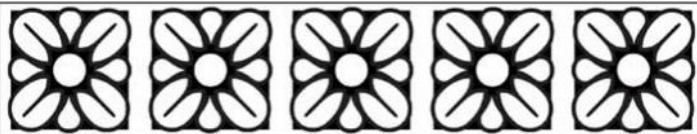
That was the last line with which I ended my book. I gave it to Director Ram. It went later to Prema Revathi. It was published as the first book of "Maithri", a

publishing house started by Krishnaveni and Prema Revathi.

Shankara Ramasubramaniam wrote a very good review of the book in the Tamil edition of *The Hindu*. The term traveller suits it well for it has travelled to many. Many speak to me with tears after reading it. A Christian priest I have never met often talks to me. Many bedridden patients tell me that my book has given them courage. A student from the Tamil University has chosen this book for her doctoral work. Many from Tamil Nadu have praised the book in many ways. But I never even imagined that the book would get recognition and appreciation from Ambai. Even now meeting Ambai and talking to her is for me like a wonderful dream!

I am immensely happy to receive the SPARROW award for my book *Latchumi Enum Payani*. I express my thanks to the panel of judges.

That happiness never lasts has been the rule of my life. But I take leave with thanks to the organisers and with the hope that the happiness I feel for this award from SPARROW for documenting my experiences, will last Vanakkam.



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SPARROW LITERARY AWARD 2017



Ashalata Kamble receiving the award from Urmila Pawar



Kalyani Thakur Charal receiving the award from Urmila Pawar.



Stalin Rajangam receiving the award from Urmila Pawar



STALIN RAJANGAM works as an Assistant Professor in American College, Madurai. Stalin Rajangam has been actively involved in the Tamil intellectual world for the past two decades. He is one of the important researchers among the new generation that is bringing forth alternative ideas. Both in terms of research and writing he has depth of vision with incisive analysis along with contemporary consciousness. His research work is in the context of Dalit politics and he deeply believes that to write is to act.

He has written several books which have received critical acclaim.

Some of his books are:

Jananayakamarra Jananayakam (Democracy Without Democracy)

Olippadaa Ulakam, Theendappadaa Ulakam (A World Lightless; A World Untouched)

Varalatrai Mozhithal (Putting History into Spoken Words) -

Ariya Udhadum Unadhu Dravida Udhadum Unathu (Your language is Aryan; Your Language is Dravidian)

Saathiyam: Kaikoodaatha Needhi (Casteism: Justice Denied)

Theeraath Thiyakam (Unending Sacrifice)

Ayothidasar: Vaazum Bautham (Ayothidasar: Living Buddhism)

Anavak KolaikaLin Kalam (The Times of Arrogant Murders)

Tamizh Cinema: *Punaivil Iyangum Samukam* (Tamil Cinema: A Life in Imagination)

Ezuthak Kilavi (Unwritten Words)



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Recognition from "Outside" for Someone Who is Dealing with the Local... Stalin Rajangam

Like it is for many others, writing happened in my life as an accident. I began to write as a part of my enthusiasm for politics and my activism. As a child, my father narrated historical events to me as if they were stories. And then when I began to read on my own, all that I read were stories that were being seen as history. If we take history as real and story as imagination, we have to accept the fact that it is a confused kind of situation where history has become stories and stories have become history. Everyone is physically and mentally bound by such confusions. We accept that framework and change the places of some things; we bring some closer to us and keep some at a distance; we ask for space to hang some newfound images that are not there and feel content once the space is granted. When I first began to write I followed this method without giving it much thought.

I did not plan to write historical essays. I wrote about history as a part of the writing I was doing on socio-political issues and research on cinema. So my writing on history must be seen in relation to these other writings of mine. I write about history as an extension of the writing I do, impacted by politics, media, culture and literature. It was when I was analysing contemporary issues that I was taken to the past, which is history. I would like to say that being a part of contemporary political criticism my writing on history must be seen as a critical view of historiography.

It is necessary here to refer to the period when I came to write. In the nineties many different Dalit organisations had come up. And in the art and literary fields, post-modernism, subaltern histories, autobiographies or fictionalised autobiographies were being talked about. I have evolved as a person with the impact of meetings, journals and books connected with these discussions and dialogues. Around the same time in the local space there were caste conflicts, governmental oppression and contemporary Dalit organisations that had been formed as a consequence of facing this situation which revealed some new realities in the social sphere. In power was non-Brahmin politics that had been constructed in

opposition to Brahmins. Non-Brahmin Shudras who had benefitted from this politics were the ones who were involved in the violence against the Dalits. But the Dravidian parties which had come to power calling themselves non-Brahmins and which included Dalits, did nothing about it. This is because of the conceptual definitions that they had about caste. We can say that this definition was something that was an anti-caste point of view that did not take into cognizance the Dalit point of view. So people like us felt the need to write about caste politics based on majoritarianism of the Shudra castes and also about Dravidian politics. In the nineties non-Dalit forces that wrote for the Dalits and were actively supporting Dalits, although they supported the Dalits, where reality on the ground was concerned, their ideological underpinnings were very much within the non-Brahmin political framework. What I mean to say is that, even if in a given field situation a different reality emerged, they would not see it as being within the existing dialogues on caste but would see it as being part of the old framework that was constructed on Brahmin/non-Brahmin divisions. They would emphasise the "historical belief" that it was the Dravidian movement that had elevated the Dalits. Hence the need to critically view this understanding of caste, taking into consideration many new facts that had emerged, became naturally imperative.

The existing picture created the impression that the Dalits had not struggled against the oppression meted out to them, and that others had brought them out of their oppression. This picture demanded a great faith in what was seen as history. One felt the necessity to deal with this "historical belief" of the Dravidian movement and unearth the long history of the struggle of the Dalits. Two experiences of mine, as someone writing political criticisms and also documenting history, are important. The first was that nearly hundred years later the thoughts of Ayothidasar had been discovered and published. My doctoral dissertation was on Ayothidasar. My background in Tamil literature and my interest in Dalit politics were responsible for this. The second one was becoming part of the Dalit History Month activities of Ravikumar

who had pointed out the limitations of the Dravidian movement

Making interventions into history is not limited to gathering information and correcting it. As someone who was writing about history for some time I reached the inevitable conclusion that since the details gathered lay within a certain framework, my work had to begin with the framework itself. Perceived in this manner, I would say that I see myself as someone who is an insider in the local who is looking out and who is writing the local. This understanding began when I realised that there was a need to look at the possibilities and dimensions of a specific local issue within as much as the outside causes. Strangely in my writings on caste and history I have used the word local or similar sounding words mostly. The local need not be seen as finding some local incidents and bringing them out, or as being opposite of what lies outside the local. I would request that they be interpreted as local documents and as methodology of the local.

The moment you say 'local' it becomes something that is against the mainstream. When I say local documents I always give priority to field-research documents rather than textual documents. Many lies have become historical beliefs because they became written texts and took different forms repeatedly based on that. When we start believing something as truth its fictional nature does not remain in mind, and it becomes history. Even if something really happened if no one believes it, it becomes a lie. Hence history is a kind of faith. When you change history you also change the belief system of the society. Many fictions became history here because of these repeated assertions that become belief. The lie of caste and the pride and degradation in its name has thus been made to look like truth. Hence just as we analyse history in the social, political and economic context, it is also necessary to understand it in the socio-psychological and cultural context. To describe how a statue has been made is information. But delving into the reasons and having back-and-forth dialogues on why a statue was made in a particular way is where critical viewing of history lies. A song, private letters, small publications, name

of the place and the names of people, their appearance and attire, statues, public speeches, banners, applications, books, customs, local lore and usages including proverbs everything from the local become documents. Stories regarding the local undergo changes and also other stories get added to them. My essays not only try to find the roots of the local stories but also take into consideration how the stories get altered and shaped and how they are understood. My essays on history, hence, are based less on academic theoretical concepts and more on frameworks based on life and experiences of the local.

I have to refer here to the research methodologies that are employed to study the local. In my opinion, writing Dalit history should not be just a chronological record. Just as we see the complexities of the human mind come to light in stories, we should also see the gaps, reversals and ups and downs of history. We have to talk about many different aspects, like unrealised ideologies and about spontaneous moments deciding history. We have to see not just how people accept lies but also about how they are maneuvered to accept lies. Only when we find the language of dominance can we find the language of release from it. There is a Tamil proverb which says that a lie when repeated often becomes the truth and this proverb, for me, is the key to understand the contemporary historical lies. Ayothidasar talks about how caste degradations were constructed from the point of view of the local. He explains the process of how a story is first fabricated, repeated and then how people are forced to accept it with the logic that it is old and has stood the test of time and how by a slight twist in the story or its title the meaning is altered and it becomes a totally different story. We feel that referring to his thoughts is the way to talk about him. But I feel that his ways of seeing, which I have referred to, are more important. Although the current western methodologies we utilise cannot completely be forsaken, they only act as external tools to understand local culture. But if we use a methodology already in existence in the local to approach a problem, we are able to come closer to it and have an indepth understanding of it. To understand the degradation imposed on the Dalits being seen as

culture it will be more useful to see it in the language in which it was imposed. Domination has not happened through violence and through government alone. Domination has been accepted and executed by the majority. Caste does not exist because of a book by Manu or because of the justification of an individual group of Brahmins. It may be justified through a text but it gains its meaning and acceptance only through local customs and practices. It can be seen that it varies in terms of time and from one caste to another. I could arrive at this understanding only through frameworks derived from the local. They have also helped me to understand some very subtle situations.

As far as Dalit history is concerned, what is known as history is based on political parties, well-known movements and what have been left as textual documents by some. The impact that subaltern literature created in me, the need to see history as a part of historiography which is able to see categories like local history and micro-history. At the same time I also held the critical view that in Tamil, subaltern writings had introduced only the history of communities which were not considered untouchables. I believed that they saw other discriminations in the society and made them synonymous with the discrimination of untouchability and that each discrimination must be seen taking into consideration its own specific characteristics. With this aim I began to collect details of local activities and of those who had waged struggles in several localities in Tamil Nadu keeping in mind their unique qualities. This approach made it possible not to see history only in the context of Tamil Nadu or in the general language of narration and made it clear that struggles and their causes varied from place to place and from person to person. I could see organisations and people who were able to perceive a problem from very close and keep track of it and struggle to deal with it. We look at activists and organisations as being part of a planned ideological strategy. But I could see many uneducated simple people who were not great orators who had struggled for civil rights and self respect and lost their lives in the struggle. I wanted to combine the experiences of these struggles and make them a part

of what is seen as Dalit history.

The realisation that history changes according to time and place helped me to expand this vision to understand the caste system also. Caste is also not the same everywhere. It varies according to time and place. Hence I believed that the variations in different places must be brought within the narrative of the history of caste and its growth. The search and the documentation of Dalit struggles and personalities that I do now have been impacted by this understanding. Ayothidasar's knowledge of the local has helped me to understand the caste system with its local attributes. In the beginning I began to write the history on this subject keeping the Dravidian movement in opposition but eventually I came out of it. This does not mean that the Dravidian movement framework is above criticism. Since I found the framework and language from within the Dalit history itself, the need to speak of the Dravidian movement diminished. This made it possible to move away from the historical falsehoods of the non-Brahmin Dravidian movement and the cultural myths of the Brahmins at the same time.

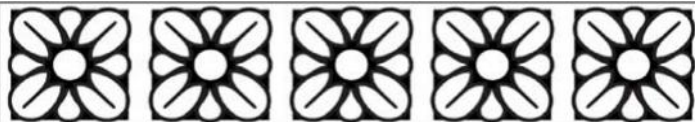
The modern political historiography has claimed that social inequalities in the locality exist here because of imposition from the outside. This attitude makes it entirely an issue of those outside and prevents us from taking into account those within and relieves those in the local space who play a role in the caste system and gain benefits from it. If we consider outside or the non-local as Brahmin, north, text or ideology in that order, we can say that what is local is in opposition, non-Brahmin, south, reality on the ground and functional. The Tamil intelligentsia views caste as something that was derived from an ideology and became functional. I take the stand that while ideology cannot be overlooked, the changes in the ground realities in the local must also be accepted. When you consider only ideology we stop with the view that Brahmanism has created caste and has perpetuated it. This is a political position that is favourable to the non-Brahmins. It is to retain this that historiography is being written with the Brahmin/ non-Brahmin

binary. But as Dalits facing the reality of caste, the ground reality takes into consideration not just the Brahmins but also the power of the non-Brahmins. It is this that has led to dealing with the limitations of ideology through documents from the ground. This has also led to efforts to rewrite history. It is this local reality that has given me the logical reason to write history the way I do.

This is the reason why those who based their history pointing to outsiders are greatly agitated with the writings of people like me. We are seen as those who have betrayed the local to the outsiders and those who have prostituted ourselves. But I don't see this in the narrow terms of individuals. I call this an ideological struggle. I will say that this is a debate between seeing caste as derived from an ideology and taking the stand of combining ideology with the reality on the ground.

I don't write for awards like many others. Awards are embarrassing when we see that many highly dedicated people have died with no recognition. I expected that there would be debates and discussions on my books in Tamil. But instead of debates on my writings I have only been receiving defamation as recognition. A Dalit youth group called Thudi gave me an award sometime ago. This is the first recognition from outside for the Dalit position. As someone who has searched for Dalit history in the local and has tried to share some conceptual understanding derived from it, I am happy to accept the award from SPARROW which is documenting women's history. This is symbolic. Someone who has not been recognised enough in the local is receiving an award from "outside"! I thank SPARROW, the judges Ambai, Sukumaran and Kannan and the SPARROW team who have made this possible.

Most young people of today read. The Dalit youth who form their political views from this reading know about this kind of historiography. So I end here dedicating this award to those Dalit youngsters who read with a desire to know Dalit history.



SPARROW LITERARY AWARD 2017



Lakshmi M receiving the award from Urmila Pawar



The Awardees with C S Lakshmi & Urmila Pawar



Students of Swar Sanskruti Music Academy performing



Activist and well-known writer Ashalata Kamble worked as a lecturer in Pendharkar College, Dombivali, Mumbai and has now retired.

She has several books to her credit like *Bahinabainchi Kavita: Ek Aakalan* (second edition) (Bahinabai's Poems)

Samarth Striyancha Itihas, (The History of Women Achievers)

Yashodharechi Lek (poetry) (Yashodhara's Daughter)

Aamachi Aai, (Our Mother)

Pravas Aamha Doghancha (Our Journey Together)

She has won several awards for her work like Dr. Ambedkar international award from Canada, Prabhakar Padhye critics award from Konkan Sahitya Parishad, Maharashtra, Wamandada Kardak award from Darpan Sanskrutik Manch, Kankavali, Maharashtra, Savitribai Phule-Fatima Sheikh award from Shikshak Bharati, Maharashtra, Mahila Kasturi Bhushan award from Dainik Pudhari, Maharashtra and Bhimabai Ambedkar Award 2017

National Blind Association (NAB) has translated the books *Bhinabainchi Kavita:Ek Aakalan* and *Samarth Striyancha Itihas* into audio recordings

Some poems from *Yashodharechi Lek* have been included for the study of M A Marathi Mumbai university.

Currently she is working on literature of Savitribai Phule.



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

My mother represents the working class women of the entire world...

Ashalata Kamble

In Indian society issues like gender and caste inequality have been in existence for a long time. There are many obstacles in creating a healthy society. That is why it is essential that society and government work together to end these problems. There are many people in the society who believe that it is the responsibility of the government only to bring about an end to these issues. But government alone cannot do anything. Government cannot have the will needed for it also. At the most, the government can make laws. But laws alone cannot bring about an end to problems. It is important that there is social awareness, and organisations have to take up the task of creating awareness in society. I feel that organisations like SPARROW have been doing the kind of work that is very important for the development of both the society and the nation. I believe that even writers at an individual level should work towards this goal.

SPARROW is doing important work of doing research on the status of women and at the same time also bringing to the public sphere the writings of women whose aim is to change the society. That SPARROW liked my book *Amachi Ai* and believed that it could transform society and that it should reach many people, is a great honour that my writing has received. *Amachi Aai* is the story of a hard working mother. My mother fought against caste and gender inequality living in a small village and showed the way to her children constantly dealing with poverty. 'Be educated' was what Ambedkar urged people and 'Be good' is Buddha's advice. These are the only two ways to come up in life. My mother followed these paths and made the lives of her children worthwhile. She shunned blind beliefs and mere belief in the divine and had faith in her own capacity to work. I have written about my mother to give this message to every working class woman. This mother represents the working class women of the entire world. My heartfelt wish is that the child of every mother in this world be free of poverty and ignorance and live dignified and prosperous lives.

Our India or the world as a whole is divided into two

parts. One is the sophisticated elite class which lives a safe and protected life. And the other half of the society is mostly that of the working class. This class has been rejected by the elite class because of the caste system, Varna system and the class system of hierarchy. The women of the working class live in much more isolated and rejected conditions.

They do not have a sense of safety and security within their home or in society. In spite of these circumstances when a woman strives for the wellbeing of her family, then one needs to salute that woman. That's why, for me, my mother and so many mothers who are scattered around the world are inspirational and worthy of respect

The strength of women in society is immense. But in the name of culture and tradition the same women have been turned into bearers of discriminating customs. When a woman herself rejects these ideas the culture would also change. My mother was a simple woman; she was not even literate. But she was a wise woman. She fought for the education of her children and stood strong against her husband. She didn't allow herself to become a carrier of discriminating traditions. How far even highly educated women are these days from scientific and rational thinking! They believe in the caste system in the name of religious duty; they discriminate between a male and female child. I feel that only when women distant themselves from religious slavery would the society attain a sense of equality.

I would like to conclude by thanking SPARROW and with sincere wishes for a society permeated by equality.

Jai Hind. Jai Bharat



[www. http://www.sparrowonline.org/newsletters.htm](http://www.sparrowonline.org/newsletters.htm)



Kalyani Thakur Charal is the leading Dalit voice from West Bengal.

Dalit studies in Bengal is in the infant stage, as compared to its counterparts in Tamil, Marathi and Kannada. Until the early 1990s, Dalit voice in literature did not find its place in Bengali literature. Women are positioned much below in the hierarchical ladder of caste and sub-caste. Among the Bengali Dalit women writers, Kalyani Thakur is a name that stands out.

She is a Dalit activist who voices pain, suffering and oppression of Dalits in her writings. She writes as she wants to create a space for herself and her disadvantaged community.

For the last 17 years she has been singlehandedly bringing out the Dalit journal *Neer* (The Nest) at her own expense. She has taken early retirement from her work with the Railways and is currently concentrating on her writing. She has four poetry collections and one collection of essays. She has co-edited four books, one of them on her father Krishna Chandra Thakur.

Apart from the magazine *Neer Writupatra* she has also edited *Chathurtha Dunia*.

Her published works:

Dharlae Youdh (You Touch, Fight Begins)

Meye Andhar Gone (Girl in the Dark)

Chandalinir Kabita (*Chandalini's Poems*)

Chandalini Vane (poetry) (*Chandalini's Poems*)

Fire Elo Ulango Hoyo (short story) (Return of the Naked)

Chandalinir Bibriti (essays) (*Chandalini's Statements*)

Ami Kano Charal Likhi (autobiography) (*Why Do I Write Charal*)

Her autobiography is currently being translated into English and will soon be published.



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

I think that no Dalit's life story will be a single person's story; it is the story of all the Dalits and the story of his or her society...

Kalyani Thakur Charal

History of Bengali Dalit literature came from *Charyapad*, which was a collection of mystical poems and songs of realisation in the Vajrayana tradition of Buddhism from the tantric tradition in Bengal, written in pre-modern Bengali dating back to at least 9th century A.D. After a long absence of Dalits in literature, we see the Matua literature, where the biography of Harichand Thakur (1812) was written by Tarak Chandra Sarkar (1853-1913) and the biography of Guru Chand Thakur (1946) was written by Mahananda Halder (1899-1972). Let me explain what Matua Dharma is. Harishchandra Thakur founded a sect of Vaishnavite Hinduism called Matua. This was adopted by members of the Namasudra community, who were then also known by the pejorative name of Chandalas and considered to be untouchable. After this we see some references to the works of Jogendranath Mondal. Recently his son Jagadish Mondal has put together his father's speeches and works. That is not a very large body of Dalit literature.

We do have some autobiographical works like *Diner Atmakahini Ba Satya Pariksha* (Autobiography of a Distressed or Examination of Truth) by Raicharan Sardar (1875-1941); *Aborbalae Pari* (Sailing in the Evening) by Bonomali Goswami (1894-1976); *Rang Beranger Dinguli* (Colourful Days) by Anil Ranjan Biswas (1916-2005), *Akjan Daliter Atma Katha* (Autobiography of a Dalit) by Monoranjan Sarkar; *Son of a Street Cobbler* by Sripada Das; *Amar Bhubane Ami Benche Thaki* (Surviving in My World) by Monohar Mouli Biswas; *Shikar Chhera Jibon* (Rootless Life) by Jatin Bala and *Eti Britte Chandal Jibon* (History of Chandal Life) by Monoranjan Byapare.

There are not many Dalit women writers in Bengali literature. Sushma Moitra Sarkar (1929) wrote some books and she wrote some essays about her work and movement

in her book *Monmukure* (Mirror of the Mind) Bina Ray Sarkar has a book of essays entitled *Jago Nari Jago*. (Arise Women, Awake). Other writers like Kiran Talukdar, Lily Halder, Manju Bala, Smritikana Hawlader, Sujata Biswas have written poetry, fiction and essays but have not written autobiographies. I have written about my childhood and some of the difficulties I had to face as someone in government service. This is not only my experience but many Dalit women have had similar experiences. I think that no Dalit's life story will be a single person's story; it is the story of all the Dalits and the story of his or her society.

I was born and brought up in a village and when I was 15, I migrated to Kolkata for better education. I saw caste discrimination in this urban culture. When I entered government service I saw the ugly face of society. How aggressive and ferocious people are! These are not just my experiences. Urmila Pawar, D U Saraswati and Sivakami have also faced similar experiences and left their jobs. I also left my job after a long struggle. I don't claim that I am a Dalit icon and that my autobiography is an attempt to inspire Dalits. I am not in a position to change their social situation. The problem is too deeply rooted. But I feel that if many others also write their autobiographies, then we can assess the position of that particular community. Such autobiographies are needed in Social Science Studies. Only women from Namasudra and one or two other communities are writing at present; but one does not find any literary contribution from women from Ati Dalit communities like Dom, Muchi, Bagdi, Bauri, Methor or Adivasi. This may take time but I sincerely believe that we shall overcome all difficulties.

Thanks to everyone once again.



2018



SPARROW

Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women

SPARROW Literary Award 2018

(Instituted by R Thyagarajan, Founder, Shriram Group)

To

**S Thenmozhi, Ba. Venkatesan, S Senthilkumar,
Varsha Adalja & Aruna Dhere**

Former Trustee, SPARROW

Dr. Roshan G Shahani

(Retired English Professor, Jai Hind College)

Will give away the awards to the writers

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By

Mandar Katti

Disciple of Pt. Ravi Chary

An event held in collaboration with
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SNDT University, Juhu campus

At the Mini Auditorium

SNDT Women's University, Sir Vithaldas Vidyavihar,
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Do come and join us for an evening of celebration of Literature and Music

On 8th December 2018

(5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.)

And also join us later for

Tea and snacks

Do confirm your presence

Contact Persons: Pooja: 9967337734, Sharmila: 9867660354

SPARROW: 022-28280895; 28965019

Email: sparrow1988@gmail.com



Thenmozhi was born in 1974 in Thiruvarur to V Swaminathan, a school teacher, and Sagayamary. Her father was a Tamil teacher and it was through him that Thenmozhi got interested in Tamil language and its literature. The loss of her father a few years ago was a traumatic event in Thenmozhi's life as he lived with her, his only child, in his last years when he was afflicted with dementia.

Thenmozhi has a master's degree in Chemistry and History. After completing her schooling in Thiruvarur she did her graduate studies in Chemistry in Nagappattinam and her MSc in Chemistry at Annamalai University in Chidambaram. She later did her Master's in History and got interested in art history. She got her doctorate from Thanjavur Tamil University with research on temple sculptures of ancient temples of Kundrakudi.

She is probably the only Dalit woman in India whose research interest is art history. Her writing includes several genres like poetry, fiction, translation and reviews.

Till 2009 she worked as a scientist in the Forensic Science Department in Thanjavur. At present she is working as Deputy Commissioner, Commercial Taxes Department in Tirunelveli. She is also on the Editorial Board of a research and literary magazine *Manarkeni*.

Her husband Ezhilselvan is a dealer with Indian Oil Corporation and they have a daughter, Govarthani who is now in college.

Her Books: **Poetry Collections:** *Thuravi Nandu* (Hermit Crab), 2008, *Thinaipunam* (Millet Field), 2012.

Art History Research Books: A Study of Karaikkaal Ammaiyar from the perspective of art history. (2017) A Study of the descriptive sculptures in relief of Saiva Nayanmar.(2017) A Study of Thenachiamman Temple.(2017)

Short Story Collections: *Ner Kunjam* (Tassels of Paddy), 2009 *Koonal Pirai* (Crescent Hump), 2014

Translations: Translations of Pakistani women writers' works and a collection of Pakistani writer Sehba Sarwar's works with an interview. *Katanthu Varum Kural* (Voices That Come From Afar), 2011 *Neela Vaanai Neythal* (Weaving the Blue Sky), 2014.

Edited Works: *Varalatrai Ezuthum Pengal* (Women Who Write History), 2017

Essays: *Pulappadaa Suyam* (Hidden Self) A book of papers presented in seminars, research papers and reviews.

Interviews: *Ketkappadaatha Kuralkal* (Unheard Voices) Interview of Nine Important Women.

Awards and Appreciation:

Her art history books, short story collections and poetry collections have received much appreciation from scholars and eminent writers. Her *Koonal Pirai* collection received laudatory comments from eminent writer Indira Parathasarathy who called her the "future of Tamil."

Indian Express Newspaper chose her as one of ten young writers of India. Her stories, poems and essays have been translated into English and have been included in the *Tamil Anthology of Dalit Writing* published by Oxford University Press in 2012.

Tamil Nadu Progressive Writers' Association chose her short story collection *Koonal Pirai* (Crescent Hump) for the best short story collection award in 2016. The Women's Studies Department of Bharatidasan University honoured her with a Notable Women Achiever Award.

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

A Dream, A Nightmare... S Thenmozhi



I find my poems and short stories in the nest of a bird which collects dreams. I create wiping hands in my stories when I hear a cry; I bow with love in my poems when a child crawls, a bud blossoms and a butterfly adds colour. But , when a girl is abused, a woman is raped, an oppressed man is humiliated, instead of writing about weapon, I wish my writing itself to be a weapon.

SPARROW—here the dreams are preserved not of vultures but of birds; dreams of women which are denied, ignored, forgotten by the society. The institution SPARROW is creating is a precious gift for present and future generations by way of documenting the activities and contributions of women. Receiving an award from such an important organisation is really a big honour for me. I thank the selection committee and the founder trustees of this institution Dr C S Lakshmi (Ambai), Dr Neera Desai, and Dr Maithreyi Krishna Raj and the trustees, past and present, who are part of SPARROW. I also congratulate fellow awardees Ba. Venkatesan, S.Senthil Kumar, and the eminent Marathi and Gujarathi writers Aruna Dhere and Varsha Adalja.

In my sincere opinion, feminist awareness began in modern Tamil literature with Ambai. Despite “literary patriarchy” she has created a place for herself in the literary sphere. She is a guide and mentor to many young women writers.

On this memorable occasion I remember with gratitude writer Ravikumar and senior writer Indira Parthasarathi. I want to thank my friend Poongodi Shanmugavadivel and her family for their support which can't be explained in mere words. I feel proud to introduce my family members Govarthini and Ezhilselvan. It is apt to remember here my father who was my beginning and who is living in my memory.

Now I would like to present my acceptance speech:

Mushrooms which seem to hold umbrella for the earth bear witness to the rains: they are nothing but our life. They look as if they are the evidences to the rainy sky and the moisturised earth. The mushrooms sprout slowly declaring their existence through their feeble voice. This affirmation is the confidence we have in our life. At the same time we are aware of its transience, its quiet hallowed soft structure, and its end. An ordinary person cannot understand, live or overcome this duality of life. He/she chooses either permanence or impermanence. A person who believes in the permanence of life curses or misses life when he/she encounters impermanence. A person who lives in impermanence never experiences the extremities of life. It is the writer, who is the only one, who can travel between permanence and impermanence. Writer fills the vacuum of impermanence with permanence and decorates the permanence with impermanence.

In this journey which touches these two borders, a writer is obliged to work continuously. A writer keeps a dialogue with the society and happens to be a participant in all its activities. Society is the background of a creative work. So a writer knows very well the impossibility of transcending the society and never tries to do it. A writer travels with the society in all times, spaces and occasions. That's why we see a creative work as a mirror of time and a reflection of society.

Though a creative work has artistic qualities, uniqueness, it has its limitations too. It yields to the whims and fancies of its creator. Readers should understand this. Creative writing is a way of escaping not only for the readers but also for its authors. A writer creates a work to escape from sorrow, tears, failure, anger and separation. Sometimes a writer creates it to escape from success, love and joy too. So, a reader should approach a creative work not only as an art, they should have an understanding that there is a place for political struggle, gender discrimination, caste, race and linguistic variations within the creative work. A writer's success may be in the support of the reader. But the success of writing is in its proper understanding. Good writing will stimulate correct understanding and a critical outlook in the reader. A mere reading of a creative work is not sufficient for a reader, he/she should understand it, criticise it

Generally, the creative work is gender neutral, but when we say 'writer' it denotes mostly a male writer. In Tamil classical literature starting from Tolkappiyam, during the time of Sangam literature i.e between 2nd Century BCE to 2nd century CE, we find many women writers who had the freedom to speak about sexual desire and they could even criticise the king. Karaikal Ammaiyar—the mother of South Indian music who lived probably in 4th or 5th Century CE, was the forerunner of a genre called 'Pathikam' and Bhakti literature. It is said that the God Siva called her as 'mother'. But still our literary critics, historians and religion are reluctant in recognising her contributions. It is only because of their patriarchal

attitude. But, women have established themselves, continuously in the spheres of literature, science, social struggles and spirituality up to recent centuries.

Feminist awareness forced us to see the writings of Tamil women with special attention only after 1990s. Women have found not only a new way of writing but also a new language. They have started to express their inner selves, their desires to converse with the society. It becomes different from the naive language which was created for her by the male dominated society. This new language seems very powerful. In the society where women's bodies were idolised as objects of male desire, where they were treated as personal properties of men, this new writing demanded respect and recognition for women. It spoke about menstruation, child birth, sweat and have distorted the so-called aesthetic values constructed about women. African American women writers and Dalit women writers have used this new language in a powerful way and have established their voices in the literary world. Their writings have earned them respect and an unavoidable place in literature.

The forms of gender oppression are manifold: rejection, humiliation, commodification, discrimination are a few we can mention. In earlier times women were oppressed in the family and work places by known persons. But nowadays we are unable to recognise the perpetrators, from where it is coming, who are planning and who are the executors. This is very dangerous. A woman's throat can be slit anywhere, acid can be thrown at her by anybody, her mutilated body can be found from a thorny bush or an abandoned well with an iron rod or a stick inserted in her vagina. Any woman can be a prey to any unknown animals. We are living in such an unfortunate time that their body becomes their enemy.

Our motherland has become a monster which devours girl children. NCRB data for 2016 says in every hour four women are being raped. 38947 rape cases were registered in 2016; among them 2116 girls were under 12 years. 43.2 % of the victims were girls below 18

years.

Think about the little girl who was raped and killed at Kathua in Jammu and Kashmir. Imagine the fate of that eight-year-old child abandoned for four days at an isolated temple with eight beasts. We have to calculate the time of the victim not with hours, minutes or seconds but with pain and horror. Think about the tribal girl who came to her home to celebrate Deepavali and was brutally raped and killed near Dharmapuri. Think about the 13-year-old girl whose head was chopped off in front of her mother near Salem. They didn't commit any mistake. They didn't provoke the perpetrators with their attitude or dress. Girl-children who are two or three years old are also sexually assaulted in our country. They don't know to lie or steal. To them their body becomes hostile, their birth itself a curse. They don't even know that they are girls. In such a tender age they are raped. They are dying without knowing their enemies, without knowing the reasons. They didn't commit any sin other than their birth; they didn't have any enemies other than their bodies. How can we tell this truth to the unfortunate children?

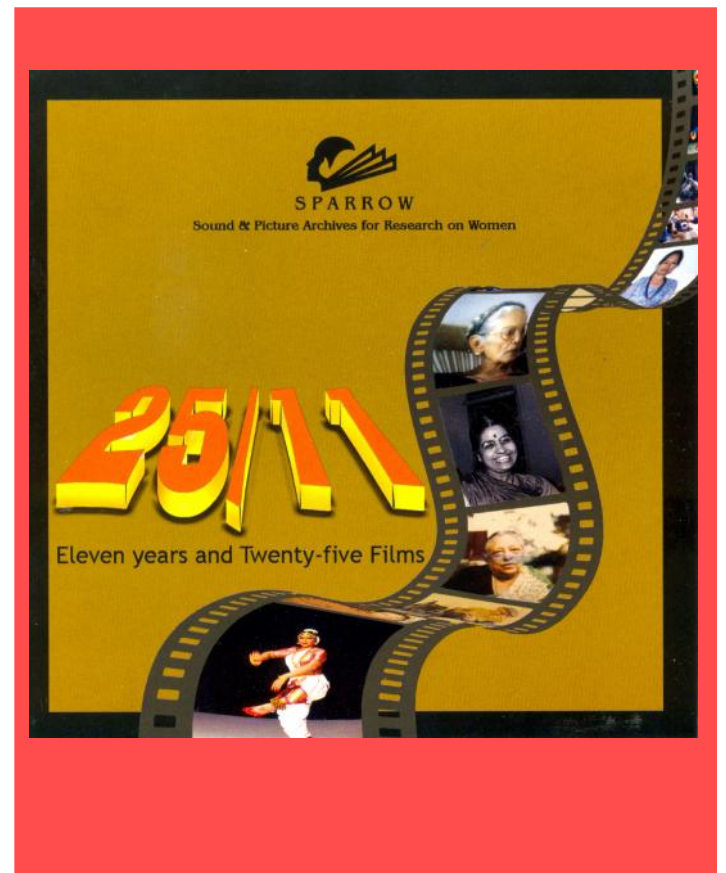
Nothing is more painful than the loss of trust in our fellow humans. What a tragic life this is! Every woman sees a criminal reflected in every man's face.

We have numerous laws, police, judicial organizations, but they have failed miserably in protecting our girls. These predators are mostly educated, economically well-settled and living happily with their families. Their status, their age does not make any difference. Then what is the reason for their beastly attitude?

Those who indulge in this kind of violence are culturally poor. It shows the poverty of values. They have no understanding about women. We do have some criticism of the established concepts of culture and civilisation, but definitely we should recognise the importance of them. Indian, Tamil cultures, were intruded by communal, patriarchal tendencies, but it has some inherent strength to feed good sensibilities. That's why we still feel proud of it. Moral literature

which has flourished in the medieval Tamil Nadu still has its use and value. We follow in our day to day life the values propagated by the moral literary texts. That is why the world has adopted the words of Kaniyan Poongundran: "Every place is my native, Every person is my relative" and the teachings of Tirukkural.

Literature is the only tool which can create a good universe. Trust it, it never fails you. It can educate men about women and can sensitise them. Literature alone can erase the beastly tendencies from human beings. Nothing is better than literature in erasing the images of sexual vulgarities from men. I request everybody to read literature, introduce the writings of women and writings about women to your children, definitely they will give you back a civilised generation which makes you proud.





Ba. Venkatesan was born on 13th August 1961 in Madurai, considered a city that cherished Tamil. His proud parents were S Balasubrahmaniam, an employee in the TVS company, and B Rukmini.

Ba. Venkatesan grew up in Madurai and had his early education and college studies in Madurai. Later he shifted to Hosur to take up a job there and since then has remained a resident of Hosur. He is currently a manager in the finance section of a company.

Although he resides in Hosur it does seem like his heart is in Madurai for even in his latest novel *Bhagirathiyin Madhiyam*, Madurai figures very prominently with its little bylanes around the temple and public grounds where lectures are held and its milling population that has been witness to so much of political and social history.

Ba. Venkatesan began to write from the 1980s. His writing includes poetry, fiction (including short stories, long stories, novellas and novels) translations and essays on structuralism. He is known as a writer who can write the shortest of stories and the longest of novels. His novels normally run up to a thousand pages and his one sentence can be an entire paragraph. His writing deals with several literary trends like realism, fantasy and magical realism. Currently he is working on a novel entitled *Varanasi* and a translation of *Ghost of Chance* by William S Burroughs. His manuscripts of a collection of 12 fables and a novella await publication. Authors who have inspired him are Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Milan Kundera, Jose Saramago and Umberto Eco. His favourite authors are Italo Kalvino, Haruki Murakami, Orhan Pamuk, and Mikhail Bulgakov.

Apart from literature his interests are music, movies and paintings. Ba. Venkatesan's works have received much appreciation but except for a few poems none of the major works have been translated into English or any other languages. As for awards, his crisp reply is: Nil.

His wife Nithya and his two sons make his family. His works include:

Poetry Anthologies:

Innum Sila Veedugal (Some More Houses), 1992.
ttippaarkkum Katavul (The God Who Peeps In), 2001.
Neella (Neella, the Third Consort of Vishnu), 2014.

Short Story Collections and Novellas:

Original Newsreel Sirukathaikal (Original Newsreel Stories), 1995.
Rajan Magal (Daughter of a King), 2002.

Novels: *Thandavarayan Kadhai* (Tale of Thandavarayan), 2008.
Bhagirathiyin Madhiyam (Noon Time of Bhagirathi), 2016.

Collection of Essays: *Uyirgal Nilangal Pirathigal Matrum Pengal* (Souls, Lands, Texts and Women), 2017.



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

...in each decade Tamil has produced fiction, poetry and thoughts that can compete with other languages...
Ba Venkatesan

The expansion of the web and various types of communication media have nearly turned every individual into a writer. Someone or the other is writing about something or the other all the time. The result is an astonishing number of texts to read which are in lakhs. If the desire to see a work in print still exists the tremendous growth of printing technology makes it possible to print it in high quality paper and wrap it in world renowned paintings on the cover and back cover and present it. Those days when one could see the cover picture and guess the content are gone. So the pain of dealing with texts has now passed on to the reader from the writer. What I mean to say is, today's literary challenge is not to write well but to be able to find good writing. It is in these circumstances that literary organisations and their awards have to do the important job of bringing together a reader in search of good writing and a well-written text.

When an award is announced, I feel that from the large warehouse of international literature it has found for me a fine text to read. It reduces the time I would waste in searching for a good text. But fortunately or unfortunately the award-giving organisations are also thriving these days. Just like the increasing number of people who write someone or the other is receiving some award or the other from someone or the other. Sometimes the list of people who don't receive awards seems more attractive than that of those who receive awards. Yet, I still have faith in an award-giving

organisation that insists on having on its panel only those who are familiar with literature. It is these organisations that bring to our attention, much to our embarrassment, some brilliant writers who belong to our own soil writing in our own language whom we have missed reading. I give priority to reading those texts. I need not explain to all of you sensitive people why I am standing on this stage today and giving this elaborate introduction.

Being in the list of SPARROW awardees gives me many different feelings. Firstly, since all my writings including fiction and poetry, written after the year 2000 up to now, have naturally been attempts to understand the wonderful fellow being that is a woman, a women's organisation like SPARROW awarding me gives me happiness. Secondly, to find my name amidst the names of members of SPARROW, the judges on the panel, and the list of those who have received the award so far, makes me feel proud. Thirdly and the most important, a sense of wonder at SPARROW's eagle eye that has spotted me and dragged me to this stage, suddenly reminding me for the first time, that I have achieved something after spending nearly thirty years in literary writing, starting from 1988.

I have the responsibility of talking about writers from my language to fellow writers of other languages here since I stand here as a representative of my language. As someone familiar with literatures of other languages I can say with conviction that in each decade

Tamil has produced fiction, poetry and thoughts that can compete with other languages. Tamil language with its classical background and its unique ways of understanding has continued to give some of the best creative works that have taken into consideration different periods of Indian history that have included people's liberation struggles, changing perspectives in spiritual literature and the routes of technology and growth. Despite political and conceptual differences Tamil writers with their immense creativity have been expressing the classicality of their tradition. They celebrate translations from other languages. They know at least three or four writers including contemporary writers. Tamil literary field has kept open its doors to read challenging unique creative works from other languages. At the same time it is also waiting for a long time for those self-effacing translators who would take the gift from this language to other languages. In fact, compared to the speed with which other language works enter Tamil through English the speed with which translations from Tamil to English happen is much lower. I don't know if such a problem exists in other languages too. Whether it exists or not this lacuna with regard to Tamil must be taken care of.

Just like government organisations non-governmental organisations like SPARROW must take the responsibility of translating into English at least one book of a writer it has chosen to award. Please note that I am not talking of one story or one poem but one edited work or a novel. My fellow writers here would agree that since the writers are chosen with the strong conviction that the writer has given a great reading experience, more than the award amount, what would indeed honour the writer is choosing in return for the trouble the writer has taken to create the work, a book of the writer for translation into English. I know that this would be an additional burden on literary organisations but despite that I am putting forth this request taking the liberty of being a writer. On behalf of creative writers from an ancient land who are capable of thinking and imagining at a global level but who are not able to present themselves at an international level, this request alone will form the crux

of my acceptance speech expressed through the mike here aimed at SPARROW and other similar literary organisations.

My heartfelt thanks to SPARROW, the award panel, fellow awardees and readers present here and also my family that accepted my invitation to come here and be part of this occasion.

Long Live Tamil!

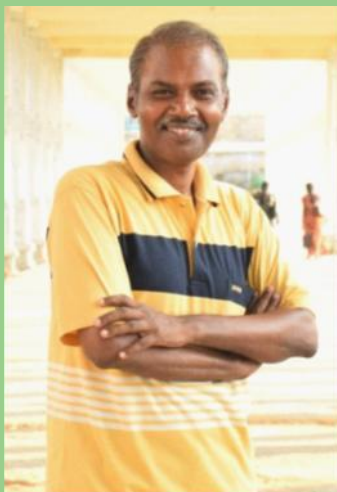
SPARROW LITERARY AWARD 2018



Awardees with audience



L to R: Aruna Dhere, S Thenmozhi, Dr Divya Pandey, Dr Roshan Shahani, Ba Venkatesan, S Senthilkumar, Dr C S Lakshmi and Varsha Adalja



Senthilkumar was born in 1973 to Subramanian, a jeweller by profession, and Murugeswari. He belongs to Bodinayakkanur in Theni District, Tamil Nadu.

He is currently the editor of the journal *Pesum Puthiya Shakthi* that is published from Thiruvarur.

He has been writing in literary magazines from 1999 onwards. He is a prolific writer who writes poetry and fiction including short stories and novels, and has so far written more than fifteen books in this short period, all of them receiving very good notices. His writing has been inspired by the life around Periyar river and the life, joys and travails of people of the mountain region in Western Ghats.

His wife Malarvizhi, a postgraduate, and his daughter Manjulakadambari are his family.

His books include:

Short Story and Long Story Collections:

Veyyil Ularthiya Veedu (A House Dried by Sunlight), 2006
Siththirap Puli (The Tiger in the Painting), 2006.
Manjal Nira Paiththiyangkal (Yellow Coloured Lunatics), 2010.
Vilaki Sellum Paruvam (An Age to Move Away), 2009
Mazhaikkup Piragu Purappadum Rayil Vandil (The Train that Starts After the Rains), 2010
Alexander Enkira Kili (A Parrot Called Alexander), 2015
Anarkaliyin Kathalarkal (Anarkali's Lovers), 2016.
Sivappuk Koodai Thirudarkal (Red Basket Stealers), 2019.

Novels:

G Soundararajanin Kathai (The Story of G Soundararajan) 2007. *Murimarunthu* (Antidote), 2009.
Niingal Naan Matrum Maranam (You, I and Death), 2010. *Kaalakandam* (Slayer of Time), 2013.
Marukkai (Nanny Goat), 2016.

Poetry Collections:

Kuzhandaigal Illaatha Viittil Udaiyum Jaadigal (Pots that Break in Childless Homes), 2002.
Samiipaththiya Kaadhali (Recent Beloved), 2006. *Munsendra Kaalaththin Suvai* (Taste of the Bygone Days), 2010.

Awards:

In 2009 he won the Sundara Ramasami Award meant for young writers.
 He won the Sujatha Award for his long story "Anarkaliyin Kathalarkal" (Anarkali's Lovers)
 He won the Kavingyar Meera Award jointly given by Kovai Vijaya Pathippagam and Vasagar Vattam.
 He has received an award from the SRV Groups in appreciation of his creative works.



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Bodinayakanur Passenger Train and the Gods of Bodinayakanur...
S Senthilkumar

Paatti, my grandmother, told me this story. But it was not a story for her. It was actually an incident from her life. It was one of those wonders of her village. Amma, my mother, had gone to the market with her friends. Amma's baby was due in a few weeks and Paatti was all prepared. Paatti told me that it was the end of the month of Aippasi which falls mid-October to mid-November, and there was rain and a bit of flooding everywhere. Paatti's house in Renganathapuram was a beautiful one. In front of the house would be seated Thaatha, my grandfather, with the jewellers' charcoal stove, table and a few other tools. None of us inherited his dark, thin, bespectacled personality. We were all on the fatter side like our Paatti. Our uncle, aunt and mother were tall like Thaatha but plump like Paatti.

Since it was the rainy season the market was slushy. Amma slipped and fell. Her friends brought her back. Since her delivery time was close and she had fallen, Paatti felt that she should call the local old woman who gets possessed by divine spirits and who also reduces trauma of illness, fear or untoward events by uttering a few mantras, and ask her to deal with Amma. After the pacification ritual was over and it was time to apply the holy ash, the old woman got possessed. Not possessed by a god but she got possessed by Paatti's elder sister who had been Thaatha's first wife. She cried saying, "I had come and sat at the parapet with the package. Why did you drive me out?" Thaatha immediately knew it was Chinnathayi, his first wife. He told Paatti it was Chinnathayi. Chinnathayi Paatti

wanted to see Jayaram Mama, my mother's brother. Thaatha did not know where he had gone at that time of night and sent someone to look for him. Chinnathayi Paatti herself said that he can be found in the cinema theatre. When he came from the cinema theatre, Chinnathayi Paatti hugged him and wept. Later she gave the holy ash to Mama, Chithi (which is how we called our mother's younger sister) and Thaatha and Paatti.

It was a rainy week. On the first day of the month of Karthikai, which falls sometime after mid-November, Amma had her labour pains. On the second day, before dawn, Amma delivered a boy. Thaatha had brought his jeweller's tools inside and had vacated the parapet outside for the delivery. Midwives from nearby village and Renganathapuram had come to help deliver the baby. I was born a chubby child, plump like my Paatti. The stream in between Renganathapuram and Bodinayakanur that was five kilometers away was overflowing. To reach the news to Appa about my birth Thaatha sent Thoppannan to Bodinayakanur. He had to cross the stream to go to Bodinayakanur. He started with a hurricane lamp and a big stick and the lamp had to be relit two times on the way with the match sticks he carried with him. When he reached Bodinayakanur it was not yet dawn. Cows that go to graze along the river Periyar and burden-bearing donkeys that take the donkey-route to Kerala were standing on the streets. He knocked on the door and told Appa about the birth of the child. Paatti has told me about this incident many times.

When I was 21, I read Atin Bandyopadhyay's *Nilkantha Pakhir Khoje* (In Search of the Nilkanth Bird) and I was reminded of what Paatti had told me. When I read about the boatman Isamsheikh going past the Shonapali river and Dharmuj creepers I felt as if my Paatti was sitting beside me telling me the story. I am still not sure if it was Bandyopadhyay or my Paatti who has told the *Nilknatha Pakhir Khoje* novel's story. Whenever I see Thopannan I feel as if I am talking to Isamsheikh. And I would feel like asking him if he was the Isamsheikh who went to announce the birth of Dhanbabu's child.

Many have told me stories after Paatti. Stories which they knew. Stories they liked. Periappa, my father's elder brother, has told me stories. Appa has also told me some stories. He had the desire to write stories. But he had the responsibility of getting his two younger sisters married, get married himself and live in the joint family with Periappa. So he could not write. Appa was a jeweller. As soon as I finished my Fifth Standard I was formally seated in the jeweller's workplace and trained. This is something not just me but all male children of my community had to face. Carpenters' sons would carry on their heads chisel, hammer and carpenter's plane and go with their fathers. Those who do the work of sawing metal would saw iron rods. Those who escaped from doing what was family profession and studied in schools and took up government jobs may be just two in a hundred and even saying that would be an exaggeration. I was not interested in doing the job of a jeweller like my father. Instead, I wanted to take up carpentry like those from my mother's side residing in Renganathapuram.

The first thing I was told when I began to sit with my father to learn the profession was that I had to get up early in the morning and go with Appa to Periyar river for my morning ablutions. The toilet at home was meant only for women. On the way to Periyar river there was a railway bridge. There was a rail track and a railway station. And in the station would be stacked cardamom bags meant for Mumbai.

Near the railway station was an open ground. It was a

huge one. The rail track would run in the middle of it hidden in the grass there. Just a little after dawn one could see the train coming like a moving light. That was the famous Bodinayakanur Passenger Train. It would come in the morning to the station, rest the whole day and in the evening leave with the cardamom bags with a long sigh as if it was loathe to take leave. As a small boy I also used to stand with the crowd to watch the train. In a voice that had in it the smell of train smoke and the fragrance of cardamom the station master would try to scare us saying, "All these bags are going to Mumbai. Shall I tie you up like the bags and put you in the train?" I feel quite proud being here and talking to all of you, in the city of Mumbai which he mentioned to scare us, for my stories—for the stories of our village. I would like to say that the cardamom in the tea that this city drinks has the fingerprints of our village women. These women sieve the cardamom in 7, 8 and 9 number sieves and bundle them and put them in the train. One of the many "good" things that the government did was to stop the Bodinayakanur passenger train service. It is on the bench of this station that I read Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Adarsha Hindu Hotel* (Ideal Hindu Hotel).

On the way to the Periyar river and while returning, one of the stories I heard from Appa was the Puranic story of Aryamala. Aryamala was one of the seven virgins. I asked my father who were the other six and what their stories were. That evening my father took me to the library in our town. Till then I had only heard stories but that day I could see them take shape as lines, books and pictures. He made me a member of the library and took out books for me and encouraged me to read. I could say that it was from that day that I got interested in reading and writing stories.

There is no place without stories. Stories are like the grains the ants hide in their anthill. The story writer, crawling like the ant, knows which story is hidden where. There is a pond even today in the Theni District known as Seven Virgins' Pond where the seven virgins are supposed to have come and bathed. When the

Periyar dam gets full, the pond also fills up. One does not know when the seven virgins come. But in the green fields spread around the pond one can see hundreds of young women wearing men's shirts and with their saris tucked in, transplanting from early morning to afternoon without so much as raising their heads, coming to the pond to quench their thirst. After wetting her lips with water one of the young women would jump into the pond to get wet all over, and then come up.

Marakka Mountain that is at the foothills of Western Ghats also has a story. Sannasi, the local god, has five sisters called Salaikkaliyamma, Muchanthi Kaliyamma, Thangamuthamma, Nondimukkamma and Seelaikariyamma. Sadaiyandi and Karuppasamy are his two younger brothers. The elder brother and two younger brothers go to the fields to work. They tell the younger sisters to dry the grain, remove the husk and cook the rice. The five sisters enjoy themselves singing and dancing and don't do the work assigned to them. The brothers come hungry after work and see that the food is not cooked and scold the sisters. Sannasi kicks the box in which the grain is measured and kept called Marakka Petti. It goes and falls near the mountain and becomes Marakka Mountain. The five sisters get scared and go into the town and go to different streets and turn into stones and later goddesses. The younger brothers stand outside the town as hungry hunting gods. And Sannasiappan goes to the Marakka Mountain and sits there.

Those who take the mountain path from Bodinayakanur sometimes may slip and fall in the night and die. It is a custom to plant a stone where they have died and worship them annually as gods. The local gods are human beings. It is these human beings who come in my stories. Many have become local gods who have died in the process of working and creating coffee, tea and cardamom estates. For new gods to be born one of us must die. To turn the dead into living beings again and let them wander in their world has remained the source of my stories. The stories I have written so far are about such people. The novel I am currently writing is also about them.

My best wishes and regards to Kalachuvadu Kannan, poet and friend Sukumaran and writer Ambai who have chosen me for the SPARROW award, and other writers who have come here to receive the award. And my thanks to everyone here.



SPARROW LITERARY AWARD 2018



Mandar Katti and Shreeraj Tamankar performing



SPARROW Team



Varsha Adalja was born on 10th April, 1940 in Bombay to Gunvantrai Acharya who was an iconic figure in Gujarati literature and his very enterprising wife Nilaben.

Her family belonged to Jamnagar. She has a Bachelor's degree in Gujarati and Sanskrit, a Master's degree in Sociology, and a Diploma in Dramatics.

Varsha Adalja is a household name in Gujarathi families interested in literature. She has written novels, short-story collections, one and two act plays, essays, travelogues and edited compilations.

As a young girl Varsha liked the theatre and dance, acting and music was her passion. She started acting for the theatre group Rangbhumi from the age of eleven or twelve. Her first role, in fact, was in a three-act play *Jagte Raho* (Keep Awake). Many other plays followed including Darshak's *Jher to Pidha Chhe Jani Jani* (Drinking Poison Knowingly) and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. She was keen to join the National School of Drama in Delhi and had made it through the admission interviews but fell ill and could not join. This coincided with the closing of Rangbhumi and her acting career was cut short. Maybe the love for theatre never left her really for even though she began to write fiction later in life she wrote many teleplays, film scripts, skits, and full-length plays.

She began her career as a broadcaster in Akashvani, Mumbai, from 1961 to 1964. She began writing as a fashion columnist and also wrote several articles in *Shri*, *Sudha* and *Mumbai Samachar*. Much later in the seventies she became the editor of magazines for a while. She was editor of *Sudha*, a women's weekly of Janmbhoomi group of newspapers of Mumbai from 1973-76. She was also Editor of *Femina* (Gujarati) of the Times of India Group from 1989 to 90.

Her serious writing career, however, had begun in 1966 due to a series of circumstances in her life. It was to get over the trauma of her father's death that Varsha began to write. She married Mahendra Adalja in 1965. Her husband Mahendra gifted her a pen and some paper to encourage her to write something to get over her grief. And thus she wrote her first mystery novel in the Perry Mason genre, *Panch Ne Ek Panch* (Five and One Make Five). It was followed by two more novels, *Shraavan Tara Sarvada* (Light Rains of August) published in 1968 and *Timirna Padchhaya* (The Shadow of Darkness) published in 1969. The second one was made into a Gujarati film and a play which ran to many shows in India and abroad. Her third novel *Mare Pan Ek Ghar Hoy* (I Dream of a House of My Own) was the first T V serial produced by Mumbai Doordarshan.

Again the same novel was made into another serial, a teleplay and adapted for a Gujarati film. She wrote other serials and screenplays and dialogues for films based on her novels and other classic novels of Gujarati literature. Her serial *Aparajita* on ETV Gujarati Channel won the best serial award from Transmedia. Another serial written by her *Sami Sanje Ajwala* (Luminous light at Twilight) on Zee T.V. Gujarati also won the best serial award from Transmedia. Her novel *Mare Pan Ghar Hoy* won the Sahitya Parishad Prize for the best novel of the year. Her one act play *Mandodri* won two prizes as a best play from Gujarati Sahitya Parishad and Gujarat Sahitya Akademi.

Varsha's novels touch upon a wide range of issues. *Aatash* (Fire) that was published in 1970 was a novel on the Vietnam War which received the Gujarat Sahitya Akademi Award and Soviet Land Nehru Award. *Ganth Chhutyani Vela* (Time to Untie the Knots Within) is on the plight of adivasis of Madhyapradesh-Gujarat border. Another novel *Bandivan* (Imprisoned), which came just after Emergency in India is about what actually goes on behind the high walls and dark cells of jails.

Her next work *Khari Padelo Tahuko* (A Bird That Could Not Sing) is the story of the tender relationship of a mentally challenged child and her mother. *Anasaar* (An Indication) portrays the life of leprosy patients. Her other novels *Matinu Ghar* (A Home of Mud), *Trijo Kinaro* (A Third Bank of the River) and *Shag Re Sankorun* (I Light My Own Candle) have also been greatly appreciated.

Since 1978 Varsha holds an executive office with Gujarati Sahitya Parishad. She has written more than 40 books including 22 novels and seven volumes of short stories. Many of her works have been translated into Hindi, Marathi and English.

Varsha's sister Ila Arab Mehta is also a writer and her two daughters Madhavi and Shivani are also writers.

Awards and Achievements

Varsha's novel on adivasis, *Ganth Chhutyani Vela* (Time to Untie the Knots Within) got her the *Bhagini Nivedita Award*. Along with Rajatram gold medal, she was conferred the Sahitya Akademi Award for Gujarati language for her novel *Anasaar* (An Indication), 1995; Soviet Land Nehru Award in 1976; Gujarati Sahitya Akademi has awarded her three times in 1977, 1979, 1980; and Gujarati Sahitya Parishad has honoured with an award two times in 1972 and 1975.

Her recent novel *Crossroad* has received Maharashtra Rajya Gujarati Sahitya Akademi Prize. She also won Darshak award for Lifetime achievement with reference to *Crossroad*



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

As a litterateur I have always tried to light a lamp in the dark corners of the society....

Varsha Adalja

Friends,

I have received quite a few accolades till date but today on receiving this award from SPARROW I feel honoured.

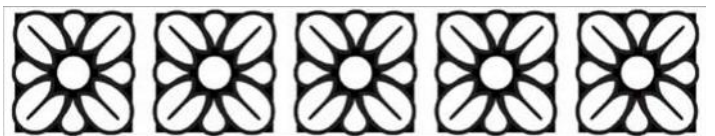
For years brotherhood has been considered a high ideal in many cultures, many languages all over the world. But sisterhood has never been given any importance.

The giant wheel of time does not move very fast. All of us will have to make collective efforts with all our strength to turn that wheel. For years various organisations and a number of women have been working in this direction. SPARROW, with its limited resources, is also doing commendable work in this direction. The *mantra* of SPARROW is: the society will change only when it unfolds the dreams and achievements, hopes and despairs, the struggles of women —both internal and external—to achieve their right to a dignified status in the society.

As a litterateur I have always tried to light a lamp in the dark corners of the society. I write my stories by blending reality with imagination. I had lived with lepers in their Ashram to give voice to their pain and suffering in my novel *Anasaar*. *Anasaar* received the Sahitya Akademy Award as well as the National Award of Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad. After a lot of persuasion I obtained an entry into a prison to get an insight into the pitiable condition of women prisoners.

In the novel *Bandiwan* I brought to light the stories of women and under trial prisoners, rampant corruption, exploitation and oppression prevalent in prison. In order to write a moving novel on the subject of a delicate relationship of a mentally challenged child and her mother, especially the mental and physical trauma that such a girl-child has to undergo, I had spent a lot of time in the hospital with such kids and their mothers. I was a witness to their pain and suffering. I have written short stories and novels based on how women are enslaved by tradition, ritual fasts, social customs, beliefs, rituals and blind faith. My short stories and novels also cover the subjects such as domestic violence and a woman's pursuit of her own identity. Various editions of these books are being published. In my last novel *Crossroads* I have illustrated the changing face of the society as well as the changing status of women in the past 50 years. The novel has received three awards.

Today when SPARROW is honouring me with this award they are not only honouring me but they are honouring all the women working in the field and for that I humbly accept this award.



Positive change is possible only when we understand women's lives, history and struggles for self-respect and human dignity.



Aruna Ramachandra Dhere was born on 2nd February 1957 as the daughter of an illustrious writer in Marathi Ramchandra Chintaman Dhere and Indu.

She has an M A and PhD in Marathi and has worked in several capacities in different institutions.

She was a lecturer and producer in the Educational Media Research Center at Pune University during 1983-1988, and was also associated for a while with the Indian Institute of Education, Pune.

She was Director of the Women's Creativity Development Centre "Shashwati" in Pune from 2010-2015. She became a full-time writer from 1990 onwards. A renowned and prolific writer, she has written in different genres including personal essays, short stories, novels, poems, travelogues, children's stories, bhakti literature, folk literature and social history.

She has published more than fifty books which include 6 poetry books, 11 non-fictional collections, 5 social history books and biographical works, 3 books on folk literature, 5 short story collections, 5 books for children and 12 edited books on Marathi literature. *Krishnakinara* (Being With Krishna) A collection of long stories has been translated into Hindi and Gujarati.

Bandh Adharonse (Through Closed Lips) is a collection of her selected poems translated into Hindi and published by Sahitya Akademi. She has translated into Marathi selected stories of Indian women writers. She has also written TV scripts and scripts for several stage programmes. She has been President of Maharashtra State Book Selection committee and also President of Marathi Vishwakosh Mandal.

Recently She has been chosen to chair the 92nd All India Marathi Literary Meet to be held at Yavatmal in January 2019.

Awards:

She has received more than forty coveted awards both from the State government and other organisations. The following are some of the prestigious awards received by her:

Maharashtra State Government Award for a collection of essays entitled *Lavanyayatra* (1988-89).

Kavi Kusumagraj Award for her poetry collection entitled *Niranjana* 1994.

N C Kelkar Award and D V Potdar award for a book of essays on prominent women in history entitled *Vismrutichitre*.

Pu. La. Deshpande Award for a collection of articles entitled *Vegali Maati Vegala Vaas*.

Sahityadeep Puraskar from Pune for contribution to literature 2016.

Mritunjay Puraskar 2017.

Maharashtra Shasanacha Utkrushtha Sampadit Granth Puraskar (Maharashtra State Excellence Award) for editing for her book of selected stories of women writers entitled *Strilikit Nivadak Marathi Katha* 2013.



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

I started writing even before I became aware of things around me and since then I am writing because for me writing is the medium through which one can look within and also at the external world.... Aruna Dhere

I am very thankful to SPARROW and especially Lakshmi for giving me this award.

The quiet but substantial work SPARROW has been doing in Mumbai for many years now is very valuable for all those who are working on women's issues.

This award is being given to me for my writing. I write. I started writing even before I became aware of things around me and since then I am writing because for me writing is the medium through which one can look within and also at the external world.

I have seen many women in my family and in the "Wada" culture I grew up in. Women of different age groups and women playing different roles in the family and the society. It is through these women whom I have seen closely that I have tried to see Indian women.

Later I drifted into studies which revealed to me ancient Indian culture which had remained for me, shrouded as if by a veil, in its fullest form. Changing roles of women and her status in the society has always been my focus.

I wrote about women from the Vedic period; about Buddha Theris; I wrote about women saint poets of India; I wrote about 19th century women who are self-conscious and aware; I wrote about women from folk culture and also about the life of contemporary women.

Women and culture has been one of my main areas of research. I am able to perceive remnants of women's life as lived in the five-thousand-year-old culture of this country still being visible. On the one hand there is the woman who is competent and self-aware with the support of science and technology and globalisation. On the other hand there is still the woman who is oppressed, weak, stifled and unaware of who she is.

There is the increasing graph of her abilities in all fields on one side and on the other, there is the burning reality of injustice, inequality and sexual oppression. I believe that I write to reduce the gap between these two realities and to increase the honour of woman as a human being.

In this effort of mine I have received the support of many extremely accomplished and competent senior and contemporary Marathi women writers who have done substantive work. I shall continue to write with the confident thought that women's perspective is very important in changing the world from being a nucleus of destruction to being a nucleus of creation. It is an honour for me that an organisation like SPARROW has taken note of my writing and my work.

Thank you



