

SNL Number 39

December 2019



SPARROW newsletter



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Making Faces: Painted Posters for Films

A book of hand painted film posters

In the early years of Indian cinema the posters were hand-painted. With the advent of digital technology hand painted posters have almost become extinct. SPARROW has a good collection of hand painted posters. A well-known painter, V Jeevananthan, whose father was a painter of posters from 1954 and who himself has painted several posters from the eighties, has written an introductory note on his experience of painting posters with some of his own painted posters for the e-book and film historian Theodore Baskaran has also written an introductory note.



Contribution Price: Rs. 350/-

This e-book is available in BookGanga.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Since we have not brought out books in recent years, we have decided to make each newsletter seem like a book. It is an effort that brings us a lot of joy for it involves as much work as one would do for a book. So here is SNL 39.

It carries book reviews of Tamil writer Puthiyamaadhavi's recent short story collection, poems and a novel. There are translated poems of Sri Lankan Tamil writer Dharmini and Malayalam writer R Sangeetha. Charanjeet Kaur has written the lead article on the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. There is a report on Payal Tadv's death and the protest that followed and another report on the archival trip made to attend an archival conference held in Bengaluru and to Kharagpur to visit the National Digital Library of India and meet the people who are part of it. There is also a long note written by C S Lakshmi and Katharina Hoffman on a Feminist Memory Workshop held in University of Oldenburg on 29 and 30 June 2019 with C S Lakshmi's note also covering a visit to the Belladonna Women's Archives in Bremen and subsequent visits to the University of Marburg to screen SPARROW'S film *Degham* on the 1st of July and to take part in the interdisciplinary workshop "Which Archive and Memory is needed in Gender Studies?" held on 2nd of July and later a visit to the Robert Havemann Society's Archive of the Opposition to the GDR in Berlin, especially the Grau Zone part of it that contains the women's archives.

As always in our Homages section we celebrate the lives of many women and condole the deaths of women who have died before their time.

We look forward to your feedback and do visit our website www.sparrowonline.org to know about our work and to donate towards our archival activities.

This SNL also has a supplement like the previous one which carries a transcription of a conversation between Aruna Burte and Sunita Aralika, a writer and a social activist, held on 18th October, 2014.

Happy Reading!



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–*C S Lakshmi, Charanjeet Kaur, Sudha Arora, Balasingam Sugumar & Poo. Ko. Saravanan*

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LEAPFROG GAME TO NAUPAKA FLOWERS

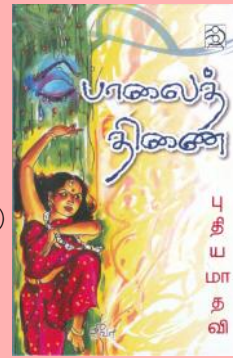
-C S Lakshmi



Pacchaik Kudhirai
(Leapfrog Game),
Annai Rajeswari
Pathippagam,
Chennai, 2019,
Pages: 144;
Price: Rs. 140/-



Rasulin Manaviyaakiya Naan (I, Rasool's Wife)
Kaavya,
Chennai, 2019,
Pages: 139;
Price: Rs. 140/-



Paalai Thina
(The Desert Landscape)
Annai Rajeswari
Pathippagam,
Chennai, 2019,
Pages: 96;
Price Rs. 90/-

Puthiyamaadhavi is a prolific writer who can produce a novel, a short story collection and a poetry collection in the same year. I began with the novel with the title of a game similar to the leapfrog game played by children in India where players vault over each other's stooped backs except that in India the animal referred to in the game is called a green horse. Puthiyamaadhavi uses the game as a metaphor where the person with the stooped back who allows someone to press her back and jump over is seen as the one suppressed, exploited emotionally and used. It is an interesting novel which Puthiyamaadhavi introduces with the words, "...we see leaping over as victory in life. We don't stop to think: Who do we leap over? What do we leap over? With what aim do we leap over? Why do we leap over? Must we leap over at all? Life becomes a horse ride where every time one takes a great leap a person's back is pressed down, the shoulders used for a ride, the other person pushed down hard enough not to rise and victory is celebrated. The colours of the green horses may have changed but the horses remain: Mother, daughter, wife, beloved, grandmother, girlfriend...."

The story revolves around Sama, the short name for Samadhana Mary, a warden in the hostel for college girls and her three friends, Senthamarai, Kanmani and Sangeetha and their college days and present life. Their college days were spent in the same hostel and the novel goes back and forth on the memories of those days and the present happenings. Sama has had a love affair in her college days which gets broken because of caste. She tries to commit suicide once

but Kanmani and others tell her not to indulge in such theatrics in future for it is not worth so much trouble. Senthamarai belongs to a political family and marries into the family of a liquor baron who finally gets shot in a gang war and Senthamarai becomes a full time politician; Sangeetha joins medical college and gets manipulated into marrying her paternal cousin who is also a doctor, so that her father-in-law's hospital can be successfully run by her, and Kanmani goes to Mumbai and does not return and later in the novel we get to know that she is involved with extremists and is disillusioned with her father who is a very big name. Sama continues her postgraduate studies and is now part of the college faculty and the hostel warden. But she has not quite got over her lover and needs tranquilizers to calm herself and sleep at night. And there are problems in her family too in the form of a lecherous brother-in-law and a sister who has to give in to his various demands. There is also the question of property.

There are those other characters who come as vignettes and some who take the story further. There is the warden who commits suicide and then there is Muhamadhu Gani, the gardener and his love for trees. There are politicians who give empty speeches on getting rid of the caste system who cannot do much except talk. Then there is the student Sharmila and her defiance. Through many dramatic events the friends get back together as intimately as they did before—the Mumbai underworld, an alleged extremist friend Rafiq who is married and with whom Kanmani has a relationship, Sama's old lover Wilson who comes back into

her life seeking favours for his daughter's education which he wants her to do through her politician friend Senthamarai, Sama's sister's attempted suicide because of accusations of a useless husband and finally Wilson's daughter falling in love with a Hindu boy from a lowered caste and Wilson putting his daughter in a train helping her to run away with her lover and both of them settling down to a peaceful life with the help of Sama and Kanmani to work in a school for underprivileged children set up by an idealistic woman.

The novel, the way it begins, in the voice of Sama, seems like a very large canvas and initially its pace is leisurely with many details with emphasis on Sama's family background and the longing and memories of Sama for a lost love around which other stories are built. Although this thread of her lost love runs through the novel it constantly gets lost when the life stories of many others which really seem like separate novels by themselves get compressed within the main story. Finally Puthiyamaadhavi is not able to fill the large canvas she has taken up to tell the stories of four friends and their lives and others who are part of their stories. One feels that the story ends rather abruptly and in a forced idealistic scenario of education for the underprivileged with the added Buddha statue as a symbol of the underprivileged. Despite this sense of incompleteness that the novel leaves the reader with, there are many areas of life of women in the family and in the public sphere that the novel covers with deep sensitivity be it the different mothers who store years of pain in their hearts or different men from a gardener who loves trees to a man who lets down a woman but is keen to make up by standing by his daughter or even the simple matter of relief after purchasing sanitary towels after years of using cloth that fills the inner thighs with rashes. Puthiyamaadhavi's keen eye sees it all.

The short story collection is a collection of long and short stories with some of them dealing with different encounters with terrorism in the city of Mumbai. It begins with the experience of a wife whose husband is in a coma after a bomb blast and the fifth anniversary of the bomb blast day when her mind has gone numb to even pain. The title story is the long story in the collection which talks about a Hindu girl married to a Muslim. The story is not about the inter-religious marriage but about the aftermath of the bomb blast and her life and how different women deal with this experience. While she has to deal with a comatose husband there is another who has to fight for compensation for the death of a husband whose body was never found. She has children to care for and a brother-in-law who harasses her. The protagonist Gowri helps her and once she gets the compensation she comes to inform that she has now decided to remarry her brother-in-law for her children need a father. Then there is

Mangathram's wife who loses her son Kapil in the blast. Their driver Karimbhai who is like one of the family is suddenly informed not to drive the home vehicle and only to drive the office vehicle. He understands why and hands over the key quietly and leaves. Gowri's father-in-law tells her to remarry. Her father who curses her leaves home in frustration and finally she is called home by her grandmother when her mother is seriously ill with cancer and there is her grandmother, the grand old lady, who tells her love is above religion and that that is the only way to understand it, instead of tightening the grip of tradition and saying that it is hurting. Gowri also finds warmth in the embrace of a man who is taking care of a comatose wife but that is just a fleeting moment of relief and camaraderie. And her life continues and she rushes and jumps into trains every day like many other Gowris like her. Written without many descriptive passages except a constant thought about the body and its needs that keeps gnawing away at her mind, the story tells the story of many whose lives changed forever after the bomb blast. The last story, is also about the bomb blast and its fifth anniversary being observed with a group of women lighting candles in the memory of those who died in the bomb blast. The protagonist remembers the eyes of a Muslim gentleman she encountered in the train and how she quickly moved away from him and his eyes trying to explain something to her, haunting her since then. The story ends with his little daughter coming with a lighted candle to be placed along with those placed by other women.

The story on identities again takes up the issue of inter-religious marriages and how in a situation of riot a woman gives her Muslim husband a Hindu name to save him. The crowd of rioters warn her that ahead is a Muslim gang waiting and to avoid that route. She wonders if some Hindu would be changing his name to that of a Muslim to save himself. But her husband who shaves off his beard later for the safety of his family, feels deeply the loss of his identity. The Ganpati Bappa story is not just about the immersion of Ganpati but also about pieces of Ganpati being strewn on the beach the next day, of the corrupt and the rich whose homes have been opened to Ganpati and the way all this affects a woman psychologically where she imagines Ganpati conversing with her about his situation. Two other stories are about the complexities in relationships both in a living together situation and an arranged marriage of two people abroad and the constant power play between two people in love. In one it is the man, an extremely warm person, wanting marriage and the woman not wanting to get bound and in the other it is the case of a jealous husband who cannot get over the feeling that his wife is his possession. Very different from other stories in the collection is the story of a woman undergoing

a cataract operation and the splashes of thoughts that go through her mind which ends with a very surreal image of a crow casually flying over a Shivling and pooping on it. In true Puthiyamaadhavi style, the surreal image actually cleverly combines two different political controversies where the prime minister was referred to as bird dropping and a scorpion sitting on the Shivling!

Although the stories are located in Mumbai and abroad the central characters are Tamils, and the stories are not only about living in an urban space with its everyday tensions but also about carrying memories of caste, religion and families from a different space and different time and bringing them into the urban space. Puthiyamaadhavi uses various ways of going back and forth from one space to another sometimes as a direct flash back and sometimes by making them seem like hallucinations. The stories try to combine many different aspects of life and living in a big city.

Puthiyamaadhavi's third book is a poetry book that chooses an arid landscape as its theme. In the classical Tamil division of lands the barren land's deity is a goddess. While Kotravai, the goddess, is an ancient one, Puthiyamaadhavi sees her as someone who continues to exist in different ways

with her righteous anger that is not extinguished over the centuries. The poems revive images of love and longing, considered the emotional qualities of land that has gone barren, in classical Tamil poetry even while contrasting them with love ending in murders in the present times. Images of Periyar, the poet Bharathi along with the fragrance of the soil, poisonous snakes, the sound of birds, colours of flowers and trees permeate the poems as if in a fantasy mix of fact and dreams. There are some poems which give you pleasure when you read them but some poems can have their impact only when you read them aloud. These poems of Puthiyamaadhavi are poems to read out. They have a range of references from the Bel Baha fertility ritual of the Newari culture of Nepal where the girl is "married" to the bael fruit (although Puthiyamaadhavi wrongly mentions it as being married to the bael tree) to the Naupaka flowers of a Hawaiian legend. They become part of the poems which are from the arid landscape, a metaphor for an altered land that becomes barren with different qualities, with an angry goddess as its deity.



In India Women Spoke, Women Worked, Women Wrote, Women Acted

Women Chose, Women Demanded, Women Created, Women Rebelled

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POEMS

-Dharmini

Untitled

In the distant sky
A piece of cloud
Chases a bird
From the night blooms a day
The day dissolves into the sea
Age moves clockwise on the wall
To overtake time sprinting past
An access
Opened in dream

*From the Tamil original published in Aakkaatti,
No 15, October-December 2017*



House without Heating

They say at the end of October
Those who live in multi-storey apartments
Will be given central heating!
But
The alarm rings at five in the morning
Someone wakes up shivering and leaves.
The next alarm will be at seven
I close my eyes tight
Pull the blanket over my face.
The soft sound of water dripping next door.
A door hurriedly banged shut in the house
opposite.
The lift has been giving trouble for a while
Someone in a hurry is knocking continuously on
its door.

Is today the garbage clearing day?
The caretaker is dragging the wheeled bins
Before the onset of next winter
Must discard this blanket which cannot keep the
cold out
Thirty or forty Euros, whatever the cost,
Must buy a heavy blanket!
The seven o'clock alarm...
Let the daughter sleep awhile.
With a cup of green tea
When the winter morning is unlatched just a
little...
A long distance call with a kiss to start with
Near the corner of the kitchen window
Lies the yellow leaf
That has flown down
In the balcony lies writhing
The feather of the pigeon that must have taken
shelter
The chrysanthemum flowers have wilted
A droplet of water hangs at the edge of the vase

Must tell my girl to wear the
Black winter coat.

*From the Tamil original "Kanappatra Veedu", March
4, 2017 published in her blog Thumai*



POEM

-R Sangeetha

When you love a girl who writes poems...

Friend,
it is a risky business to love
a girl who writes poems.
Like
a blossomed branch lets its arms
be caressed by the breeze.

Can never be trusted!
You'll be drenched
in the raining words,
and left all alone by yourself,
without an umbrella.
She will let the river flow
on your sunlit veins,
and make you search for
the green and yellow metaphors,
from the deep blue.
There will, forever,
be a salty sea
between her eyes.
A song, which
she alone knows,
will curl on her lips.

She will sleep till eight
in the morning,
under the blankets of a warm kiss.
She will learn to hang stars
from the rusty window bars at night.
She will make you feel angry saying

that the noon is bitter,
and the dark
has grown too black.
She will make you ask her,
'Are you mad, girl?',
at least ten times a day.
In the end,
she will hold on to your dense forests tightly,
like the rain drenched seeds,
when you feel bored and decide to leave,
and say, "Don't go!"

My dear friend,
it is a risky affair
to love a girl who writes poems.

*Translated by Dr Nithya Mariam John, Assistant Professor,
Department of English, BCM College, Kottayam.*

*Translated from the original Kavitha Ezhuthunnavale
Pranayikkumbol, in the collection Ottaykoraal Kadal
Varaykkunnu, 2016.*

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

AFTER SUCH KNOWLEDGE, WHAT FORGIVENESS?: THE 1919 MASSACRE IN JALLIANWALA BAGH

-Charanjeet Kaur

'I feel a deep sense of grief, humility and profound shame having visited the site of the horrific Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar today. Here, a great number of Sikhs – as well as Hindus, Muslims and Christians – were shot dead by British troops in 1919'

(Tweet by Archbishop Justin Welby on 11 August 2019)

'Killing the Soul of a Nation' – Mahatma Gandhi

1. *Khooni Vaisakhi* (Bloodied Vaisakhi) [1920] by Nanak Singh; trans by Navdeep Suri, Harperperrenial, 2019, xv+128, INR 399
2. *Jallianwala Bagh: Literary Responses in Prose and Poetry*, edited and introduced by Rakshanda Jalil, Niyogi Books, 2019, pp227, INR 495

The historical city of Amritsar, in which the holiest shrine of the Sikhs, the Golden Temple, or Darbar Sahib, as it is referred to by the devout in the Sikh community, is located, attracts crores of pilgrims every year from all over the world. Apart from the other 'tourist' attractions like the Wagah Border, a must-halt destination is also the Jallianwala Bagh, which is just a stone's throw from the Golden Temple, and the newly established Partition Museum, in the Town Hall premises. Sikh history, the Partition and the massacre in Jallianwala Bagh in 1919, are all steeped, simultaneously, in tragedy and the spirit of resurgence that mark this city. 2019 happens to be a very significant year for this region and the Sikh community: it marks the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, the 100th anniversary of the macabre event that marked a turning point in the freedom movement of India, and the centenary of the birth of the most celebrated woman Punjabi poet, Amrita Pritam.

The heartbreak of the historical disasters that Punjab has faced has been most famously and poignantly depicted in Amrita's iconic partition poem, 'Aj Akkhan Waris Shah Nu' ('Today I invoke Waris Shah, again'). Partition has been well-

documented and its representation in literature is a continuing trajectory; new and hitherto unknown aspects come to light, in the light of the research by scholars, especially since Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* created this awareness of the fissures in the partition narrative. The silence surrounding this narrative—forced as well as voluntary—especially in those areas in which women's 'honour' is concerned, has been broken since then.

At the same time, though Jallianwala Bagh has also been well-documented and most of the official papers regarding it are in the public discourse, the literary representation about it is not very well known, and much of it needs to be 'recovered' from various sources like the small magazines in which they were published in particularly, Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu. The publication of two books to commemorate the happenings in the Bagh in 2019—the English translation of Nanak Singh's long narrative poem *Khooni Vaisakhi* (translated by his grandson, the diplomat Navdeep Suri) and *Jallianwala Bagh: Literary Responses in Prose and Poetry* Introduced and Edited by Rakshanda Jalil—seek to cut through this literary under-representation and bring little-known works in these three languages to a larger, global, English speaking readership.

A brief recap of the countdown to the day when General Dyer ordered the indiscriminate firing into the peaceful and unarmed crowd at Jallianwala Bagh, and its aftermath, is presented at the end of this feature. But let us begin with a brief description of what the Bagh was like in 1919, in two of the fictional accounts presented in Rakshanda Jalil's books. Both these, the chronology of the events and the description of the area will help in understanding the enormity of the tragedy, and point to the brutality with which the whole exercise was carried out:

Abdullah Husain, in his novel, *The Weary Generations* describes the Bagh as follows:

"The place, called Jallianwala Bagh, was no Bagh or garden but in fact a large yard, hedged in by a brick wall on three sides with a single exit on the fourth, and could well be taken for one of those places customarily used for tying up cattle or horses away from built-up areas in most cities. It was not, however, used as such but as a gathering place on any occasion which people got together in numbers. The ground was corrugated baked earth with not a green shoot in sight—a place both close and desolate."

Or, as Chaman Nahal describes it from the perspective of Dyer, who is shown to have a weird fascination for it:

"Dyer had taken a commission in the Indian Army in the year 1887, and in the last thirty-two years he had passed through Amritsar perhaps as many times. And each time he was mystified by the sight of that open field in the heart of the town—Jallianwala Bagh...an irregular quadrangle 200 ft by 100 ft, enclosed by the back walls of houses surrounding it. Maybe at one time a house or houses stood there. Now there was just a field, with a few trees and an old tomb, and it was largely used by the populace for dumping rubbish... but what a boon, that field, in the centre of a teeming city of a hundred and fifty thousand people!"

Walled in on three sides, with a narrow entrance/exit on one side, surrounded by unplastered and unpainted brick houses, a well housed within it, the ground with a capacity to hold about 15000 people at a given time—and given the

malicious intent of the General, who is keen to teach the India protesters a lesson—it was the scene for a tragedy waiting to happen.

Let us begin with Nanak Singh's *Khooni Vaisakhi* (1920), which begins with an invocation to the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh:

*Let my pen fly across the pages,
To tell this tale, my Divine Guru.
Of innocent souls laying down their lives,
For our nation's sake, my Divine Guru.*

It is the earliest and, by far, the most comprehensive poetic account of the happenings in Amritsar in April 1919. Published in 2019 as a commemorative bilingual edition in English, this poem gains added significance from the fact that it presents an eye-witness and first-person account of the massacre: Nanak Singh, aged 22, was actually present at the site when the shooting happened. It was immediately banned by the British Government when it appeared in Punjabi in 1920, along with two other eye-witness accounts—Vidhata Singh Teer's *Teer Tarang* (The Surge of Arrows) and Firoz Din Sharaf's *Dukh De Kirne* (Keening).

The translator of *Khooni Vaisakhi*, Navdeep Suri states that throughout his association with his grandfather, he does not recall any discussion of the book, and finding the complete original text and the cover page of the first edition was a tough job for him. The 25 sections of the poem take in every detail of each of the associated events, pointing to the tremendous research done by the young poet in his quest to get the historical nuances and details correctly. In its exposition of the themes religious freedom, the oppression of the Sikh *panth* by the Moghuls, revenge, justice, forgiveness and divine grace, it follows the tradition of the poems of Guru Nanak, particularly the *Baburnama* or *Babarvani*, and Guru Gobind Singh's *Zafarnama*.

The association of the carnage with *Vaisakhi*, the Spring festival, has deep cultural and religious significance: for the Sikhs, it is an important day of celebration because the *Khalsa* (the spiritual army of the Sikh *panth*) was anointed on Vaisakhi Day by Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur on 13 April 1699. Apart from the particular Sikh context, in which this happy occasion becomes, in one stroke, a day of mourning for the dead, *Khooni Vaisakhi* is a severe indictment of British Rule and it works within the humanistic, nationalist concerns of

the patriot and freedom fighter, Nanak Singh and his faith in communal harmony:

*In minutes, the Bagh was strewn with corpses
None knew just who was who, my friends.
Many of them looked like Sikhs
Amid Hindus and Muslims plenty, my friends.
In the prime of their youth, our brave hearts lay
Gasping for one last breath, my friends.*

The poem represents the events in slow motion, so that each part of the poem makes for a lived experience, while the agonised presence of the poet-witness pervades the narrative. The lament is counterbalanced by the inspiring tales of the sacrifices of the martyrs, and the courage that is exemplary of the contribution and sacrifices of the many unsung heroes of India's freedom struggle. To name Dyer in 1920 as "a murderer for eternity" was an act of tremendous courage, and it is not surprising that the poem was immediately banned.

Apart from the poem itself (in both Punjabi and English), the essays in the 2019 edition are significant: Navdeep Suri in "The Bagh, the Book and Our Bauji" presents a moving account of the life of Nanak Singh, the first Punjabi novelist to explore social and political themes, and "the unspoken part of the family folklore" that Bauji, as he was called, "was present in Jallianwala Bagh that fateful day on 13 April 1919."

"He had gone there for the rally against Rowlatt Act with a couple of friends, we were told. Bauji had collapsed in the stampede triggered by the firing and had been left for dead under a pile of corpses. Both friends died and Bauji himself suffered damage to his hearing in the left ear. He walked out some hours later after regaining consciousness. But this was a subject he did not want to talk about, and that was that."

Navdeep traces the discovery and the recovery of the manuscript of *Khooni Vaisakhi*. He says that it came to the notice of the reading public only in 1980 when Kishan Singh Gupta, then a lecturer in DAV College in Hoshiarpur, discovered a copy of the poem in his grandfather's collection in their family home in Mukhtsar, wrote a paper, "Nanak Singh's *Khooni Vaisakhi*", in August 1980 for the literary magazine *Jagriti*, thus reinstating it in the public discourse.

Navdeep also talks of how, according to political observers, Jallianwala Bagh was the turning point in the course

of the Indian freedom struggle, because it led to a complete change in the strategies adopted by Mahatma Gandhi:

"The whitewash of Jallianwala Bagh attempted by the European majority on the Hunter Commission contrasted so blatantly with the testimony that Gandhi and his team had collected from 1700 witnesses that his faith in the British system of fairness had been irredeemably damaged. He decided that a new movement of protests was the only way to make the Raj see reason and to outline a blueprint of his non-cooperation movement."

Navdeep also cites the anguish of Pandit Nehru by citing his account of it in his Autobiography in 1936: "The Punjab was isolated, cut off from the rest of India; a thick veil seemed to cover it and hide it from outside eyes. There was hardly any news, and people could not go there or come out... odd individuals, who managed to escape from that inferno, were so terror struck that they could give no account. Helplessly and impotently, we, who were outside, waited for scraps of news and bitterness filled our hearts."

'The Sins of the Great-Grandfather' is Justin Rowlatt's contribution to the book. The great-grandson of Brigadier General Reginald Rowlatt, of the infamous Rowlatt Act 1919, writes what is in the nature of an agonised regret account and he minces no words in its condemnation of the dastardly series of acts. He begins the details of his journey to Jallianwala Bagh with a simple statement of shock and remorse:

"I wasn't expecting to react as strongly as I did when I visited Jallianwala Bagh, the walled garden where the 1919 Amritsar massacre took place. I certainly wasn't expecting to cry."

Justin discusses how the insensitivity of British officialdom has been succinctly captured by Jawaharlal Nehru in his *An Autobiography* (also known as *Toward Freedom*). Justin recounts that on a train journey from Amritsar to Delhi, soon after Jallianwala Bagh happened, Nehru's co-passengers included high ranking British military officers, with General Dyer being one of them. He remembers how Dyer "was holding forth in an aggressive and triumphant tone" about "how he had the whole town at his mercy and he had felt like reducing the rebellious city to a heap of ashes, but he took pity on it and refrained."

This is reinforced in Stanley Wolpert's chilling account, which is part of Rakshanda Jalil's book, of the proceedings of the Hunter Commission which exposes the self-righteousness, dogmatism and insensitivity of Dyer, who feels no remorse for what he has done.

And he ends it by summing up all that he has explored in the entire traumatic mental and physical journey to Amritsar:

"I still believe the measures my great-grandfather's committee recommended were unjust and misguided. I still find the omission of any discussion of the justice of the independence cause shocking. I still am sick to my stomach at the way the British forces behaved in Jallianwala Bagh. And I am also still appalled that my great-grandfather was honoured for his work on the Seditious Committee with a knighthood."

Jallianwala Bagh: Literary Responses in Prose & Poetry, introduced and edited by Rakshanda Jalil, offers a historical overview of the trauma and selects some very vivid literary pieces for this anthology. It is the first such book in English and it is to be hoped that it will open up the paths for the recovery of many more such short stories, poems, novels and non-fiction on the Jallianwala Bagh events and its aftermath.

Most of the work that she has selected is from longer novels based on the Indian freedom movement—from Abdullah Hussain, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, Mulk Raj Anand, Caman Nahal, Venu Chitale and Ghulam Abbas. There is an excerpt from a play by Bhasham Sahni, a short story each by Sadaat Hasan Manto, Krishan Chander and Ghulam Abbas. An extract from Stanley Wolpert's fictionalised *Massacre at Jallianwala Bagh*, and a critical first-person account of his visit to the site by Navtej Singh complete the prose section. Then there are the poems/ excerpts of poems by Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Sarojini Naidu, Sohan Singh Misha, Babu Firoz Din Sharaf, Giani Hari Singh Dard, Nanak Singh, Mohammed Iqbal, Trilok Chand Mahroom, Zafar Ali Khan, Josh Malihabadi and Ahmaq Phaphoondvi.

Most of the poems reflect the immediate response to the event and verge on the sentimental and the predictable: thus, in "Vasant in Jallianwala Bagh" Subhadra Kumari Chauhan says: "And so you must offer some half-opened blossoms/ In their

memory and shed some drops of tears". Babu Firoz Din Sharaf compares this brutality with other acts of tyranny in history, particularly the ones unleashed by Nimrud and Nadir Shah. Josh Malihabadi exhorts the British to look within their souls and ask themselves the uncomfortable questions which they have been deliberately ignoring:

"O merchants, how can you tell the world today
To raise the standard of humanity in our age...
I am amazed by the message from your assembly
And your seeming concern for the future of humanity
For, when you had come here as a trading mission
Were you not aware of the future of humanity then?
Was the spirit of freedom not alive in the body of Indians?
Tell me truthfully: was India not an abode of human beings?"

Referring to the signs of the shooting on the walls of the Bagh, Sohan Singh Miska points out:

"These are not bullet marks
It is our history
Written on the walls of Jallianwala Bagh."

The prose—both fiction and non-fiction—is, however, much more nuanced and complex. Two of the most telling ones are Manto's "An Incident in 1919" and the satiric, almost black comedy-like, "Those who Crawled" by Ghulam Abbas. The narrator in Manto's story is one of the witnesses to the entire series of events, and who weaves into the historical events the story of two prostitutes who seek revenge for the murder of their so-called 'good-for-nothing' brother, Thaila. Thaila is killed in the agitations in protest of the Rowlatt Act. They two sisters are led to the British Officers' mess to entertain them and the general belief is that they will use it to avenge the death of the protesters, including their brother's. Their story seems to be reminiscent of Mahashweta Devi's "Drapadi":

"They tore off their fine garments. Standing stark naked before the English Officers, they said, 'We are Thaila's sisters—sisters of that martyr whom you riddled with bullets simply because he possessed a soul that loved his country. We are his beautiful sisters. Come and besmirch our fragrant bodies

with the molten lead of your lust. But before you do that, let us spit on your faces—once!

... Tears came to his eyes. He said, 'They were shot dead!'

But there is a twist in this story, which shows, true to Manto's ethos, that human weakness triumphs over heroism and courage. When the fellow traveller guesses that he has "coined the ending of that particular story," the mask he wears collapses: "'Yes those bitches...'. He checked the invectives that rose to his lips. 'They defiled the name of their martyred brother,' he said and got off the train."

"Those Who Crawled" is a spoof. Two school mates, the narrator and Naushad, his friend, see the events from 10th April to the 13th from close quarters in horror and fascination. Young as they are, they have a boyish curiosity and much against their parents wishes sneak out, whenever possible, to be in the thick of things, in spite of the curfew orders. After Martial Law has been clamped down on the city and the order have been issued for all Indians to crawl in the lane in which Miss Sherwood had been assaulted some days ago, they see the humiliation of a villager who is forced to crawl on his stomach by the soldiers, and it makes their blood boil. Suddenly, they see two youngsters approach the soldiers with the strange request. "Sahib Bahadur, we want to crawl." And then begins their exercise in which they crawl from one end of the lane to the other and back again and make several rounds, all the time laughing and enjoying themselves. Naushad and the narrator are perplexed, but the soldiers on duty hardly know how to handle the situation. They are ordered to stop, and the soldiers then realise that they have been racing each other in crawling. The Gurkha soldier is amused at their cheekiness, but the British Sergeant has understood that this was their way of revolting and subverting the Crawling Order.

The story of Rattan Devi is the subject of Bhisham Sahni's play "Colour My Robe Saffron". It is about this woman who goes in search of her husband, Chhaju Bhagat, who has been killed in the Bagh. Defying the curfew orders, she spends the whole night trying to find him in the heap of bodies. It is only in the morning that she is able to find him; the horror is compounded by the fact that the body of her neighbour, Ishro's child, who had been consoling her the previous night, and preventing her from risking the walk to the Bagh, is also discovered. Rattan Devi is the subject of many poems and in this volume, she is mentioned in Giani Hari Singh Dard's

poem, "Vaisakhi of the Jallianwala Bagh". Her story and a painting of her are now a part of the Jallianwala Museum.

Well. The centenary of the Jallianwala Bagh *ghallughara*, as it would be called in Punjabi. The time is ripe to rediscover the obscure accounts of it in the works of small and big writers who were part of it—who lived it and left their impressions in diaries, pictures, leaflets, booklets, poems... along the lines of *Eyewitness at Amritsar: A Visual History of 1919 Jallianwala Bagh Massacre* by Amandeep Singh Madra and Parmjit Singh (April 2019).

THE TIMELINE OF EVENTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE JALLIANWALA BAGH MASS KILLINGS:

- 1918

The Black Rowlatt Act, depriving citizens of civil liberties and authorising "government to imprison, without trial, any person suspected of terrorist activities" and "anything that smacked of revolutionary activities could be punished," imposed. It is in stark contravention of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of the same year, initiated to reward the meritorious service of Indians in the British Army in the First World War, which ended in November 1919. Wide-spread anger in the populace in Punjab and the government fears a 1857 like uprising

- 30 March 1919:

A nationwide hartal called by Gandhiji; later deferred to 6 April.

- 6 April 1919:

Gandhiji's call for hartal

- 9 April 1919:

Ram Navmi—a large gather of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs converge on the city. Gandhiji stopped from entering Punjab and sent back to Bombay Presidency.

- 10 April 1919:

- o The Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer deports two important local leaders of Amritsar – Dr Satya Pal and Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew – both spearheading the non-violent agitation to Dharamshala. Crowds gather at a bridge leading to the Civil Lines, where the British live, in protest and demanding their release. The government responds by shooting at them, in which several protesters are killed.

- o Government buildings are set on fire by the mob and some Europeans are attacked. Three bank employees beaten to death.

o Assault by a mob on Miss Marcella Sherwood, a school teacher near her school, the Mission Day School for Girls, in Kucha Kurrichan. Rescued by locals who lead her to safety.

• 11 April 1919:

General Dyer arrives at Amritsar to bring the agitators to book and to deal with the volatile situation in Amritsar.

• 13 April 1919:

o Dyer learns of a meeting that is to take place at Jallianwala Bagh in the evening, in spite of the prohibitory orders. 5pm, he reaches the Bagh with his troops – 50 Gurkha and Baluchi soldiers of the British army.

o About 15000 people present in the Bagh. The crowd includes the protesters, peasants, and the tourists who had come to pay obeisance at the Golden Temple on the occasion of Vaisakhi – men, women and children included.

o He orders firing and for 10 minutes “1650 rounds of 303 marks were fired,” killing about 500-600 people and leaving about 1500 wounded. The Indian records put the death toll at 1000 and more.

o Curfew imposed from 8.00 pm to 6.00 am leaving the wounded unattended for the night, taking the death toll higher.

• 15 April 1919:

Martial law declared, and the infamous “Crawling Order” passed, as per which all Indians crossing the lane in which Miss Sherwood had been assaulted were required to crawl on their bellies, and salaam all English Officers.

• 30 May 1919:

Rabindranath Tagore renounces his knighthood.

• 29 October 1919:

Hunter Commission set up to investigate the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. General Dyer appears before the Commission on 9 November 1919. The Report is submitted to the Government of India on 8 March 1920. On 23 March, General Dyer is divested of his Command and on 20 April 1920, he leaves India.

• 14 May 1920:

The case is brought before the army Council. In 1927 Dyer dies in England, of cerebral haemorrhage and arteriosclerosis.

• 13 March 1940: Sir Michael O’Dwyer shot dead by Uddam Singh in London. Uddam Singh convicted and hanged to death in July 1940 and his ashes exhumed and brought back to his native village in Sunam. A part of his ashes is preserved in a sealed urn at Jallianwala Bagh

(Basic information culled primarily from both the books discussed in this write up)



Congratulations!



Odisha sprinter Dutee Chand won the Vogue award for Sportsperson of the Year 2019. Dutee Chand holds the national record in women’s 100m. She has brought many laurels to the country and state. In October 2019, she clocked 11.22 seconds in the semi-final of women’s 100m event at the 59th National Open Athletics Championships 2019 in Ranchi. With this score, she broke her own previous national record of 11.26 seconds. She aims to win the gold medal for India in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

All the best Dutee!

PAYAL TADVI'S DEATH AND PROTEST

-Neelima Mundayur

“We will not move until the accused are arrested! Not a single person will move” asserted a woman standing outside the gates of Nair hospital under the scorching midday sun on 28th May 2019, surrounded by medical students, protest groups, and a hungry media and police. “It has been six days since Payal’s death, and yet there’s no action taken!” She bitterly reminded the crowd. “Remember Rohit!” Others cried.

Payal Tadvi’s death has opened up a discourse that Dalits are far too familiar with. Tadvi, who worked as a gynecologist at the state-run BYL Nair Hospital, had hung herself on the 22nd of May. But the term “suicide” would erase the racially charged nature of the situation as she had been a victim of severe and painful casteist harassment from three of her seniors, Ankita Khandelwal, Hema Ahuja and Bhakti Mehre, and the wilful ignorance, and therefore abetment, of the department. They overworked her, refused her entry into surgeries, stopped her from visiting her mother (a cancer patient), humiliated her in front of her patients and harassed her through whatsapp. The family further explains that a verbal complaint attempted by Dr Tadvi’s husband only made the situation worse, making them realise that the students had the unit’s support. Tadvi begged her mother to not send in any more, especially a written complaint, as the torture they would only worsen the torture. Tadvi’s death thus cannot be ruled a suicide when she was routinely being harassed by people who held a doubled position of power over her—through their caste and their seniority. In such a case, accusing the three on grounds of “abetting suicide” also falls short of recognising it as an instance of institutionalised murder.

Since the protest the three—who had been on the run—have been arrested and have put forward a demand for anticipatory bail. They have also raised a statement through “MARD” (Maharashtra Association for Resident Students). They argue that her suicide was a result of the pressure that is put upon all resident students, and that as residents of a hospital where patients from lower caste backgrounds are regularly treated, they are incapable of being casteist. Apparently, they didn’t give her work at par with her, threw files at her, humiliated her and her capability at every front because of any prejudices that they hold against her, but simply because she wasn’t good enough for the field—her suicide, they argue, was because of the same. This, however, simply cannot be considered true after placing the case in

the larger Indian context where the vast majority of the students from these “difficult” fields of engineering and medicine who commit suicide are lower caste.

The statement put forward by the three raises the same dangerous and mythical rhetoric of “meritocracy.” When upper-caste students argue that caste-based reservations hurt “meritocracy” they presume that they are better in the field itself. They ignore the privileges that are necessary for them to gain a higher grade, and assume that these numbers are indicative of ability. Instead of accounting centuries of systematic, casteist oppression, upper castes rewrite the narrative to presume intellectual superiority. These three do the same by diverting the blame from themselves and institutionalised casteism to Dr Tadvi’s abilities, and her strength in persisting with residency. In light of Payal Tadvi’s death it is imperative that we raise questions against this rhetoric surrounding caste and discrimination not just when considering cases of suicide, but with education and the workplace as a whole.

However, who is really putting these questions forward? Certainly not the media. It seems that the days where “the mirrors of society” act as genuine platforms for intellectual debate and criticality about society is past. In fact, the few journalists that I was able to speak to during the rally were more suspicious of Tadvi’s motivations than of critiquing the oppressive institution of the brahmanical caste system. They argued that the protestors were conflating issues of mental health and casteism together. With these statements they completely ignored the reality that these two issues are inextricably related. Caste based atrocities aren’t simply a “political” issue; they take away an individual person’s autonomy and self-assertion. These cases are inherently dehumanising as they reduce their existence to their caste and their caste alone. It is natural that the loss of personhood would take a toll on their mental health. Of course Tadvi’s death could be a result of depression, but that doesn’t negate the casteist violence that is involved in the process of her dehumanisation.

Nevertheless, it does not come as a surprise that this dehumanisation doesn’t concern the media as all journalists present at the rally seemed to do the same, albeit in a different manner. Over and over again during the day, the protestors had to reorganise because of journalists and their cameramen who hungrily pounced at the family, hunting for a new “scoop” and in the process pushing over and at times even trampling

the ones who came in solidarity. One protester even shouted, “The rule of such (an uncritical/apathetic) media cannot continue!” They didn’t seem to care about the fact that a real, human life was lost because of caste-based harassment and prejudice. They didn’t care for the fatigue that the family was facing from telling the story to a people who are hounding them with the same questions over and over again. They didn’t come to support them or the many dalits who face the same kind of violence all over the country. They didn’t come to inform and critique. They came to be the first to get interviews, and if that meant shutting down the protesters who were sloganeering, shouting at the students, or even trampling the women who had adamantly sat down to show their persistence and resistance, so be it. Empathy did not seem to be a concern.

And in the end, it comes down to this question of empathy. The process of humanisation of the oppressed classes is a process of simply becoming more empathetic. Upper caste people must reassess how their social privilege and conditioning shapes their lens. We must understand how it translates into daily comforts, be it as simple as the kindness of one’s seniors. The discourse surrounding Payal Tadvi’s death that’s concerned with her mental health immediately empathises with upper-castes as well. This is not unlike the rhetoric which pushes for the protection of the rapist and his “future” over the female victim. By delegitimizing Payal’s case against caste-based violence, the three upper-caste women who inflicted it are protected. The same was done after Rohit Vemula’s death as well. To protect an oppressive institution, his dalit identity was questioned to delegitimize his death as a case of institutional harassment and violence. Over and over again, the oppressor is protected over the oppressed. This discourse must be rewritten so that Dalits are irrevocably at the epicentre, and not the upper castes.

Of course, this conversation about casteism cannot end with the arrest of the three women. It must continue so that their right to existence as individual, autonomous human beings is restored. We must listen to and believe Bahujans when they raise issues of harassment. We must stand in solidarity and protest for stronger reforms and policies that protect Dalits from the terror of caste based institutional harassment, and not their oppressors. Rohit Vemula died because the so-called “meritorious” reduced him to his caste, but after his death they questioned whether he was really Dalit. They harassed Payal Tadvi for her caste, and now that she too is gone, they argue that she was simply depressed. We who love to assert ourselves as “meritorious” must stop arguing, protecting other upper castes, and listen—educate ourselves, and continue the

dialogue that people from lowered castes are extending. Otherwise, it is not going to be long before journalists report of and sensationalise another “Payal” or “Rohit”.

Neelima Mundayur, a second year undergraduate at FLAME University, Pune.



SPARROW ENTERED ITS SILVER JUBILEE YEAR IN DECEMBER 2013. IN ORDER TO CELEBRATE THIS WE HAD TAKEN A FEW INITIATIVES, ONE OF WHICH WAS TO ORGANISE CONVERSATIONS WITH WOMEN FROM VARIOUS WALKS OF LIFE.

The conversations can be viewed on the following links

Conversation with Kalyanee Mulay

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTxTDSOEWjKbERIPDZZpic6UzqVPzvZV>

Conversation with Vimmi Sadarangani & Puthiyamaadhavai

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTxTDSOEWjKbERIPDZZpic6UzqVPzvZV>

Conversation with Jhelum Paranjape

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTxTDSOEWjKbERIPDZZpic6UzqVPzvZV>

Conversation with Purvadhanashree & Ranjana Dave

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLGQe1I6sLySEIqqDvyKdruGkVUNqqqXIW>

Conversation with Sumathi Murthy

https://www.youtube.com/_playlist?list=PLGQe1I6sLySEIqqDvyKdruGkVUNqqqXIW

Conversation Sudha Arora

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4dB7gdoMgc>

YOU CAN ALSO VISIT SPARROW WEBSITE FOR MORE DETAILS ABOUT THE CONVERSATIONS

<http://www.sparrowonline.org/silver-jubilee.html>

MEMORIES OF AN ARCHIVAL TRIP

-Sharmila Sontakke

The archival trip Asmita Deshpande and I took up was in three parts and involved three different journeys to three different places. The first one was to Bangalore to take part in a workshop organised by the NCBS (National Centre of Biological Sciences) and the second was to Chennai to visit RMRL (Roja Muthiah Research Library) and to meet Chamki Raj, a lawyer, keen to archive with SPARROW the private papers of her mother Shajadi who had been active in The All India Women's Democratic Association (AIDWA) and the third was to Kharagpur to visit NDLI (National Digital Library of India) and acquaint ourselves with their digitisation project. We left Mumbai on 18th August 2019 and reached NCBS. On 19th and 20th we attended the Workshop on 'British Library: Archival Standards and Digitisation Workflows' organised by British Library and NCBS Archives. On the first day, Tom Derrick and Nicholas Moretto from British Library introduced participants to the South Asian Collection at British Library and major digitisation projects taken up by British Library. They also guided us on digitisation strategy and workflows.

In the afternoon session participants were told to form groups and each group was given an imaginary situation of an archives and told to present digitisation strategy best suited for that situation. The next day the sessions were on Accessibility, Metadata standards and OCR (Optical Character Recognition). They introduced us to a new OCR software called Tesseract, which reads Indian scripts. We also did a hands-on experiment on the software and were satisfied.

On both the days between two sessions they organised sessions called Lightning Sessions where the participants presented the archives they were representing. SPARROW was presented well by Asmita with a PPT. In these sessions we got to know about more than 30 other archives like the Indian Institute of Astrophysics and the Indian Music Experience, to name some of them, which were functioning in and around Bangalore and the different areas, themes and subjects their collections focus on.

On both the days after the workshop we visited the NCBS Archives. It is a new initiative which archives developments in the sphere of biological sciences in India. Though the archives is just a year or two old, the way the archives is organised and maintained by Venkat Srinivasan and his team, and the thorough manner of digitisation of each item, is worth seeing and learning from.

On 21st August we headed to Chennai where we reached around 2.30 in the afternoon. Our host Kirubanandan Srinivasan came to pick us up at the station. For the next four days we stayed in his house with him and his wife Gowri Kirubanandan, a SPARROW awardee, who has since become our friend and Chennai contact. Both of them hosted us with warmth.

On 22nd August we visited RMRL, which is trying to archive the history of Tamil language and culture and provide these materials to the research scholars of Tamil Studies. Mr. R Prakash, Documentation Officer, showed us the entire library with its different methods of stacking materials and different methods of preservation. He discussed with us about the library collection, library catalogue and the software they



Asmita Deshpande, Librarian from SPARROW presented SPARROW archival work with a powerpoint presentation at the Workshop on 'British Library: Archival Standards and Digitisation Workflows' organised by British Library and NCBS Archives, Bangalore.



National Digital Library,
IIT Kharagpur

Assistant Librarian,
Mr. Samrat Guha
Roy with
SPARROW Team at
Central Library, IIT,
Kharagpur

use for cataloguing. We also met and discussed with G Sundar, Director of RMRL. We finished our visit to RMRL in the afternoon; so as suggested by Prakash, we visited another library in Chennai, the Anna Centenary Library. It is a huge, 8-floor public library which is well-maintained and open to all.

On 23rd and 24th August 2019 we fixed the meeting with Chamki Raj, a practising lawyer, the daughter of Shajadi and Govindarajan, both of whom were active in the Communist Party and its various meetings, protests and marches. Chamki Raj had expressed a wish to give the private papers, photographs, newspaper articles of her mother to SPARROW for archiving as mentioned above. Her mother Shajadi had been President of AIDWA, South India Region. On the first day she got photocopies of the private papers of Shajadi which included letters, party notices and cards which belonged to her mother. She also spoke in detail about the work of her parents. The next day she brought photographs and newspaper articles. There were 37 photographs that she handed over to us. We went through the usual archival procedure of taking down the details of all the photographs and getting her signature on the copyright form.

The next day, 25th August, we took the flight from Chennai to Kolkata with a lot of eagerness to visit the NDLI, IIT, Kharagpur. At the Kolkata airport Dr C S Lakshmi and Pooja Pandey, our colleagues from SPARROW, joined us. It was a three-hour drive to Kharagpur and at Kharagpur NDLI had made very comfortable arrangements for our accommodation and food. When we got tired of the hostel food we went to Sahara, a nearby restaurant for some mouth-watering aloo ka paratha, ghee-dripping dal and spicy vegetables.

On the 26th August we visited NDLI, a project of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India, that is being developed by and housed at IIT, Kharagpur. We met Nanda

Gopal Chattopadhyay, the Chief Technical Officer of NDLI, who explained to us the aim and working methods of NDLI. Two types of professional experts—Computer Science and Library Science—work in tandem at the NDLI. We got to know how they work together. When an organisation or an individual send their digital content with the metadata to NDLI for sharing, the library science experts filter and modify the metadata as per NDLI standards and computer science experts put the metadata along with the actual content or its link on their server.

Later we visited the Central Library, IIT, Kharagpur, being the first IIT in India, it has a huge library with a large collection and separate departments to process the library materials. We visited all the departments and officials in charge of the various departments explained to us the workflow of the departments.

In the afternoon we paid a visit to an interactive science museum in IIT and the Hijli prison where freedom fighters had been detained, the site and its surrounding area which later became the location for IIT, Kharagpur. After that we took a tour around the entire massive IIT campus.

Next day we went again to NDLI to meet Suparna Chaudhuri, who explained to us about the kind of material an organisation can share with NDLI. After the official trip got over, in the evening we went to see the river Subarnarekha and the bridge constructed on it, which has become a tourist spot, and the garden nearby.

Next day began with the drive to Kolkata. On the way we first visited two temples and then headed towards the airport to start our return journey. At the airport we ate sondesh and mishti dahi to our hearts' content. We landed in Mumbai at 7.45 p.m. So ended a very fruitful trip where we learnt a lot about archiving and could also share our own archival experiences.



NO MORE SEWING MACHINES!

TWO POINTS OF VIEW OF A FEMINIST MEMORY WORKSHOP AND OTHER EVENTS

-Katharina Hoffman & C S Lakshmi

Image on the cover of the exhibition catalogue "The World of Maya" on the cartoonist Maya Kamath (1951-2001), © SPARROW.



Feminist Memory Work in India and Germany

A workshop of Medienbüro/Cine K and the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Women and Gender (ZFG) at Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg with Dr C S Lakshmi, SPARROW, Mumbai, India & Dr Sruti Bala, SPARROW Advisory Committee, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands, as well as representatives of Women's and Lesbians' Archives and Centres in Germany.

Dr Katharina Hoffman, Retired lecturer, Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg and Independent Researcher in History and Gender Studies

Dr Katharina Hoffman

The workshop "No more Sewing Machines! Feminist Memory Work in India and Germany" took place in Oldenburg, a city with over 160,000 citizens in northwest Germany. It takes a half hour drive from Bremen Airport to the city, the Dutch border in the west is about 80 kilometres away. The history and present of the city refers mainly to its function as administrative centre in agricultural and horticultural surroundings. The university has a young history; it was founded in 1973 and named after Carl von Ossietzky (1889–1938), who was a journalist and pacifist. Ossietzky was detained in the concentration camp Esterwegen, which was built approximately 71 kilometres west south from Oldenburg, also not far away from the Dutch border (<https://www.gedenkstaette-esterwegen.de/english>). In 1935, Ossietzky received "The Nobel Peace Prize" (<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1935/ossietzky/biographical>). He died in 1938 from the effects of tuberculosis and the mistreatments in the concentration camp Esterwegen. Naming the university after Ossietzky aimed at stressing the social responsibility of teaching and research. About 16,000

students attend the university, which provides a variety of study programmes among them women's and gender studies. Its *Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Women and Gender* was founded in 2000 (<https://uol.de/en/zfg>). The centre was one of the organisers of the workshop, the other being the NGO *Medienbüro* (media office). The organisation runs the art film cinema *Cine K* in Oldenburg. The organisation provides not only a venue for film screenings, it also organises film series, retrospectives, workshops and special film screenings for pupils and students. The main goal of its work is the initiation of encounter, conversation and discussion between different people and groups living in Oldenburg.

The workshop that took place on 29 and 30 June 2019, aimed at introducing SPARROW to a German audience and discuss with representatives from German women's and lesbians' archives the differences and similarities of the past and present of feminist memory work in both countries. Feminist memory work gained relevance in both countries since the so-called second wave of women's movements. In both countries women's archives, libraries and other forms



C S Lakshmi introducing SPARROW to the group.

of organisations for feminist memory work were often founded by women activists who had collected documents and conducted interviews with women of diverse social and cultural walks of life for writing women's history and/or distributing knowledge of this largely silenced past in order to empower women. Materials of women's perspectives have been rarely stored in state or community archives. The documents, which are stored there, usually represent governmental perceptions and interpretations of social lives and movements. Thus, archival work and active programmes to distribute knowledge and raise consciousness about the varieties of women's life in past and present is still an important task. Nevertheless, it seems to be important to discuss the challenges of archival work against the background of changed political, social and economic contexts as well as different perspectives, ideas, concepts and programmes of feminist memory work within and beyond a particular society.

The workshop started with a short introduction of the workshop's content, aims and the representatives of organisations by me. The modus of communication during the workshop was English and German. Thanks to Dr Sruti Bala's language skills, main parts of the presentations could be translated from German to English and vice versa. She also impressed the audience by explaining and giving an example of playing the tabla. Sruti, currently in the teaching faculty of the University of Amsterdam, was invited to the workshop as member of SPARROW's Advisory Committee. Dr C S Lakshmi introduced SPARROW's work to the audience on 29th June, Saturday afternoon and evening. She gave an overview of SPARROW's archival and educational work as well as its founding concept. In particular, attention was paid to SPARROW's audio-visual productions as films have been not in the focus of German organisations of feminist

memory work and the workshop was conducted with support of the art film cinema. Lakshmi presented and commented on sequences of conversations produced for SPARROW's Silver Jubilee. This was followed by a public film screening of *Ten Women, Ten Lives, Ten Concerns*, the 45-minute version from 2006 with excerpts from all ten interviews that were conducted during the project *Global Feminisms* done in collaboration with the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Michigan. This film was chosen as it shows a variety of women's life and different kinds of activism. The comments of the spectators during the conversation after the screening showed that the film offers a good introduction into aspects of women's active lives and gender issues in India and that it inspired a meaningful conversation. Thus, such visual representations help to challenge images of Indian women as helpless victims, who have to be saved by white men and women.

On Sunday, the following organisations introduced their concept and work: the Lesbians' Archive in Frankfurt, FemRef, a students' organisation and the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Women and Gender at Carl von Ossietzky University, the Centre for Women's History in Oldenburg and the Archive of the Opposition to the GDR, founded by the Robert-Havemann Society, which is the largest and most significant amongst the so-called 'reappraisal archives'. Part of its collection is what is called the Grau Zone Women's Archives with documents and photographs and other material on the women's movement in East Germany, the former German Democratic Republic. Unfortunately, the person who was to represent the archive and library of Belladonna, a women's organisation in Bremen, fell ill and could not present the work. In other words, archival work as core element of feminist memory work could not be presented from different angles. The skills of the other organisations touched issues of distributing knowledge by exhibition projects, lectures or guided tours, providing particular aspects of knowledge about the history of women including gender and queer history and perspectives by collections of books or material mostly outside but also inside academia. The work of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Women and Gender differs in so far as archival work (collecting, storing and making accessible) is not part of research or teaching although research on gender history and women's history requires good archival work. Moreover, from the histories presented it was clear that the centre in the university of Oldenburg was founded later than the local organisation outside the academia, which had made women's history visible through its various activities.

The workshop was announced nationwide in newsletters and platforms as well as locally by flyers and posters. Yet,

only a few people attended the workshop. Therefore, the discussions and exchanges of ideas did not reach a broad audience. It is always difficult to find out the reasons why an event attracts people and why it does not. I enjoyed spending time with Lakshmi and Sruti and appreciated very much learning about different perspectives.

C S Lakshmi, Director SPARROW

When Katharina Hoffmann was here in Mumbai as a Visiting Professor in the Department of German in the University of Mumbai plans for this collaborative workshop were made by both of us. During my previous visit to Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg, on the invitation of Dr Lydia Potts, Working Group Migration-Gender-Politics-European Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations, in 2015, I had associated with Dr Katharina Hoffmann and enjoyed our association which had led to many discussions and exchange of ideas. The 2019 workshop we planned for two days in the last week of June actually began much earlier when we went to the

the Belladonna archives in Bremen. It was an archives situated in a nice locality in a beautiful house which I later came to know belonged to one of the trustees. We met **M o n i k a** Brunnmüller, who was supposed to represent Belladonna archives in the workshop planned. It was good we visited the archives for she could not come



Monika Brunnmüller in charge of the Belladonna Archives, Bremen.

for the workshop and share the work of her archives. Belladonna is a centre for women's culture, education and economics and was founded in Bremen in 1986. It has one of the largest archives on women's issues in the German-speaking region. Speaking with Monika and going around the well-maintained archives with newspaper clippings, private papers, films, books other material was a good experience. Lydia Potts could not be part of the workshop but she organised a talk of mine a day before the workshop in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Women and Gender,

one of the organisers of the workshop, at the University of Oldenburg, on Literature and Translation. Professor Sheila Meintjes, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, who has been a visiting scholar at the University of Oldenburg for some decades, introduced me and a young intern from South Africa, Tinyiko Sithole, had been asked to read my "Squirrel" story as it had to do with books, archives and women. Tinyiko read one paragraph with great difficulty stumbling over words like Urvashi and then I asked her to relax and told the story to those who were there. Not all of them were students of the Centre; some of them were friends of students and some had come from other departments. A good discussion ensued and even those who were not into reading stories took part in the discussion.

The Feminist Memory Workshop had been aptly named "No More Sewing Machines!" by Dr Katharina Hoffmann who had taken the term from an article I had written some years ago on how development programmes did not try to take women out of their traditional roles. Katharina Hoffmann had planned the workshop with two of her young colleagues Pia Wienholt and Katrin Windheuser. The other participants who were going to make presentations were Professor Sheila Meintjes and Tinyiko Sithole, the young intern, and Karin Weber from the Lesbian Archive in Frankfurt, Rebecca

Hernandez Garcia from the Robert Havemann Society to make a presentation on the Grau Zone part of the Robert Havemann Society's Archive of the Opposition to the GDR, Lou Kordts of the FemRef, a students' organisation at the University of Oldenburg and Regina Engel from the Centre for Women's History in Oldenburg. SPARROW, of course was being represented by me and Dr Sruti



C S Lakshmi with Rebecca Hernandez Garcia, in charge of the Grau Zone, the Robert Havemann Society's Archive of the Opposition to the GDR, Berlin.

Bala, our Advisory Committee member and a friend and well-wisher of SPARROW. Unfortunately, but for the participants themselves there were no other students or researchers who attended the workshop. One or two who came left after a while as they had other projects to do. Katharina and I thought it would be a good idea to pep up the group



L to R: Professor Sheila Meintjes, Johannesburg, SA, Regina Engel, Dr Lucyna Dąbowska, C S Lakshmi, Elke Koltermann, Oldenburg, Katharina Hoffmann and Sruti Bala.

if we start with Sruti Bala inaugurating the workshop with some mnemonic syllables (*bol*) of tabla as she is a tabla player. Sruti sportingly agreed and the first day sessions began with Sruti presenting tabla *bol*s and explaining them.

The workshop thus became an intimate discussion with a small group as many had not turned up. And what became obvious in the presentations and the discussions (which Sruti Bala ably translated into English and German whenever it was needed) was that all of them committed as they were to the work which they were doing voluntarily, had set up documentation centres in the heat of the eighties which they were still managing and that these were really not archives. Their experiences of how they functioned were very interesting but some of the experiences evoked laughter and were told in good humour but had a tinge of sadness. Karin Weber, for example, goes around with a rollator walker and has health problems and is the only one running the Lesbian Archive in Frankfurt, which is really a space full of non-catalogued books and other materials. She was not computer savvy she said, and had worked hard to prepare a PPT for the workshop and spoke humourously about the experience of creating a logo for her archives when they participated in the anti-war protests in the US, taking images from the web and photo-shopping those images to create a logo. She said she would like to digitise all the archival materials but needed funding to buy a professional scanner. She was the only one managing the Lesbian Archive. The experience of Regina Engel of Centre for Women's History in Oldenburg was somewhat similar. Despite programmes to organise tours etc., the Centre had been unable to interest young people in its management. She had been there from the beginning but was the only one now managing it and was not sure of its future. Lou Kordts, a transwoman from FemRef, the students' organisation at the University of Oldenburg, spoke about how they had got together and collected many books

which spoke about alternate sexuality and how the books have now become part of the main library. Compared to these experiences the work of SPARROW which had been set up around the same time seemed more organised and professional and truly archival. It was much appreciated but Katharina Hoffmann felt that a critical engagement with the work of SPARROW and that of others would have been more fruitful. The most interesting presentation was made by Rebecca Garcia on the Grau Zone (Gray Zone) women's archives which is now part of GDR Opposition Archives, in Berlin. It is an archives with material like secret documents, letters, surveys and interviews with women from East Germany brought after the Berlin wall came down. I visited the archives in Berlin later details of which I give below.

The public screening of SPARROW'S film *Ten women, Ten Lives, Ten Concerns* on the first day went very well and there was good interaction. Where the workshop itself is concerned, despite it being a small group the discussions and presentations were going well with lunch breaks and tea breaks becoming extended time for discussions. Pia Wienholt's mother had prepared an excellent pumpkin soup for everyone and with sandwiches and fruits and other snacks we began to look forward to the lunch breaks on both the days! On the second and last day we had just begun the afternoon session which was to last till the evening to wrap up all the sessions when Karin Weber made a comment that transwomen were taking away the public spaces lesbians and others had fought for. She was referring to the use of women's toilets by the transwomen. The comment infuriated Lou who felt that this was not a safe place for her to be as she was being attacked and she left abruptly bringing the entire discussion to a halt. Karin's comment and her walkout surprised me coming from India because we are used to transwomen travelling in the ladies' compartments in the local trains in Mumbai and other places and using ladies' toilets with no objection from other women. The walkout upset everybody and Pia and I went looking for Lou but she had disappeared. We did the wrapping up after we had collected ourselves from this sudden disruption, and it went well. I had taken what we call in Tamil Nadu, a *ponnadai*, a silk shawl, as a gesture of honouring Katharina Hoffmann and Sruti Bala put it around her and we had some more excellent tea and biscuits to wind up the whole workshop.

I left the next day for the University of Marburg taking a ride with Karin Weber (more of this later in another write-up) for a SPARROW Workshop organised by Professor Susanne Maurer so that I could interact with feminist colleagues from different faculties regarding the work of SPARROW and also get to know about their own work. Dr Susanne Maurer herself had been a co-founder and long-

time co-chair of a feminist archive in the south of Germany (in the city of Tübingen), and during the 1990s she was also involved in the network of feminist archives in the German-speaking countries (later known as i.d.a., an umbrella organisation, which contains 40 German-language lesbian/women's libraries, archives and documentation centres from Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg and Italy, whose purpose is to collect, preserve and show lesbian and women's history). She was currently working with colleagues from different countries on the topic of transformative processes within and mediated by social movements and political activism. She was professor for social pedagogy in the faculty of education (since 2004) and also one of the committed volunteers of the Centre for Gender Studies and Feminist Future Research. The public screening organised on the first evening of SPARROW's film *Degham* was very well received by a large group of students from different departments who patiently watched the entire film of more than two hours. The next day when the actual interdisciplinary workshop on the subject "Which archive and memory is needed in Gender Studies?" took place there were only four of us! Two were Dr Susanne Maurer's students Julia Korell who had very efficiently done the coordination along with her colleague Jacob and another was a researcher who came in for a while. This became another intimate discussion between Susanne Maurer and me. Susanne Maurer spoke about her own work on feminist memory while I made a presentation on SPARROW and its work. It was a pity that the large audience of students that was there for the film was not there for this discussion.

The trip to Berlin and the visit to the Robert Havemann Archives on the 4th of July made up for some of the disappointments in both the workshops. The Robert Havemann Archives in which is also the Grau Zone (Gray Zone Women's Archives) is in the eastern side of Berlin. It is a four-floor building with an underground vault of books, posters, photographs and objects like t-shirts the prisoners wore which Rebecca Garcia said would take fifty years to catalogue! The material catalogued from the Gray Zone itself is about 1/3 of the entire material of private papers, secret surveys, meetings, posters, photographs and other documents. So much of material apart from audio interviews done to tell the dark tale of communist rule in GDR.

The workshops in Oldenburg and Marburg and the later visit to the Grau Zone Archives in Robert Havemann Archives made possible by Rebecca Garcia who was a participant in the Oldenburg workshop, were, on the whole, very fruitful in terms of knowing about where the documentation and archiving work with regard to women's history and women's movement is heading and there were those wonderful trips

to Bremen and trips within Hamburg that Katharina and I thoroughly enjoyed together. About what more happened in Berlin and later in Amsterdam, I will have to write another long essay later!

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From A Rill to a Mighty River: Vijaya Mulay (16 May 1921-19 May 2019)



It was in the year 1974 that many of us saw the animation film *Ek Anek Aur Ekta* telecast by Films Division and began to hum the song written by Vinaychandra Maudralya and composed by Vasant Desai, *Suraj ek, chanda ek, tare anek* (A sun, a moon and many stars) which begins with the foreword *Ham sabi ek hai, basha anek hai* (We

are all one but our languages are many) and ends with the afterword *Phool hai anek kintu mala sirf ek hai* (Flowers are many but the garland is just one). One was familiar with the name Vijaya Mulay and her activities as an educationist and her association with the Federation of Film Societies, and also just a year before her documentary film *The Tidal Bore* had won much acclaim. But this first animation educational film is how Vijaya Mulay came into the drawing rooms of middle-class families and municipal and other schools. In the book she wrote *From Rajahs and Yogis to Gandhi and Beyond: India in International Cinema*, in which Vijaya Mulay tries to find out what excites foreign filmmakers about India, she writes in the introduction that her book project began as a rill and took the shape of a mighty river, similar to Ganges. Although she speaks of the book as the journey of a film buff one could say the metaphor of rill and river might as well be referring to her own life. From being a private student in Patna University, she went to Leeds and avidly watched international films. She returned to actively take part in film societies and later became joint secretary with Chidanand Das Gupta of the Federation of Film Societies. The President was Satyajit Ray. She was the Presiding Officer in the Film Censor Board for five years. Her association with Satyajit Ray and Louis Malle, the French filmmaker became a lifelong one. She was honoured with the V Shantaram Award for Lifetime Achievement for documentaries at the Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) in 2002. Although she was associated with cinema and made documentaries it is as a person who combined education and film technology that many like us remember her. And the name Vijaya Mulay always prompts us to hum the song *Suraj ek, chanda ek, tare anek* and the visual of a little girl drawing the map of India on a piece of paper always comes along with the song.

—C S Lakshmi

Dying in the Mountains: Kalpana Dash (7 July 1966-23 May 2019)



Kalpana was a lawyer from Orissa but her passion was to climb mountains. Not just any mountain but the Mount Everest. She scaled Mount Everest in 2008 as a member of a team of five from different countries. It must have been a dream come true for she had tried twice before in 2004 and 2006 and had failed because the weather was bad and her own

health was not in the best condition for mountain climbing. Her family encouraged her in her ambition to scale Mount Everest and she succeeded in 2008. She had also scaled several peaks in India, Nepal, South America, Australia and Europe. She summited Mount Kilimanjaro (East Africa) in 2014 and in the year 2015 she scaled three mountains: Mount Aconcagua (South America), Mount Elbrus (Europe) and Mount Kosciuszko (Australia). On 23rd May 2019 she made it to the summit once again but became ill while descending due to the traffic jam of climbers at what is called the 'death zone' and died just above what is called Everest's balcony area. It is reported that the Nepal government issued far too many permits in the current spring climbing season and that the small window of suitable weather before the short season ended had created bottlenecks of hundreds of climbers. It is a pity that Kalpana chose this season to climb Mount Everest which she had already scaled once. She reached the summit this time too but lost her life on her way back. Befitting the life of an adventurous mountaineer that she was, her last breath mingled with the air in the mountain that she had scaled for the second time.

—C S Lakshmi

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A Tireless Activist: Saudamini Rao (19 September 1933-29 May 2019)



In the eighty-six years that she lived Saudamini Rao covered many areas of activity. She was an educationist, a journalist and a much admired activist. Daughter of Professor G B Sardar who was a well-known writer and researcher, she taught economics for more than thirty years. She had

done research on women workers and the industrial environment in the electronic industries in Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad for her PhD and throughout her life she never let her interest in the issues of women flag at any point of time. She was editor of *Bayaja*, a women's magazine. She was also the founder member of Stree Mukti Andolan Sampark Samiti. She worked on several important women's issues like the Mathura rape case, dowry and anti-alcohol activities. She was honoured with the Maharashtra Foundation (America) award and the Dr Babasahab Ambedkar Journalist Award for her work. SPARROW has an interview of hers done by Dr Neera Desai in 1991, as a part of its oral history collections.

Waqt Ki Awaz: Ruma Guha Thakurta / Ruma Ghosh (21 November 1934-3 June 2019)



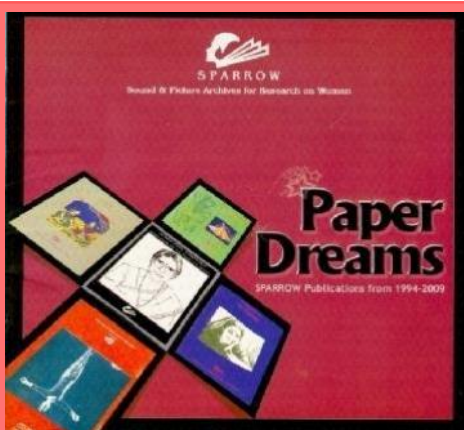
Waqt ki awaz hai Milke Chalo (It is the voice of time, walk together) was one of the Hindi songs that Calcutta Youth Choir was famous for. The CYC was set up in the year 1958 by Salil Chowdhury, Ruma Guha Thakurta and Satyajit Ray, Ruma's maternal aunt Bijoya Ray's husband. Vinayak

Lohani in his homage to Ruma Guha Thakurta in *The Wire*, says that till then, secular choir singing was almost unknown in India. Under Ruma's direction the CYC became one of the leading youth choir groups. From 1958 to 2004 when Ruma's husband passed away and she had a heart attack, it had continuously performed for 55 years and had done some 18 recordings. CYC's presentation of Bhupen Hazarika's song "Ganga" is considered an extremely imaginative interpretation of the song.

The year 1958 was an important one for Ruma for that was the year she separated from Kishore Kumar, the legendary singer and it was the same year that she set up the CYC which gave her a larger purpose in life. She married writer-director Arup Guha Thakurta in 1960 and with the stability the relationship gave her, her singing career flourished. Ruma was an actor and a singer born into an artistic family. Her mother Sati Devi was a singer. Her father was Satyen Ghosh. Her aunts were also extremely talented vocal artistes. As a young girl she learnt dance and later went to Almora Academy of Uday Shakar at Lahore to start her career as a dancer. Her parents had established a music school Swarabitan, and she also learnt music there. Later she trained under Abdul Rehman Khan of Patiala gharana, the Ustad of Nirmla Devi and Lakshmi Shankar in Bombay. At the age of 10 she acted in Amiya Chakravarty's *Jwar Bhata* (High Tide, 1944). This was followed by many other films like Nitin Bose's *Mashaal* (Torch, 1950) in Hindi adapted from Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel *Rajani*. This film was also made in Bengali. Later she produced the film *Benarasi* in 1962 which her husband directed, with Soumitra Chatterjee as hero, in which she did the role of a dancer. In all she acted in some 45 films and was a playback singer for more than ten films.

She leaves behind a rich legacy of music for her children and the music world. Her son Amit Kumar and her daughter

—C S Lakshmi



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Sromona from her second marriage will carry forward her legacy of music. But the music world will miss an indefatigable woman who brought choir singing to Bengali and Hindi following the footsteps of Salil Chowdhury and kept it alive all her life.

—C S Lakshmi

A Woman Who Got Into Guinness Book of Records: Vijaya Nirmala / Nidudavolu Nirmala (20 February 1946-27 June 2019)



Vijaya Nirmala began her acting career very early in life as a seven-year-old girl when she acted in the film *Machcha Rekai* (The Lucky Mole on the Finger, 1950). She acted in many Tamil films with all the prominent Tamil heroes of her times like Sivaji Ganesan, M. G. R. and Muthuraman. Although she has acted in more than 200 films in Tamil,

Telugu and Malayalam languages she is better known for the 44 films that she directed which got her into the Guinness Book of Records. Apart from the Guinness Book of Records achievement, her name is immediately associated by the Tamil filmgoer with the “Elanthai pazham” song full of double entendres that she enacted in the film *Panama Pasama* (Wealth or Affection? 1968) She was born in Tamil Nadu into a film producing Nidudavolu family. She also acted in T V productions like *Pelli Kanuka* (Wedding Gift) produced by Balaji Telefilms. She had a banner of her own, Vijaya Krishna Movies and produced some 15 films. Her son Naresh from her first marriage to Krishnamurthi, is also an actor. Her second husband was her co-star Krishna Ghattamaneni (father of current Telugu super star Mahesh Babu) with whom she starred in 47 films. In 2008, she received the Raghupathi Venkaiah Award for her contributions to Telugu cinema. In the 73 years of her life Vijaya Nirmala made significant contributions to popular cinema, Telugu cinema in particular.

—C S Lakshmi

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

Thana Margam: Abburi Chayadevi (13 October 1933-28 June 2019)



In 1967, when we entered the Indian Council of World Affairs library in Sapru House as PhD students of Indian School of International Studies, later to become a part of Jawaharlal Nehru University, there were two librarians who were always smiling and ever ready to help us out and solve all our problems and answer all our queries. One was Mrs. Andrade and the other was Chayadevi. I never knew that she was a Telugu writer and many years later when we met as writers I reminded her about her Sapru House days but she did not remember me as a student. But I am sure not a single student of those years will forget her and her warmth. Friends in the Telugu literary field say that her room in her Kondapur home, filled with her own paintings and decorations, retained this warmth of her personality. Apart from writing some of the finest stories, which were sensitive studies of the everyday experiences of women, she also translated from German. She was editor of *Vanitha* monthly for a while. Her husband Abburi Varadarajeswara Rao was also a well-known writer and critic. She jointly edited the magazine *Kavita*, a quarterly devoted to free verse, with her husband. She also tried her hand in poetry. Her poem *Vinnaava* was published in *Andhra Jyoti* and later was included in the *Neelimeghalu* (Blue Clouds) edited by Volga. Her father-in-law Abburi Ramakrishna, was a pioneer initially of the romantic and later the progressive literary movement. She was honoured with several awards like the Ranganayakamma Pratibha Puraskaram, 1993, Rachayitri Uttama Rachana Puraskaram, 1996, for her autobiographical novel *Mrityunjaya*, Sushila Narayana Sahiti Award, 1996, and Telugu University Award, 1996. She won the Sahitya Akademi Award in Telugu for the Year 2005, for her short story collection *Tana Margam* (Her Own Way). And true to the convictions of her life she wrote in her will that her eyes must be donated and that her body must be donated for medical studies. She gave this responsibility to Satyavati Kondaveeti of the Bhumika Women's Collective whom she considered her daughter.

SPARROW is grateful to her for allowing us to record a long interview with her and publishing it along with a story in our *Sweeping the Front Yard* volume of translated stories.

—C S Lakshmi

Working for the Cause of Poor Women: Jaya Arunachalam (8 February 1935-29 June 2019)



In Chennai, Bheemasena Garden Road in Mylapore was synonymous with Jaya Arunachalam in the seventies. Jaya Arunachalam had plunged into the task of working for the welfare of marginalised women. She was a pioneer in micro-finance and in organising poor working women and providing them with seed

capital as micro credit, with assistance from banks, to start their own small businesses. Evaluation reports on Working Women's Forum (WWF) mentioned how the credit programme of WWF reached the poorest of poor women in the informal sector. Individual empowerment apart from changing their lives also changed their perceptions. U Kalpagam, Professor, G B Pant Social Science Institute, talks about how a collective consciousness was created: "Earlier they perceived their own oppressions or unhappy experiences as something personal and unique to themselves, now they are able to share their own experiences in the wider milieu of a class, caste and patriarchal society. This is because of the "collective consciousness" that promoted these women to do so." And Dr U Kalpagam considers this the most noteworthy aspect of WWF. Jaya Arunachalam wrote about her experience in the book *Women's Equality: A Struggle for Survival*.

Jaya Arunachalam was born into a Brahmin family in Tamil Nadu and studied for a master's degree in Economics and Geography. She had six sisters but at the age of 20, she defied her family to marry a person from a Chettiar family and since then inter-caste marriage has been a cause close to her heart. It took her family two decades to accept her. She was an active Congress Party worker in the time of Kamraj but when she was in her forties she felt that she must create a grassroot movement with the goal of poverty alleviation. That is how the idea for WWF was created in 1978. There are more than 1.2 million women now who are part of WWF spread across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The movement spread because Jaya Arunachalam diligently chose hawkers, fisherwomen, lace industry workers and many others in the informal sector and provided them loans and raised the level of their every day existence. Apart from giving them money she also made them self sufficient by educating and training them in their respective trades. WWF has also taken up other causes through its wings Indian Co-operative Network for Women, and National Union of

Working Women. While WWF provides loans with low interests the wing organisations take up other causes of women like female foeticide, female infanticide, child prostitution and child labour. With this massive successful grassroot movement Jaya Arunachalam earned the honour to be the first woman from South Asia to sit on the governing council of the Society for International Development, Rome. Many awards came her way like the Global Leadership Award for Economic Development from Vital Voices, International Activist Award (2003) from the Gliestman Foundation, California, and the Rashtriya Ekta Award from the National Awareness Forum, India. She received the Padma Shri in 1987. She received the Jamnalal Bajaj Award in 2009. In 2010, she was chosen for the Social Lifetime Achievement Award in the Godfrey Philips National Bravery Awards. Her life was a life well spent for the cause of poor women for whom she worked tirelessly educating them, making them capable of fighting for their rights and existence. Her daughter Dr Nandini Azad, currently the President of Indian Co-Operative Network for Women, would carry on the work of Jaya Arunachalam.

—C S Lakshmi

The Longest Serving Chief Minister: Sheila Dikshit (31 March 1938-20 July 2019)



For a long time Sheila Dikshit's name was synonymous with Delhi. When one talks of development of Delhi it is difficult not to mention Sheila Dikshit. Improving public transport and dealing with pollution by

introducing buses powered by compressed natural gas (CNG) have been seen as her achievements. One of the longest serving Chief Ministers of Delhi who was the Chief Minister thrice since 1998, she belonged to the Congress Party. She had been active in fighting for women's rights and justice and was instrumental in setting up two working women's hostels in Delhi in the seventies. Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, impressed with her administrative skills, had nominated Sheila Dikshit as an Indian delegate of the United Nations Commission on the issue of status of women. This became her entry into politics. She was one of the people Rajiv Gandhi specially chose to be in his council of ministers when he became Prime Minister in 1984. From

1984-89 she represented Kannauj parliamentary constituency of Uttar Pradesh. As a member of Parliament, she served on the Estimates Committee of Lok Sabha. She was also the secretary of the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust. Apart from praise for transformation of New Delhi as a city she also faced her share of criticism. Her granting parole to Manu Sharma who had murdered Jessica Lal who was convicted for a life sentence, came in for much criticism. In 2010, she was also allegedly accused by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of corruption related to Commonwealth Games held in the same year. She resigned in 2013. Her stint as Governor of Kerala which began in March 2014 lasted only five months.

She was honoured with many awards for her hard work. The Journalist Association of India awarded her the Best Chief Minister of India award in 2008. In 2009, NDTV gave her the Politician of the Year award. The Indo-Iran Society gave her the Dara Shikoh award in 2010. The All Ladies League (ALL) founded by Dr Harbeen Arora, chose her for the Outstanding Public Service Award for its Women of the Decade Achievers Award in 2013. In her acceptance speech, however, Sheila Dikshit did not speak about her public service experiences but spoke about a woman's role as a mother and a homemaker: "The most important work is rearing a family because this makes the future of a country," she said. "I am proud to be a woman and I am proud of all the women who work without being recognised. And I am receiving this award on behalf of all those women," and added, "The 21st century will be the century of the women of the world. Today society needs love and compassion more than anything else. Nothing can compensate the contribution of a woman as a mother, wife, sister and daughter." Maybe for her, looking back on her life, her activities as a politician became secondary to her role as a woman in the family. Nevertheless Sheila Dikshit remained an active political player in the Congress Party and was instrumental in putting energy back into the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) in 2018, by settling differences with DPCC chief Ajay Maken and forming what can be called a united front to take on Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

Working for Rural Women & Underprivileged Students: Nirmalatai Purandare (5 January 1933-20 July 2019)



Nirmalatai was the founder of Vanasthali Rural Development Centre (VRDC) which worked for rural women and child development. Her main concern was to educate children and women in rural areas. In 2015, Continental Prakashan brought out a book *Atmasiddhi: Nirmalatai Purandare*

Ani Mission Vanasthali Chi Charitkatha by Manik Kotwal. To make education possible for the students all through she also founded the Vidyarthi Sahayak Samiti, which provides lodging and boarding facilities at a nominal cost to students from the economically weaker sections of society coming to Pune to pursue higher education. She was also instrumental in setting up over 250 'balwadis' (pre-school) in Maharashtra. She was married to historian, writer and novelist Balwant Moreshwar Purandare popularly known as Babasaheb Purandare who is 97 years old and survives her. She has a daughter Madhuri and two sons, Prasad and Amrut. She was honoured with the Adishakti and Savitribai Award for her social and educational contributions. Nirmalatai worked for the underprivileged almost all her life and not only her own children but all those to whom she opened the doors to education will miss her presence in their lives.

—C S Lakshmi

—C S Lakshmi

Congratulations!

SPARROW Congratulates Annie Zaidi, journalist and playwright for winning the Nine Dots Prize-2019 for her essay book *Bread, Cement, Cactus*.

Happy to Share!

Congratulations!



SPARROW Congratulates Deepa Mallik for winning the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award 2019 for Para Athletics. She is the first Indian woman to win a medal in Paralympic Games

Sahityaratna of Sri Lanka: Jean Arasanayagam (2 December 1931-30 July 2019)



Jean Arasanayagam's name is a much respected one in Sri Lanka as a poet and fiction writer. She belonged to a Dutch Burgher family and got her M.Litt in Literary Linguistics from the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. Writing about her in *The Wire*, Susan Haris says that she was "a deeply sensitive investigator of identity" and that hers was a "lifetime's search for an identity." Susan Haris adds that Jean Arasanayagam "straddled multiple heritages in her poetry and sought to chart a cartographic course that would transcend ethno-nationalist boundaries. She was born Jean Solomons into a Dutch Burgher family, an ethnic minority of Dutch origin who had married Sri Lankan women. The Dutch Burghers enjoyed wealth and social privilege in colonial Sri Lanka. Acutely aware of this former inheritance of privilege, she was nevertheless fascinated by the non-indigenous culture that had shaped her upbringing." Writing on gender, relationships and ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, she taught English at various institutions in Sri Lanka. She also took part in several literary programmes like being a fellow in the Creative Activities of the International Writing Programme at the University of Iowa in 1990 and a Visiting Fellow at Exeter University, UK, in the Faculty of Arts. Married to a Tamilian writer-painter-playwright, Thiagarajah Arasanayagam, she has received the Sahityaratna award of the Sri Lankan government in September 2017 and received the Premchand Fellowship of the Sahitya Akademi, India, for her lifetime contributions in 2014 and Gratiaen prize, the most prestigious award for Sri Lankan writing in English, for her poetry collection *The Life of the Poet*. Jean Arasanayagam's poetry legacy will be continued in Sri Lanka for as she said in one of her poems, poets are part of this embattled world and they will continue to survive: "The poet too is then, a survivor/ Bombed out, shelterless, dispossessed, diploid by history/ By powerful regimes, by repressive measures to silence you."

—C S Lakshmi

We thank all our trustees and advisors who reposed immense faith in our efforts which has made it possible for us to spread our wings. They continue to stand by us. We also thank our funders, donors, supporters, well-wishers, friends and many more who have supported us in many ways.

Choosing to Be An Educationist: Rajalakshmi Parthasarathy (8 November 1925-6 August 2019)



Also known as Rashmi or just Mrs Y.G.P, linked to her husband YG Parthasarathy, a playwright and dramatist, Rajalakshmi Parthasarathy was born into an affluent and educated family and she completed her graduation in journalism from the University of Madras in 1947. She did her

Master's in History and also completed her MEd from the same university. She worked as a journalist for a while in *The Hindu* and was also associated with the Tamil weekly *Kumudam* for a while. She could have continued her life thus but she made a different choice. In 1958, she started a school in a shed on her terrace along with members of the Nungambakkam Ladies Recreation Club with just 13 students, which later became the Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan and then a senior secondary school. The school is known as a school that encouraged its students to think differently and Rajalakshmi Parthasarathy herself is seen as an icon of culture. However there have been those who have seen her as being brahminical and a saffron agent and an iron lady who ruled over a bastion of brahminism that brainwashed tons of young minds to embrace brahminical values. Despite such criticisms, Rajalakshmi Parthasarathy's death brought forth many responses from old students and acquaintances about how she inspired them to be different. Writing about her in RITZ on August 7, 2019, Vidya Pinto, who has been associated with PSBB, calls her a torchbearer who lit a flame in many hearts. She writes that the 'Research Science Initiative', a month long annual summer camp for select school students at IIT Madras, to understand and explore what science has in store for them, was her brainchild. And it was she who thought of introducing extra mural lectures in the evenings, to lessen the academic rigour. Not just that; she was the first one to think of a Movie Appreciation Course where students could watch classics and later write about them. Rajalakshmi did receive many awards she richly deserved like the Padma Shri in 2010, 'Achievement Medal for Leadership and Commitment to Excellence in Education' by the U.S-based Center for Excellence in Education, and the 'Vayoshreshtha Samman' award from the Government of India and also Paul Harris Fellow Award by the Rotary Club of Madras. But the real reward for her work came when Sanjay Pinto, a lawyer, columnist and public speaker and former bureau chief and resident editor at NDTV 24x7 and

executive editor at NDTV Hindu, tweeted that Lake 1st Main Road where PSBB is situated must be renamed Dr Mrs.YGP Road, and many called it a fitting gesture.

—C S Lakshmi

The One Who Was Sushma: Sushma Swaraj (14 February 1952-6 August 2019)



According to the Sanskrit dictionary Sushma is an ancient word that belongs to Sanskrit language and references to the word can be found in both Rig and Atharva Vedas where it means rushing of water, fire, the wind. It also means fragrance, courage or a courageous

person or strength within and strength for others who are around. In a way, Sushma Swaraj was all this to many people. To those who were stranded or whose families were stranded or in difficult situations abroad in various ways, she, as the External Affairs Minister in the first Narendra Modi Cabinet (2014-2019), was the beacon light they turned to for guidance and help. Very often she saw to it that they reached the safe shores of India.

After a degree in law from the Punjab University she began to practise as an advocate in the Supreme Court of India. Her political career began in the seventies with Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad. In 1977, when she became a cabinet minister of Indian state of Haryana, she was probably the youngest cabinet minister; she was only 25. In 1998, for a short duration, she was also the 5th Chief Minister of Delhi. In March 1998, she was re-elected to 12th Lok Sabha from South Delhi Parliamentary constituency for a second term. She served as the Union Cabinet Minister for Information and Broadcasting with additional charge of the Ministry of Telecommunications from 19 March 1998 to 12 October 1998, under the second PM Vajpayee Government. It was during this period that she declared film production as an industry which made the film industry eligible for bank loans. Community radios were started by her in universities and other institutions. She was Minister of Health, Family Welfare and Parliamentary Affairs from January 2003 until May 2004. She was re-elected to the Rajya Sabha for a third term in April 2006 from Madhya Pradesh state and she served as the Deputy leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha till April 2009. Once again, she won the Vidisha constituency in Madhya Pradesh in the 2014 elections.

Public life comes with its own pitfalls. In 2004 when Congress Party won the elections and was backing Sonia Gandhi to be the Prime minister, Sushma Swaraj had threatened to don a white sari, shave off her head, sleep on the floor and eat only chickpeas and live her life like a Hindu widow, if Sonia Gandhi were to be sworn in as the Prime Minister of India. Many women recalled this statement upon her death saying that this statement not only insulted Hindu women but also stereotyped Hindu widows. Obviously Sushma did not see it as such and saw it more as an angry response to a situation for she was unrepentant about making such a statement. Sushma was generally known as a person who may observe Karva Chauth but as someone who may practise but not preach or impose her views on others. However, sometimes when some traditional images like that of a Hindu widow are evoked, even in anger, it remains in public memory and does not get erased. But Sushma was not the kind of conservative this statement makes her out to be for it was her daughter Bansuri, and not her husband Swaraj Kaushal, a peer and fellow advocate at the Supreme Court, who performed her final rites, against what is considered the traditional practice.

—C S Lakshmi

Rajnigandha: Vidya Sinha (15 November 1947-15 August 2019)



Vidya Sinha's first film was not *Rajnigandha* (1974), directed by Basu Chatterjee but this was the film that catapulted her into stardom and both the film and the song *Rajnigandha phool tumhari* came to be associated with her. She acted in more than 30 films but *Rajnigandha*

remained synonymous with her name until the end. She acted in many films like *Choti Si Baat* (1975), *Karm* (1977) *Mukti* (1977) *Inkaar* (1977) *Pati Patni Aur Woh* (1978) *Gulzar's Kitaab* (1977) and *Meera* (1979) and *Josh* (1981). She had acted with all the big stars of her times. Despite a negative role of a gangster in the last film, she remained the *Rajnigandha* girl, representing a young urban girl choosing between two men. After a hiatus from films spent in Australia she came and acted in television serials. *Bodyguard* (2011) was her last film.

She was born into a family involved with films. Her father Rana Pratap Singh known as Pratap Rana in films, was a film

producer. She became Miss Bombay at the age of 18 and became a model which paved the way to her entry into Hindi films and her lasting image as the *Rajnigandha* girl. But her real life story was not as tenderly romantic as the *Rajnigandha* story. She got married to her neighbour, Venkateswara Iyer in 1968 and in 1989 adopted a daughter, Jhanvi. But she spent many years taking care of her ailing husband who passed away in 1996. The move to Australia came after that. Her second marriage in 2001 to an Australian doctor ended in a divorce in 2009. She fought a long battle for maintenance after that. But throughout this she had her daughter Jhanvi, who was with her 71-year-old mother when she passed away. That must have been a great consolation.

—C S Lakshmi

Letters of Blood: Rizia Rahman (28 December 1939-16 August 2019)



Rizia Rahman was a writer who wrote in many different genres. A Bangladeshi writer, she wrote many significant novels and short stories. She had a long writing career in which she published more than 50 novels and short story collections. Her best known work is *Bong Theke Bangla* (Bengali to Bangla, 1978) which

fetches her the Bangla Academy Literary Award (1978).

Rizia was born in Bhabanipur, Kolkata, but her family shifted to East Bengal (Bangladesh) during the Partition in 1947. She has a Master's in Economics from the University of Dhaka. Her writing career began rather early at the age of 8! By the time she was 12 she was getting published and her stories and poems were published in newspapers like *Satyajug* and *Sangbad*. Her first collection of stories, *Agni Shakkora* (Signature in Fire) was published even while she was a student in Dhaka University. Her novel *Rokter Okshor* (Letters of Blood, 1978) on the life of sex workers and their living conditions shocked a lot of people because of its candid descriptions. It was translated into English in 2016 as *Letters of Blood* by Arunava Sinha. Her stories written in the last four decades were brought out as *Caged in Paradise and Other Stories* in 2010, edited by Niaz Zaman and Shirin Hasnat Islam. Her best known other works are: *Ghar-Bhanga-Ghar* (Broken House, 1984), *Uttar Purush* (Posterity, 1977), *Surja Sabuj Rakta* (Sun, Green, Blood, 1980), *Ekal Cirokal* (Now and Eternity, 1984) and *Nodi Nirobodhi* (Infinite River, 2011). She was honoured with several awards like the Bangla Academy Literary Award (1978), Jessore Sahitya Parishad

Puraskar (1984), Bangladesh Lekhak Sangha Sahitya Padak (1985), Kamar Mushtari Sahitya Padak (1990), Anannya Literature Award (1995), Humayun Kadir Sriti Puraskar, Jasimuddin Shwarna Padak, Shawgat Shwarna Padak and Ekushey Padak (2019).

Eight decades of life in which seven decades were spent in writing is a boon which very few writers receive in their life. That the boon was given to Rizia Rahman makes her the chosen one.

—C S Lakshmi

Making Films Because You Care: Manjira Dutta (1949-25 August 2019)



Manjira Dutta has been making films from 1986 and all her films were on subjects that mattered to her and to everyone who cared about issues that affected the country. Her first documentary film *Babulal Bhuiya ki Qurbani* or *The Sacrifice of Babulal Bhuiya* made

in 1986 was a documentary about the tribals around Bihar's Mailgora collieries who survive by recycling the pits' coal slurry. In February 1981, Babulal Bhuiya, one of the workers, was shot dead by the Industrial Security Force. The film goes into the circumstances of his death via covering Communist Party rallies in the area. The film got very good notices which made her venture into full time documentary filmmaking. Her other films focussed on a wide range of subjects like environment, rural and industrial labour, labour in the entertainment sector, Iyengar yoga, politics, agrarian technology, and discrimination against women among others. Her film *Relationship* on femicide based on the terrible 1993 incident of Lalli Goel who poisoned two of her daughters and committed suicide. Lalli Goel had four daughters and when she was pregnant a fifth time the foetus was wrongly diagnosed after many sex-determination tests as a female foetus and she aborted it only to find out that it was the much awaited male child. The film covered the suicide with all its ramifications and also the efforts of Shyamkali, the activist, to create awareness in the community so that women don't succumb to such pressures.

Manjira Dutta made films for UNICEF, UNDP, BBC2, Channel 4 (UK), ARD (Germany), UNIFEM and also for Indian corporate houses and State government departments

and her films reached a wide range of audience. She will be sorely missed by all those who appreciated her films.

—C S Lakshmi

Life as A Continuous Flight: Kanchan Chaudhary Bhattacharya (1947-26 August, 2019)



Kanchan Chaudhary was the second woman to be inducted into the Indian Police Service after Kiran Bedi. She was the first woman to become Director General of Police. After a Master's in English Literature from Delhi University and a MBA degree from University of Wollongong, New

South Wales, Australia, she decided to do her Civil Service Exams and chose to join the IPS because she felt that it would give her an opportunity to fight for justice. She had a brilliant career that brought some of the most important and interesting cases her way. Among the cases she is known for was the one where she tracked down 13 dacoits in a single year in her very first charge as Assistant Superintendent of Police in Malihabad in Uttar Pradesh. Among the 13 dacoits was the dreaded Makhan Singh who had evaded the police for more than a decade. In an interview given to *The Tribune* in 2004, Kanchan does not make much of these sensational cases but talks about sensitive moments in her career like when a battered woman came to see her once when she was posted in Meerut as DIG: "One day, a badly beaten up Muslim woman came to me. She told me that her husband had been assaulting her. I looked into the matter and followed it up for several weeks. A few months later, I saw a good-looking woman breeze into my office with a smile on her lips. She was the same woman. It gave me so much of joy.... So, there have been a number of such cases and my joy has been that I have been able to contribute towards improving other people's lives." There was also another instance of an old man coming to see her once. He came to the police station, "upset at the treatment being meted out to him by his daughter-in-law. She had even thrown away his shoes...." Kanchan says in the interview, "So just for a lark, I said let's buy him a new pair of shoes and we did, and the joy on his face...! I live my life on small pleasures. These small things give me happiness." One of the small pleasures in life as a police woman must have been writing poetry and taking part in dramatics which was also part of her life.

Kanchan retired in 2007 and later ventured into politics

and ran as a candidate of Aam Aadmi Party from Haridwar, Uttarakhand in the 2014 general elections. The T V serial *Udaan*, written by her sister, Kavita Chaudhary, was based on her life. Kanchan lived a life touched by the magic of success in everything she did. She died in Mumbai after an illustrious career which did not lack sensitivity and compassion and that is a rare feat for a police woman.

—C S Lakshmi

An Artiste with Haunting Eyes: S K Padmadevi (1924-19 September 2019)



SK Padmadevi who passed away last month was the oldest surviving woman theatre artiste of Karnataka and also an artiste who had lived to see Kannada cinema take its different courses. She acted in the first Kannada talkie film *Bhakta Dhruva* (1934). But it became the second talkie film to be

released because *Sati Sulochana* released the same year, got released just a month before. But Padmadevi became an important part of the Kannada cinema's history.

Her father, S. Krishna Iyengar, was from Srirangapatna, and he divided his time between teaching and acting. He was fond of theatre. Her mother, Seethamma was from Madhugiri, and was an exponent in veena, violin and harmonium. Her father and her siblings were all involved in theatre because her great grandfather had once owned the Janamanollasini Sabha, a professional theatre company. It was but natural for Padmadevi to choose theatre although her mother opposed it. She began to act in Kannada amateur theatre as a child. Her first role was in the play *Bhakta Prahlada* where she appeared as Bhoodevi. In an interview given to Muralidhara Khajane for *The Hindu* in 2012 she says, "My appearance as Bhoodevi was an instant success. I was nine years old then and the legendary Kanakalakshamma of Mysore tied the sari for me and decked me with jewels." Padma Devi also sang four songs in the play. It was H.K. Sheshagiri who trained her to sing. In the interview Padmadevi says that it was her eyes that lifted her to stardom. She was 11 years old when Kanakalakshamma of Varadachar Memorial Association thought of producing *Bhakta Dhruva*. Filmmaker B R Panthulu chose her to act in the film because of her haunting eyes. The rest is history.

Bhakta Dhruva was followed by *Samsara Nauka* (The Boat of Life, 1936) the first Kannada social film in which she played the lead, adapted from a play by Chandrakala Nataka Mandali. She went on to act in *Vasantasena* (1941) and *Jaatakaphala* (1953) directed by R Nagendra Rao, and *Bhakta Sudhama* by Kalaivani. Besides Kannada films Padmadevi also acted in Telugu films *Sathyabhama* (1942) and *Haravilasa* directed by Y V Rao.

Although she got into cinema she did not give up theatre. She had the opportunity to act with veteran theatre artistes like G Nagesha Rao, M Subba Rao, M G Mari Rao, B S Raja Iyengar, R Nagendrarrayaru, MN Gangadhara Rao, Kotturappa, Dikki Madhava Rao to mention a few who were considered top actors of those days. She was part of the troupe of Ballari Raghavacharya. She also performed in HLN Simha's professional theatre for a while and later established her own troupe of professional theatre. She had, in fact, married a theatre artiste Padmanabha Rao. Like her mother Padmanabha Rao was not keen on her acting and opposed it but Padmadevi had held on to her passion. She quit films for quite a few years but was associated with the All India Radio for two decades and was part of the theatre scene till 1960. She also acted in the role of a grandmother in the telefilm *Kirana* (A Ray of Light) directed by her son Nandakishore. Padmadevi lived for almost a century and was a witness to and participant in the history of theatre and cinema in Karnataka. Seemingly there was not much that she forgot about this aspect of her life for in the interview given seven years ago, in 2012, she said, her eyes glinting with mischief, "The hero of *Vasantasena* was not good-looking; had the hero been handsome I would have performed still better!" Obviously along with her haunting eyes she also had a sense of humour which must have made these years worth living.

A Partner in Life: Ganavathi Amma (1932-25 September 2019)



Not often do we think of a male writer along with his partner. There are some rare exceptions though. Writer Sundara Ramasamy is always remembered along with his wife Kamala Ramasamy who has written some interesting books after his demise. Similarly Ganavathi Amma (she was Amma, mother, to everyone like Ki. Ra. (Ki. Rajanarayanan) was Naina, father) was someone we could not separate from Ki. Ra., the writer. I met her first in 1974 sometime, if I remember, when I was doing my field trip for my book on social history of women in Tamil Nadu, in Idaiseval village in Tirunelveli when I had gone to meet Ki.Ra. She was milking the cow. They had cows and poultry in their house. While Ki.Ra. talked about writing and his life Ganavathi Amma joined us every now and then in the conversation taking a break from her cooking. What she told me then and during many other meetings which have lasted until now in their house in Pondicherry where they have shifted for the last several years, are known to everyone who is close to Ki.Ra. Ki.Ra. was not only active in the Communist Party but was also not a very healthy person physically. He had been in the T.B. sanatorium and it had taken him a while to recover. Not many girls were willing to marry him but Ganavathi agreed to marry him. She was 19 and he was 29. She was a girl brought up by indulgent parents and her agreeing to marry Ki.Ra. was not taken well by many. Many in her own family commented that he was a sick person and would not live for long but Ganavathi was determined to marry him. Since he did not keep good health Ganavathi also took care of the lands. The water used to be put on only at night those days. She would go with her two sons who were children to water the fields at one in the night. Elder son Diwakar, would hold the torch light and the younger son Prabhakar, whom all of us call Prabhi, would be given a stick to hold and made to sit in one part of the field. The stick was for his protection! She knew all about working in the agricultural fields. She would work along with the other hired workers hired for sowing, transplanting, harvesting etc. When Ki.Ra. was invited to the University of Pondicherry as

—C S Lakshmi

Congratulations!



SPARROW Congratulates Hima Das, nicknamed 'Dhing Express', an ace sprinter from the state of Assam, who won five gold medals in just 19 days in the month of July 2019.

Proud of You Hima!

a Visiting Professor and also given a government house as a writer, Ganavathi did not think twice about giving up life in Idaiseval and coming to Pondicherry. She was his first reader who would also tell him if there were any spelling mistakes in the story. S. B. Shanthi has written a book on Ganavathi Amma, the only book written on a Tamil writer's wife. Last year when I went to Pondicherry, Ganavathy Amma was fast asleep and I did not want to disturb her sleep. Otherwise I would always leave after a hug from her. This year when I rang up Ki.Ra. on September 16th, his 97th birthday, which is also his wedding day, he seemed distraught for Ganavathi Amma was semi-conscious and seriously ill. On September 25th, in the evening, Ganavathi Amma passed away without regaining consciousness. Had she been conscious, her heart would have never allowed her to leave this world leaving her beloved husband like an aged bird without its mate.

—C S Lakshmi

Rani Siromoney (July 4, 1929-28 September 2019)



Anyone who studied in MCC (Madras Christian College) knew the Siromoney couple. Gift Siromoney and Rani Siromoney were in the Mathematics Department but Gift Siromoney was a polymath and his interests ranged from Tamil language to archeology and so even students from other departments like History in which I was studying in the sixties, knew the couple who kept their doors open to students from all departments. The younger photograph given above is how I remember them. When SPARROW did its book on women scientists, I was keen to talk to Dr Rani Siromoney about her life and work. Although math was a subject I dreaded, I was interested in the work she and her husband had done linking the threshold designs, kolam, women's art and math. The interview somehow did not happen and it is an immense archival loss. Dr Rani Siromoney was her husband's student and also his co-researcher. In their Home Page she talks about their

association:

"I was perhaps the first Ph.D. Gift Siromoney carved out — from suggesting the problem to the final stage of typing the thesis. He typed the entire thesis himself, with me reading it out systematically doing 10 pages a day and then filling in the mathematical symbols not available in the typewriter of those days. Professor Bennet Albert, looking at the finished product, commented that it was a "labour of love"! Soon after he received the Ph.D in 1964 and Arul had started going to school, he proposed a problem in grammar. I thought that it would be very difficult for me, with an abstract and formal mathematical training, to work on Tamil grammar. However with constant help, my first paper was on "Grammar of Dravidian Number Names" published in *Foundations of Language: International Journal of Language and Philosophy*.

Gradually, I moved on to "Formal languages and Automata Theory". One day in 1967, from nowhere, he produced the first original paper on Matrix Grammars (journals were not easily available and there was no internet to get the paper downloaded!!) which formed the basis for my paper "On Equal Matrix Languages" which led me on to my Ph.D thesis. Every time a research paper was accepted for publication in a journal, a big box of biscuits (chocolates were not common then!), from West Tambaram, will arrive in our house on campus; he would have slipped out quietly on his motorbike to get it!

When a technical paper is co-authored by several, it is not nice nor (sic) proper to dissect it to analyse the contributions made by each author individually. However, I cannot help mentioning two very novel ideas of his, which bloomed into significant definitions, leading on to theoretical results one that of "arrow-head catenation" and the other that of "kolam moves".

Any new idea will look unbelievable to venture into but his relentless persuasion and insight helped to weave a rich theory based on simple observations.

Most of her professional life was spent in the Madras Christian College although she had taught in Lady Doak College from 1950-51. Her areas of interest were formal languages and automata theory, public-key cryptosystems and Algorithmic learning theory & DNA Computing. She combined her math with interest in music and gardening. When the Department of Computer Science was founded in 1993 to offer the MCA Programme, it was the first self-financed course in the College and the department functioned under the pioneering leadership of Dr. Rani Siromoney. She was associated with many prestigious institutions like American Mathematics Society, European Association for Theoretical Computer Science, Society for Computational Modelling of Creative Processes, (Board of Directors 1994) and was also Adjunct Professor at the Chennai Mathematical Institute. Her contribution to math was recognised with several awards including State award for Best Teacher in 1983-84, Outstanding Woman Professional Award in 1984 by FICCI- Ladies Organisation, and Lifetime Award for Women in Mathematical Sciences in 2002.

When someone has spent almost her entire lifetime being in mathematical sciences, her ninety years of life has to be celebrated. We don't mourn your death Dr Rani Siromoney; we celebrate your life that has inspired us!

—C S Lakshmi

A Beauty Aesthetician: Maya Paranjpye (19 March 1945-4 October 2019)



For those of us who do not know what being a beauty aesthetician entails it would be useful to know about the educational rigour it involves. Maya Paranjpye's educational qualifications are worth detailing. Maya graduated from Pune University with an Honours in chemistry. Later she had specialised in bio-chemistry and

biochemical analysis. She worked in the laboratories of University of Geneva, Switzerland, in the Department of Biological and Special Organic Chemistry. But being a beauty

aesthetician meant training in different fields for many years and that is what she did from 1966 onwards. In 1972 she completed her Diploma in Hairdressing from Classical School of London & Beauty Therapy from the International School of Natural Beauty, London. In 1980, she travelled to USA to complete her Cosmetology Diploma from Royal College of Beauty, Phoenix, Arizona, and did an Aesthetician's course from the famous Christine Valmy International School for Aesthetics, Skin Care and Makeup, New York. One would have thought she was immensely qualified after this. But Maya Paranjpye was someone who did not believe in giving up her pursuit for excellence. In 1995 she took the CIDESCO (Comité International d'Esthétique et de Cosmétology) international post-graduate diploma exam in Bretland School, England. As if all these qualifications were not enough, between 2006 to 2008 she completed training courses in Hot Stone Therapy from Phoenix, USA, Balinese Massage from Bali, Indonesia, and SPA Therapy and Management from Indonesia.

Maya Paranjpye had started her own Butic Beauty Parlour at Khar in 1968 itself even while she was training herself further. A second branch was started in Pune in 1976. In 1980 a third branch was opened at Shivaji Park. Since 1968 she was also offering a short duration course in beauty culture at her Butic Institute of Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology, the only institute of its kind in India. The Institute is currently housed in Udyog Mandir, Mahim. Butic Institute was the only Institute in India accepted by BABTAC (British Association of Beauty Therapist and Cosmetologists (U.K.) in 1983 and since then the Institute has conducted CIBTAC exams. The Institute is accepted as a CIDESCO school and began giving CIDESCO examination from 1994. CIDESCO is an internationally acclaimed Swiss-based qualifying body in beauty therapy set up in 1946. Maya has also been an examiner at CIDESCO.

Maya Paranjpye strongly believed in not just institutional education in her chosen field but also in educating the common women who may be interested in knowing what beauty therapy was all about. So she wrote books not in English but in Marathi so that she can reach a larger readership within Maharashtra. Her books *Soundarya Sadhana* (Beauty Therapy) and *Parlour Kashe Chalwave* (How to Run a Beauty Parlour) were received very well and much appreciated. Maya has been honoured with several titles like Entrepreneurs' International award, Vocational Excellence Award, Millennium award, Lifetime Achievement Award and many more much deserved awards. In the 74 years that she lived Maya Paranjpye was able to fulfil all that she set out to do and that is an achievement not many can claim.

—C S Lakshmi

The Quiet Chronicler of Mumbai: Asiya Siddiqi (1928- 7 October 2019)



Often it is when you write the homage for someone that you realise how we forget women who work in quiet ways and have done admirable work but have not made much noise about it. Asiya Siddiqi was a chronicler of 19th century India who wrote just two books but

these two books set a standard for writing microhistory. She taught and lived in Mumbai till the late nineties and yet SPARROW has not documented her life and work. It is a great loss for recording her life and archiving her work would have expanded in many ways our archival efforts.

Asiya Siddiqi was born in Dalhousie and grew up in Lucknow and Allahabad. She was a student of the Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow, and later, the Allahabad University. She got her bachelor's degree from Somerville College, Oxford and did her DPhil from the University of Oxford. She taught for a while at the Aligarh Muslim University and also at the University of Mumbai. Her book *Bombay's People 1860-98: Insolvents in the City* is considered a book that broke new ground by reconstructing the lives of a range of inhabitants of 19th century Bombay through a keen examination of the High Court insolvency records. In the introduction to the book Professor Amar Farooqui, Department of History, University of Mumbai, says that the picture that emerges from the book "is of a city with a strong tradition of cosmopolitanism, wherein relationships maintained across communities sustained everyday life notwithstanding the practices of colonial governance which emphasised community identities. Yet Bombay managed to retain for long an inclusiveness that accommodated considerable diversity, thereby marking out its specific paths to modernity." He also says that in the early twentieth century, these class solidarities provided the basis for nationalistic mobilisation for they cut across "ties of the village, ties of religion and ties of caste."

Her book deals with not only prominent entrepreneurs like Jamshedji Tata, Kahandas Narandas and Premchand Roychand, the legendary Jain broker, but also of working people, including women, who were also affected by the financial crisis of 1860s. Majority of the women insolvents were courtesans and dancing and singing girls. In his review of the book in August 2017 in *The Hindu*, Shoumojit Banerjee says that they constituted the largest occupational group of

the 650-odd petitions studied. He adds that Siddiqi "etches the divisions in the class of courtesans and their cultural range, noting that conversions to Islam may have been a path to achieving respectability." Of the women insolvents, there is a special chapter on Ayesha, the widowed mother of a butcher whose life is covered in the chapter "Ayesha's World: A Butcher's Family in Nineteenth Century Bombay." Ayesha is the widowed mother of Ismael, an insolvent butcher. Gleaned from the court documents, Asiya presents a detailed account of her life. What is interesting is not only Ayesha's strength and ability but also the commercial culture and social relationships in the neighbourhood near Mohammad Ali Road where she lived. Asiya says that this part of the city was heterogeneous with regard to religion, ethnicity and occupation and that it was a "close-knit urban milieu" where "the core categories of identity, caste and religion took on new meanings."

As an economic historian, Asiya Siddiqi did path-breaking work; work that matters as foundational work on which to construct social and economic history of Mumbai in the years that followed. That she would choose to do her independent research quietly and without much fanfare in an academic world given to self-promotion and pomposity, and die quietly at the age of 91, speaks a lot about not just her but about us.

—C S Lakshmi

The Woman who Remained a Baby: Saroja Ramamrutham (28 January 1931-14 October 2019)



was not born when the child star Baby Saroja sang her lullaby "Kanne Pappa" in the film *Balayogini* (The Child Saint, 1937). The song became a big hit and so did her name and the smocking frock that she wore. It is said that many girl-children born after this film and two other films she acted in (*Thyagabhoomi* (The Land of Sacrifice, 1939) and *Kamadhenu* (The Bovine Goddess Who Grants All wishes, 1941) were named Saroja and that smocking frock became

the fashion for small girls for a long time. I remember wearing a smocking frock myself stitched by my mother Alamelu. Baby Saroja became so popular that she was compared to American child star Shirley Temple and was known as the Shirley Temple of India. I got to see *Thyagabhoomi* many years later when there was a Golden Jubilee screening of the film in Chennai. Baby Saroja singing “Sollu, Gandhi thathavukku je, je je, je Gandhi thathavukku je” (Say Jai to Grandpa Gandhi) and walking on the road with other kids even in 1989 was exhilarating. This was because *Thyaga Bhoomi*, directed and produced by K. Subramanyam, was a film produced when the freedom movement was at its height and Mahatma Gandhi whom the film glorified and whom every child knew, was Gandhi Thatha in Tamil Nadu and Bapu elsewhere. The film was based on a novel serialised in *Anandavikatan*, written by Kalki Krishnamoorthy. The serial came with stills of the film and little Baby Saroja had already become popular.

Thyagabhoomi was the only Indian film to be banned after release by the British government. Anticipating the ban director and producer of the film K Subramanyam advanced its release and organised free screening and the film became a rage. Baby Saroja was the first daughter of K Viswanathan, the brother of the director K Subramanyam. An article published in *The Hindu* on October 15, 2019, says that at the age of nine, she reportedly already had fans in Japan and colour postcards of her were printed there. I think her fame lasted through the forties for I remember her name being mentioned during my childhood when smart kids were compared to her. “Baby” Saroja moved to Mumbai after her marriage and she did not pursue an acting career but art was a part of her life. She learnt to play the veenai from none other than Karaikudi Sambasiva Iyer and later mastered Ikebana and much later in life she trained in painting under the legendary S Rajam. Having been born in a family that pursued art Saroja’s house remained a hub for both performing and non-performing artists. She must have inspired in many ways, Padma Subramanyam, the famous dancer who was her younger cousin and the well-known singer Charumathi Ramachandran, her younger sister. 88 long years in the pursuit of art is no mean achievement. SPARROW has in its archives (as a part of R Chudamani Private Papers) the printed version of the novel *Thyagabhoomi* written by Kalki and serialised in *Anandavikatan* with stills from the film.

The Bhel Puri Queen of South Mumbai: Nila Mehta (1936-October 15, 2019)



Some people are ageless. So all that we know of Nila Mehta, not having tasted her famous snacks and chutney, is that she was a senior citizen and that for many years, in fact, from 1974 onwards, the taste buds of south Mumbai to begin with and later

Ahmedabad, Delhi and Kolkata have been fed by her. She says in one of her early social media posts quoted in a paper, that she began from her kitchen in an apartment in Peddar Road, and the first snack she sold was dhokla and she sold it door to door. Later a chain of Nila Mehta stores was started with mouth-watering Gujarati snacks dhokla, bhel puri, sev puri, assorted farsan like samosas and the special Gujarati snack Ghugra in Kemp’s corner, Cuffe Parade and Peddar Road and now almost all over Mumbai and other big cities. Those who have tasted her food say that one could die for her chutneys and her tirangi dhokla. Gujaratis who live as far as Jakarta say that their trip to Mumbai is incomplete without snacks bought in Nila Mehta stores. Someone did a study of patients with Parkinson’s and one of them said that he and his wife had Nila Mehta’s theplas with milk in the night. Nila Mehta snacks has a social media presence in Facebook and Instagram and one can find pictures of food that look heavenly on these pages. Having satisfied the tastes of so many people from so many corners of India Nila Mehta must have decided to call it a day and take the rest she much needed on the 15th of October. Her family will continue her business but one must wait and see if the snacks remain the home food that many craved for in the last 45 years.

—C S Lakshmi

*Once a SPARROW decides to fly high, the sky is the limit!
The larger and bluer the sky,
the better!*

—C S Lakshmi

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The Chronicler of Batticaloa: Thangeswari Kathiraman (26 February 1952-26 October 2019)



Thangeswari Kathiraman was a writer, archeologist and a politician. Viluthu, a civil society organisation, had begun a political campaign after ten years of the end of war, to persuade Tamil political parties and LTTE to include more women in politics from the North and East. Pujika

Rathnayake in her article on women's political participation mentions that this campaign was titled "*Aduppadiyilirunthu Arasiyalvarai Aimbathukku Aimbathu*" (50:50 - From Pots and Pans to Politics). Thangeswari was selected by the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) as a Tamil National Alliance (TNA) parliamentary candidate from Batticaloa (Kodikara) and she won the elections. She represented the Batticaloa district from 2004-2010. But the relationship between TNA and LTTE had always remained tenuous and in 2010, when she was not selected by the TNA she joined the governing United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and stood as one of its candidates in Batticaloa District in the 2010 parliamentary election which she lost. But she continued to remain active in politics. She felt that a political party was needed to represent the demands, needs and identity of the Eastern Tamils. In 2012 she announced the new party that would cooperate with the government and serve the people. The new party was named Tamil People's Freedom Party (TPFP). In an interview given to the *Daily Mirror* she said that "though there were dozens of Tamil candidates registered with the Election Commissioner, none of them worked for the social, cultural and linguistic identity of eastern Tamils."

Many consider her a feminist who never declared herself as a feminist. In 2009 she was barred from entering the House of Representatives and ordered to stay out of the house for the whole day because she was wearing a salwar-kameez and not the mandatory sari. As per the Sri Lankan Parliamentary dress code women members had to be in a sari. The Muslim women members had applied and got permission to come in the new Arabised Islamic dress but since salwar-kameez had become a Tamil attire for many Tamil women by then, it had not occurred to them to ask for change in the dress code. No MPs, not even her own TNA Party members came to her support when she was ordered out. It is in this context that Thangeswari had to fight for the Eastern Tamils and for her own rights.

Although seen as a politician by many Thangeswari had other facets to her personality which were equally important. Balasingam Sugumar, former Dean in the Eastern University, Sri Lanka, from September 1992 to October 2006, in the Faculty Of Arts & Culture who is currently settled down in UK, talks about the archeologist Thangeswari in his homage to her. He says that she is one of those from the Eastern provinces who has brought glory to the region by her activities. She was a pioneer in history, archeology, literature and politics. She was born in the Kannanguda village and studied in her village and later in Batticaloa and got her degree in Archeology from the University of Kelaniya. She wrote several books as an archeologist and questioned the conclusions reached by none other than Dr Senarath Paranavitana, who was considered a pioneering archeologist and epigraphist whose works were considered authoritative in the mid-twentieth century. He was the Archeological Commissioner till 1956 after which he became Professor of Archeology in the Peradeniya campus of the University of Ceylon. When Thangeswari was the District Cultural Officer in Batticaloa she took the lead in documenting the koothu tradition of Batticaloa. When Balasingam Sugumar had served as dean in the Eastern University, he had many occasions to work with her and he says that although she had made her mark as a bold and determined politician, she will be remembered for her work in the field of archeology.

As a writer, she wrote in the pseudonyms Kalaichelvi, Thamizhchelvi, and Sivachelvi. She wrote her first story in *Veerakesari* and wrote her research papers and articles on culture and people's traditions in newspapers like *The Observer*, *Dinakaran* and *Dinakural* and journals published from Sri Lanka. Her research work especially on Kulakkottan who ruled in Trincomalee and Kalinga Magha who ruled in Batticaloa brought her recognition and fame as an archeologist. Both research works were honoured with awards by the Jaffna Literary Association in 1994 and 1995. The Tamil Social and Cultural Federation of Canada awarded her the first prize for her research on the Vanni region. The Canada Tamil Federation also honoured her with the Tholliyal Chudar (The Flame of Archeology) award. Batticaloa has lost someone who was deeply involved with its history and culture.

—Balasingam Sugumar and C S Lakshmi

Do write to us if you get to know about a life, a book, a visual, a film or a song which you think must be DOCUMENTED in SPARROW.

For REVIEWS please send two copies of the book.

India's Oldest Yoga Teacher Decides to Retire: V Nanammal (1920-26 October 2019)



We just finished celebrating last year Nanammal's Padma Shri award. And this year we celebrate her life. Nanammal comes from a family of traditional practitioners of medicine and Nanammal learnt yoga, a family tradition, from her father at

the age of 8. Her father also taught her martial arts. Nanammal's husband was also a practitioner of Siddha medicine. Nanammal could have just practised yoga and naturopathy and led a healthy life. But she felt the urge to teach and train others and in 1972 she established the Ozone Yoga Centre in Coimbatore. She taught about hundred students a day and has taught more than 100,000 students, they say. Apart from training others to be yoga instructors she has trained her own family members to be yoga instructors. In her long life, Nanammal's work was recognised with many different awards. Apart from the Padma Shri, she has won 150 awards and six national gold medals. The major awards she has received are Yoga Ratna award (2014) of the Government of Karnataka, National Nari Shakti Puraskar award (2016) received from former President of India Pranab Mukherjee, Shwaasa Yoga Organisation's Yoga Ratna award (2018) and Rotary Club's Life Achievement award (2018). They say she was going to take part in the India's Got Talent programme as a contestant. Had she taken part, we are sure she would have floored everyone not just with her yoga but with her smile, determination and the way she carries her body like a feather. We will miss you Yoga Paatti, but we know it is time for you to retire and rest now but we are going to keep your yoga, the Nanammal diet and your smile with us always.

—C S Lakshmi

We often pause to recall the statement of Gloria Wekkar: "Show me your archive and I will show you who is in power!" And we know that we have no other choice but to continue with resilience our task of archiving for we have to remain in power.

A Lifetime Filled with Social Work and Writing: Girija Keer (5 January 1933- 31 October 2019)



Girija Keer died at the age of 86 but has left behind a vast range of works that include short stories, novels, travelogues, biographies and literature for children. She was a popular writer who began her career as a school teacher. Later she was assistant editor of *Anuradha*

magazine from 1968 to 1978. It gave her an opportunity to understand the working class, the community of lepers and the tribals. She had participated in educational projects for tribal children for 6 years. She did communication and counselling work with the prisoners in Yerwada Jail in Pune, Aadharwadi Jail in Kalyan, Agwad Jail in Goa and Kalamba Jail in Kolhapur. Her work with juvenile offenders resulted in three books: *Rakhatali Paakharan* (Birds from Ashes, 1977), *Ithe Diva Lavyala Hawa* (Lamp Should Be Lit Here, 1996) and the more recent *Janmathep*, (Imprisoned for Life, 2010). She was honoured with three awards for her social work. Long interviews with her have been broadcast on Sahyadri channel, Zee and E-TV. She was part of many television and radio programmes. She has been working through many schools in Mumbai, discussing Marathi reading and writing and conducting workshops. She was honoured with various awards namely H N Apte (Hari Narayan Apte) best novel award from Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad, Kamlabai Tilak award from the Pune Marathi Library, Abhiruchi award and Shri Akshardhan award for women novelists. Some of her famous biographical works include *Gabharyatil Manase* (Scared People, 1992), *Jagavegli Manase* (Different Kinds of People, 1979), *Kalavant* (Artists), *Sahitya Sahvas* (Literary Associations, 1997) and *Girijaghar* (The Church, 1974). She published her autobiography *Mazyra Ayushyachi Goshta* (My Life Story) in 2001. But it is her work on juvenile lifetime prisoners of Yerwada jail that brought her work with juvenile murderers into sharp focus. In 2018, 45-year-old Santosh Bhintade, one of the prisoners whose life stories has appeared in *Janmathep* spoke to a newspaper about how he now works among various jail prisoners spreading Gandhian ideology. He was a law student and only 22, when he saw a girl being molested by a boy. He rushed to save the girl and in the altercation he killed the boy. He was put in lifetime imprisonment in Yerwada jail in Pune. He gives credit to Girija Keer for counselling him in Yerwada. With a life filled with

such satisfying work which touched the lives of several human beings Girija Keer must have died a peaceful death at 86. What more could she ask for except that her work and efforts be remembered by the future generation.

—C S Lakshmi

The Woman who was *Soi* to Many: Nabaneeta Dev Sen (January 13 1938- November 7 2019)



When Nabaneeta Dev Sen set up *Soi*, a women writers' association of Bengal open to other writers also, in 2000, she asked me to be a part of it. I asked her what *Soi* meant. She told me it meant a *sakhi*, a friend. She felt that women in the creative field of writing had special concerns and special ways of telling stories and that

they needed a dedicated forum and that is how *Soi* had come into being. She was its president. Many important writers of Bengal including Mahasweta Devi, were associated with it. I found out later that *Soi* had other meanings too. It also meant "signature" and "I endure" and I felt that Nabaneeta symbolised in a way, all the three meanings. She was a friend to many other writers. She had put her indelible signature on modern Bangla literature and she had endured through a lot of inner and physical pain. Even before 2000, the year *Soi* was started, her house was a meeting point for so many writers where they could freely talk about their ideas and share their defeats and victories and gain strength from one another. Not only did her many stories, poems, plays and literary criticism inspire people, but also Nabaneeta herself, as a person, exuded love and warmth. That is why in the pamphlet on the meeting in her memory on November 30th 2019, *Soi* friends have written that she "symbolized love for writing and for life to all of us." Indeed, Nabaneeta did symbolise that for many, even those who were not part of *Soi*. All of us celebrated when she received many prestigious awards including the Sahitya Akademi Award (1999) and the Padma Shri (2000)

I knew her for many years and have lived in her old house in Kolkata with her, interviewing her for SPARROW. I have chatted and laughed with her so often. I have also admired her guts and wondered about those hit by her caustic tongue. She could utter the most scathing comment with a wry smile on her face. I will miss Nabaneeta for all those wonderful moments we shared of laughter and jokes and tearing some

people, who deserved it, into bits. There are not many writers one can laugh with. Nabaneeta was an exception.

—C S Lakshmi

The Rebellious Woman: Shaukat Aapa (October 21 1928-November 22 2019)



Shaukat Kaifi is no more.

She was lovingly called Shaukat Aapa and she was well-known for the many roles she

donned: An IPTA artiste, the writer of *Yaad ki Rajguzar* (Reminiscences), the Jameela of the film *Garam Hawa* (Scorching Winds), Khanum Jaan of *Umrao Jaan*, the lifelong companion of

the famous poet Kaifi Azmi and the mother of Shabana Azmi and Baba Azmi, both of whom forged their distinct identities in the film industry. *Kaifinama*—a one-and-a-half-hour-long documentary—was screened at the Kolkatta Film Festival, on 14th November this year. It was received by the discerning audience with a fascination normally reserved for a feature film. As *Kaifinama* unfolded, and Shaukat came on screen, she held the audience captive from the very beginning and sustained the ambience which Shabana Azmi and the film Director, Sumant Ghoshal had created by their reading of Kaifi's poetry in Urdu and English. Every time she lit up the screen with her poise and confidence, the heart reached out to her. We were charmed by her uninhibited narration of her unremitting love for the handsome poet Kaifi, her memories of him, and her rebellion at a young age [to get married to him]. After the film ended, the manner in which Shabana was besieged by the adulatory crowd, and the requests for selfies with her, it was obvious that had Shaukat Aapa been present, she would have loved the warmth with which the audience responded!

Often, the influence of a talented husband overshadows the creative impulses of a wife; but Shaukat was not 'wifely' in the traditional sense. She was always a revolutionary companion to him—one whose fame and self-esteem never paled in comparison with his. She was his strength, as he was hers. There was this strong strain of possessiveness and grit in her nature, which would strike you at the first instance, [when you met her].

This girl who hailed from a royal and affluent family, did not fall in love with a poet who wrote in the romantic vein; rather, she was attracted to him because of his firebrand beliefs. In an old recording of his [in the film] the tall Kaifi

stands out, not so much for his striking looks, as for his deep, sensitive voice. It was a voice to die for—‘*is aawaz pe kaun na mar jaye ai khuda!*’ The resolve of Shaukat was such that at a time when even speaking about love was considered brazen, she had the guts to set out from Hyderabad to Mumbai, determined to marry the poet. She was not one to give up. When she was expecting Shabana, the party workers urged her to go in for an abortion, saying where would she have the time to bring up her child. But Shaukat wanted to give birth to the child and once she had made up her mind, nobody could move her or change her mind. Even though she knew that she would have to bring up her two children, living for years in just a single room with a tiny kitchen and veranda [she still stuck to her decision]. She was also a part of the IPTA theatre group. Balancing her home and career, she opened up a progressive world for her children, because of which their talents, too, flourished. With mounting domestic responsibilities, Kaifi Saheb agreed to do film lyrics and penned memorable songs for films like *Haqeeqat* (Reality)—‘*mai yeh sochkar uske dar se uthatha*’ (I left her threshold thinking...)—and *Kaagaz ke Phool* (Paper Flowers)—‘*waqt ne kiya kya haseen sitam*’ (Time has done such great injustice). Shaukat Aapa also joined films and we got to see her fine performances as Jameela in *Garam Hawa* and Khanum Jaan in *Umrao Jaan*.

The beautiful home she set up in Janki Kutir radiated creativity and finesse even on the outside. Like the fragrance of the jasmine wafting from the garden, the wooden fencing of the house was a precursor of the warmth within it. Inside, a row of beautiful Ganpati images and statuettes sat ranged in the alcoves. It was the doorbell, however, which was the most attractive feature of the house. A rough thick rope dangled near the door and when pulled it rang with the sweetest chimes. We almost wished that the door wouldn’t open soon so that we could pull the rope once more to hear the soft bells. The chimes were so melodious that even those within would be in no hurry to open the doors.

1977. Kamleshwar, the Editor of the monthly magazine *Katha Yatra*, had set up his office in Vikas Apartment in Janki Kutir. The editorial staff included Devesh Thakur and Sajid Rashid, along with my old friend, Lajpat Rai, who was also working in the PR department of the Russian Consulate. Lajpat Rai was a close friend of Kaifi Saheb. Both were card-holding members of the CPI. We had descended on Kaifi’s place in a large group, for the first time. *Katha Yatra* used to feature a column by a well-known artist, known for his sharp and witty one-liners, which some pointed questions would elicit from him. One issue of the magazine featured the handwritten, and not printed *Kaifiyaat* by the poet, curated by the noted fiction writer Jitendra Bhatia. I would often join

Lajpat Rai when he went over for a cup of coffee with Kaifi and Shaukat. How can the tea, they served in clay kullads be ever forgotten? It was here that I saw transparent glass teacups for the first time. There was the touch of the creative in every nook and corner of the house—right from the cups in which tea would be served, to the figures on the walls, to the wooden furniture—and that was the touch of Shaukat’s hands. We seldom sat in the drawing room. We would walk into Kaifi Saheb’s room, which had his writing table and his long easy chair. Shaukat Aapa would wander in and out of the room. Just as the house was marked by exquisite, unmatched furnishings, Shaukat Aapa was always dressed in style and her bearing was always regal. Her presence made such a strong impact on us! I remember that as we sipped tea interminably in that house, not once did they make us feel that we were in the presence of such a distinguished and creative couple.

I came back to Mumbai after spending 12 years—1979 to 1991—in Kolkatta. Mumbai was in the grip of the post-Babri Masjid demolition conflicts. Violence and killings were rampant in many areas of Bandra East. Many of the more sensitive citizens were engaged in relief work. People were standing in long queues to donate blood. The two sons of Amjad Khan were very active in the rehabilitation work in our area. I asked them where we could deposit the relief material we were collecting, and they directed me to Shaukat Aapa’s house. Next week I packed bundles of clothes in the dicky of my car and drove up to Shaukat Aapa’s house. When I met her that day, she was particularly happy. I learnt from her that Kaifi Saheb, who had been much agonised by the poison of communalism which had spread in the city, had just completed a *nazm*—‘*doosra banvaas*’ (Exile, a second time). He was unwell—with a racking cough and a severe chest congestion—and so, she herself read out the poem for us. She was commenting upon it as she read—Shri Ram’s feet had just touched the waters of the river Saryu... and here the *quaafiyaa*, the rhyming pattern, changed. My eyes grew moist as she read on. There and then I transcribed it into *devnagiri*. On the 6th of February I read ‘*doosra banvaas*’, as part of a paper I presented at a meeting—‘When will this madness end?’—organised in Churchgate, by Raman Mishra for the Janvadi Lekhak Sangh. Next day it was published in the *Jansatta*. A few days after this she recited Kaifi Saheb’s *nazm* again as she lay on the easy chair in her own home. It is a classic *nazm* which Kaifi had written after living through a great deal of pain.

There is no doubt that Shaukat Aapa was not only the inspiration for the poetry of Kaifi Saheb; she was also its first reader and enthusiast. She kept that little girl in her alive always—the girl who had once approached Kaifi Saheb for

his autograph, and had faced his ire for having sought the autograph of Sardar Jafri first. She was always the ideal companion for him, just as she was a loving mother and a dedicated party worker. We are now eager that after “Kaifinama” the “Shaukatnama” of the revolutionary and unparalleled woman will also be written. Shaukat Aapa, my salutes to you!

—Sudha Arora and Charanjeet Kaur (Translated from her Hindi article “Ik bhaagi shaksiyat thi Shaukat Aapa” (A Rebellious Person Shaukat Aapa Was) written in Navbharat Times, December 1, 2019.

A People’s Lawyer: Lily Thomas (1927-December 10, 2019)



Advocate Lily Thomas, the most senior woman lawyer of the Supreme Court, passed away on 10th December. She was 91. Lily Thomas has left an indelible mark on the legal and socio-cultural landscape of India. Born in Kottayam, she did her collegiate education in Madras University. In 1955 she enrolled in the bar in the

Madras High Court. Two years later she joined the LLM course at Madras University and went on to become the first woman to obtain an LLM degree in independent India. She started her legal practice in Madras and completed her Masters in Law by 1959. Although a PhD was what she wanted to do, she became an advocate in the Supreme Court and was one of just four women who were practising in the courts at the time. The initial days were challenging and turbulent. The words of her father, “You will make it count” made her go on relentlessly.

The name of Lily Thomas is associated with several Public Interest Litigations that she filed in the Supreme Court. The one that is most remembered in the legal circles is her petition which resulted in striking down of Section 8 (4) of the Representation of the People Act. Under this convicted lawmakers could continue practising during the time it took for appeals made against them to be heard in court. The landmark judgement in this PIL resulted in the automatic disqualification of convicted legislators for a minimum of two years. The government prepared an ordinance to retract the ruling, but Lily Thomas challenged it with a Review Petition. Subsequently the government withdrew the ordinance after facing severe backlash and criticism to it. A “satvik” Parliament without criminals was her dream.

Lily Thomas fought against Advocate-on-Record system. Under Article 145, an Advocate-on-Record can act as well

as plead for a party in the Supreme Court. An additional qualification is needed to be an Advocate-on-Record though. Four years of practice and after that taking training with a Senior Advocate-on-Record and after one year’s training appear for an examination conducted by the Supreme court itself. After passing this exam the advocate has to set up a registered office within a radius of ten miles from the Supreme Court building and also have a registered clerk. Only after this can the advocate be accepted as an Advocate-on-Record by the Chamber Judge of the Supreme Court. The lone warrior Lily felt that lawyers should be allowed to practise across all the courts of the nation.

There were other landmark fights she took up in which she succeeded thus setting precedents for similar cases in future. In the case of Mary Roy, mother of Arundhati Roy, she fought for equal rights under Succession Act. When Mary Roy’s father expired, she was thrown out of the family cottage with her two children. Syrian Christian property laws give mere peanuts to daughters as share in ancestral property. The challenge by Lily Thomas in the apex court resulted in nullification of discriminatory sections of Cochin as well as Travancore Succession Act and ensured equal share in succession suits.

Lily Thomas continued to wage more battles. She fought a legal war against men converting to Islam to enter into bigamous relationships. She pointed out to deeper legal fault lines that failed to address the equal marital status guaranteed to the wife under Hindu Code. After exhaustive arguments, the Apex court held that the marriage resulting from conversion to Islam from any other faith during the existence of previous marriage before conversion is deemed illegal even if the Muslim Personal Law Act allows polygamy, because such conversions are not acts of freedom of conscience as without change of faith they would be considered fraudulent. Changing faith for polygamy is only a feigned act. In short, she always excelled as a polestar in furthering the cause of gender equality. Staunch fights against power centres, earned her the moniker ‘Lily Thomas Vs. Union of India’. Once Judge Katju of Supreme Court remarked in the open court, “You are the same Lily Thomas who made us read about ‘Lily Thomas Vs. Union of India’.”

Lily Thomas opted to remain single all her life. On being asked about her single status, with her fine sense of humour she replied, ‘All the men I was interested in have either become priests or Judges. On a serious note, I have never been able to find a man who was James Bond, Lincoln, and Churchill all rolled into one.’ She kept on contributing to furtherance of rights and causes of common people by toiling for 8 hrs in courts even at the age of 90. She has earned her rest and it is for us now to pick up the baton.

—Poo. Ko. Saravanan & C S Lakshmi