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Rohini Mani
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SPARROW Supplement

*A bird flies away leaving the nest alone;
so is life related to body.*

(Thirukkural, Chapter 34, 338)

(From the blog of Kannan's Translations of Thirukkural in English: A Modern Rendition of the Tamil Classic)



SOUND & PICTURE ARCHIVES
FOR
RESEARCH ON WOMEN

REMEMBERING WOMEN FROM DIFFERENT WALKS OF LIFE

FROM SPARROW ARCHIVES

A Young Life Cut Short: Soujanya (August 1996-30 September 2021)



Suicide by young people in the film and television industry has increased and the news always casts a gloom in the industry. The reason is very often depression due to several reasons combined with loneliness. When Kannada actress Soujanya committed suicide leaving a note saying, 'I had promised I'll never do such a stupid thing in my life but I had

no option', it sent shock waves through the Kannada film industry which had just witnessed the suicide of Jayashree Ramaiah, another young actress who could not cope with the struggles in the film industry. And earlier in the year 2021, actress Chaitra Kotoor of Big Boss Kannada fame, had also chosen to end her life. Soujanya's suicide comes on the heels of these two suicides. She had been a part of a few television serials and a couple of films. The actress hanged herself in her apartment in Kumbalgoodu in Bengaluru. While there were many speculations about why she would choose such a drastic step, her suicide note blaming no one and citing mental suffering put an end to all of them.

Sadly, a young life came to an end because of the stress of dealing with the film and TV industry.

—C S Lakshmi

A Game of Destiny: Madhavi Gogate (7 August 1964-21 November 2021)



Many actors fell victims to the second wave of COVID. Madhavi Gogate was one of them. She did the mother's role in the famous TV Serial *Anupama* (2020). She came from a non-filmy background and started her career in Marathi cinema with films like *Ghanchakkar* (Crazy, 1990) opposite the well-known Marathi

actor Ashok Saraf. In the same year she acted in *Dokyala Taap Nahi* (Not Quite a Headache, 1990). These films were followed by *He Khel Nashibache* (It is a Game of Destiny, 2001) and Hindi movie *Yeshwant* (1997) and *Krishna Cottage* (2004).

Apart from Marathi films she did different kinds of roles in various Hindi and Marathi TV serials like *Koi Apna Sa* (2001-2003), *Kahiin To Hoga* (2003-2007), *Ek Safar Aisa Kabhi Socha Na Tha* (2009), *Baba Aiso Varr Dhoondo* (2010-2012), *Sapne Suhane Ladakpan Ke* (2012-2015), *Kaal Bhairav Rahasya* (2017-2019), *Sindoor Ki Keemat* (2021), *Tuza Maza Jamtay* (2020) and *Swapnanchya Palikadale* (2020). She was a much-appreciated actor both in films and in television. She still had many years to do good roles and it is a pity she fell a victim to COVID. But when destiny plays its hand, it is a losing game.

—Asmita Deshpande

CONTRIBUTIONS TO SPARROW QUALIFY FOR 80 G.

A Fulfilling Acting Career: Rekha Kamat (1933-11 January 2022)



Veteran Marathi actress Rekha Kamat, who had been active in the art world for over 60 years passed away at the age of 89. Her original name was Kumud Sukhtankar. Her acting career started at a young age when she used to take part in fairs. Kumud and her younger sister Kusum both were interested in dance and

singing. Both the sisters were studying in Indian Education Society's Girls School in Dadar. While in school they learnt Kathak from Gaurishankar and Bharatanatyam from Parvati Kumar. They learnt music from Bhanudas Mankame and Ghodke Guruji. They were selected and were performing in Sachin Shankar's *Ramleela* ballet at the age of 15. Actress Hansa Wadkar once saw their dance in *Ramleela* and suggested their names to Rajabhau Paranjape, Sudhir Phadake and G D Madgulkar of Gajraj Pictures. Both the sisters got their film break in Gajraj Picture's *Lakhachi Goshta* (The Story of a Lakh, 1952). G D Madgulkar changed their names from Kumud and Kusum to Rekha and Chitra respectively. *Lakhachi Goshta* released in 1952. G R Kamat was assistant dialogue writer for this film. Rekha met him there and got married to him in 1953. Later she acted in many Marathi films. *Kuberache Dhan* (Wealth of a Rich Man, 1953) was a film in which she was in a double role. Film *Gruhadevata* (The House Deity, 1957) got National Award for Best Marathi film in 1957. She entered into theatre through musical dramas such as *Saubhadra*, *Ekach Pyala* (A Single Cup), *Bhavbandhan* (Emotional Bond). Later she also acted in non-musical dramas such as *Tujhe Ahe Tujapashi* (What Is Yours Is With You), *Sundar Me Honar* (I am Beautiful), *Lagnachi Bedi* (Wedlock), *Kalpavruksha Kanyesathi* (A Wish-fulfilling Divine Tree for a Daughter), *Dilya Ghari Tu Sukhi Raha* (Be Happy in Your Marital Family) and many more. She got a lot of fame after her performance in *Diva Jalu De Sari Raat* (Let the Lamp Burn the Whole Night). *Gandha Nishigandhacha* (The Fragrance of Tuberose) was the last play she acted in. She also acted in many television serials such as *Prapanch* (The World, 1999), *Manoos* (People), *Yala Jeevan Aise Nav* (Life is Like That), *Sanj Savalya* (Shadows at Dusk) and *Eka Lagnachi Dusari Goshta* (The Other Story of a Marriage, 2012). *Vastupurush* (The Guardian Spirit of the House, 2002) and *Agabai Arechcha* (She is Surprised, He is Surprised, 2004) are her recent films. She also acted in a Hindi film *Bhoot* (Ghost, 2003) and in a few ad films also.

She received Jankavi P Savalaram Puraskar for her long career in acting in 2005. Maharashtra State 'Lifetime Achievement Award' was also conferred on her in 2007. Dooradarshan's Sahyadri channel gave her the Navratna Puraskar in 2012. Rekha Kamat did justice to the profession she took up and looking back at her life at the age of 89 she must have found many reasons to feel contented to have made acting her career. What could make an actress happier than that?

—Sharmila Sontakke

Finding Peace in Serving the Cause of Tribal Girls: Shanti Devi (18 April 1934-16 January 2022)



Shanti Devi was a social worker who was born into a well-to-do landlord family in Balasore, Odisha. Her family was keen on her education and she went to college but did not complete her college education. She got married to Ratan Das, a doctor who was a Gandhian, in 1951, at the age of 17. Both shifted to Koraput after marriage. They shifted to the village

Sankhalapadar near Rayagada in 1953. Leprosy and the disease of Yaws, a virulent and infectious skin disease, was endemic in the village. Shanti Devi took up the task of healing those who suffered from those diseases and succeeded in curing many. She set up an ashram for leprosy patients in Jabarguda in the Rayagada District. She is also well-known for bringing peace to the Maoist affected areas in Odisha.

Shanti Devi was part of the Bhoodan Movement of Vinoba Bhave from 1956 to 1982. During this time, she founded Seva Samaj in 1964 with 8 tribal girls. She also established a tribal girls' hostel in Gunupur. She was also working as a teacher in Khadi Vidyalaya, Gopalbal. She was Joint Secretary of Nabjeevan Mandal and Secretary of Odisha Bhoodan Yagna Samittee. For the major part of her life, she worked for the all-round development of tribal girl children. This work included education, rehabilitation, and vocational training of orphans and destitute children. In fact, she had started her social work by founding an ashram at Gobarapalli locality in Rayagada. She started a rehabilitation training camp for tribal women at Gunupur and later she shifted to Gunupur where she set up the now-famous Seva Samaj Ashram, mentioned above, in 1964 to provide education for tribal girls, develop the all-round skills of tribal, orphans and downtrodden girls

to help them stand on their own feet and also provide shelter homes for widows and depressed women. According to a tribute published in *The New Indian Express* (18 January 2022) she had started three child care institutions, an educational complex for ST girls and several creche centres in southern Odisha. She worked tirelessly with her team of 50 social workers and 500 volunteers till her last breath. At the educational complex she set up at Limamedia village near Gunupur in 1993 with help from the Central Government there are currently 100 tribal girls who are studying free. She was a champion of land rights for the poor and anti-liquor movement. She strongly believed that majority of problems in Odisha could be solved if the government provided everyone a piece of land and implemented stricter laws for restricting liquor production and consumption.

She kept alive the Gandhian in her whether serving as an honorary judge of Juvenile Court of Koraput and Gajapati District in 1990 or when she took part in a March for peace and non-violence with 20 Sarvodaya Activists of Sarvodaya Samaj.

She has several publications of translations to her credit including *Ahinsara Anweshana* (Exploration of Ahimsa), a translation in Odia of the thoughts of Vinobaji. Tulsi Das's *Ramcharita Manasa* in Odia and *Sanchyita*, a book of poems by Rabindra Nath Tagore, translated into Odia. Shanti Devi was the recipient of many awards including an award from The Ministry of Women and Child Welfare in 1991, the Radhanath Rath Peace Award, Jamnalal Bajaj Award in 1994 and the prestigious Padma Shri in 2021.

Shanti Devi passed away at the age of 88 after complaining of chest pain at the Shanti Seva Ashram where she lived and worked. The Seva Ashram will continue her work but it would be wonderful if one of the tribal girls who has benefitted from the education she has received could write a biography of Shanti Devi.

A Many-Faceted Woman: Smita Rajwade (30 January 1948-18 January 2022)



Smita Rajwade, a versatile writer passed away at the age of 74. She wrote in many genres of literature such as novel, short stories, poetry, biography, plays, translation, children's literature and spiritual literature. She completed MA in Hindi and Marathi with a first class and she also passed the Rashtrabhasha Pandit, Sahitya Visharad examinations with a

first class. She worked as a teacher at Patwardhan High School and Pathak High School in Ratnagiri. She is one of those rare writers who learnt Urdu and composed poems in Urdu. She wrote extensively on freedom fighter Savarkar, Marathi writer Kusumagraj and Sant Kabir. She translated the entire epic poem *Ramcharitamanas* based on Ramayana into Marathi. Smita Rajwade published more than 17 books. Among them, *Anudini ani Soneri Kshan* (Every Day and A Golden Moment), *Aakashvel* (A Creeper), *Raju Haravala*, *Raju Sapadala* (Raju Lost, Raju Found), *Gun Gun Gani* (Humming Songs), *Ganmatgani* (Fun Songs), *Jaduchi Duniya* (Magical World), *Waghobachan Lagine* (Tiger's Marriage), *Suvarnakamal* (Golden Lotus), *Giridhar Nagar*, *Deepmal* (A Row of Lamps for Krishna), *Gypsy*, *Tya Doghi* (Those Two), *Shevatache Gharate Maze* (My Last Nest) and *Narapashu* (Cannibal, 1975). She also wrote spiritual texts such as *Phodeele Bhandar* (Open Treasure) and *Jagadguru Shree Vallabhacharya Pushit marg*. She was 'A' grade artiste of Akashwani when the radio station was started in Ratnagiri and she wrote many programmes for Akashwani Ratnagiri station. She was active in Konkan Marathi Sahitya Parishad. She contributed in Konkan Marathi Kosh (Konkan Marathi Encyclopedia) by writing on Feminine life, Saint Literature. She also participated in the 64th All India Marathi Literacy Conference held in Ratnagiri in 1990. She played an important role in the Janseva Library of at Ratanagiri. Her children's book, *Gun Gun Gani*, received Pune's Sahitya Premi Bhagini Mandal's award. Smita was also honoured with the Kusumtai Abhyankar Award. Having lost her husband Sharad Rajwade in 2005, she had lived alone but had moved to Mangaluru the last two years to be with her daughter where she passed away of a heart attack.

—Asmita Deshpande

—C S Lakshmi

WHERE THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT IS
CONCERNED SPARROW IS CONCEIVED
OF AS A NATIONAL ARCHIVES
COLLECTING ORAL HISTORY AND
VISUAL MATERIAL FROM ALL OVER INDIA.

Knowledge for Students and Houses for Teachers: Sanjeevani Raikar (1935-5 February 2022)



A successful teacher of Marathi in Balmohan Vidyalaya, Mumbai, Head of the Women's League of Teachers' Council, Head of the Women's League of All India National Educational Federation and later Vice President, President of the All-India Secondary Teachers' Association, Teacher for 18 years,

MLA, President of Vatsalya Trust, Sanjeevani Raikar, who successfully juggled various responsibilities, passed away at a hospital due to old age. Mukundarao Kulkarni and other members had established the Teachers' Council in Vidarbha in 1970 and when Mukundrao Kulkarni suggested in 1988 that she should contest the election from the teachers' constituency, she was not interested. She said she was happy visiting schools and distributing leaflets. But she did take part in the election as a candidate and was elected after defeating veterans from the teachers' constituency. Again in 1994, she was not ready to contest the elections. But, at the insistence of the workers, she took part and won once again. Once again in the election year 2000, it was proposed that she should stand again. She was elected for the third time. Sanjeevani Raikar spent her entire life for the cause of education and the teachers' movement. She found a solution to hundreds of issues of teachers while working as a member of the Legislative Council and leading the Teachers' Council at the regional and national levels. One of the problems of housing for teachers was solved by getting sanctioned teachers' colonies from MHADA at four places in Mumbai. Many MLAs in the Legislative Assembly had literally 'grown up' in front of her. During the long period of being an MLA for 18 years, she was one of those Legislative Assembly members who travelled all around Maharashtra only in State Transport buses. And later by railway for all India level work. She lived a very simple life. She hardly ever used personally the residential flats given to her in Amdar Nivas (MLA residence). She kept those flats open for the patients and their relatives who used to come for treatment in Mumbai. She also used those flats in 26th July 2005 floods. She allowed women employees of Mantralaya to stay there during the floods. She has also collected money for Teachers' Federation during the floods.

She had successfully fought Corona and had come out of it. Her death soon after this has come as a shock.

—Asmita Deshpande

Gujarat's First Woman Judge: Sugnya Kamalashanker Bhatt (25 March 1941-10 February 2022)



Sugnya Bhatt was the first woman to be posted as Additional Judge in the Gujarat High Court on 17 October 1994. Born in 1941 Sugnya Bhatt was registered as a lawyer at the Gujarat High Court on February 28, 1968. In 1989, she became the judge of Ahmedabad City Civil Court and later was promoted as its Additional Principal Judge in the following year in November 1990.

After being posted as Additional Judge in the Gujarat High Court on 17 October 1994 she was later transferred to the Kerala High Court which she refused due to personal reasons. She then remained as a High Court Judge from January 2, 1995 onwards. She was the sitting Chairperson of Other Backward Class Commission of the State Government and also headed an Inquiry Commission set up by the Gujarat government into an illegal snooping on a woman architect allegedly by a top minister and IPS officers in 2009.

Her sister Bharati confirmed the news of her passing away on 10 February 2022 due to COVID complications at the age of 80. She was an inspiration to many women to take up the profession as a lawyer in her era.

—Pooja Pandey

Many Dreams of An Artist: Bhargavi Narayan (4 February 1938-14 February 2022)



Kannada film and theatre artiste and writer Bhargavi Narayan passed away on 14 February 2022 in Jayanagar, Bangalore. She was suffering from age-related ailments. She was born on 4 February 1938 in Bengaluru, Kingdom of Mysore in the then British Raj. She completed her schooling in Acharya Patashala Public School in NR Colony. She did her pre-university course in Vijaya College and went on

to do a BSc from Maharani's College. She later enrolled privately for MA in English. She was an avid reader and frequented libraries in the neighbourhood. In an interview she gave to *Deccan Herald* in 2021 she said books and theatre kept her occupied during her formative years. In the same interview she narrated an interesting story of how she met

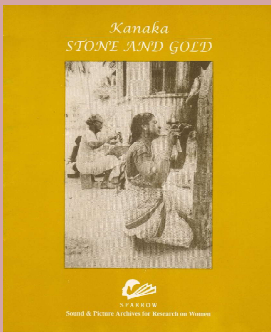
her husband Belavadi Nanjundaiah Narayana known as Makeup Nani, an actor and a makeup artist, during her college theatre performance.

She has acted in more than 600 Kannada plays and more than 45 Kannada films. Some of her famous films were *Eradu Kanasu* (Two Dreams, 1974), *Hanthakana Sanchu* (Assassination Plot, 1980), *Pallavi Anupallavi* (Refrain and Continuation, 1983), and *Baa Nalle Madhurchandrake* (Come Girl, for the Honeymoon, 1993). She also acted in television series including *Manthana* (Churning) and *Mukta* (Liberated). She directed and wrote plays for AIR's women's programmes and Women's Association for Children, Karnataka. She had also worked as a member of Karnataka Natak Academy. She worked as a manager in ESI Corporation, Bengaluru before choosing her career in the arts. She has written a book in Kannada known as *Naa Kanda Nammavaru* (Our Own People Whom I Have Met, 2017), published by Ankita Pustaka, Bengaluru. She was a speaker at the Bangalore Literature Festival, 2018.

She was the recipient of the Karnataka State Sahitya Academy Award for her autobiography *Naanu Bhargavi* (I Am Bhargavi) published by Ankita Pustaka, Bengaluru in 2012. Apart from literary award, she also received many awards for her work in theatre and films. Karnataka State Film Awards for Best Supporting Actress (1974-75) for her role in film *Professor Huchuraya* (1974); Karnataka State Children Drama Contest state-level award for Scriptwriting and direction for the drama *Bhoothayana Pechata* (The Plight of Bhootayya, 1998); Karnataka State Nataka Academy Awards for her work in theatre (2005); Alva's Nudisiri Awards for her work in theatre; Mangalore Prestigious Message Award for screenplay, dialogue writing for Kannada serial *Kavalodeda Daari* (Forked Road) and many more. She was also awarded the Rajyotsava award in 2019.

After such an illustrious life she breathed her last at the age of 83. As per her wish her body was donated to St. John's Hospital in Bengaluru.

—Sharmila Sontakke



**SPARROW
BOOKLET**

A Gandhian way of Life: Shakuntala Choudhury (25 June 1920-20 February 2022),



Not many people who have contributed a lot to the country get noticed unless and until they get Padma Shri Award. In 2022, This Gandhian social worker from Kamrup was awarded the Padma Shri for her contribution in the field of social work especially towards women and children. Shakuntala Chaudhary was well known as Shakuntala Baideo by the people of Assam. Born in 1920, Shakuntala

Chaudhary became a teacher at Tarini Charan Girls' Higher Secondary school in Guwahati, after completing her education from Handique Girls College, Guwahati. As a young teacher while teaching she met Padma Shri Amal Prabha Das, a social worker and a Gandhian who set up Kasturba Ashram at Sarania Hills land property donated by his father.

Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust was founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1945 in Madhya Pradesh, Indore. The trust works for the development of women and children in the rural parts of our country and focusses on health care, education, vocational training and employment.

While continuing her teaching she joined the Assam branch of Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust (KGNMT) which is known as Kasturba Ashram or the Sarania Ashram. Kasturba Ashram was inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi on 9 January 1946. She became the office secretary of the Trust branch and helped run the Gram Sevika Vidyalaya. Her associations with the KGNMT came a long way when she was appointed as a head in 1955 after Prabha Das. During her twenty years journey Shakuntala Chaudhary has contributed a lot towards the development KGNMT which no words can describe. She has witnessed many developments like the Chinese aggression, the migration of the Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetans into India after the 1959 Tibetan uprising, the India-China war, the Tibetan refugee crisis and the Assamese Language Movement. She organised Shanti Sewa activities on the international borders.

She was a part of Bhoodan Movement and was greatly associated with Vinoba Bhave. She took a major part in the Bhoodan Movement in Assam. She not only travelled with Vinoba Bhave to the rural parts of Assam but also translated his lectures from Hindi to Assamese for the people. She was part of 'Ban Cow Slaughter Satyagraha', which Vinoba Bhave started in 1978.

As Vinoba Bhave was very much interested in introducing Devanagari script, he suggested to Shakuntala Choudhary to start a magazine. Shakuntala Choudhary founded a monthly

magazine *Asomiya Vishwa Nagari* in Devnagari script and edited it for many years. The magazine is still published focussing on Gandhian ideals, thoughts and spirituality.

Her great contribution towards society and lifelong efforts to promote Gandhian values will always be remembered. It's a pity that just after receiving Padma Shri in January 2022 Shakuntala Chaudhary passed away in Guwahati on 20 February 2022 at the age of 102.

—Pooja Pandey

Creating Sweet Springs in Khara Kuwa: Kumudini Madhavrao Ranganekar (1929-17 February 2022)



Affectionately referred to as Kumudtai by everyone Kumudini Ranganekar was an activist of the Jan Sangh and a former MLC from Marathwada Graduates Constituency. She was 93 and passed away due to old age in Nashik on Thursday, 17 February 2022.

Although she had spent her life after her marriage at Khara Kuwa area of Aurangabad, she was a native of Mumbai and had spent her childhood in Mumbai where she completed her education till Master's degree. After her marriage with Madhavrao, she shifted to Aurangabad in 1958 for her husband was given the responsibility to work in Marathwada by Jan Sangh. She helped her husband with the Jan Sangh Party work but also gave vent to her own creative urges even while enjoying running the household and raising her only daughter. Although the name of the area she lived in—Khara Kuwa—meant well with brackish water, she seems to have delighted in creating her own metaphoric sweet water springs. She wrote poems and brought out seven anthologies. *Atrupta Aakash* (Insatiable Sky), *Arghya* (Offering) and *Aradhana* (Worship) are some of them. She also wrote a collection of articles. She was running a literary organisation Madhugandh, which became a forum for budding writers. Jan Sangh's Rambhau Mhalagi and Jagannathrao Joshi would visit them regularly for the party work, which inspired the social activist in her. She became the first MLC of the Marathwada Graduates Constituency and remained in that position from 1978 to 1984. This position gave her more confidence and later she tried to solve the problems of not only the graduates but also that of farmers and took up other grassroot level problems as well. She had started a

typewriting institute, stenography classes and had also set up the Netaji Subhash High School and Dindayal Sanshodhan Sanstha in Khara Kuwa. She also contested the municipal council election in 1967. Former minister Jayawantiben Mehta and many other activists had campaigned for her. She was a sought-after speech writer for many leaders and speakers. There are many awards to her credit. Ahilyabai Holkar Award by Maharashtra State and Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Akademi Award are some of them. She had recently moved to Nashik owing to her old age and falling health, to be with her daughter and her family. She was a rare combination of a creative writer, a sensitive activist and a conscientious politician.

—Pooja Pandey

Living Life Challenging Lupus: Radhika Khanna (23 March 1974-28 February 2022)



The author of *Yoga: From the Ganges to Wall Street* Radhika Khanna passed away due to multiple organ failure in New York City. She was just 47. Radhika Khanna was born in Amritsar. In order to pursue her studies she shifted to New York and completed her study at the Fashion Institute of Technology and further started her own clothing company, Estilo Inc. in 2005.

She was also a Yoga expert and an author. Some of her notable books include: *Pose: Yoga for Ambitious People*, *Standout: Yoga and Self Defense* and *Yoga: From the Ganges to Wall Street*.

At a very early age she was diagnosed with lupus, kidney failure, and atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome. She started taking part in campaigns to find a cure for lupus, an autoimmune disease, through Lupus Foundation of the United States. She was very close to her brother Vikas Khanna, a well-known chef and author who has contributed a chapter on 'Yogic Food' in his sister's book *Yoga: From the Ganges to Wall Street*. The messages shared on Twitter by Vikas Khanna during the last days of her life were moving and one could make out the great bonding between the siblings. The family was in the process of preparing for a kidney transplant for Radhika but death had its own plans.

—Pooja Pandey

A Life Spent Fighting for the Oppressed: Comrade Devyani More (1935-7 March 2022)



In 1970s in Mumbai there were many agitations against inflation, marches for women's issues under the leadership of Comrade Ahilyatai Ranganekar, Mrinaltai Gore, Comrade Suman Sanzgiri and other Communist and Socialist leaders. Comrade Devyani More took active part in all these agitations, even though she was an employee of the

Central Government. She got this legacy of rebelliousness against inequality, fighting for the rights of poor people from her grandfather, Gangaram Bhatankar. Her grandfather was active in the Ambedkarite Movement in Pune. Com. Devyani's father was in the military. She was born in Jhansi. Initially her school education was neglected, but later when they shifted to Subhedarwada in Panvel permanently, she completed her Matric by getting double promotion and passing two standards in one year. She stood first in the then Colaba district. She was inspired by Dr Ambedkar's thoughts not just because her grandfather and two of her uncles were in the Ambedkarite movement, but because she had memories of Dr Ambedkar staying at Subhedarwada, Panvel, while travelling between Mumbai and Pune. She got married to Comrade Satyendra More who was an activist and MLA from Dharavi. Comrade Satyendra's father Com. R B More was considered as a right hand man to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. When Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar announced conversion to Buddhism Devyani and Satyendra's marriage was the first Buddhist style marriage in Maharashtra. Along with her husband Comrade Devyani remained active in the struggle of workers, Dalits and tribals. Along with CPM Comrade Subhashini Ali she formed many Marxist organisations, especially for women, in the areas between Andheri and Goregaon in Mumbai. She remained active all her life with Janvadi Mahila Sanghatana, Dasgav Janata Pragatishil Sangh and the Communist Party (Marxist) of India. She carried the legacy of her parents and her in-laws of fighting against economic, social and caste inequalities. Her life was of a common woman but filled with activism and struggle. So many of the activists, Marxist leaders of Maharashtra, leaders of the Dalit movement and women's movement came for her funeral which was on 8th March (International Women's Day) and paid tribute to Comrade Devyani More and bade her good bye with Lal Salam.

—Sharmila Sontakke

A Diya Extinguished: Vatsala Deshmukh (1930-12 March 2022)



Veteran Marathi actress Vatsala Deshmukh passed away at the age of 92. She came from a family involved with entertainment. Vatsala Deshmukh's father Sridharpant Deshmukh was a theatre artiste and was connected with Bapurao Pendharkar's Lalitkaladarsh theatre company. He acted in different kinds

of roles and used to travel along with the theatre groups. Vatsala Deshmukh and her sister, actress Sandhya Deshmukh Shantaram, and her brother used to be with their parents travelling all the time with theatre groups and thus got the chance to work in theatre at a very early age. After coming to Mumbai from Nashik, Vatsala Deshmukh began her acting career with Gujarati theatre and then acted in Marathi and Hindi movies. Her first Hindi movie was *Toofan Aur Diya* (Storm and Light, 1956) where she was a dancer. She acted in many movies such as *Shirdi ke Sai Baba* (1977) *Naag Panchami* (1972), *Jal Bin Machhli Nritya Bin Bijli* (Fish without Water Dancer without Spark, 1971), *Mai Mauli* (Loving Mother, 1971), *Navrang* (Beautiful, 1959), *Suhaag* (Marriage, 1979) *Pinjra* (Cage, 1972) and many more. She acted in character roles of mother, aunt and so on and started getting more of such supporting roles. Vatsala Deshmukh's sister Sandhya got married to V Shantaram, the celebrated film producer, director and actor. Vatsala Deshmukh got married to a stage actor Govardhan who was known as Bal Gandharva of the Gujarati stage. Her married life did not last for long. Her daughter Ranjana Deshmukh was one of the popular actresses of Marathi cinema. She had a huge fan following and was remembered for her acting in various films. Unfortunately she passed away due to a heart attack at a very early age of 45.

Vatsala Deshmukh was always connected with Marathi cinema in one way or the other. Recently after many years she appeared in front of the camera in Marathi TV programme 'Chala Hawa Yeu Dya' (Let the Wind Come). Her contribution to the Gujarati stage and Marathi cinema will always be part of theatre history and the history of Marathi cinema.

—Pooja Pandey

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A Dedicated Political Career: Kumudben Manishankar Joshi (31 January 1934-14 March 2022)



There are very few women governors who have governed states of India since Independence. One of them was Kumudben Manishankar Joshi.

She was the Governor of Andhra Pradesh from 26 November 1985 to 7 February 1990. She was the second woman Governor of the state after Sharda Mukherjee. She also became Deputy Minister of Information and Broadcasting (October 1980-January 1982) and Deputy Minister of Health and Family Welfare (January 1982-December 1984). Kumudben was a member of the Rajya Sabha thrice, from 15 October 1973 to 2 April 1976, 3 April 1976 to 2 April 1982 and from 3 April 1982 to 25 November 1985. She was also the General Secretary, Gujarat PCC

Soon after taking charge as governor, she travelled extensively to all the 23 districts of the state which shows how politically active she was but N T Rama Rao, the then Chief Minister and his partymen saw this more as an attempt by Kumudben to build a stronger base for the Congress.

She died in Changa Dhanori village near Gandevi, Gujarat, on 14 March 2022, at the age of 88 after a political career in which she made all efforts to do what she considered her best.

—Sharmila Sontakke



We thank all our trustess 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.

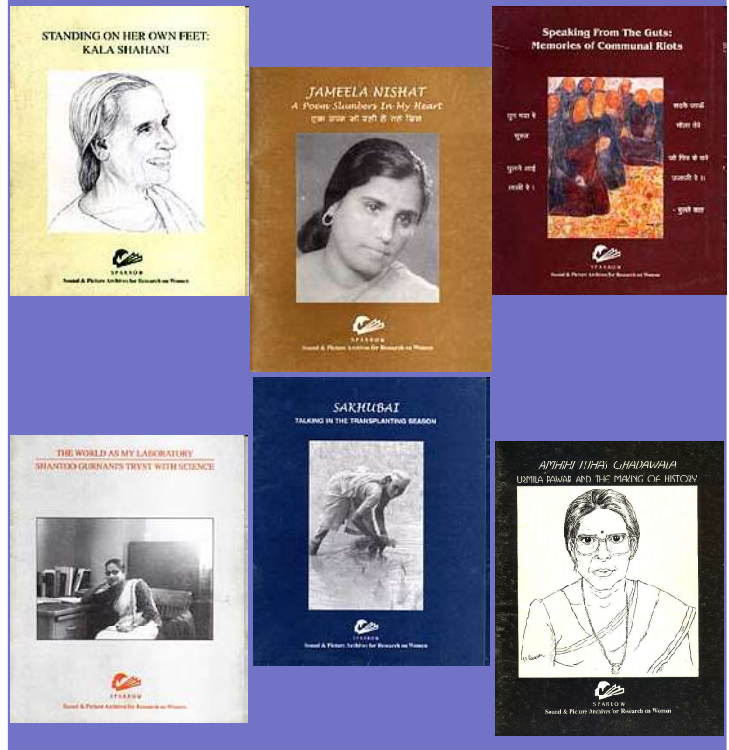


Solvanam - Tamil Arts and Literature

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<https://m.youtube.com/channel/UCEk2q9JZIE7Y6ACZGy87ieQ>
Voice, Video: Saraswathi Thiagarajan

- Standing on her own feet: Kala Shahani November, 1997.
- The World As My Laboratory :Shantoo Gurnani's Tryst With Science April, 1998.
- Amhihi Itihas Ghadawala: Urmila Pawar And The Making Of History July, 1998.
- Sakhubai: Talking In The Transplanting Season October, 1998.
- Jameela Nishat: A Poem Slumbers In My Heart January, 1999.
- Speaking from the Guts: Memories Of Communal Riots December, 1999.



APRIL 2022

**A Sports Legend of the Fifties: Meena Parande
(12 December 1931-1 April 2022)**

Meena Parande, a table tennis player from the fifties, was born on December 12, 1931, in Nagpur. Her father was Barrister D K Parande who loved sports and used to play cricket and tennis. This kind of family environment created a love for sports in her and encouraged her to follow her passion and dreams. Her grandmother played a very important role in encouraging her to play table tennis in those days when there were restrictions on women to take up anything in the fields of sports, science and others. Meena Parande took up table tennis so seriously that within a short period of time she became a well-trained sports person. She trained under well-known coach Chandorkar from Nagpur. By the time she was 20 she was well-prepared to play national tournaments. Sultana Syeed was the sportswoman in the fifties, who was winning national titles every single year from 1949 to 1953. She was defeated by Meena Parande in 1954. After winning her first title from Maharashtra Meena Parande later became the first player from Maharashtra to win the titles four times—in 1954 at Baroda, in 1956 at Saharanpur, in 1958 at Ahmedabad and in 1959 at Calcutta. She was ranked number 3 in Asia in 1954. After playing for nationals she was rewarded with a place in the Indian team in World Championships at England in 1954 and at Japan in 1956 and later in Asian championship at Singapore in 1954, Bangkok in 1955, Vietnam in 1961, and Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1963. She became the first Maharashtrian to represent India in World Championships. Medals and trophies won by her filled her house. She played for Maharashtra from 1953 to 1958 and for Indian Railways from 1959 to 1965. In the sixties she decided to quit and started coaching students. She coached many students who later represented India in World Championship and also at the Indian National Championship. Some of her students are famous neurologist Dr. Charudatta Apte, Rajeev Bodas, Suhas Kulkarni, Neela Kulkarni, Nandini Kulkarni, and Sunanda Kane.

Apart from coaching students Meera Parande started taking interest in Yoga. She started studying Yoga and she visited many ashrams to learn different techniques in Yoga and also attended Vipassana camps in Igatpuri and rendered her services there for six months.

She led a very contented and peaceful life in her Ashirwad Apartment in Pune and passed away at the age of 92. As the legendary player from the fifties, her contributions to the game of table tennis game will always be remembered.

—Pooja Pandey

**Playing Her Chosen Role in Life: Dr Leela K
Arjunwadkar (10 June 1932-5 April 2022)**

Dr Leela K Arjunwadkar's life which has been a journey of more than 70 years in education and cultural fields is admirable and inspirational. Dr Leela Arjunwadkar was a multi-talented personality. She was not merely interested in linguistics, teaching, literature, music and acting but she put her stamp on all these fields. Born in 1932 she completed her MA with Sanskrit and Pali from the University of Pune. She got a Central Government scholarship. She did her PhD in 1956. For 36 years from 1956 to 1992, she worked as a Professor in S P College, Pune. She was the Head of the Department of Sanskrit from 1973. She also taught Pali language to MA students of Pune University. She was a member of the Sanskrit Study Circle at the University. She was also on the governing committee of the Bhandarkar Institute of Oriental Studies, Bharatiya Sanskritikosh Mandal. She also acted in the plays of the Progressive Dramatic Association, a pioneering experimental theatre group established in 1951. Her way of teaching earned her the admiration of many students and she was one of the favourite teachers of students. On her 77th birthday her students brought out a volume of her selected articles entitled *Leelakamalpatrani* as a gift for her. She used to take part in scholarly discussions on music, literature and acting. Many of her articles were published in scholarly journals. She also wrote biographical articles on eminent personalities she came in contact with such as Pt. Mahadevshastri Joshi, Bhalba Kelkar and R C Dhere. She also used to present audio plays in Sanskrit on Akashvani. The death of Dr Leela K Arjunwadkar is not just a loss of an eminent scholar of Sanskrit, Pali and Ardhamagadhi languages who kept those languages alive all her life, but it is also a loss of a rare teacher who was loved by her students. With her death we have also lost an eminent orator and an artist who was deeply involved in the cultural activities of Maharashtra.

—Sharmila Sontakke

Writing from the Heart: Binapani Mohanty (11 November 1936-24 April 2022)



In 2014 Sahitya Akademi had organised a Meet the Author programme with Binapani Mohanti. The brochure it brought out introduced her as “an eminent literary figure of Odisha. Winner of Odisha Sahitya Akademi Award (1968) for her collection of short stories entitled *Kasturi Mriga O Sabuja Aranya* (Musk Deer and Green Forest) and Sahitya Akademi Award (1990) for her collection of short stories *Pata Dei* and Other Stories (Elder Sister and Other Stories) Binapani Mohanty has carved out a niche for herself in the field of Odia writing.” It looks like being known as a feminist was not all that welcome in Odia literature because the brochure goes on to say that though she was branded by some as a feminist writer, her literary talent transcends any such limitation and goes on to say “She is a writer par excellence. Her stories as well as novels, portray characters from different strata of society” and that “her characters include women, men and children.” The brochure emphasised that her stories, “in particular, narrate the joys and sorrows, sufferings and celebrations, achievements and failures, vices and virtues of common men and women as well as men and women of lower and higher middle class.”

Binapani was born to Chaturbhuj Mohanty and Kumudini Mohanty. Although her family was from a village near Kendrapada called Chandol (then part of the undivided Cuttack district), she was born in Berhampore in 1936, since her father as a government servant, was posted at Berhampore. After her matriculation she chose economics as her subject and got her graduate degree in 1957 and post-graduation in 1959 from Ravenshaw college, Cuttack. She later worked as a lecturer and was posted to various colleges. She retired from Sailabala Women’s College in 1992.

It is not unusual for most writers to begin as poets early in their life. Binapani also began to write poems first. In 1955 she wrote her first poem entitled “Tandrahata” (Destroyed Sleep) published in the magazine *Prajatantra*. Since then she has written many poems and published a collection of her poems entitled *Asibara Bela* (Time to Come) in 1998. By 1960 she had decided that she would be a story teller. Her first story “Gotie Ratira Kahani” (Story of a Night) appeared in 1960, again in *Prajatantra*. This was followed by many stories which are considered excellent by critics. Some of her best-known stories are ‘Khela Ghara’ (Doll House), “Naiku Rasta” (Road to a River), “Bastraharana” (Disrobing), “Andhakarara Chhai” (Shadow of Darkness), “Kasturi Mruga

O Sabuja Aranya” (Musk Deer and the Green Forest). If asked which story she likes best, Binapani would always say that all her stories are her children and that she cannot compare and that all stories are important for her. Her story “Pata Dei”, considered one of her finest, is based on an incident that she witnessed in the local bus. A rural girl was being teased and taunted by her own friends, in the bus. Unable to bear the ragging, the girl was weeping silently and Binapani wrote a story on that. It got published in *Jhankara*, an Odia literary magazine. Jayanta Mahapatra, the eminent Indian English poet, translated it as “Lata” and published it in *Femina* in 1986. In 1987, its Hindi dramatisation was telecast in Doordarshan’s Kashmakash programme and was much appreciated. *The State of Life*, a prestigious English magazine chose “Pata Dei” as a representative Odia short story and the collection *Pata Dei* translated as *Chitrita Andakar* by Bharati Nandi in Bengali won the translator a Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize.

Many short stories of Binapani Mohanty have been translated into different languages such as English, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Bengali, Urdu, Telugu and Russian. A film made on her story “Andhakarara Chhai” (Shadow of Darkness) got a very appreciative audience. Although mainly considered a short story writer she has also written three novels: *Sitara Sonita*, *Manaswini* and *Kunti*, *Kuntala*, *Shakuntala* and a one-act play entitled *Kranti*. She has translated two Russian folk-tales from English to Odia, a book on Premchand by R Mitra into Odia and translated Mati Nandi’s Bengali book *Sada Kham* into Odia.

The Sahitya Akademi Meet the Author brochure mentions that talking about her stories, she said, “Writing comes spontaneously from the heart, from one’s own experience, from search for truth and by empathizing with characters and grappling with incidents.” She had also said that stories come from the soil.

In an article on her written by Bhaskar Parichha, a Bhubaneswar-based journalist and author, in *Borderless Journal*, (“Binapani Mohanty: The Iconic Odia story-teller”, *Borderless Journal*, August 21, 2020), when she was conferred with the prestigious Atibadi Jagannath Das Samman, Odisha’s topmost literary award, by the Odisha Sahitya Akademi, at her Cuttack residence in the midst of the pandemic, the award was seen as a fitting compliment to someone who had contributed immensely to Odisha literature and enriched it. The article went on to say, “If Odia short stories have evolved over time and kept pace with the changing trends, writers like Binapani Mohanty have experimented the form in all its hues and colours. A feudal society with all its specious characteristics, Odisha has been a fertile ground for literary exploration and the short story genre has only

facilitated that quest. Social injustice, women's rights, and the caste system have been the central themes of Mohanty's short stories. The focus has, all along, been on the storyline and the circumstances rather than the new-fangled aspects of syntax and language.... Many of Binapani Mohanty's stories are grim tales where characters refuse to bow down to social prejudices, despite undergoing extreme torment. But then the reader does not lose all hope and there is a silver lining at the end of each story."

In this context, her story "Pata Dei" that tackles directly the issue of sexual attack has been discussed in detail in the article. It quotes very relevant portions of the story translated by Sunita Mishra, who teaches in the Department of English, University of Hyderabad:

"Nobody had ever seen Pata Dei after that fateful night of Dola purnima. It seemed as if the night itself had engulfed her. The moon was spread clear and bright all over the village. After the ritual journey from house to house the deities were being gathered in the field. The air was thick with the swelling crowds, the sounds of cymbals and bells, and the children smearing colours on one another. The excitement of the purnima night is very different from what follows the next day—the Holi celebrations. This night comes once a year, only to disappear before one realizes it was there. But the experience generally settles down like dust, like the colours, unnoticed by all. It clings to the body and mind the whole year long – piled up inside. That is how, maybe, behind her pleasant smile Pata Dei had layers of worries spread like slime inside her."

The article talks about what happens when Pata Dei returns to her father's home with the child. When she comes to her father's home, "slandorous accusations are hurled at her and the villagers question who the child's father is. Defiant and fearless, Pata Dei narrates to the villagers the trauma of the night when a group of her own village men had raped her."

"You want to know who the father of this child is. There, they are all standing here. Ramu, Veera, Gopi, Naria and a couple more of them later. How can I tell whose child this is? That night, during the Dola festival when the mock fight was going on, these people had stuffed a cloth in my mouth and carried me away to the edge of the graveyard. There, behind the bushes, they had chewed me up alive...like plucking out flesh from bones. My mouth was closed but before losing my senses I did recognize them all by the moonlight. How can I tell whose child this is? Ask that Hari Bauri. He took money from all of them to leave me at Cuttack. I didn't come all these days because I didn't want to bring more shame on my father. After returning too, I've revealed nothing. But ask them all now. Let them swear on themselves and decide who the father of this child is."

Then Pata Dei looks at her crying son and says, "...Why should you cry, dear? Don't be afraid of these people. None of them is man enough to stand up and admit to being your father But your mother is always there for you..."

Binapani has some 30 short story collections, three novels, a poetry collection, a play, and translations to her credit. She was also the President of Odisha Lekhika Sansad which encouraged young women to write and publish. Binapani has won all the prestigious awards for literature too many to list here but being honoured with the Padma Shri in 2020, meant that a writer's lifetime's work of writing and its significant contribution to Indian and world literature had been properly recognised. Binapani lived a long and meaningful life and her stories would never fade out of Indian literature and would inspire several future generations of young readers. It would be a fitting tribute if all her works are put together in a translated volume by Sahitya Akademi.

—C S Lakshmi

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Jathis Sounding Like Thunder: Indra Rajan (1939-29 April 2022)



When the Narada Gana Sabha Trust honoured Indra Rajan on August 7, 2007, the first day of Natyarangam's 11th thematic dance festival Kshetra Bharatham at Chennai, the following citation was presented to honour her. Guru Indra Rajan has had an illustrious career as an accomplished Bharatanatyam exponent, teacher and nattuvangam artist.

Indra was born in 1939 in an Isai Velalar family at Karaikal in Tamil Nadu. Her grandmother Sundarambal was a renowned Sadir dancer of her time, mother Sundara Kamakshi was a well-known musician, and paternal uncles KN Dandayudhapani Pillai and KN Pakkiriswami Pillai were eminent natyacharyas. Indra was initiated into dance under Kutralam Ganesa Pillai and had her arangetram at the age of nine. She continued her gurukulavasam and launched on an independent dance career when she was 13 years old.

Indra has performed extensively in India and abroad. In the course of her long and successful career she was selected to perform in northern

and eastern India under the cultural exchange programs of the Tamil Nadu Eyal Isai Nataka Manram. She has performed at important State functions and in the presence of dignitaries. She has composed dance to traditional songs from Tevaram, Tiruvachagam and Nalayira Divya Prabandham, and has choreographed many dance-dramas on varied themes. She has also tried her hand at dance choreography for films.

Indra Rajan holds a unique place among women nattuvanars. She excels in rendering complicated jati patterns and has a flamboyant and vibrant style of reciting the sollukattus with punch and vigour. She has wielded the cymbals for famous dancers like Vyjayanthimala Bali, Yamini Krishnamurthi, Alarmel Valli and her disciple Rajeswari Sainath. She has conducted arangetram for more than 1000 disciples in the past three decades. Apart from imparting training at her dance school Vadhini Natyalaya established in Chennai in 1968, she has had a distinguished career in dance teaching. She was invited to teach dance at the Government College of Music, Chennai, and has been the 'asthana guru' for more than 20 years at the dance institution run by BHEL Tiruchi. The Sangeet Natak Akademi and the Tamil Nadu Eyal Isai Nataka Manram entrusted her with the responsibility of training artists in nattuvangam skills under two separate schemes. She has been selected as one of the 'eminent gurus' by the South Zone Cultural Centre of the Govt. of India.

She has been decorated with many honours and awards including Natya Kala Ratnam (1976), Natya Kala Bhushan (1976), Kalaimamani (1991), the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi award (1996) and Acharya Choodamani (2004).

Natyangam, the dance wing of the Narada Gana Sabha Trust is happy to honour Guru Indra Rajan for her accomplishments and contribution to the field of Bharatanatyam.

Indra Rajan passed away on 29 April 2022. For the past few years, she had been living in a senior citizens home in Coimbatore and she had students all over the world who made sure that she was comfortable in her old age. Shanmuga Sundaram, a dancer who knew Indira Rajan as he was a student of K J Sarasa, her cousin and a much-admired dance guru

who passed away in 2012, sent us a short tribute to Indra Rajan. Excerpts from his tribute in Tamil are given below:

Indra Rajan was born in Karaikal in Puducherry in 1939. Her mother was the well-known singer Sundara Kamakshi. Her music has been brought out as records. Indra Rajan learnt the art of dance that was the traditional heritage of her family, from when she was a small girl, from Kuttralam Guru Ganesa nattuvanar. She had her arangetram in 1952. After a while she settled down in Chennai and opened a dance school named Vadhini Natyalaya. She not only taught students but also performed. She was the paternal cousin of the famous dance guru K J Sarasa.

Those days only men did the nattuvangam but Indra Rajan, as a woman nattuvanar, became equal to all of them. The special aspect of her nattuvangam was its rhythmic calculations and the clear way in which she pronounced the jathis, the rhythmic syllables, with such precision and appropriate hard and light stresses. Combined with her resonant voice, the jathis sounded like thunder and this earned her the admiration of the audience and her own students. Where nattuvangam was concerned there was no one to equal her.

Since Indra Rajan teacher was related to my guru K J Sarasa, I respected her as my own guru. I have been close to her for several years. I have also travelled with her. I have learnt from her some adavus, the basic steps, some jathis and have also danced with her in a dance drama. Whenever I met her the days used to be spent with interesting chats and laughter as she was not only a good conversationalist but had a natural sense of humour. I continued to keep in touch with her visiting her and talking to her over the phone. Whenever I performed, she used to be there to bless me with a silk shawl. So many memories come to my mind—how she used to do physical exercise even in her old age and how she used natural products to do facials and how she was always active and bubbling with energy and happiness.

She lived for dance but fate dealt her a big blow once. Yes, a few years ago, all the money that was at home and all her jewels kept at home got stolen.

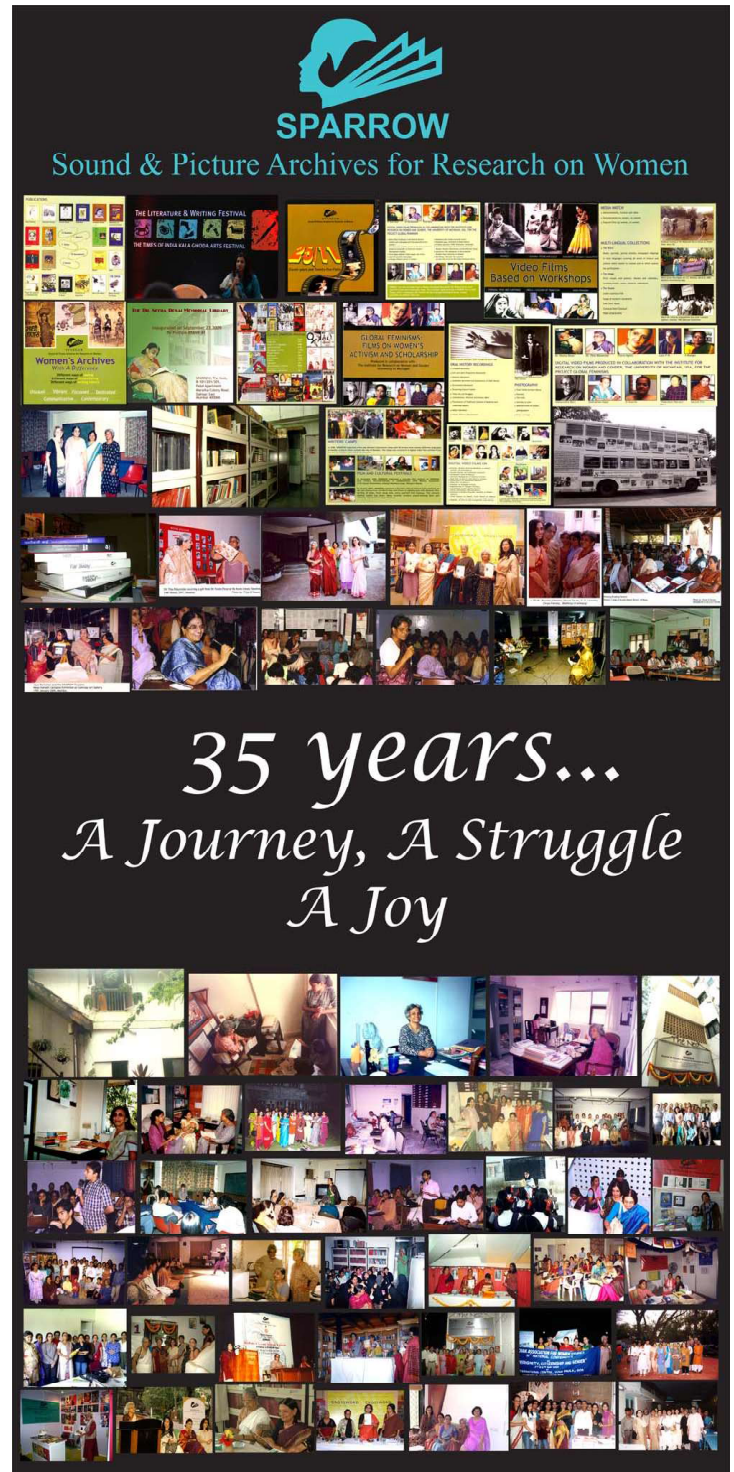
This event traumatised her and for the first time, she was heartbroken. She could not accept that this could happen to her and went into depression. Soon she was afflicted with Alzheimer's. She was someone who had enjoyed being independent and had led a dignified life running dance classes and with Alzheimer's her day-to-day life got affected. She was taken by her husband and son to Coimbatore. At one point when she lost their support, Mridangist T Viswanathan and his family came to her aid and she was put in a senior citizens home. I heard that her students took care of the expenses.

Whenever I went to Coimbatore and met her, she did not remember anything of the present but remembered her young days very clearly and used to keep talking about them. She would think that she was in Chennai and say it was getting late to go to her dance classes to teach. The senior citizens home she was in was in Pannimadai in Coimbatore. There were only ten senior citizens there. Those years that she was in the Home the dance world and the dancers mostly ignored her. Last year on International Dance Day (April 29) I was in Pondicherry and I heard that she had passed away and I hurried to Coimbatore. I went directly to the Thudiyalur electric crematorium on the morning of 30th. Her body had already been brought there in an emergency ambulance. There were some ten people there and I performed the funeral rites and lit her pyre. What was cremated that morning was not just her body but also human kindness. For someone who had trained thousands of students not even one student had come for her cremation. And that is something that is very sad. That was the day that put an end to the sacred teacher-student relationship of Guru-Shishya Parampara.

So ended the journey of a renowned dance guru. When the pyre was lit, suddenly from the flames rose the resonating sound of jathis uttered with force and precision. Or was it my imagination?

Thathinginathom!
Thaka thathinginathom!
Thakathiku Thathinginathom!

— C S Lakshmi and Shanmuga Sundaram



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MAY 2022

A Lonely Bird Flies Away: Rajani Parulekar (16 June 1945-5 May 2022)



The death of Rajani Parulekar who passed away in her sleep at her residence in Girgaum was a tragic end of a highly sensitive poet. Born in 1945 at Pavas in Ratnagiri district, she did her MA in Marathi and taught in Burhani College in Mumbai for many years. She was living in Girgaum. She could have been like any other middle-class Maharashtrian woman with similar qualifications who has spent her life teaching students. But Rajani Parulekar was made of a different mettle. With her poems she made a place for herself in the world of Marathi literature. Her contribution to Marathi poetry in the post-1970s is very important. *Deergh Kavita* (Long Poetry, 1985), *Kahi Deergh Kavita* (Some Long Poetry, 1993), *Sweekar* (Acceptance, 1993), *Chitra* (Picture, 1996), *Punha Deergh Kavita* (Long Poetry, Again, 1999) are her poetry collections. Poet Neeraja has edited Rajani Parulekar's poems and published them with the title *Nidrahin Ratrichya Kathor Katalavar* (On the Harsh Rock of Sleepless Nights), which was the last anthology of her poems. What make her poems stand out are the images she uses, the way she expresses the relationship between two human beings through her poetry. In her poem *Samvad* (Conversation) she says:

*Suddenly from somewhere many sparrows came,
They sat and enjoyed swinging on the fence
The strongly twisted knots of strings
So easily they avoided!
And the string did not feel the weight of the sparrows either:
It was a picture of a conversation between you and me!*

She expressed life's contradictions through the perspective of women. She broke the way women poets expressed before the 1970s when their expression used to be centered more on themselves or were purely aesthetic. Rajani went beyond these forms of poetry and she wrote as a self-conscious human being and looked at women's life from a very different perspective. The images she used in her poems were from the everyday life of women but the images took a new form in her poetry for example, *Hiravya Chudysarakhya Laataa* (The Waves like Green Bangles), *Kujbujnari Dara-khidakya* (Whispering Doors-windows). Arising from the context of a woman looking at life around

her, her poetry contained violent expressions and very often, it was harsh and direct. However, she retained her style of writing not particularly worried about fame or money. And that may be the reason why her photo on the back cover of one of her books is the only published picture of her available.

Her unique style and her poems were so important that when Granthali Publications took up the project called *Kavita Dashakachi* (Poems of Decade) on ten poets of 1970s, Rajani Parulekar's poems were included in it. Her first collection *Deergha Kavita* has received Maharashtra State Award, *Sweekar* has received Kavi Kusumagraj Puraskar and *Chitra* has received N D Mahanor Puraskar.

Earlier she used to take part in many literary conferences. But after retirement she gradually kept herself isolated from social life. She did not keep in touch with anyone. She used to live alone. And lately she used to be seen walking on the roads of Girgaum and her health and appearance seemed to have deteriorated with age and isolation. Poets like Neeraja and others tried to stay in touch with her, but because of the lockdown they could not contact her as often as they wanted. And finally, what they got was the news of her death.

—Sharmila Sontakke

A Warrior Who Fought for LGBTQ Rights: Urvashi Vaid (8 October 1958-14 May 2022)



Urvashi Vaid was admired and followed by many who believed in the fight for not just LGBTQ rights but also for other political and social causes.

Urvashi was born in New Delhi. When her father got a teaching position at the state university in Potsdam, New York, her family moved to Potsdam. When she was hardly 11, she had taken part in an anti-war protest. She attended Vassar College. Vassar College had a Women's Studies Program which was renamed Women, Feminist, and Queer Studies Program as a response by students, faculty, and administrators to the Women's Liberation Movement of the late '60s and '70s. At Vassar College, apart from actively taking up many political and social causes, she also co-founded the Feminist Union on campus and participated in activism against apartheid.

Urvashi began her career as a staff lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union. In the years that followed,

she took up a wide range of activities and held many different positions in academic institutions philanthropic foundations and advocacy groups. Many saw her as a warrior who fought for causes she believed in, especially the cause of LGBTQ rights. Among other things, she had launched LPAC, which is referred to as the first lesbian Super Pac, in 2012.

Urvashi was an author and attorney who by the strength of her belief in action which gave her the courage to take up even the mighty, drew many to take up the fight for equality along with her. She died at age 63 of cancer at her home in New York City. In her death the LGBTQ has lost a fervent fighter and an inspiration. But her legacy will be carried on by many others who have fought along with her.

—C S Lakshmi



Mon Mane Na: Pallavi Dey (23 February 1997-15 May 2022)



It is very sad when a young person dies when she or he is on the top of their careers, more so, when the person concerned is a creative person and the death is an unnatural one. In recent times such cases are increasing which is not only painful but also a serious concern. Pallavi Dey's death was one such tragic death. Pallavi / Pallabi Dey was an actress who was

working in the Bengali Film Industry. She started her career with Bengali serial *Resham Jhanpi* (Silk Box, 2017-2018). Later she was best known for her role of Lutfa in a Bengali historical soap opera *Ami Sirajer Begum* (I am the Begum of Siraj, 2018). She also acted in the television serials, such as *Kunjochaya* (Sylvan Shelter, 2019), *Saraswatir Prem* (Saraswati's Love, 2020). It was *Mon Mane Na* (The Heart Does Not Accept), another Bengali television serial, during which Pallavi committed suicide and was declared dead on 15 May 2022. According to the *Times of India* she was found hanging from a ceiling fan and rushed to Bangur Hospital, where she was declared dead. Her death was initially said to be suicide. But her father is accusing her partner Sagnik Chakroborty of her murder.

Whatever may be the cause of her death, it is a pity her life ended so tragically.

—Sharmila Sontakke



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JUNE 2022

A Gracious Writer from Mangaluru: Savitri Babulkar (1936-5 June 2022)



We came to know about Savitri Babulkar through our friend Shyamala Madhav and requested her to send her book *Childhood Daze* published in 2011 by Shroff Publishers & Distributors Pvt. Ltd. She graciously responded immediately and sent us the book. A review of the book will be in our forthcoming Newsletter. But it is a pity Savitri is not amongst us to read the

review although after publication her book had received some rave reviews. Apart from *Childhood Daze*, she had also written an abridged version of Hemadpant's *Shri Sai Satcharitra* and a book of rhymes, *Rhyme Time for Children* (Notion Press, Inc., 2018)

Savitri Ramesh Babulkar nee' Udyavar hailed from Mangalore and was a much-respected person in the city of Mumbai. She passed away at the age of 86 after successfully writing her autobiography some ten years ago. Some of the details about her life that we have gathered are not only from her book but also from *Mangalore Today News Network* (I J Saldanha, "Savitri Babulkar: A noble lady of Mangaluru origin passes away in Mumbai", June 7, 2022)

Savitri Babulkar was a retired teacher and freelance journalist who wrote on topics of human interest. Her hobbies included reading, music, dramatics and alternative healing. Born in 1936, Savitri Udyavar was the daughter of U Bhaskar Rao (Sub Editor of *Times of India*, Bombay). Her husband Colonel Ramesh Babulkar was an Army man, who after retirement worked in a civilian organisation and they moved to Mumbai. He passed away in 2010. Savitri had pursued her degree from St. Agnes College, Mangalore in 1958; Master's from St Xavier's College, Bombay in 1960 and BEd from St Theresa's College, Bombay in 1978. As the wife of a service officer, she had travelled to many Defense stations and taught in many different schools. She had taught in Mount Carmel Convent, Jorhat (Assam) and Mount Carmel Convent, Ahmedabad. She was the first principal of Ganapati Junior College in Mangalore. In Mumbai, she taught in Lawrence School, Santacruz; Arya Vidya Mandir, Santacruz and SVT College (the Santacruz branch of SNDT). She also enjoyed writing and had written for *Woman's Era*, *Femina*, *WE*, *Eve's Weekly*, *Mid-day*. She also wrote 'middles' for *Times of India* on human interest subjects. She had many other interests as well, like dramatics, public-speaking, light music (Indian

and Western) yoga and so on.

Her book *Childhood Daze* was translated into Kannada by Shyamala Madhav as *Balyakaala Mayajala*. And when Shyamala Madhav wrote on her own son Tushar after his passing away Savitri sent her heartfelt comments in Kannada as a voice message. Her words were appreciative and also consoling and her voice warm and loving. Shyamala Madhav shared the voice message with me and I was very moved by what she had spoken. It spoke so much about how she interacted with her fellow writers, much younger than her.

A second edition of her book *Childhood Daze* was on the anvil when Savitri decided to take leave of us. That none of us in SPARROW had the opportunity to meet her and document her rich life will remain a great loss for our archives.

—C S Lakshmi

A Human Rights Lawyer: Jaya Menon (15 August 1953-9 June 2022)



On June 10, 2022, Vibhuti Patel, academic and activist, wrote an obituary for Advocate Jaya Menon on her Facebook page, which reflected the feelings of everyone who had known Jaya Menon. The obituary quoting *The Examiner Catholic News Weekly*, spoke of Jaya Menon as a "veteran women's rights activist and human rights lawyer, who had been

involved in several community based social movements in Mumbai since 1977." It also spoke of the various forums she had been involved with like being the founder member of Stree Jagruti Samiti, Mumbai Initiative for Human Rights Education and Women Networking and being actively associated with Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) and Institute for Community Research Organisation (ICOR) for over two decades.

Vibhuti Patel wrote that Jaya Menon's "enthusiasm and determination were unique and infectious, and galvanised us into action. Both the Menon-sisters, Jaya and Lakshmi were heart and soul of Women Networking. In the mega event to commemorate International Women's Day year-after-year, Jaya's electrifying persona would enhance the spirit of all participants—women, children and men...."

Jaya and Lakshmi Menon were twin sisters and both of them were committed to the working-class movement. Both

of them together brought out several booklets aimed at educating social activists on many contemporary issues. Lakshmi Menon passed away sometime back and it looks like Jaya decided to join her twin sister. Vibhuti Patel ended her obituary saying, “Rest in power, dear Jaya. Heartfelt condolences to her life-partner Prabhakar Nair, son, Roshan Nair, sister Gowri and family members, friends and co-travellers in the social movements concerning women workers, community development, tribal people’s land rights and sociology-legal rights.”

The Examiner Catholic News Weekly in its 14 June 2022 issue’s note on Jaya Menon, elaborated the nature of her work:

“She joined in the capacity of a lawyer-mediator at the Legal Cell of JPC. Having earned her degrees in both law and social work her approach to cases was very humane and before long she was most sought out by clients referred to the Legal Cell from the Centres for Community Organization (CCOs) across the diocese. Jaya’s legal service was indeed a great contribution to the Church. Resolving matters without going to court, bringing about reconciliation in marriages among Catholic couples, and resolving property issues among many Catholic families were what kept her preoccupied at work. She also resolved legal disputes at various churches across the diocese related to property, or offered conciliation service in labour matters. She was the faculty for the Archdiocesan Women’s Commission program ‘Towards a Discipleship of Equals’ at which she acquainted the seminarians at St. Pius College about women’s rights under the law. One can truly say she proclaimed the gospel of Jesus through her service to the Church in a big way.”

Jaya Menon knew about SPARROW and its archival work and so did Lakshmi Menon, her sister. On the several occasions we met, we have had very useful discussions about documenting women’s movement and the lives of women. Since SPARROW was located in a building with no lift, they could not visit us but followed our work with great enthusiasm. We will miss the conversations with Jaya Menon and her enthusiastic support.

—C S Lakshmi with inputs from Vibhuti Patel



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

Playing A Destructive Game: Prathushya Garimella (1986-June 11 2022)



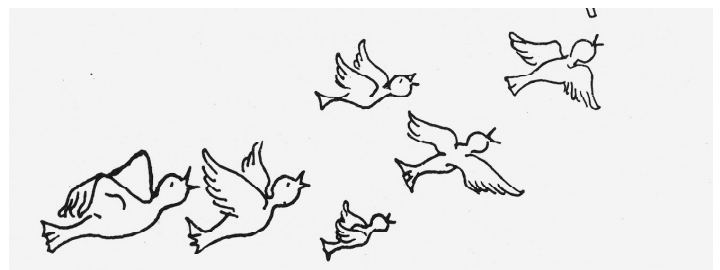
A successful young person’s suicide is always sad and the response is always that it could have been prevented had the person sought help. Fashion designer Prathushya Garimella’s death was one such death that plunged her family and many close friends into gloom. Prathushya was found lying in her boutique’s bathroom and it was suspected that she had

committed suicide by inhaling carbon monoxide. She had left behind a suicide note where depression and loneliness were mentioned as the reasons for taking this extreme step. She also stated that she did not want to become a burden on her parents anymore.

Prathushya had studied fashion designing in the US and had started her career in Hyderabad. Prathushya had her own boutique by the name ‘Prathushya Garimella’ which she had started in 2013. Her signature style was floor-length Anarkalis and lehengas. Within less than a decade of starting her design brand, her clientele included famous celebrities from Tollywood and Bollywood. Prathushya had recently designed outfits for Keerthy Suresh. She had also created designs for Kajal Aggarwal, Shriya Saran, Huma Qureshi, Raveena Tandon, Bhumi Pednekar, Parineeti Chopra, Madhuri Dixit, Juhi Chawla, Gauahar Khan and Neha Dhupia among others.

Prathushya had a good career, loving parents and a good clientele. She had the best of everything. And if she was still lonely and depressed it speaks volumes about the stress such careers involve. One wishes such careers could be managed by young people with maturity and with a sense of contentment instead of the destructive desire to be at the top of one’s game.

—Asmita Deshpande



Not the 'Shadow' But the Light of Her Master: Krishnabai Surve (1930-21 June 2022)



Krishnabai Surve, wife of celebrated Marathi poet and Communist Party activist Narayan Surve passing away at the age of 92 may not be first page news but when one looks at the life Krishnabai led and the way she supported her husband, one would know that despite her claim, in her autobiography, to be the shadow

of her master, she was actually the light of his life. Krishnabai never went to school. Orphaned as a small child she was raised by her grandmother. This similarity she shares with her husband who did not know who his parents were and was brought up by a mill-worker of Girangaum, Mumbai. Surve was known as an efficient party worker and public speaker among the mill-workers, so he became famous as 'Master'. Krishnabai Talekar, which was her maiden name, was born in Girangaum and was living in the same chawl in which Narayan Surve lived, and she and the Master fell in love and they got married against her family's wishes. They did not have a roof above their heads nor did Surve have a secure job. For nearly two years they were living on the pavements or in dilapidated rooms without toilets or living in huts which could be wiped off due to rain or demolished by the Municipal Corporation as illegal encroachments. Surve did odd jobs as and when they could be found. Nearly after two years of homelessness and joblessness both of them found jobs as peons. He got job as peon in Kapila Khandwala's office and she got job as peon in a Municipal school in Vile Parle and their life started getting stable. Krishnabai encouraged Surve to study further. He passed the 7th Grade and later completed the teachers' training course and became a primary school teacher. Krishnabai also supported his other interests which allowed Surve to continue his active role in the Communist Party and later he became the editor in *Lokvangmay Griha*, a left-wing publishing house. Surve's first poetry collection was published with the money Krishnabai offered after selling her only gold ornament, her mangalsutra. The anthology got published in 1962 and Surve received many awards for the same. He became well-known and was invited to many national and international programmes to present his work. Krishnabai avoided accompanying him to public events for she felt that she did not come up to his public image. Although on the one hand she was diffident and shy, on the other hand, she was a very determined and straightforward person. She never used her husband's status to seek any concessions or favours in her work as a peon.

She was the one who safely kept the writings of Narayan Surve's final years and got them published as a book entitled *Kahani Kavitechi* (Story of Poetry) just before his death in 2010. Her autobiography *Mastaranchi Sawali* (The Shadow of the Master) is an honest narration of her life. SPARROW has reviewed her autobiography in SNL 32 March-May 2015 and it is one of the treasured books of the archives. People tend to see women like Krishnabai as the women behind great men but in truth, women like her spur their husbands on to a creative life and to greatness.

—Sharmila Sontakke

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Twenty-Two Years of Struggle for a Brother: Dalbir Kaur (1962-25 June 2022)



Dalbir Kaur was the sister of Sarabjit Singh—the Indian prisoner in Pakistan jail convicted for espionage in 1991 who was fatally attacked by inmates in Pakistan jail in 2013. She passed away at the age of 60.

During her younger brother Sarabjit's 22 years in jail, Dalbir Kaur had fought against the system to release her brother. He was caught by the Pakistan officials in 1990, when he had allegedly crossed the international border and reached Pakistan. They accused him of carrying out bomb blasts in their country. He was termed an Indian spy who had come to Pakistan in the guise of one Manjit Singh. He was sentenced to death in 1991. Sarabjit was lodged in Pakistan's Kot Lakhpat Jail. On April 26, 2013, the inmates of the jail viciously attacked him and beat him up. He succumbed to his injuries on May 2, 2013.

Dalbir Kaur had always insisted that her brother Sarabjit was innocent and that he had entered Pakistan by mistake when he was apprehended and that it was a case of mistaken identity. She had also visited her brother in Pakistan. She fought a long battle to bring him back to India. Many in India and Pakistan supported her.

Dalbir Kaur lived in Bhikhivid with her sister-in-law Sukhpreet Kaur and nieces Swapandeep and Poonam. A movie *Sarabjit* was made on the life of Sarabjit. Aishwaya Rai Bachchan had acted as Dalbir Kaur. Randeep Hooda who had played the role of Sarabjit began to consider Dalbir Kaur his real sister. He was at the cremation paying his last respects to Dalbir Kaur.

Many dignitaries came to pay their respects to her.

—Pooja Pandey

JULY 2022

**Stoker of Dreams: Dr Minoti Chatterjee
(12 August 1950-4 July 2022)**

Minoti Chatterjee was one of the legends of Indian radio broadcasting along with Surajit Sen, Lotika Ratnam and Melville de Mellow. But she was not just a former newsreader of All India Radio but also the third principal of Kamala Nehru College and a theatre enthusiast. The Kamala Nehru College Home Page describes her thus:

“The third Principal Dr. Minoti Chatterjee (1-11-2004 to 31-08-2015) carried forward the tradition of the college and worked hard to bring about a beautiful amalgam of academic and extracurricular excellence. Being a cultural impresario herself, she ensured that the students got a taste of the tradition and culture of the country as a part of their academic exercise. All her efforts were towards value creating education, empowerment and employability of the young women of the college. During her tenure, Kamala Nehru College made collaborations with universities abroad on both academic and cultural fronts and ushered in the Golden Jubilee Year 2014, carrying in earnest the very spirit of Smt. Kamala Nehru, with a greater vision of producing more confident, dignified and responsible young citizens.”

And her tireless work for the college bore fruit the very next year after she left in the form of an ‘A’ grade (CGPA 3.33) by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council in 2016.

Among other things she had created a space for theatre in the college and so it was not surprising that Lakshya – The theatre Society of Kamala Nehru College performed a play titled ‘To Ma’am, with Love’ dedicated to her for her Farewell Day. An article in 2012 (Henna Rakheja, “Theatrical Extravaganza”, *Deccan Herald*, January 9 2012) wrote about ‘Concoction 2012’, the annual festival of the college known for its theatre society, and how the chaupal was “filled with excitement and the auditorium was brimming with thrill as students from various colleges of Delhi” had gathered there. The success of the active theatre society of the college went to Dr Minoti Chatterjee. Theatre became a movement in the college with her encouragement.

In an earlier interview given to *Hindustan Times* (Vimal Chander Joshi, January 27 2011) Dr Minoti Chatterjee had

spoken about the role she had played as principal of Kamala Nehru College. “As a student of Lady Sri Ram College, Minoti Chatterjee used to run a school for the slum kids of Jamrudpur. She also used to donate blood every three months, she says sitting in her spacious office, which is adorned by a certificate from the Rotary Club. Three decades later, as the principal of Kamala Nehru College (KNC), she is trying to infuse a similar sense of social consciousness in her students,” the article said. As Principal, she played an instrumental role in creating social outreach societies in order to groom the girls to deal with issues around them. The students worked on programmes such as ‘Jago Grahak Jago’. They also brought out a consumer-focussed magazine, ‘Awaken’, which was distributed among people outside the college. At the end of the day the students could relax and hang around ‘Mithas’, the shopping complex cum eatery.

In 2014 when HT City — Fever 104 FM’s Campus Ka Mahayuddh was organised Sukriti Dua of Kamala Nehru College talked about how Dr Minoti Chatterjee was multitasking. “She is involved with cultural activities, is a theatre artist, a news reader and a fashionista who wears lovely saris and sports a flower in her hair. She once preformed to a song from (the film) *Dabangg*, too. She even lets us organise classes in the coolest hangout in our college – the chaupal,” she said.

Her son Gaurab Chatterjee or Gabu, the drummer, who has contributed in many ways to the evolution of Bangla rock, through his band Lakkhichhara and also compositions for Bengali films, like his father Gautam Chattopadhyay, the leader of Moheneer Ghoraguli, spoke about the influence of his parents on his career on Teachers’ Day September 5, 2020. “My father, the late Gautam Chatterjee, and my mother Minoti Chatterjee, have influenced me the most. They have been my teachers since my childhood. They taught me about life, discipline, music, dreams and how to achieve them. After my father passed away, my mother made sure that I never gave up on my dreams. They have been my life’s first teachers and today whatever I am is all because of them,” said Gabu.

With her death, a great teacher who brought out the best in her students throwing open the world to them has been taken away from us. Such teachers are rare and one is sure that from Kamala Nehru College many more Minotis would emerge creating awareness and working hard but never forgetting to laugh and dance.

—C S Lakshmi

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Life in Camlin Colours: Rajni Dandekar (1942-21 July 2022)



A reputed businesswoman, Rajni Dandekar started handling the marketing section of their family business Camlin, India's oldest art and stationery supplies company, 50 years ago. There are not many women in this field. But Rajni took up this task and made Camlin products reach national and international markets. She used many new ideas to bring their business to global level such as organising exhibitions of Camlin's products and literature in India and abroad, organising hobby classes at local level where students were encouraged to use Camlin products and organising drawing competitions and so on. Along with her husband Subhash Dandekar she founded Camlin Foundation in 1998, through which they organised annual art competitions and exhibitions and also contributed to many social causes. She instituted a fellowship in the Asiatic Society of India, Mumbai, for studying 'History of Art' of the value of Rs. 30, 000 /- p.a. to be given every alternative year. She was also interested in other arts. With the aim of supporting the teaching and propagational activities in performing and allied arts, particularly classical dance, she became one of the trustees of Kalavardhini Charitable Trust established in 1988, along with the renowned Bharata Natyam exponent Dr Sucheta Bhide-Chapekar and Pt. Sharad Sathe, the well-known vocalist. She also tried encouraging women entrepreneurs. She lived a life not only marketing products of colour but also filling her life with colours of fulfilment. The Art Society of India paid her a rich tribute on Facebook. The tribute said: "After a long illness, Rajni Dandekar who coloured every artist, student and art lover's life with Camlin colours, passed away last night. She, along with Subhash Dandekar and the Dandekar family, gave the country's colour industry a boost, took it to an international level, encouraging many painters and painting teachers and students. Through the Camlin Foundation, she was able to award young artists, students and promote art internationally. Art Society of India is grateful to her for the support she has provided." The post was accompanied by a beautiful portrait of hers by Shree Gopalrao Deuskar which we have used here.



—Sharmila Sontakke

A Life Censoring Films: Aparna Mohile (1943-27 Jul 2022)



A former chairperson of Central Board of Film Inspection (Censor Board) and an author passed away at her residence after a brief illness. She was originally from Vidarbha. She excelled in her school education standing first among the girls in the matriculation examination. By the time she finished her Master's she was proficient in Sanskrit, Marathi and English languages. And then she chose to go into administrative services. She was Administrative Officer from the 1965 batch. Her first posting as a bureaucrat was in the Indian Postal Service. She was the first Maharashtrian woman officer selected for this post. In the postal department she worked on different important posts like Chief Postmaster General, Postal Service Director and Postal Services Board Member. She was selected as a Divisional Officer of the Board of Film Censors in the year 1978 and later she was the Executive President in the year 1982-83. She had a close friendship with famous personalities from literary and film world such as Shanta Shelke, Vandana Vitankar and Vijaya Mehta. She retired on 31st August 2002 after 37 years of administrative service. After retirement she was living in Nigdi, near Pune. She has written a number of books including a collection of articles, *Sansar Ani Censor* (Being in the Family, Being a Censor), a collection of plays, *Tridal* (Three Parts) and a poetry collection, *Shabdapushpanjali* (Offering of Words Like flowers, 2018) and a collection of different articles and memoirs written between 2012 and 2018 describing her life as executive president of Indian Censor Board, *Censor Jeevansar Ani 'Mi'* (Being A Censor, Life and I, 2018).

—Sharmila Sontakke

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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.

The Singer and Her Songs: Nirmala Mishra (21 October 1938-31 July 2022)



The news that legendary Bengali singer Nirmala Mishra is no more is not just sad news but an announcement of a void in songs in Indian languages. Nirmala Mishra enthralled music lovers with Bengali, Odia and Assamese songs.

Born on 21 October 1938 at Majilpur, then British Presidency, she comes from a musical family. She was the daughter of Pandit Mohinimohana Mishra and Bhabani Devi. Her father and elder brother were both famous singers. She delighted music lovers with her hit songs like 'O Tota Pakhi Re' (Oh, Colourful Bird), 'Emon Ekta Jhinuk Khuje Pelam Na' (Never found a sea shell which has a pearl inside), 'Ei Banglar Matite' (This Bangla soil) among others. In 1960 she got the first chance to sing a song for the Odia movie *Sri Lokanath* whose music director was Balakrushna Das. She then sang songs for many Odia movies such as *Stree* (Woman, 1968), *Kaa* (Impersonation, 1966), *Malajanha* (Dead Moon, 1965), *Abhinetree* (Actress, 1965), *Anutap* (Remorse 1977) *Kie Kahara* (Please get meaning, 1968), *Amadaa Baata* (The Untrodden road, 1964) and *Adina Megha* (The Unwanted Cloud, 1970). Her Odia film songs like 'Nida Bhara Raati Madhu Jhara Janha' (Sleepy night, honey drops don't taste sweet) and 'Mo Mana Binara Tare' (Please get meaning) were iconic. She also sang for All India Radio, Cuttack. Apart from songs in films, she also had several solo albums to her credit. While the West Bengal government conferred on her the 'Sangeet Samman', 'Sangeet Mahasamman' and 'Bangabhibhushan' awards, she was given the Sangeet Sudhakar Balakrushna Das Award for her lifetime contribution to Odia music in 2011 because she has sung more songs in Odia than in Bengali or Assamese.

Her melodious voice which appeared in the films of 1950's, 60's and 70's will be remembered by all music lovers whenever they embark on a nostalgic music journey of classic Bengali and Odia songs and sung by younger singers to please their audience.

—Sharmila Sontakke

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AUGUST 2022

An Anchor Lost: Uma Devi Pemmaraju (31 March 1958-8 August 2022)

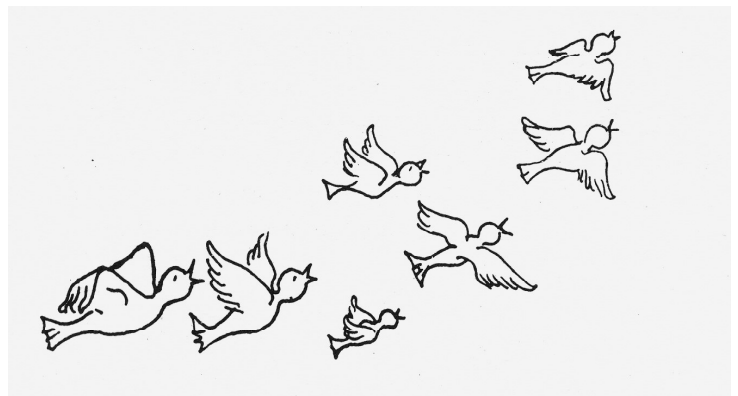


Uma Devi Pemmaraju, was an Indian-American journalist and television anchor. She was born in Rajahmundry but America had become her home and her family lived in San Antonio in the US. She got her Bachelor's degree in political science from the Trinity University in Texas.

Uma Devi's television career had started even when she was a student in college. When the Fox News network was launched in 1996, Uma Devi was part of the original Fox News team. Many different news shows on the network were hosted by her including a number of specials. Her interviews with many eminent personalities like the spiritual leader Dalai Lama, President Donald Trump, actor Whoopi Goldberg and politician Sarah Palin got very good notices. She was referred to as "Boston's Best Anchor" in 1996 and 1997 by *Boston* magazine. Her reporting and investigative journalism won her many Emmy awards. Many other honours also came her way like the Matrix Award from Women in Communications, the Texas AP Award for reporting and The Woman of Achievement Award from the Big Sisters Organisation of America.

Uma Devi passed away at her home in Ossining, New York. Hers was a life well lived.

—C S Lakshmi



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

A Passion for Broadcasting: Saroj Narayanaswamy (10 June 1935-13 August 2022)



Those who have grown up listening to Tamil news on All India Radio would remember Saroj Narayanaswamy's clear voice reading the news with the Tamil words pronounced perfectly. She was a news reader who was very popular. She worked as a Tamil News Reader-cum-translator in the Tamil News Unit of

the News Services Division of All India Radio, New Delhi. She was the News in-charge of the Tamil Unit for over 20 years.

Saroj Narayanaswamy had done her English Literature Honours in the University of Bombay and had later taken up a course in Broadcast Journalism from the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi. She was the person chosen to be official interpreter to the former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M.G. Ramachandran, during Chief Ministers Conferences.

Saroj Narayanaswamy was 87 and as an early broadcaster must have had an interesting life. Unfortunately, her life and work have not been documented. Every time someone like Saroj Narayanaswamy passes away one realises how many lives go undocumented.

—Asmita Deshpande



What others say.....

“...SPARROW is performing an invaluable national and international service in documenting the full range of women's contributions to contemporary and recent Indian public life. SPARROW is a treasure —one we must all value and support, whether from near or far.”

*Abigail J. Stewart
Former Director
Professor of Psychology and Women's Studies
University of Michigan*

The One who Sowed Love Everywhere: M Ramya (6 June 1986-15 August 2022)



Although Ramya was active on Facebook one got to know about her through an article by Mu. Raghavan in *Ananda Vikatan* that appeared on 25 April 2020, which spoke about how she worked during the Cyclone Gaja to help people and how during the lockdown at the time of pandemic she made food at home and went in her scooter and distributed it to people. Ramya was a single mother with a son whose name

was Sai Prakash. On the Facebook and elsewhere she was known as Sairamya. She was a lecturer in the Andavar College of Education in Nagapattinam, always eager to help those who wanted to study and those in need. She was the Nagapattinam Coordinator for the School Education Security Movement. She had done her Master's and later a DTED (Diploma in Teacher Education) and then MEd and MPhil and later had decided to do her MSc in Psychology. She completed three semesters in MSc Psychology and had sent Shahjahan R (who had introduced me to the work done by Ramya as something that needed to be documented) the mark sheet of the third semester on 23 April 2022 in which she had scored in four subjects—86, 90, 76 and 75 marks. She could not attend the last semester as cancer struck her. Her constant pursuit for educating herself must have motivated her to take active part in *Illam Thedi Kalvi* (Education at Doorstep) government scheme which was started to reduce the education gap among students and volunteers physically went to the students to help them in education. Ramya was in the District Coordination Committee of the scheme. She conducted free tuition classes at home. Whenever anyone needed anything, Ramya was there to help them—meeting the Collector, Police officers, government officials on behalf people to give applications was her regular job. She took a child who had damaged his hearing aid to the collector and got another hearing aid for him. She cleaned the steps of a pond near her house so that it can be used. In an old age home in Nagapattinam she looked after everyone as if she were their mother. She was an Ambedkarite and an avid supporter of Viduthalai Siruthai Katchi (Dalit Panthers) in Tamil Nadu. She worked hard for the victory of Aloor Shah Nawaz MLA. Many certificates and awards were waiting to be collected by her when she suddenly died of cancer. Beginning with an initial pain in her spine it soon disabled her entirely and although she was brought to Chennai by

ambulance and admitted in the Rajiv Gandhi Hospital and given proper treatment she did not survive.

It was after her death that one went to her Facebook Page and it was a page rich with events she was involved in and the people she knew. What particularly was moving was what she wrote on Mothers' Day, 9 May 2021. It was not just about her mother but about her entire life and the struggle for education that people like her had to undergo. This tribute will be incomplete without that note.

I thought I will not write on Mothers' Day. But my heart could not stay quiet. I am not someone who thinks of mother only on Mother' Day. For those like us living in the embrace of mothers to this day, every day is a Mothers' Day.

It was my Amma who taught me valour, love, compassion, the attitude of helping people, pride and the honesty to voice opinion against society. She was the one who gave me courage when I used to hold her hand and walk as a child by letting go of my hand and telling me to walk on my own.

Whether it was travellers who had lost their way or mentally disturbed people whoever they were, she would feel no disgust in helping them. She would help them to change their clothes and have a bath, feed them and sometimes even tonsure them to get rid of their knotted hair and give them my grandfather's clothes to wear.

If someone in the village was sick and dying, she would go and ask them what they felt like eating and buy them that. They would mostly ask for Biryani, halwa, milk sweet or the fish curry prepared in our house. This continues to this day.

I also follow that. I never fail to get cheroots, betel leaves and nuts for my grandfather whenever I go to the market.

There was nothing she did not teach me—how to catch crabs in the fields, how to cut grass for the goats, how to do sowing in the fields, how to carry a bundle of grains just like men, how to harvest; no lesson was spared.

When it rained and our roof began to leak, she would make something hot and make us sit on an elevated ground and keep pouring out the water collected in the house throughout the night.

She could cut firewood to make 30 bundles in one day. She brought me up with the ability to carry the 30 bundles of firewood and reach them home. Even now we would compete with each other carrying two pots of water each.

Amma is illiterate but she is guiding us in the proper

path with her matured words... She would never allow us to take leave from school. She did not know what we were reading but would force us to take out our study books in the evenings.

She would keep feeding us fruits. If asked, she would say that what one eats at a young age gives strength. She would keep telling us this and feed us.

After construction work when she came back at 9 or 10 p.m. if she saw us sleeping on a hungry stomach, she would make it a point to wake us up and feed us and only then go to sleep.

She struggled to educate the two of us because she thought we should never give up our education. When my Akka cried saying that she was no good at studies, she stopped sending her to school.

She never delayed buying uniform, note books or anything. Everything was bought on time.

When I was in 11th Standard there was abject poverty at home and I gave up my studies and began to work in people's houses. My younger aunt's daughter and I used to go and wash utensils. The house where we went to wash utensils was that of my own classmate. When my teacher Murugan Sir found out that I was not coming to school he sent a word saying I must be sent to school and that he would bear the expenses of my school education. I went back to school then and continued my education.

After 12th Standard to manage Amma's economic problems, Appa and I went to to work. I went to the Thiruppur Spinning Mill and Appa went to a tea stall to work. We worked for a year but my work got exploited. The person who put me in the job put me in a four-year scheme and put his signature and took away the money.

When everyone made 1000 bundles of yarn, I could make 4000 bundles in a day. I was so good but when I realised that the payment for a day was only Rs.35 I gave up the job and came back to the village.

After coming back, I was doing small jobs here and there but Amma encouraged me to study. I eagerly applied to the Government Arts College. I did not get a seat. Everyone said that I can get a seat only on recommendation. I came back and told Amma sadly, "Who would recommend us?" Amma said she would come and talk to the college authorities but I told her she knew no one there and avoided it.

But Amma forced me and dragged me to the college the next day. In the college on seeing Amma the person there asked what she was doing there and she said, "My child has not got a seat" and he said he would get

me a seat and everything was done in a second. I was so surprised. It was then I came to know that he belonged to our village and that my grandfather used to supply Murrel fish to their house.

I felt so ashamed that I had considered my mother illiterate. Whenever I could not pay the fees, she would remove her earrings or nose-ring and ask me to go and pawn them and pay the fees.

But she always kept us well groomed. She never once said that there was no money. Without realising how hard up Amma was for money, I have spent a lot of time in cinema theatres in my college days.

Three years of college life. And in between failure in love. When I was in love, she used to denigrate me with the choicest words of abuse. But when I felt low afterwards when I failed in love, the kind of advice she gave me even someone who had studied psychology could not have given.

When I could not go for higher studies and took up a job in Chennai and asked her if I could do part-time studies, she gave me the courage saying, "After me, you have to take care of yourself; so, do whatever you feel is right."

But Amma and I fought often. I could not do anything without her help and whenever I tried, I failed miserably and when I would come home on those occasions, she would never mock me and that has been her attitude to this day.

When I took up a job the first thing I told Amma was that she should not go to work and that I would work to earn a living. Amma does not go to work now.

I took up any job that I could do. The economic situation of the house improved. I did everything that I wanted to do for Amma.

I knew what Amma's expectations were and what she enjoyed eating and kept fulfilling those needs without fail. Amma used to talk about how she struggled to get food as a child and every time I heard it, I used to feel sad.

She was very particular that such a fate should not befall us. And I am very clear in my mind that Amma should not face such a situation again and keep working accordingly.

Amma has never hidden from me the pitfalls of her life due to ignorance. To the person who was critical of her pointing out her mistakes in life and who humiliated us pointing out our mother, the improvement in my life has been like a whiplash many times.

When I wanted to study further and Appa said that I don't have a job for my education it was Amma who

said I must study further if I thought it was important.

In poverty when everyone wanted to eat very often Amma and I acted like those two deer and doe in the old Tamil poem where they tell each other to drink the little water in a pond and the deer pretends to drink so that the doe can quench its thirst.

When the tsunami happened, the whole town was running helter-skelter but I was worrying that Appa and Amma were not to be seen. When everyone was running for their lives, my mother came running with my education certificates.

She came out with the idlis that had been prepared at home and started distributing them all the way among the children who were walking. Whatever the situation she tried to help in whichever way she could.

Amma used to tell me often. "You have been working ever since you grew up, I won't die before building a house for you..." In anger I have told her that she was exploiting me and had not done anything for me. But to everyone's surprise she built a house for me.

In building the house most of the labour work was done by Amma. When I returned from the college, she would say, "Come let us pile up the sand; we will save on labour," and make me work. During weekends we would work with the mason. In the evenings we will pick up the stones, pour water. We did not waste a minute and laboured to build the house and built it in one year.

Until now in education, life and work she has been by my side.

Now when the lockdown has been announced and there is no job, she takes care of two of us as if we are children. There was no one to lend a hand in times when I felt low. No one bothered to see my drawn face. But Amma always reassured me that she was there for me whatever the situation.

I am not writing this overwhelmed by emotion. In college when asked about great women I have only mentioned Amma. I have not seen her express too much love or get too emotional and cry at any time.

When we sold the jewels to build the house, she gave me all the ten sovereigns of gold jewellery of hers. She said jewels are bought to help in times of need; not to look beautiful. "Go sell them," she said, "if I am alive, you can buy and give me jewels." She said this time and again and gave away all her jewels. The mental maturity she had to say that one needed a roof above the head and not jewels, I have not seen in anyone else.

Amma, I am determined that I will never take you back to those days of humiliation, suffering or the

troubles that you went through. That is what I am doing at present. I have seen my mother break into pieces whenever I cried. I have heard you tell others, "She is not someone who cries. Today I am there for her when she is crying. Please tell her this. Tell her Amma won't let them all down come what may."

But I have scolded you often and made you cry. I have stopped talking with you. Even now when I say I want to study you ask me how much money is needed as if I were still a child. This attitude of yours has not changed. You have been my all from then until now. You must remain mine forever.

I have often heard you say, "My daughter will somehow manage her life." You have been my guide for that.

Amma, my wishes to you on Mothers' Day.

On 8 August Ramya posted a poem strangely talking about body and death.

Clothes

For the child to soil
Amma tore her sari.
Appa who bought
New skirt and blouse
On festival days.
Anna who gave his shirt piece
For a half sari
To match my skirt.
The silk sari that
The groom's family gave
For the marriage.
The male dress I wore
In adolescence
To get rid of gender differences.
The fashionable dress I wore
Showing my cleavage
Claiming my body to be my own.
And finally, the new cloth
To cover the dead body...
Thus, thousands of clothes
Worn in the journey of life
More permanent than them
Is the body skin
That covers the flesh and life within.
I would say that the body
That covers the life within
With no culture or controls
Is my favourite dress.

I would say it is my right
To cover it or leave it bare!

Who would have thought that Ramya would be the one to leave her mother, sister and her son? In the strange ways of life, one wonders what induced Ramya to write the note for her mother, which became testimony to her own life and the poem. Ramya was only 36 and deserved to live longer with her mother and with her son Sai Prakash, in that house she built. But then cancer is a disease that is blind and strikes at random.

—C S Lakshmi

A Life Lived for the Nation: Kamaltai Apte (1925-August 2022)



As Indians we owe a lot to the freedom fighters who dedicated their lives to get freedom for the nation and later devoted themselves to work for social awakening. Kamaltai Apte from Ahmednagar was one such freedom fighter. She was born in 1925. It was a time when the country was coming together and fighting for freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Kamaltai Apte was only 11 years old when she went to Mahilashram at Wardha for her studies. She stayed there for seven years, and there she got a chance to meet great leaders like Pandit Nehru, Vinoba Bhave and so many others. She got married in June 1942 to Damodar alias Annasaheb Apte from Ahmednagar. Soon after marriage she went to jail for taking part in 'Chale Jao' (Quit India) movement. She was imprisoned for six months in Yerwada Jail, Pune, where she brought women inmates together and hoisted Tiranga flag at the jail office. They were kept without food for one day by jail officers for this act. She was attracted towards service to nation from the age of 17-18 and this urge remained throughout her life. Kamaltai's maternal home was extremely nationalistic which is why she had been sent to Wardha but she was fortunate that at her marital home also there was an environment of service to nation. Her mother-in-law Janakibai Apte had started a Balikashram (a hostel for girls) in 1933 for girls from what were considered backward communities. When Janakibai was in jail, Kamaltai looked after the house and her social activities. Kamaltai worked hard with her mother-in-law in different social activities. She encouraged her husband D P Apte to

take up journalism. Kamaltai worked as a Hindi teacher in the Municipal school for 40 years. After retirement she devoted herself to social service through various social organisations such as Balikashram Sanstha, Andha Seva Mandal (an organisation that she founded for blind people's welfare in Ahmednagar), Mahila Mandal and Mata Balak Mandir. All her life she wore khadi. Government of India felicitated her with the Tamrapatra for her contribution to the freedom movement. She also received the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Dalit Mitra Puraskar from the Ambedkar Mahasabha. In 2021 when she was entering her 97th year the Rotary Club of Ahmednagar and the Mankanhaiyya Trust honoured her with the Rishitulya Vyaktimatva Sanman Puraskar (Saintly Personality Award) in March 2021. There is a video clipping of her interview taken when she was 96, by the Joint Editor of Gazetteers' Department of Maharashtra State on the occasion of the 75th year of India's Independence, where she can be seen singing a song which they used to sing during the freedom movement. She remained active till the end of her life. In August 2022 she celebrated the Independence Day and later that month passed away after living a life dedicated to the nation and its disadvantaged people.

—Sharmila Sontakke

A Mysterious Death: Sonali Phogat (21 September 1979-23 August 2022)



Sonali Phogat was an Indian politician and a social media personality from Haryana. She was one of the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party from Hisar, and was the national vice president of the BJP Mahila Morcha.

Sonali Phogat was born in a small village in Hisar district of Haryana called Bhuthan. She was married to Sanjay Phogat who died in 2016 and has a daughter, Yashodhara Phogat.

Sonali Phogat began her television career in 2006 when she appeared as an anchor for a Haryanvi show in Hisar Doordarshan. She became popular through Tik Tok, Instagram and Twitter. In 2016, she was part of a Zee T V serial *Ek Maa Jo Laakon Ke Liye Bani Amma*. (A Mother who Became Amma to Lakhs of People) In 2019 she appeared in the web series *The Story of Badmashgarh*. In 2019 she also

debuted in the Haryanvi film *Chhoriyan Chhoron Se Kam Nahi Hoti* (Women Thieves Are Not inferior to MaleThieves). She also appeared in the Big Boss show in 2020.

Along with her professional career she continued to be in politics although in the 2019 election she stood as a BJP candidate from Adampur constituency and lost to Kuldeep Bishnoi who was a Haryana Janhit Congress candidate (who later joined BJP).

Sonali died under mysterious circumstances same as her husband who had died in the farm house in Hisar with no clear causes for his death. In the case of Sonali, she was in Goa for a shoot and although it was initially declared as a heart attack, after three months, Sudhir Sagwan, her personal assistant, and Sukhwinder Wasi, her associate, were suspected of killing her for her farm and her property.

As a politician, although she had lost in the 2019 election, she had not given up on her political career and her career in films and TV was also doing well. But her career involved ambitious people wanting to make quick money who would not mind eliminating a life such as hers. Thus, a young, ambitious woman became a victim of the circumstances she had created around herself.

—C S Lakshmi



SPARROW is a Women's Archives that collects oral history and visual material connected with women's lives and experience as important material for future research on women. Our intention is to make such material more visible and accessible to people interested in women's lives and history. Kindly visit our website, www.sparrowonline.org which will give you an idea about the work we are doing.



SEPTEMBER 2022

**A Fighter for Justice: Mary Roy
(1933-1 September 2022)**

It was in one of the meetings organised in Kerala by those in the Left Movement in the mid-seventies or so that many of us who had gone as both participants and observers to discuss women's issues, that we had met Mary Roy. There were both formal and informal sessions and in one of those sessions she sat amongst us and spoke

about her life. We knew her as an educationist and about the Corpus Christi School later known as Pallikoodam that she had set up in 1967. But that day we saw her as a women's rights activist when she spoke about the gender biased inheritance law prevalent within the Syrian Malabar Nasrani community of Kerala. She spoke in detail about the Travancore Succession Act of 1916 and the Cochin Succession Act of 1921. Denied inheritance she had to leave her ancestral house after her father's death. We followed her legal fight for justice and celebrated when she won the Supreme Court law suit in 1986 against her brother. The judgement ensured equal rights for Syrian Christian women as with their male siblings in their ancestral property.

There was also another important case she won which was for freedom of expression. In 1990, when her school children were all prepared to perform *Jesus Christ Superstar*, a musical written by Andrew Lloyd-Webber and Tim Rice, Christian fundamentalists objected to it as being blasphemous. An order from the District Collector was brought to ban it in the last minute. Mary Roy fought this case too and took it right up to the Supreme Court. The ban was found untenable and lifted by the Supreme Court in 2015. The Pallikoodam children got to perform it after 25 years.

It was only in 1997 when *The God of Small Things* became the talk of the town winning the Booker Prize that one got to know that Mary Roy was the mother of Arundhati Roy. Since then, Mary Roy came to be known as Arundhati's mother. But to those who knew her as an educator and the founder-director of Pallikoodam, she remained the indefatigable fighter for justice.

Mary Roy's was a life lived for the finer aspects of life and for causes worth fighting for. At 89, one could say, she had won all her battles. And won them honourably.

—C S Lakshmi

**"Khamoshi todo, waqt aagaya!": Gouri Choudhury
(15 December 1938-9 September 2022)**

All those involved with the women's movement one way or the other knew Gouri Choudhury. She was a senior women's rights activist, who had founded Action India, a community-based women's collective in the bastis of New Delhi, in 1976. The programmes she organised such as *Beti Utsav*, were part of her pioneering work

in eradicating gender-based violence. Women's empowerment was a cause she was committed to throughout her life.

In 2017, at 79, she had the energy to still travel to participate in a joint programme called The Pad Project. She visited Oakwood to meet the school's chapter of Girls Learn International (GLI) and the organisers of The Pad Project. Gouri was a partner in Oakwood's GLI and their Pad Project, an initiative that sought to reduce the gender gap in education by making menstruation not an impediment to girls' education. She spoke to a crowd of students about child labour and what girls in India often face when they reach the age of menstruation. GLI and Gouri also screened a teaser on The Pad Project. Gouri spoke about what menstruation does to a girl in a developing country. She explained that when a girl in America gets her period, she may miss a class, but when a girl in a developing country gets her period, she may never go to class again. Lacking access to affordable and hygienic menstrual products, girls in rural India, she explained, may use old clothes or rags with the risk of infection. They may drop out of school if the family does not allow them to go to school. Gouri worked with Oakwood students to purchase a machine for the community living outside New Delhi in the village of Kathikera. Purchasing the machine meant producing pads, employing women and creating a micro-economy.

On January 29, 2020, Day 2 of the IAWS Conference in Delhi, there was a panel of iconic feminist activists like Kamla Bhasin, Urvashi Butalia, Indu Agnihotri, Kumud Sharma and Gouri Choudhury in which Gouri traced the history of women's movement's protests against the so-called dowry "deaths" where the word "deaths" was only a euphemism used for murders.

The office of Saheli organisation was in Gouri's bungalow in Delhi. Gouri had very kind eyes and when she smiled the smile always reached her eyes. She had encouraging words for any work done in the cause for women and Vibhuti Patel

in her tribute posted on her Facebook timeline on September 9 2022 says that Gouri's favourite song was "Khamoshi todo, waqt aagaya !" (Break the silence, time has come!). 84 is not a very young age to leave the world, but when energetic and active women like Gouri Chodhury pass away one wishes they could have lived longer.

—C S Lakshmi

A Performer's Life Comes to An end: Gulabbai Sangamnerkar (1932-14 September 2022)



Gulabbai Sangamnerkar died of old age at her Pune residence. She was 90. She was originally from Sangamner, Ahmednagar district. Gulabbai was born in 1932 to Dayaram More and Shivadabai. Her mother was an excellent Tamasha artiste. Shivadabai had worked for many years in Dagdoba Sali's Tamasha troupe. She started teaching the art

to her young daughter, hoping that she would take forward the legacy of Lavani in their family. After studying till the Third or Fourth Standard, Gulabbai was sent to many senior Lavani artistes to learn from them. Gulabbai studied to sing and present through dramatic action with gestures and expressions the lavanis of Patthe Bapurao, Ram Joshi, Parsharam, and Saganbhau. Later from Bhamabai Pandharpurkar she learnt how to emote the lavanis with deep understanding of the lyrics. She did what was known as Baithakichi Lavani where the artistes sit and emote the lyrics and don't dance. Music composer Viththal Shinde encouraged her and made her sing many of his lavanis. The record of her Lavani songs was released by HMV and it got a good response. The lavanis sung by her used to get broadcast on radio. At the special programme organised by Yashwantrao Chavan in New Delhi on the occasion of Maharashtra Day, Gulabbai was chosen as the representative of Maharashtra for the event. In the capital city she performed in front of luminaries from the fields of politics, social work and the arts which boosted her confidence. With her troupe she used to perform all over Maharashtra but later the troupe limited its performances to closed theatres like Aryabhushan in Pune for safety purposes. Gulabbai troupe performed regularly to packed houses at Pune's Aryabhushan Theatre. These performances, along with ones in Mumbai, made her well known among the elite. Although she had a troupe of her

own, her performances did not remain confined to only her troupe. For a few years, she performed in some shows of Prakash and Jaymala Inamdar's drama *Gadhvacha Lagna* (Donkey's Wedding). Earlier she had been part of Kantabai Satarkar's troupe for some time. Around that time, Lata Mangeshkar was also performing songs under the theme *Aajolchi Gani* (Songs from One's Maternal Home). It was like a music album. By this time Lata Mangeshkar had sung all kinds of songs, but she was not familiar with lavanis associated with performance. Gulabbai's name was suggested as the person who would emote to the lavani Lata Mangeshkar would sing. Thus, Gulabbai ended up performing a lavani written by N D Mahanor, *Rajasa Jawali Jara Basa* (Passionate Lover, Sit for a While) considered one of the immortal lavanis of Lata Mangeshkar's career. Gulabbai received many awards for her contribution to the field of Lavani. Recently she was honoured with Vithabai Narayangaonkar Lifetime Achievement Award 2018-19 from the Government of Maharashtra.

When artistes like Gulabbai Sangamnerkar die, they take with them a part of the Lavani tradition and it is a void that cannot be filled up.

—Sharmila Sontakke

An Ascetic Painter: Nalini Bhagwat (1938-15 September 2022)



Nalini Bhagwat was famous for being the first woman painter in Maharashtra to get a PhD in the field of Painting. Nalini Bhagwat was a painter, art critic and art history teacher who died at the age of 84 in Kolhapur. She did her graduation and Post-Graduation in history from Rajaram College, Kolhapur, Diploma in painting and art masters from the

Dalvi's Art Institute, Kolhapur and Doctorate in Art history in 1985 from the Faculty of Fine Arts, M. S. University, Baroda. She closely observed the style of painting of Ganpatrao Vadangekar, Baburao Painter and Rabindra Mistry from Kolhapur and also studied art of Progressive Group artists of Mumbai. She worked as Asst. Lecturer in Dalvi's Art Institute, Kolhapur and later from 1972 till 1995 she worked as a Lecturer of Art History in the Sir J. J. School of Art, Mumbai. She taught art history to almost two generations of painters. She had done three solo shows which were dedicated to different subjects. The first show dealt with social problems like dowry-deaths, injustice to women etc.

The second show of her paintings represented the festivals of India. The third depicted the views of “The Indian River Ghats” including those related to the Ghats of Banaras. Even at the age of 80, she participated in the art exhibition at Jehangir art Gallery in 2018. Nalini had written several articles on art for different magazines and art journals. She was honoured by the Government of Maharashtra in the year 2015 at the ‘Rajya Art Exhibition’ for her long journey in art. She also received Lifetime Achievement Award from V G Kulkarni Kalaniketan College, Nashik and Rangbahar Institute, Kolhapur.

—Asmita Deshpande

A Principal Much Loved: Selvaraj Kothai (1967-20 September 2022)



Dr Selvaraj Kothai who passed away at the young age of 55 had been appointed as Principal of Ethiraj College for Women, Chennai, just three years ago in 2019. She had worked in the Department of Chemistry for three decades and was heading the department when

she was chosen as principal of the college. She was the 12th Principal and Secretary of the college.

She had done her undergraduate studies in Ethiraj College for Women. It was followed by a post-graduation and MPhil from Pachaiyappa’s College in 1990. She joined her alma mater as a lecturer in 1990 and served in the college for nearly three decades in different capacities before becoming its principal. While serving as a faculty member at Ethiraj College, she had pursued her PhD from the Presidency College.

She was a keen researcher and had won the Young Scientist Award and had been the UGC-FIP (Faculty Induction Programme) Teacher Fellow. She continued to receive several grants for research in chemistry. She excelled in research. Unfortunately, she had previously undergone a cardiac procedure and when admitted recently in a hospital she did not respond to treatment and passed away. She is survived by her husband and daughter, who is a doctor.

Ethiraj College for women declared holiday on September 21st, Wednesday, as a mark of respect.

—Pooja Pandey

A Politician and a Litterateur: Jayanti Patnaik (7 April 1932-28 September 2022)



Although people tend to refer to Jayanti Patnaik as the wife of Janaki Ballabh Patnaik who was Chief Minister of Odisha (1980–89), she was a politician and social worker by her own right. She was a four-time Member of Parliament. Jayanti was elected from Cuttack and Berhampur Lok Sabha constituencies in 1981, 1984 and 1998 and she was nominated to Rajya Sabha in 1996. She was the first Chairperson of the National Commission for Women. Her term of office was from 3 February 1992 to 30 January 1995.

She was born in 1932 at Aska, Ganjam district of Orissa. She came from an illustrious family of freedom fighters. She did her schooling at Harihar High School, Aska. She did her MA in Social Work from Sailabala Women’s College, Utkal University, Cuttack, and pursued advanced studies in Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. In 1953, she got married to J B Patnaik, when he became president of Odisha Pradesh Youth Congress. He later became chief minister in 1980.

J B Patnaik was not only a politician but also a scholar, poet and writer. He was a Sanskrit-Odia scholar. His home library contained more than a lakh of books. He won the Central Sahitya Akademi for his Odia translation of Bankim Chandra’s novels titled *Bankim Chandra Upanyasmala* in 2001. Earlier he had got the Odisha Sahitya Akademi award for *Bairagya Shataka*, a translation of Bhartruhari’s celebrated Sanskrit work, in 1996.

J B Patnaik had translated the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Shrimad Bhagvat Gita* into Odia. He also wrote books on Sindhu Upatyaka and Gautam Buddha.

Jayanti and J B Patnaik were well-matched as literary scholars also. Jayanti was also known for her literary skills. She was the editor of the literary magazine *Pourusha*. She translated K M Munshi’s *Krishnavatara* into Odia as *Krishnabatara*. It was a seven-book set launched in 2010. The 2,000-page book was a compilation of articles. It had earlier come out as a series of translations of Munshi’s work in *Pourusha*. At the time of the book release Jayanti had said, “The literature of K M Munshi was so enchanting that I felt an urge to translate it so it can reach Odia readers.” Jayanti also assisted her husband in writing his voluminous book on *Mahabharata Vyaskruta Mahabharata* which he called *Mahabharat Samhita*.

Jayanti was 90 when she passed away. Her husband had died seven years earlier in 2015. In her lifetime she saw the

second edition of her *Krishnabatara* being brought out in 2020 and the seventh edition of *Vyaskruta Mahabharata* that she and her husband wrote being brought out in 2019. Jayanti lived a life made rich both with a politics of commitment to people and a love for Odia literature. And she will be remembered for both.

—C S Lakshmi

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October 2022

A leader With a Smiling Face: Annie Shekhar (1938-2 October 2022)



Advocate daughter Anita Castellino confirmed the news of her mother Annie Shekhar passing away after a long illness. Senior congress leader Annie Shekar started her political career in her youth from Colaba and represented Colaba area of

South Mumbai -forty- five years ago.

Fondly known as “Mummy” by Colaba people, Annie Shekhar spent all her life in service for the people. She did a lot of work for the common people and also fought for women’s rights. She started her journey as a President of the Colaba Mahila Congress and further became the General Secretary of the Mumbai Congress. In 1992 she was elected as a Municipal Corporator from Colaba and served for two terms as a Municipal Corporator at the BMC. In 2004 she was elected and again served for two terms as a member of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, representing the Colaba constituency.

She was also appointed as a Chairperson of the Children’s Aid Society with the rank of Minister of State in 2006 till 2009. As a chairperson she was involved in running homes for orphans, delinquent children and mentally disabled children.

Introduction of study centres in and around Colaba was her biggest achievement. The Study Centre at Cooperage Bandstand Garden was conceived and constructed by Annie Shekhar, in the year 1999 when she was serving as a municipal Corporator. The study center came as a blessing for the children who want to study and achieve something in life but need not have space to study. The 24 hours open study center became the strongest part in the career of thousands of students who studied here and came out as flying colours

in their lives. This study center was again redesigned and renovated by Annie Shekhar in the year 2013 when she was serving as a MLA of Colaba with inputs from the older students who achieved something in life because of this study center.

Her journey as a leader with commitment towards society should be a learning experience to many future leaders.

—Pooja Pandey

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Story Telling Her Legacy: Temsula Ao (25 October 1945-9 October 2022)



Temsula Ao was a friend, a warm human being blessed with a great sense of humour and generosity of spirit. I have many memories of shared laughter and conversation with her, but this is a tribute to the writer, to one of our major writers in English, our first Naga writer in English, one who wrote poetry and fiction and non-fiction prose with ease. Temsula Ao wrote

the Northeast (how she hated this homogenisation of all tribes and lands of the region) into all our consciousness and created the space for literature from Northeastern states in our Indian literary canons.

Temsula Ao was born in 1945 in Jorhat, Assam. She was orphaned at early age, her mother dying just ten months after her father. Temsula Ao and her five siblings were split up—the youngest ones went to the native village, the two eldest brothers continued their studies in Jorhat, and Temsula Ao was sent to Golaghat Mission Boarding School. Married off to a much older man before her Matriculation results were declared, all her subsequent education was after the birth of her children. It must be also noted that she brought up her children as a single mother. She did her BA from Fazl Ali College, Mokokchung, Nagaland and MA from Gauhati University, and then her Diploma in the Teaching of English from CIEFL (now EFLU) and joined the faculty of NEHU (North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong) in 1975 where she served till 2010. Her PhD was also from NEHU. I have heard and believe that she was a caring teacher and a great mentor.

While talking about her career, I must also add that she served as the Director of North East Zone Cultural Centre at Dimapur from 1992 to 1997. It was when she was a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Minnesota in 1985-86 that she realised the importance of folk literature, which motivated her to work on her book on the Ao-Naga Oral Tradition. Temsula Ao also served as the Chairperson of the

Nagaland State Commission for Women, serving two terms in that capacity from 2012 to 2019. She was also a recipient of the Padma Shri award.

It was as a poet that I knew her first, because her first collection of poems, *Songs that Tell*, was published in 1988, when she was in her forties. When we were comparing notes, she told me that she could not remember when she began to write poetry. As one can see from the title of her very first collection of poems, Temsula Ao saw herself as a lyricist. Poems are songs in oral cultures, and Temsula Ao saw herself as Naga woman-poet in search of tradition. Every collection of poetry written by her is a collection of songs—the other collections being *Songs that Try to Say* (1992), *Songs of Many Moods* (1995), *Songs from Here and There* (2003), *Songs from the Other Life* (2007), *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007* (2013), and *Songs along the Way Home* (2019).

Temsula Ao sings of her lands, about her state of mind, and about her community. She writes about the damage done to her people, their sense of uprootedness, and their wounds and pains. If the Christian missionaries in the colonial past had estranged her people from their past and their traditions and ways of life, the continuing violence and tensions had also eroded any semblance of peace, of living in harmony with the land to which you belong, in a place which belongs to you:

Today,
I no longer know my hills,
The birdsong is gone,
Replaced by staccato
Of sophisticated weaponry
("My Hills")

This is a poem that is directly on the violence that has marked the lives of the people of the region in the last few decades, something you find more in her stories than in her poems.

In her poetry, Temsula Ao writes about her life and that of her community, about myths and cultural practices—thus being profoundly political without directly referring to the troubled violent history of the present. She used prose for the more direct comments on the impact of political violence. It is interesting to see how her poetry becomes part of her quest to recover and connect with the mythology of the community, to establish continuities with the past, even while she sings of her different emotions and moods, of her personal life, of love, loneliness, ageing and death. The individual finds herself only in her community, which takes her away from her loneliness into its traditional fold, giving her a sense of continuity and purpose.

Temsula Ao's poems show you the woman struggling with her circumstances, a woman determined to go beyond, a woman expressing the angst of human lives, but a woman proud of being the ambassador of her community. Among her numerous poems on ageing and death, I would like to quote from two poems. In the first, she expresses the anxiety all of us share:

I fear
The dreaded fate
Of being rendered
Redundant
Before my formal death.
("I Fear")

In the second, which celebrates October, Temsula sees it as a magical month. The month when she was born is "Where I always/ Want to be." This is the poem that ends with the lines all tributes to her must quote for they came true:

And when the time
Is ripe for me,
I wish to depart
With October in my heart.
("October")

It is in her collections of short stories that you see Temsula Ao's writing squeeze your heart and hit you in the gut with stories about the violence that rocked her world. *These Hills Called Home: Stories from the War Zone* (2005), her first collection, disturbed my sleep for days. She wrote simply, almost dispassionately, about the war that had laid waste her land with countless lies. It showed the actions of the State and its instruments with an unblinkered and unblinking vision. *Laburnum for my Head* (2009) continues this portrayal through depictions of ordinary lives impacted by this wretched conflict. Again, these are seemingly simply told but high impact stories. It is in her third collection, *The Tombstone in my Garden: Stories from Nagaland* (2022), that we get snapshots of Naga villages, myths, and practices.

Temsula Ao's generosity of spirit extended to all. She had moved beyond conflict, which no one should forget, to forging connections, to understanding the compulsions of ordinary people sucked into this nightmare. In "The Epitaph", ostensibly about the British cemetery at Kohima, Nagaland but actually about all soldiers dying and taking lives in distant lands, "Go home then" she implores

And write an epitaph
To the end of all

Mindless mayhem.

She expressed her poetic credo in “My Last Song” where can see her desire to script new endings even if she cannot script new beginnings, to be a sensitive recorder, to move people to action. Temsula Ao, then, is paradoxically the poet of hope, the one who won’t give up:

I will have sung
My last song
When I cease to be
Moved
By a maimed body
And a broken spirit.

She would have sung her last song when she no longer responded to “children’s laughter” or “women’s chatter” or to nature or hear “The appeal/Of the mute”. But she wouldn’t have been the person and the poet that she was if she didn’t add that it would be her end as a writer:

... if I cannot laugh
At myself
At times and say
Well that’s life

Temsula Ao once wrote that she had “... lived my life believing/ Story-telling was my proud legacy” (“The Old Story-Teller”). Without stories the people would lose their sense of self. The seven collections of poems and three collections of short stories, and the memoir, and the collection of Naga folk tales that she wrote and published will ensure people don’t forget their history, their identity. Temsula Ao did her duty by all of us, inclusive till the last. My salutes to you, my friend.

—G J V Prasad

G J V Prasad formerly Professor of English at Jawaharlal Nehru University, is a poet, novelist, and translator. His teachings and research have focussed on Indian English literature, modern drama and translation.

This tribute was first published in the Usawa Literary Review, December 2022 and is reproduced here with permission with just a title added to it. The original review can be accessed at:

<https://www.usawa.in/issue-8/publisher/temsula-ao.html>

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A Writer Who Wrote About Revolutionaries and Saints: Mrinalini Joshi (13 February 1927-27 October 2022)



Veteran Marathi writer Mrinalini Joshi passed away at her residence in Pune. She was 95. She was known for writing biographies of patriotic and spiritual people. Mrinalini Joshi started writing inspired by Kavivarya Kusumagraj, the great Marathi poet. Kusumagraj used to write a new poem every year on his birthday and send it to Mrinalinitai. She was also an initiated disciple of Swami Swaroopananda from Pavas. She spent her childhood in Ratnagiri where she came into close contact with Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Savarkar used to consider her his daughter. Later she completed her school education from Hingane Ashram, Pune. After completing BA and BT, she got married to Madhusudan Joshi, a Forest Officer. Her maternal uncle Vasudeoshastri Hardikar was a revolutionary. So she got a lot of information about different revolutionaries and their manner of working. She also read the entire writings of V D Savarkar. Her own works reflected these literary influences. She wrote many books. There was the novel *Inquilab* (Revolution) on the life of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, *Om Rashtraya Swaha* (An Offering to The Nation, 2012) on the life of Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, the second leader of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, *Shankarlila* on the life of Shankar Maharaj (2016), *Amritsiddhi* (Attaining Heavenly Nectar, 1998) on the life of Swami Swaroopanand of Pavas, *Avadhya Me! Ajinkya Me!!* (Inviolable I Am, Invincible I Am!!), a novel on the final phase of Savarkar’s life. The novel *Inquilab* has been translated into Hindi, English and Gujarati languages while the novel *Om Rashtraya Swaha* has been translated into Hindi and Telugu.

Her other works are the *Anandache Dohi Anand Tarang* (Wave of Joy and Happiness, 2009) on the life of Sant Tukaram’s wife Jijai, *Venaswami* (2015) on the life of Sant Venabai, the disciple of Samarth Ramdas, and *Muktai* (2015) on the life of Saint Muktabai. She has written a descriptive book *Alok* (Light, 2012) based on her memories of association with saints and mahants whom she met in life.

Snehal Publication, Pune, presents Snehajali Award every year. In 2006, at the age of 79, Mrinalini Joshi was a recipient of this award. Mrinalini Joshi wrote what she was inspired to write and remained true to her own feelings and experiences and wrote about them because she felt that it was important to share them with others. She lived a quiet life but was able to write about revolutionaries and saints who were part of her life.

—Sharmila Sontakke



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=PLTxTDSSOEwjKbERIPDZZpic6UzqVPzvZV>

Conversation with Vimmi Sadarangani & Puthiyamaadhavai

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTxTDSSOEwjKbERIPDZZpic6UzqVPzvZV>

Conversation with Jhelum Paranjape

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTxTDSSOEwjKbERIPDZZpic6UzqVPzvZV>

Conversation with Purvadhanashree & Ranjana Dave

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLGQe1I6sLySGI55ZhsBEdaH0dnf8q0zc>

Conversation with Sumathi Murthy

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLGQe1I6sLySEiqqDvyKdruGkVUNqoqXIW>

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>



NOVEMBER 2022

A Life of SEWA: Ela Bhatt (7 September 1933-2 November 2022)



I don't think there is any activist of the women's movement who has not heard of SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association of India) and not been influenced by the earnestness of Gandhian Ela Bhatt. She was Elaben to everyone. By the time many of us had become active in the women's movement Elaben had set up SEWA in 1972. And many who visited Ahmedabad made it a point to visit SEWA and get to know about its work. And a lot of attention got focussed on her and her work when she received the Magsaysay award in 1977. It was followed by the Right Livelihood Award (1984) and the Padma Bhushan in 1986.

SEWA, the acronym, is an apt one for in many Indian languages it means "service". In short, SEWA is a trade union based in Ahmedabad that promotes the rights of low-income, independently employed women workers. In many conferences and meetings Elaben or someone from her group would narrate how and why SEWA was formed. One never got tired of listening to the story of SEWA. It would always begin with the simple detail that SEWA was born as a trade union of poor self-employed women in 1972, in the city of Ahmedabad; how it grew out of the Women's Wing of the Textile Labour Association, TLA, India's oldest and largest union of textile workers founded in 1920 by Anasuya Sarabhai and Mahatma Gandhi; that the women's wing itself had been started with a simple goal of providing training in sewing, spinning, knitting, embroidery, and other welfare activities to the wives and daughters of mill workers. But SEWA, although it grew out of the women's wing, chalked out a different path for itself. And that story used to keep many of those who attended the conferences in rapt attention.

The story is given in detail in its Home page and is worth reproducing here:

"In 1971, a small group of migrant women working as handcart-pullers / headloaders in Ahmedabad's cloth market came to the TLA looking for help in securing decent wages. The women lived on the streets, and were too poor to afford even a shack. They all worked in the city's thriving cloth market, ferrying bolts of cloth

between wholesalers and retailers. Wholesale shop-owners would pay them per job, at exploitative wages. Even more exploited than the handcart-pullers were the head-loaders, who ferried huge loads on their heads for a pittance. Ela Bhatt sat in the market with the agitated women as they recounted their struggles with ruthless contractors, erratic jobs, and low wages.

“Following the meeting, Ela Bhatt wrote an article in the local newspaper recounting the unfair wages, and other problems of the head-loaders.

“The cloth merchants countered the charges against them with an article of their own, announcing the fair wages they were paying the head-loaders. Of course, the women did not receive the fair wages they claimed, so the Women’s Wing reprinted the merchant’s claims on little cards and distributed them throughout the market to use as leverage against the merchants.

“This strategy was so effective that word spread among the women, and a group of used-clothes dealers approached the Women’s Wing with their own grievances. A public meeting of used-garment dealers was called and over hundred women attended. During the meeting in a public park, the women suggested that they form an association of their own. Thus, following an appeal from the women, and at the initiative of Ela Bhatt, and the president of the TLA, Arvind Buch, the idea of forming Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) – an association of poor self-employed women workers from the informal economy was conceptualized in December 1971.

“The women felt that as a workers’ association, SEWA should establish itself as a trade union. This was a fairly novel idea, because the self-employed have no history of organizing. So SEWA’s first struggle was registering as a trade union.

“The State Labour Department refused to register SEWA as a union because in their view, if there was no employer involved, who were the workers organizing against? SEWA argued that the purpose of a union was to unify the workers; it did not need an employer to justify its existence. SEWA’s

argument prevailed, and it was finally registered as a trade union on April 12, 1972 – A day we celebrate in SEWA as “Self-Employed day.””

Elaben was a lawyer by training. Her father Sumantra Bhatt was a well-known lawyer and her mother Vanalila Vyas was active in the women’s movement and was the secretary of AIWC (All India Women’s Conference). She did all her schooling and graduation in Surat and studied law in Ahmedabad. She got her degree in law in 1954 and received a gold medal for her work on Hindu Law. But she did not practise as a lawyer but began to teach English at SNT Women’s University (SNT) in Mumbai. But it was a short stint and in 1955 she joined the legal department of the Textile Labour Association (TLA) India’s oldest unions for textile workers, in Ahmedabad. Soon after she got married to Ramesh Bhatt and started a family.

Before founding SEWA out of the women’s wing of TLA, she first became head of its women’s wing in 1968. She acquired an International Diploma of Labour and Cooperatives from the Afro-Asian Institute of Labour and Cooperatives in Tel Aviv, after attending a course for three months. While the women’s wing trained mill workers’ wives in some skills what was needed was to get protection and recognition for self-employed women whose work came under the informal sector. And that is how the idea of SEWA took root and the rest is history. Arvind Buch who was president of TLA became its president and Elaben remained its secretary from 1972-1996.

Nelson Mandela, Graca Machel and Desmond Tutu had given a call in 2007 in Johannesburg, for the formation of a group of world leaders with integrity to solve the problems of the world. The group was known as The Elders. Elaben was with the group from 2007-2022. She was particularly involved in The Elders’ initiative on equality for women and girls, including on the issue of child marriage. She travelled with the group to many parts of the world.

Elaben also found time to write two books: *We Are Poor But So Many: The Story of Self-Employed Women in India*, published by Oxford University Press in 2005 and *Anubandh: Building Hundred-Mile Communities* written for young people published by Navajivan Trust in 2015. They have been translated into many languages.

Elaben received many awards in her lifetime for her relentless work for women and girl children. But she would have considered the tribute of SEWA family given in its home page the best award that she could have received. Written in a simple language the tribute reads:

“We, the 2.5 million informal women workers of SEWA, a National Trade Union and representative

members from 18 states of India are deeply saddened by the sad demise of our beloved founder Shri Elaben Bhatt.

“She was a visionary for the informal sector and dedicated her entire life to give voice, visibility and validation to the work of the informal sector workers. Simplicity was her virtue and her soft and loving nature still remains with us.

“We will remain committed to follow and achieve her vision which will be our true tribute to her.”

They could not have put it better than that.

—C S Lakshmi

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Celebrating Prem: Prem Kumari Srivastava (2 December 1962-12 November 2022)



Prem Kumari Srivastava worked as a Professor of English at Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi. She passed away tragically of a cardiac arrest at a pre-wedding Sangeet ceremony for her son. One learnt that she had beaten Covid19 twice and had been a heart patient.

Reports of how she collapsed while dancing with joy at the ceremony filled my heart with deep sorrow, and at the same time, an odd recognition of her true spirit: full of enthusiasm and joy till her last living moment. Prem was a beloved teacher and a prolific academic. I took membership of FORTELL (Forum for Teachers of English Language and Literature) in 2012, and I met her among other MAC faculty members at the AGM. We struck up a conversation easily and became friends. We were also together at the ELPC workshops (English Language Proficiency Course) where she had contributed in materials development. Our friendship consolidated in the next couple of years at the Central Evaluation Centre at Daulatram College in 2013, where I was then teaching; and with the FYUP workshops at the Institute of Life Long Learning (ILLL). Later, I delivered a lecture under the aegis of FORTELL at MAC on the newly introduced Translation course on 26th September 2013, and I vividly recall the warm welcome extended by fellow FORTELLers Prem, Mona and Manjari.

Prem was a generous, affable, and resourceful person who would crack jokes, pull your leg ever-so-gently, and always be concerned about your future, getting what one deserved, as she used to put it. She would keep track of what one was doing, and would make it a point to appreciate the smallest

of achievements. Our membership of FORTELL kept us together, and in touch, year after year, as we bonded in the AGMs and shared ideas on how to take the organisation forward. Prem served in key positions at FORTELL over several years, holding its banner high wherever she went, and giving the FORTELL Journal her very best. It is saddening that our last meeting was on 7th October 2022 in the familiar environs of Rajdhani College, at another AGM of FORTELL, Prem and I were inducted to the Executive Board (a first for me, Prem being a veteran!). She ate about half of the refreshment served, talked about her upcoming projects, and reminded me to wrap up my research soon. After the



meeting, we took a groupie together, and parted with the promise of coming up with fresh proposals for the next meeting. This photo was to be our last one together.

While Prem the researcher, author, critic, supervisor was well-known and well-admired, I fell in awe of Prem the poet. Her short poetry collection

“Standing by the Wayside” published by Poetryspace, Bristol, UK was remarkable, and her thoughtful poems were featured on several fora including *Muse India* (2013), *Galatea Resurrects: A Poetry Engagement*, California (2012); *Kritya: a journal of poetry*, New Delhi (2011, 2010); *Families: a Journal of Representations*, Kolkata (2011); *The Enchanting Verses Literary Review*, India (2011) and *Contemporary Literary Review*, India (2011). According to her, her inspirations for writing poetry were the stalwarts and the very finest of poets like Adrienne Rich, W B Yeats, Maya Angelou, Jayant Mahapatra and Rabindranath Tagore.

I would like to share a sample of her powerful poetic craft, rich with allusions, and bound by a tight economy of words:

Pasha

How much do I love?

A foolish dilemma.

Proscribed?

Most would say.

But I know one who loved from the bottom of her heart.

Patrician and a *pasha* of love

ceded, sacrificed, submitted to the four that she cherished.

I wonder today after years gone by

what she did, was it right?

They, who are god’s purest gift,

become impure as the clock ticks away, recalcitrant.

The one who stands uncontaminated is SHE

In a timeless zone, uncontested

but by whom?

Force majeure
ebullient, with a brio
and
a punchy topicality about life even as it trundled.
A rich lode that memory will excavate.
Ruminating on another note, resignedly, miltonically
I justify the ways of God to men.
God made mothers this way,
dismembering both horizon and limit.
Dispel the query and
Love more and more.

By all accounts, Prem was generous to a fault: she would readily walk the extra mile to help her friends and the people she thought had potential. She was a model guide and supervisor, mentoring her research scholars well after they got their degrees, providing them information about opportunities to showcase their work, and helping them hone their research acumen further. At my request, Prem also joined the reviewers' list of the journal I was co-editing at one point, *Lapis Lazuli: An International Literary Journal (LLIJ)*. Whenever we asked of her, she readily reviewed manuscripts of submission, meticulously writing out reviewer's observations, for the benefit of the authors.

Prem's vivaciousness, her exuberant laughter, her unique sartorial sense, her love for all kinds of jewellery, and her tastefully designed *bindis* added to her unmatched persona, an unmissable presence in any room or platform. Her clarity of thought, her critical acumen, her repertoire of research and writings put her in a league of her own. She was an active member of several prestigious literary organisations, was well-travelled and had lectured at universities of international repute, including those of UK, USA, Canada, Cyprus, Austria and China to name a few. Her numerous publications and books, including the forthcoming volume on Amrita Pritam she was co-editing with Hina Nandrajog (Routledge, 2022) stand testimony to her varied interests as an editor, scholar and translator. Her sudden passing away is a personal loss to me and a collective loss to academia, the Indian Academia in particular, for Professor Prem Kumari Srivastava was hardly halfway through and had so much more to give to the world. Prem will be missed equally by her wonderful loving family, her many friends beyond borders, her dear colleagues, her mentees and students, as well as by all those people whose lives she touched in direct or indirect ways. Prem's spirit will undoubtedly endure in our hearts and our celebration of her contribution.

—Kalyanee Rajan

~Kalyanee Rajan teaches English at Shaheed Bhagat Singh Evening College, University of Delhi.

DECEMBER 2022

A Name That Will Remain Shashwat, Eternal: Kusum Karnik (1932-2 Dec 2022)



A senior social worker, environmentalist and founder of Shashwat Society, Kusum Karnik, passed away in Pune due to a brief illness. The progressive thinking couple Kusum Karnik and Anand Kapoor started their social work in Ambegaon Taluka of Pune District around the year 1980. Beginning initially with Maharashtra Arogya Mandal they established Shashwat Society and through it formed the Ekjut organisation for taking up special programmes and projects for the tribals. Ambegaon is a remote hilly area of Pune District. She with her husband took up many issues of the tribal area. They both took up many causes like rehabilitation of tribal people affected by the construction of Dimbhe dam and proper market rates for Hirda crop (a crop tribals grow). They raised the issue that for the development of Padkai areas they should come under employment guarantee scheme (EGS) and they maintained bank accounts of tribal people and got their caste certificates. Her work also involved helping people living in designated wildlife sanctuaries. Her group has campaigned against eviction of tribals from wildlife sanctuaries when they got newly designated as national parks. Her experience of participation in the Narmada Bachao Andolan along with Medha Patkar was useful in the work she was doing in Ambegaon.

Among the tribals she was also known as 'Durga' and as the Tai (Elder sister) who carried satyagraha against the injustice and oppression of the tribals, Dalits and women. She had started training classes for the tribals and adult literacy classes to ensure employment of tribal fishermen professionals. She had started residential schools, ten kindergartens and 25 study classes.

The Shashwat Society bagged the prestigious award "Equator Initiative" worth three lakh rupees in 2012 at Rio De Janeiro in Brazil from the United Nations Development Program for their efforts for the development of people using natural resources in Bhimashankar area. It also got the special award of nine lakh rupees for fisheries and water resources development.

She is survived by son Saurabh Anand Karnik-Kapoor and daughter-in-law Kalyani Saurabh Karnik-Kapoor. Kusum Karnik lived a life of her choice and lived long enough to see some of her fights against injustice bear fruit.

—Sharmila Sontakke

A Professor the Students Loved: Meenakshi Dadarwala (1956-10 Dec 2022)



Students and friends will miss Professor Meenakshi Dadarwala, who passed away after a prolonged illness in Mumbai. She was a favourite teacher among the students of Marathi literature of M D Shah College, Malad. She was admired

not only by her students but the Principal Prof. Naik also used to appreciate her. Meenakshi Dadarwala was a Marathi literature scholar, critic and writer. She did her graduation from Ramnarain Ruia College, Mumbai. Later she completed her PhD on S N Pendse's novels under the guidance of Prof Vijaya Rajadhyaksha. She taught for a while in R Jhunjhunwala College and later taught at M D Shah College, Malad, affiliated to SNDT University, and also taught the post-graduate students of Mumbai University. She wrote extensively for various Marathi newspapers and magazines. She is survived by her painter husband Nitin Dadarwala, her mother-in-law, son and daughter-in-law, daughter and grandchildren. There was so much more she must have planned to do in terms of writing but it is a pity her life was cut short at the age of 66.

—Sharmila Sontakke



Lavani Samradni: Sulochana Chavan (13 March 1933-10 December 2022)



Sulochana Chavan has sung many songs in many languages but the lavis that she has sung in her lilting voice which entered many middle-class households in Maharashtra, were brought from folk theatre. Sulochana Kadam was born in the ambience of a Mumbai chawl, the typical tenement housing of Mumbai,

in 1933. She was not interested in studies; so she studied only till Fourth Standard. What really interested her was singing. Sulochana started singing when she was just four or five. She took no formal training but she used to sing in her school and during cultural activities in chawls conducted by Melas or troupes. Once, Shubam Dandekar, who did the make-up in these performances, took Sulochana to music director Sham Babu Pathak where she sang a song that she had first sung in a film. Around the same time she was acting

in Hindi, Marathi and Urdu dramas as a child actor. She had not taken any training in music or singing but she used to listen to gramophone records and imitate the songs. Gradually Sulochana got many offers to sing. She sang in Hindi, Gujarati and Tamil films. In Hindi films she worked with stalwarts like Shamshadbai, Geeta Dutt, C. Ramchandra, Shyamsundar and Husanlal-Bhagatram. In the film industry people knew her as Sulochana K and she became so sought after that sometimes she recorded ten songs in a day. After a while she started singing in Marathi films. Her first Marathi song *Sakhyare Jadali Preet Tuzyavari* (Lover, I have fallen in love with you) was composed by Shankarrao Kulkarni. She sang her first film lavani in 1951 for Acharya Atre's film *Hich Mazhi Lakshmi* (This is My Lakshmi, 1951) The song, *Mumbaichya Collegat Gele Pati, Ale Hounshan BA BT* (My Husband Went to a Bombay College and Came Back with a BA BT) was written by Acharya Atre himself and composed by Vasant Desai. Listening to her singing this song Acharya Atre honoured her as as Lavani Samradni (Queen of Lavani). In the same year she met her husband Shaymrao Chavan, who asked her to sing in the Marathi film *Kalgitura* (Question and Answer, 1955) which he was directing and also acting in. They got married in 1953. Sulochana continued to sing for films also. But the real break came in 1962 when she sang the lavani *Mala Ho Mhanat Lavangi Mirchi* (I Am Called Hot Chilli) for the film *Rangalya Ratri Asha* (The Nights Are Colourful, 1962) composed by Vasant Desai and written by Jagdish Khebudkar, which became a super hit. What made her style of singing impressive and popular was the way she made the nuances of the meanings of the words come through in the way she sang. Some of her immortal lavis are *Padaravarati Jartaricha Mor Nachara* (A Brocade Peacock on Pallu), *Solava Varis Dhokyaacha* (Sixteen is a Nasty Age), *Tuzya Usala Lagal Kolha* (Jackal Will Attack Your Sugar-Cane), *Mala Mhanat Punyachi Maina* (I Am Called Mainah of Pune) and many more. She also performed in fundraising programmes for many schools, colleges, hospitals and orphanages whichever corner of Maharashtra they were in. When her mother died in 1960, she kept aside her sorrow and performed for 10 continuous days helping a school. She also gave performances for the army in Nagaland. She received many awards. Lokshahir Patthe Bapurao Puraskar instituted by Pune Municipal Corporation (2007), Ram Kadam Award by Sharad Sanskrutik Pratisthan (2009) and Lata Mangeshkar Puraskar by Government of Maharashtra (2010) were some of the awards in Maharashtra that she received. Among the awards she received the most important were the national awards Padma Shri (2022) and the Sangeet Natak Akademy Award (2012). She also penned her autobiography *Maze Gane Maze Jagane* (My Songs, My Life) published by

Mudra Prakashan (2007) which SPARROW has reviewed in SNL 14, August 2008.

She survived a major car accident in 1992 followed by three heart attacks. But her old age with an injury to her lumbar bone, following which she underwent an operation caused her death. With her death, six decades of soulful lavani singing came to an end.

—Sharmila Sontakke

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Mad About the Violin: Dwaram Mangathayaru (29 August 1937-14 December 2022)



In the Rasikas.org note and Sampath Speaking Blog the factual details of Dwaram Mangathayaru's life as a violinist, calling her The Jewel of Triplicane, are given. What follows is a slightly edited version:

“Dwaram Mangathayaru, was born on 29th August 1937 at Vizianagaram in a family which boasts generations of Carnatic musicians. She was the daughter of renowned violinist Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu, who at that time was the principal of the music college of Vizianagaram. This unassuming great personality was embellished with many titles & awards—Nadha Kanal, Nadha Jyothi, Sangeetha Kala Jyothi, Thirupugazh Mamani, Nadha Kala nidhi, Violin Vara Gana Sudha Vani, Sangeetha Nadha Mani, TTK Award, Gangadevi Eminent Citizen award, Hyderabad, to name a few and the conferment of Kalaimamani award on 25 February 2006, was really another feather.

“In her early childhood years, she studied vocal music under the guidance of Janardhanachari, a renowned veena player. Even in her schooling curriculum she studied music as a special subject. At a very young age of 14 she made a remarkable debut performance on stage as an accompanist of Chembai Vaidhyanatha Bagavathar at Vizianagaram. She continued her studies in Waltair obtaining a diploma of violin playing as main subject. During early 1950s their family shifted to Chennai and she had intensive lessons from her father, the great Violin Maestro Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu. At a tender age, she accompanied her father on concert platform before elite audiences that included Indian Presidents Babu Rajendra Prasad, Radhakrishnan and Sanjiva Reddy and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and many other noted personalities.

“She studied vocal music from Sri Sandhyavandhanam Sreenivasa Rao. She was a recipient of scholarship for 3 years from the Govt. of India under the tutelage of Sri Varahur Muthuswami Iyer another violin vidwan of yesteryears. She imparted music to many as a Professor of Carnatic music in Maharaja college at Vizianagaram for a few years and for over 15 years as a staff artist in All India Radio. In her later part of her career, she taught violin as HOD at Music Academy, Chennai. She adorned many podiums as a professional accompanist and solo artist. Initially, she played violin in hundreds of concerts with the legend flautist TR Mahalingam. She performed duet concerts with her brother Dwaram Sathyanarayanamoorthy. She has played alongside many vidwans on stage, the long list which includes – DK Pattammal, MS Subbulakshmi, ML Vasanthakumari, Veena Doraiswamy Iyengar, DK Jayaraman, Dr Balamurali Krishna, Oleti Venkateswaralu, S Ramanathan, Radha Jayalakshmi, Bombay Sisters, Prema Hariharan, Mani Krishnaswamy and more.”

She considered T R Mahalingam fondly known as Mali, whom she accompanied for a long time, her mentor in many ways. She spoke warmly about him in many interviews. And her own playing has been remembered by some renowned violinists. Speaking to Revathi R of Kutcheri Buzz in 2006, the year he got the Sangita Kalanidhi Award from Music Academy, M Chandrasekaran recalled an event when he had played with Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu and his daughter. “A friend of mine was performing Thyagaraja Akhandam in his house,” he said in the course of the interview, “and asked me to arrange for Dwaram's concert. When I approached Dwaram, he readily accepted but with a condition—that I should accompany him. I need to mention here that I am yet to hear a Nilambari ragam like the one played by Dwaram Mangathayaru, Venkataswamy's daughter, on that day. Remember, the concert was held in 1962 and I still remember the Nilambari....” In 1962 Mangathayaru was just 25.

In the Sampath Speaking blog where he writes about Thiruvallikeni (Triplicane) and many things connected with it, he had earlier written about the Dwaram House in Bandala Venugopala Naidu Street in Triplicane, a small street about 200m or so, being demolished. All this took me back to the time I had met her on 23 June 1991, and talked to her for my book, *Singer and the Song* in the same house. The short note I wrote to introduce her is worth reproducing here:

Dwaram Mangathayaru is a violinist in the Carnatic music tradition. She is the daughter of the renowned violinist, Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu, who was later her guru. Mangathayaru spent her growing years filled with awe for her father and a yearning to learn the violin, but her father did not show much interest

in teaching her. Instead, he told her to listen. It was much later, when she was already playing with him and over the radio, that he asked her if she would like to be his student.

It was not as if Mangathayaru was making an unusual decision when she chose the violin. If one goes by research done on the violin there are sculptural representations, over a thousand years old, which show women playing an instrument similar to the violin. In its present form, the violin—piteelu in Kannada and pitill in Tamil—appeared in the last decade of the eighteenth century in Karnataka. A mural from Srirangapatnam made in 1784 CE and a wooden carving dated about 1850 CE, both show women playing the violin. (See *Sruti*, 1 October 1985). It was later claimed that Balaswamy Dikshitar, the younger brother of Muthuswamy Dikshitar, the great composer, was the first person to learn the violin. This not only changed the history of the instrument but also transformed it into a male instrument. The great violin masters from the mid-nineteenth century onwards are all men—it would be interesting to see how this transformation came about. In the devadasi tradition there were Papanasam Balasaraswati and Abhiramasundari, granddaughter of Veenai Dhanammal, who played the violin. Other women from non-performing families learnt to play the violin as early as 1908 but they did not perform on stage. (See *Sruti* 1 December 1985: cover photograph of P.S. Saradambal posing with a violin, taken in 1908 when she was eight years old.) So Mangathayaru was not doing something extraordinary. However, the personality of her father, the great master, dominated the household. Even though she was playing the violin already, her father did not encourage her in advanced pallavi playing although he himself was famous for his pallavi rendering. It was another guru, Varahoor Muthuswamy Iyer, who trained her in all aspects, taking it up as a challenge.

From 1954 she started accompanying her father but it was only in 1956 that he began to give her specific lessons. Mangathayaru, being “mad about the violin”, decided to remain single. Her role in carrying on her father’s tradition is not remarked upon by anyone, even in her own family. When *Sruti* brought out a special issue on Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu, Mangathayaru’s brothers and even Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu’s grand-nephew were asked for their views, but Mangathayaru was just another name in the family genealogy. Being an extremely sensitive person, Mangathayaru has reacted to being ignored

by withdrawing even further into her shell. (I almost never got any photographs from her, for instance. The ones reproduced in the book have been chosen by her and depict her musical career. It took me nearly two years to get these photos.)

Mangathayaru does not conform to everyone’s image of a female violinist. People refer to her as being a little eccentric for she does not bother much about her appearance. As she told me in the post-recording session: “If a man were to be like me he would be called a genius. Since I am a woman people dare to tell me how to take care of my appearance.” Perhaps it is all this that makes her violin renditions an unusual experience. People have remarked about “the tranquillity and reticence” of her playing. ((N.E. Sjomon and H.V. Dattatreya, *An Introduction to South Indian Music* Netherlands, 1986: p.86.)

There is no doubt that her father was a genius but his shadow has fallen too darkly on his daughter. In her late fifties at the time of our conversation Mangathayaru has not yet been able to emerge from his shadow. One hears that Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu always wanted to own a Stradivarius; Mangathayaru has no such desires. She would just like to play and be heard.”

Rereading that introductory note (with some of its proof reading errors now corrected), brought back that day to mind vividly. She had invited me for the interview and had given me a day but K Balachandar’s *Sindhu Bhairavi* was being shown on the TV and she wanted to watch it with her family. She asked me if I could wait. Of course, I did. I went upstairs to what seemed like a common drawing room, and waited for her. It was a traditional house where there were many rooms but no one had individual rooms. When Mangathayaru came up after the film she told me that she did not have “a room of her own” and it was in this common room that she received people and often practised in the mornings or whenever she felt like it. The conversation was in Telugu which I understood but could not speak fluently. I spoke to her in Tamil and she replied in Telugu. A Telugu friend later transcribed it for me. When I was leaving, she gave me a tentative hug and for a second her fingers that do magic on the violin strings rested on my left arm. At the end of the conversation, it seemed like a blessing.

Dwaram Mangathayaru was 92 when she passed away. She had lived a life steeped in music. Her life must have floated away maybe on those unforgettable notes of Nilambari that she had played in 1962 which M Chandrasekaran remembered, even in 2006.

—C S Lakshmi

Being Bharathiyar's Granddaughter: Lalitha Bharathi (1928-26 December 2022)



Mahakavi Bharathiyar's granddaughter Lalitha Bharathi passed away at the age of 94. Lalitha Bharathi was the daughter of Bharathi's eldest daughter Thangamma. She had been a music teacher and composer for more than 40 years. Her son Rajkumar Bharati is a Carnatic musician, and has sung

films songs under music directors M S Viswanathan and Ilayaraja. Like her grandfather, Lalitha Bharathi was also a scholar in Tamil and wrote poetry in Tamil. She involved herself in spreading Bharathiyar's poems in musical form. The Tamil Digital Library has books of Bharathiyar's songs for which Lalitha Bharathi has helped in setting them to tunes and rhythm. She also considered herself a feminist and was involved in many activities involving women.

Throughout her life she was serious about correcting misinformation regarding Bharathiyar that many people mentioned in their speeches and writing. 'Engal Blog' mentioned on 11 September 2012, one such incident in 1981. In a 1981 issue of the magazine *Kumudam* many had written about Bharathi adding a lot of imagined details. In a later issue of the magazine Lalitha Bharathi wrote to clarify a lot of details.

"That the centenary celebrations of Mahakavi Bharathiyar have been inaugurated in an admirable manner by the government everyone in the country knows. Many elders and scholars are delivering their affectionate speeches. I am very happy about it. But as Bharathiyar's granddaughter and as Thangammal's daughter, I take the liberty to make a request to everyone. It is true that Bharathiyar suffered due to poverty. But he was one who did not make much of it. I have heard my grandmother Chellamma Bharathi say that he liked to eat a good meal with fried pappads when possible; if not, he would rather eat just milk and bananas. Those who talk about his personal life must use a decent language. They describe him as someone who wore a torn coat with holes as if it had been bitten by rats, which he covered with his wife's black sari and so on. I have heard my grandmother say that he was never dressed in a way to be described thus. Even when my mother Thangammal Bharathi was alive, someone wrote that she had to be a vendor selling greens on the street. Bharathiyar had got his daughter married taking part in all the necessary rituals. I heard a gentleman say that Bharathiyar had refused to come for his daughter's marriage and that this gentleman had lent the money for the wedding

clothes so that the marriage could be conducted. In the Puducherry event someone even said that Bharathiyar had died with his head on this person's lap! When we hear such things which are totally against the truth, we feel terribly upset. Our family is not able to bear such untruthful statements. It is true I was born after Bharathiyar passed away but I have been entirely brought up by my grandmother. She has told me that Bharathiyar was someone who liked to dress elegantly. So, I request admirers of Bharathi to remember that Bharathi's family is still alive, when they write about his personal life. I am afraid that they may even go to the extent of saying that due to poverty Bharathi picked up leftovers from the street."

Lalitha Bharathi lived a long life lived with her grandfather Bharathiyar as her inspiration and his songs as her spiritual sustenance. Her dedicated work in spreading the national poet's poems in musical format is a lifetime work for which she has been much respected.

—C S Lakshmi

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A Pure Life: Heeraba Modi (18 June 1923-30 December 2022)



Priime Minister Narendra Modi's mother Heeraben passed away at the U N Mehta Heart Hospital in Ahmedabad during treatment on 30 December 2022. She was 99. Heeraba was born on June 18, 1923 in Mehsana, Gujarat. She was married at a young age to

Damodardas Moolchand Modi, a tea seller in Vadnagar. They had five sons and one daughter — Amrit Modi, Pankaj Modi, Narendra Modi, Prahlad Modi, Soma Modi, and daughter Vasanti Ben Hansmukhlal Modi. The Modi family belonged to the Modh Ghanchi community. Her "childhood was extremely difficult," PM Modi wrote in the blog informing that Heeraba Modi had lost her mother to the Spanish Flu pandemic." She spent her entire childhood without her mother. She could not throw tantrums at her mother, as we all do. She could not rest in her mother's lap like we all do. She could not even go to school and learn to read and write. Her childhood was one of poverty and deprivation." On his mother entering her 100th birthday he wrote, "In my mother's life story, I see the penance, sacrifice, and contribution of India's matrushakti. Whenever I look at Mother and crores of women like her, I find there is nothing

that is unachievable for Indian women.” He wrote in his blog, “In Vadnagar, our family used to stay in a tiny house which did not even have a window, let alone a luxury like a toilet or a bathroom.” He wrote about how hard working his mother was and how she used to hum her favourite bhajans while working. In 2015 while talking to Facebook (now Meta) CEO Mark Zuckerberg Modi got emotional while talking about his mother’s struggles. He recalled how she cleaned utensils at neighbours’ homes to raise him and his siblings.

Heeraba’s advice to him was always simple and direct and value-oriented. When Narendra Modi became chief minister, she told him “Beta, kadi lanch na leis.” (Don’t ever take bribes.) When he met her last, she told him work with intelligence and live life with purity. She herself led a simple life but remained very active. Even at the Age of 99 she was seen going to vote; she stood in queues to exchange currencies during demonetisation. She also liked to cook her own food. She lived at Raysan village near Gandhinagar city with PM Modi’s younger brother Pankaj Modi. Tweeting about her demise P M Modi wrote: “A glorious century rests at the feet of God... In Maa, I have always felt that trinity, which contains the journey of an ascetic, the symbol of a selfless Karmayogi and a life committed to values.”

A long life lived with kindness, affection and love for those around her makes Heeraba’s life an example that many must follow but is not all that easy to follow given the conflicts and complexities of today’s world. For her life meant working with intelligence and living with purity. That she was Prime Minister Modi’s mother was only incidental.

—C S Lakshmi



JANUARY 2023

Singing Her way to Hearts: Vasanti Damle (22 March 1945-9 January 2023)



The papers wrote tributes to her saying she was a professor, writer, translator, critic and scholar of Russian revolution who was very much a part of the women’s movement. But to all of us who were her friends in JNU where we studied together and were hostelmates she was a fun-loving person full of laughter, the singer who sang old Hindi songs for us whenever we got together and someone ever ready to help when someone needed something. Music was something she really loved and Muni Kaul, retired professor of JNU and our colleague in JNU, remembered in one of her posts how at a hostel function Vasanti sang the Kashmiri song ‘Bhumbro’ taught to her at a short notice by Muni Kaul’s bhabhi Prof. Neerja Mattoo and how Vasanti sportingly participated in every programme organised by the students from Fancy Dress to western country dance. She even took part in a play directed by Prof. G P Deshpande.

Vasanti kept in touch with all her JNU friends including me. She would just pick up the phone and start talking, laughing and joking. One would be waiting to get into a crowded train and there would be a call from Vasanti asking if everything was fine and if we could meet. She made it a point to visit the SPARROW archives with Jayashree Deshpande another friend from JNU. The three of us also met at a restaurant at Bandra after COVID lockdown was lifted to celebrate her birthday and we resolved to meet every year to celebrate all our birthdays as we were getting old. The restaurant owner and others in the restaurant must have been surprised that three old women could enjoy an outing so much and had so much to laugh about. The other meetings we thought we would have never happened. Vasanti is no more to call and remind me that we must meet. She died of a sudden heart attack. We will all miss her.

—C S Lakshmi



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A Lifetime as An Actor: Chitra Navathe (23 September 1935-11 January 2023)



It is so sad that two sisters who once ruled the Marathi film industry with their acting passed away in two consecutive years on the same day. Rekha Kamat the elder sister passed away on 11th January 2022 and younger sister Chitra Navathe on 11th January 2023. Veteran Marathi actress Chitra Navathe, who had been active in the art world for over 60 years passed away at the age of 87. Her original name was Kusum Sukhtankar. Her acting career started at a young age when she used to take part in fairs. Kusum and her elder sister Kumud both were interested in dance and singing. Both the sisters were studying in Indian Education Society's Girl's School in Dadar. While in school they learnt Kathak from Gaurishankar and Bharatanatyam from Parvati Kumar. They learnt music from Bhanudas Mankame and Ghodke Guruji. They were selected and were performing in Sachin Shankar's *Ramleela* ballet at the age of 12. Actress Hansa Wadkar once saw their dance in *Ramleela* and suggested their names to Rajabhau Paranjape, Sudhir Phadake and G D Madgulkar of Gajraj Pictures. Both the sisters got their film break in Gajraj Picture's *Lakhachi Goshta* (The Story of a Lakh, 1952). G D Madgulkar changed their names from Kumud and Kusum to Rekha and Chitra respectively. *Lakhachi Goshta* released in 1952. Later she acted in many Marathi films such as *Vahinichya Bangdya* (Sister-in-law's Bangles, 1953), *Devbappa* (God, 1953), *Gulacha Ganapati* (Ganapati Made of Jaggery, 1953), *Bolavita Dhani* (Parroting, 1953), *Umaj Padel Tar* (If Only You Knew, 1960), *Mohityanchi Manjula* (Manjula, Mohite's Daughter, 1963), *Courtachi Payari* (Court Steps, 1970). She acted opposite many famous Marathi heroes of that time such as Vivek, Suryakant, Chandrakant, Raja Gosavi. Raja Navathe was assistant director for Raj Kapur's film *Aah* (1953), where Chitra was in a dance sequence. So they met there and later got married. After marriage she changed her focus from film acting to running the household. In later age she started acting in grandmother's roles in films like *Tingya* (2008), *Bokya Satbande* (2009), *Agadbamb* (Fat, 2010). She also acted in Marathi dramas such as *Tujhe Ahe Tujapashi* (What Is With You Is Yours), *Lagnachi Bedi* (Wedlock) and left her stamp on those roles. She was awarded by Raja Paranjape Pratishthan, Pune; Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Chitrapat Mahamandal and also received the Natyacharya Govind Ballal Deval Award. Apart from this she received Lifetime Achievement Award in 45th Maharashtra Rajya Chitrapat Mahotsav and Maharashtra Rajya Sanskrutik Puraskar of 2010.

—Sharmila Sontakke



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

A Dancer's Dancer: Lakshmi Viswanathan (27 January 1944-19 January 2023)



Born on 12 January 1944 to Alamelu and K Viswanathan in Bangalore, Lakshmi Viswanathan belonged to a family well known for its association with the classical arts, and the Thanjavur tradition in particular. She began her tutelage in dance under Guru Kausalya of the Vazhuvur Ramaiya Pillai school. Later she trained under Guru Kanchipuram Ellappa. She was also taught by Courtallam Ganesa Pillai and

Sankari Krishnan of the Thanjavur Kittappa Pillai school. Lakshmi Viswanathan trained in music under her mother and later was taught by Tediur Narayanaswami, Thiruvaiyyaru Krishnamurthy, and Sangita Kala Acharya T Mukta. Her dance *arangetram* was in 1952 and presided over by E Krishna Iyer, founder secretary of the Music Academy, Madras.

Deep knowledge of music, dance

Lakshmi Viswanathan's dance, known for its in-depth research and scholarly approach, won her accolades the world over, and she performed in numerous national and international venues. Beginning with the traditional *margam*, she moved on to thematic solo performances, group shows, and dance theatre productions.

As she grew older, Lakshmi chose to focus on *abhinaya*, the mimetic aspect of dance. This made her art most sublime and it was a delight to watch her perform. Lakshmi was a great presenter of lecture demonstrations, where her deep knowledge of music and dance, combined with her fluency in language and sense of humour made her a huge success.

Lakshmi Viswanathan's books

A graduate and gold medallist in English Literature from the Queen Mary's College, Madras, Lakshmi was also a writer, with newspaper columns and books to her credit. Having spent much of her childhood in Mylapore, the Kapaliswarar Temple there was very important to Lakshmi. She made it a point to attend as many of its festivals as possible. This led to her writing a comprehensive account of the shrine and its year-long events. *Kapaliswarar temple, the sacred site of Mylapore* was the book and it came out in 2006. Lakshmi also penned a tribute to MS Subbulakshmi. Lavishly produced with many photographs, this was published by Roli Books and was titled *Kunjamma, Ode to a Nightingale*. Being steeped in Bharatanatyam and a scholar in that art form apart from

being one of its foremost practitioners, Lakshmi was a serious student of its Devadasi heritage. This led to a monumental work of hers: *Women of Pride*, published in 2008 by Roli.

Uncompromising ode to subtlety, beauty in classical art

Looked upon as a dancer's dancer, Lakshmi Viswanathan was an iconic personality with the rare intellectual capacity to communicate the whole gamut of Bharatanatyam's beauty, classicism and intensity to a global audience. Her commitment to excellence over several decades made her dance an uncompromising ode to subtlety and beauty in classical art.

The Music Academy, Madras conferred on her the Nritya Kalanidhi in 2018. Lakshmi was also a member of the Music Academy, Madras since 1984 and also served as vice president on its executive committee from 1998 to 2011.

—V Sriram

V Sriram is secretary, Music Academy. He is also a historian and author

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A Kaleidoscopic Life: Shantabai Kamble (1 March 1923-25 January 2023)



Shantabai Kamble was a teacher. She was also the first Dalit woman who wrote an autobiography and she was an activist. She was working as a teacher in Zilla school and retired as an education officer in Maharashtra State government. She was born as Najabai Sakharam Babar in a Mahar Dalit family in Mahud Budruk of Solapur. Her parents were poor but

wanted her to be educated for they believed education would bring changes in the lives of Dalits. She herself faced the harsh discrimination of caste. In the third grade, her teacher made her and the other Dalit students sit outside the class and the other students were told not to touch them. Upset at this discrimination she wondered what could be so wrong that two humans could not touch. Through her diligence she pursued her education to the fullest and became a teacher. She began teaching at the Solapur District Board School in 1942. Ten years later, in 1952, she completed two years of teacher's training and served as an education extension officer in the 'jat' taluka of Sangli district. She married Krushnaji

Kamble, and after marriage changed her name to Shantabai Krishnaji Kamble. She drew inspiration from her meeting with Ambedkar in 1942. She and her husband joined Dr B R Ambedkar's movement and in 1957 both Shantabai and her husband joined seven other villages to convert to Buddhism. After retiring from teaching in 1981, she wrote her autobiography *Mazhya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* (The Kaleidoscopic Story of My Life, 1990). The autobiography was first serialised in *Purva* magazine in 1983 and was tele-serialised as 'Najuka' (Fragile) on Mumbai Doordarshan in 1990. It has also been translated into French, English and Hindi. The word 'Chittarkatha' literally means a picture story but also indicates a sense of pieces of pictures being put together like a jigsaw puzzle. The autobiography is also prescribed as part of the syllabus for Marathi literature, in the University of Mumbai, where her late son Prof. Arun Kamble, a founder-member of the Dalit Panthers of India Party and a politician, once served as the Head of the Department of Marathi. Years later an animated version also came out as 'Naja Goes to School'.

—Sharmila Sontakke



A Woman Named After A River: Jamuna (30 August 1936-27 January 2023)



Jamuna was the much-loved star of the generation that started seeing films in the fifties and sixties. She began as an actress and later became a director and also a politician. She mainly

acted in Telugu films but has also acted in Kannada, Tamil and Hindi films. Her film career was an exemplary one in which she acted in 87 Telugu films, the last being *Bahubali*, 27 Tamil films, 8 Kannada films and 11 Hindi films. She was born in Hampi to parents who had had an inter-caste marriage in the thirties. Her father Nippani Srinivasa Rao was a Kannada speaking person and her mother Kowsalya Devi's mother tongue was Telugu. Her father was a businessman and she grew up in Andhra Pradesh in a place called Duggirala. While in school she used to take part in school plays. Her mother, who was a musician, taught her music and harmonium. Savitri, the legendary actor, used to stay in their house whenever she performed on the stage in Duggirala. She encouraged Jamuna to act in films. Jamuna's real name was

Jana Bai. But some astrologers told her parents that according to her horoscope she should be named after a river. So, her name was changed to Jamuna. It so happened that Dr Garikipati Raja Rao of the Indian People's Theatre Association saw her stage show *Maa Bhoomi* and offered her a role in his film *Puttillu* (House of Birth, 1953). Jamuna was only 16 then. The film in which she acted in Telugu, Tamil and Hindi versions and which caught people's attention was *Missamma* (Christian Teacher, 1955) which came as *Missiamma* in 1955 in Tamil and *Miss Mary* in Hindi in 1957. She acted with Gemini Ganesan and Savitri in the Telugu and Tamil versions and Meena Kumari and Gemini Ganesan in the Hindi version.

In the Tamil film world, her role in *Thangamalai Ragasiyam* (Secret of the Gold Mountain, 1957) in which she acted with Sivaji Ganesan and the song "Amudhaip Pozhiyum Nilavae" (Nectar-flowing Moon) picturised on her catapulted her into big time Tamil films although she had entered Tamil films with the film *Panam Paduthum Padu* (Travails of Money) in 1954 itself. Her role in *Kuzhandhaiyum Deivamum* (Child and God, 1965) based on the English film *Parent Trap* with another famous hero Jaishankar and the song "Anbulla Maan Vizhiyae" (O, Doe-eyed One) picturised on her, making full use of her huge, captivating eyes, made her a much-loved actress in the Tamil film scene. These two songs have also remained immortal in a way, because of Jamuna.

In 1965, Jamuna broke many hearts when she married Juluri Ramana Rao, a zoology professor at S V University. She continued to act in films. The Hindi film that people remember her for and in which she got the Filmfare Award for the role of Best Supporting Actress is *Milan* (Coming Together, 1967) in which she acted with Sunil Dutt and Nutan. It was a remake of the Telugu film *Mooga Manasulu* (Mute Hearts, 1963) in which she acted with the Telugu film's famous hero Nageswara Rao, and Savitri and the film based on the concept of reincarnation was a big hit. Strangely Savitri herself directed the same film in Tamil as *Praptham* (What is Destined) in 1971 with Sivaji Ganesan but without Jamuna, and it was a big failure.

Jamuna joined the Congress Party in the 1980s and was elected to the Lok Sabha from the Rajahmundry Constituency in 1989. She lost the 1991 election and quit politics, but briefly campaigned for the BJP in the late 1990s during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee's tenure. Her husband died of cardiac arrest in 2014 and they have a son, Vamsee Juluri and a daughter Sravanthi Juluri.

Many awards, which she richly deserved, were conferred on her. In 1968 came the Filmfare Best Supporting Actress award for *Milan*; in 1972 she got the Filmfare Special Award-South for the film *Pandanti Kapuram* (A Happy Household, 1972); in 1999 she got the Tamil Nadu State Film Honorary

Award named after MGR; in 2008 she was conferred with the NTR Award; in 2010 the Padmabhushan Dr B Sarojadevi National Award came her way and just three years ago, in 2019, she was honoured with the Santosham Lifetime Achievement Award at the 17th Santosham Film Awards.

The doe-eyed actress Jamuna lived a life in which as an actress and a person she had nothing to complain. When death came to her at the age of 86, she must have embraced it with the same equanimity with which she faced her entire life.

—Sharmila Sontakke

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FEBRUARY 2023

A Beautiful Mind: Charusri (20 September 1943-2 February 2023)



Charusri whose real name was Sharada Srinivasan, was born in an orthodox Hindu family. She had deep faith in the rituals and practices associated with the religion. But she did not ever get imprisoned in them. She was unique in that sense. She also took into account the changes that happened in the course of time. She did not speak about revolution but she went past some restrictions with ease and with a smile.

Life does not end with a husband for any woman. Charusri's stories talk about this even while not denying and happily accepting the traditions of the family as an institution. This is what made her stories unique. Every woman is unique. And stories of women's life experiences are interesting with many turning points. But there is a lot of hesitation in expressing this aspect. But this hesitation can be easily broken like breaking the edge of a needle. "Can all this be written about? Is it possible to write it, Madhavi?" Such hesitations on her part, those of us in her circle of friends broke. It is possible that it helped her to come out of those hesitations.

Charusri had lived within the circle of the family, children, husband and relatives. When she writes about the change that happened in her life after her husband's death, she writes with sensitivity that a woman's life goes beyond her husband:

"So far, I was immersed in family, children and relatives not even knowing how the morning began and the night ended. Now I slowly began to come out of that nest. My children Kannamma and Karthik are now at an age when they

don't need to be card for by me. At this time when I was mentally feeling low, I needed something strong to hold on to. This was the moment Sharada the homemaker, blossomed into a writer. I have risen like a phoenix bird from the ashes of Sri... I have fully come out of the circle of family. I could remain attached and yet detached to the family."

Yes, Charusri, the writer, journalist and translator, begins her journey at that point when she thought everything had ended for a woman.

Charusri was born and grew up in a joint family in the big city of Hyderabad. She had a post-graduate degree in Hindi. Her married life with Srinivasan in Mumbai was spent as a homemaker in a joint family with her husband and children and others. But she never gave up her reading habit. When Charu's son Karthick went to Bengaluru and Gurgaon, Haryana on transfer because of his job, Charu went along with him with all her books and wherever she went she looked for Tamilians and became friends with them. The Bengaluru Tamil Sangam and writer Pavannan were all in her circle of friends.

Apart from writing in the magazines *Thurigai*, *Tamil Post* and so on that were published from Mumbai she also wrote in magazines from Chennai like *Kumudam* and *Snehidhi*. Her book *Naan Nadantha Paadhayilae* (The Path I have walked) contains autobiographical essays by her and is also a record of people she has met and interviews she has done. Her interviews include interviews with a person selling idlis to famous personalities like film star Nadia, N T Ramarao's wife Parvathi Ammal, singer T M Soundararajan, actors Delhi Ganesh and Silambarasan and the well-known Solomon Pappiah who is famous for his debating forums. When she writes about meeting N T R Lakshmi Parvathi who was once the first lady of Andhra and was pushed down to the status of an ordinary commoner, she says that she went imagining her to be a dust covered statue or a demolished art work but was taken aback to encounter an elegantly dressed woman who appeared educated and who spoke knowledgeably about everything. An important interview she has done is of Rajan who performed Chakyar Koothu through the night till dawn at Mumbai Sahakar Nagar grounds. Chakyar Koothu is a performance art from Kerala where a performer narrates episodes from Hindu epics and stories from the Puranas. It is a wonderful documentation of the perishing art of Chakyar Koothu.

Charu writes about making it a habit for ten years, to go to Colaba dockyard to send off those who were going by ship from there for the holy Haj journey although she was from an orthodox Hindu family. This is not just an information that a family with wife, husband and son and daughter travelled from Chembur to Colaba to make this goodwill gesture. One

cannot imagine it these days. It throws light on how the people in Mumbai were fifty years ago.

Charusri's very important contribution is her book *Gangotri* which has Tamil translations of contemporary Indian stories. Dogri, Nepali, Punjabi, Urdu, Bodo, Hindi, Marathi, Assamese, Manipuri, Sindhi and Telugu stories have been translated into Tamil via Hindi in this collection. This is an important addition not only to Mumbai's literary world but also that of Tamil literary world.

I have regrets that she could not write all that she spoke to me about. Time did not give her that opportunity. But what she has written in the time that she had are very important.

She always wrote what she felt without mincing words. She wrote critically about the well-known and very popular film director and actor Visu's popular T V programme "Arattai Arangam" (Chat Theatre) when it was organised in Mumbai. She was critical of the pomposity with which it was conducted and the interview Visu gave following the event. It is part of the book of essays. She has also written about Tamil programmes conducted by elite groups being conducted in English. She comments that the anchoring can be done by someone who has a good knowledge of Tamil. She writes that she was not against English but that it should be used where it is needed. In her own humorous way, she adds that after making a fragrant sambar one cannot season it with cashew nuts when all that it needs are curry leaves and asafoetida.

Her published books include *Naan Nadantha Paathiyilae* (The Path I have Walked) a collection of autobiographical essays, *Janani: A collection of Two Novellas, Sinthanai Sidaragal* (Scattered Thoughts) and *Gangotri: A Translation of Contemporary Indian Stories*. The first three were published by Kannadasan Illakkiya Peravai in Mumbai in 2006 and the last book was published by Sollangadi, Chennai, in 2012.

Her religious beliefs, her deep faith in rituals and practices were totally contrary to my own path in life and my principles. But there was no one comparable to her when it came to her qualities of respecting people, forgiveness, flexibility and motherliness. That may be the reason why she has not recorded her bitter experiences as a journalist. I appreciate Mumbai's Kaviyarasu Kannadasan Illakkiya Peravai for publishing her books.

—Puthiyamaadhavi

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The Koyal that Sang: Vani Jairam (30 November 1945-4 February 2023)



Just when everyone was rejoicing the Padma Bhushan award announced for Vani Jairam on January 25th, 2023, came the shocking news that she had been found dead in her house on Haddows Road, Nungambakkam, in Chennai where she lived alone.

Come November she would have been 78.

Vani Jayaram's birth name was Kalairani which means Queen of Art. She was born into a musical family of six daughters and three sons. Vani was the fifth daughter. Her parents Duraiswamy Iyer and Padmavathi were both trained musicians who had trained under Ranga Ramunaja Iyengar. Even as a child she was enrolled in his classes and he taught her some Muthuswami Dikshitar kritis normally taught only to senior students. Her formal training in Carnatic music, however, was under Kadalur Srinivas Iyengar, T R Balasubramanian and R S Mani. Kalaivani, true to her name, proved that she was a prodigy when she performed at the age of 8 at the All India Radio, Madras.

After her graduation from Queen Mary's College, she joined the State Bank of India. She was fortunate that her marital family was also a musical one. Her husband Jairam himself was a student of Pandit Ravi Shankar. Her mother-in-law, Padma Swaminathan, was a musician herself and a social activist and was the last surviving daughter of the well-known F G Natesa Iyer, who was a pioneer of modern Tamil drama and Tamil cinema and a nationalist. N Rajam, the much-acclaimed violinist, was her sister-in-law. Another daughter-in-law who came into the family was Gayathri, the Bharatanatyam dancer. Indumati Raman, a Kalakshetra product and a Bhagawatha Mela exponent, was Vani's husband Jairam's sister. With such a marital family it is no wonder that Vani decided to make music her profession and give up her bank job.

In 1969 when she came with her husband to Mumbai, he encouraged her to learn Hindustani classical music. She began to learn from Ustad Abdul Rehman Khan of the Patiala Gharana. It was under him that she learnt to sing Thumris, Ghazals and Bhajans. She gave her first public concert in 1969. In 1969 there was another turning point in her life. She was introduced to the renowned musician Vasant Desai. He was at that time working on an album with Kumar Gandharva. It was an album of Marathi songs. Vasant Desai heard her sing and included her in the album to sing the song "Runanubandhacha" (A bond born out of past lives) with

Kumar Gandharva. In Maharashtra Vani is still remembered for this song which became very popular. Working with Vasant Desai gave her entry into Hindi film playback singing. She sang three songs for him for the film *Guddi* (Doll, 1971) and one of the songs “Bole Re Papihara” (The koel sang) became a song hummed by everyone and brought her popularity and recognition. It brought her a lot of fame and many awards including the Tansen Sanman, for best classical-based song in a Hindi film, the Lions International Best Promising Singer award, the All India Cine-goers’ Association award, and the All India Film-goers’ Association award for the Best Playback Singer in 1971. The other song that she sang in the same film, that has now become a school prayer is “Humko Mann Ki Shakti Dena” (Grant us mental strength). She has toured with her mentor Vasant Desai all around Maharashtra and visited many schools where she taught Marathi songs to children.

Music Directors began to seek Vani Jairam and she got the wonderful opportunity to work with Naushad for the film *Pakeezah* (Pure, 1972). The song was “Mora Saajan Souten Ghar Jaye” (My lover has gone to the other woman) which became another popular number. Her entry into Tamil films happened almost immediately, the following year. She was fortunate to work with the music director S M Subbaiah Naidu an icon of his times for a film but it did not get released. But in the same year she got to work with the duo Shanker-Ganesh and sang with T M Soundararajan, a senior and popular singer in Tamil films for the film *Veetukku Vandha Maumagal* (The Daughter-in-law Who Came Home, 1973) but the song in Tamil films which made her a name to reckon with among playback singers in Tamil films was the song “Malligai En Mannan Mayangum Ponnana Malarallavo” (Jasmine is the flower my lover swoons over) from the film *Dheerga Sumangali*, (An Auspicious Married Woman, 1974), composed by the great composer M S Viswanathan.

What earned Vani the epithet “The Meera of Modern India”, however, were her songs sung for the film *Meera* (1979) with Pandit Ravi Shankar as music director. What followed was a rich career where Vani Jairam collaborated with many well-known composers across various language film industries including legendary composers like O P Nayyar, Laxmikant Pyarelal, Kalyanji-Anandji, R K Shekhar (father of A R Rehman), Salil Chowdhary, K V Mahadevan, M B Sreenivasan, L Vaidyanathan, Ilaiyaraaja and A R Rehman. She has sung some 10,000 songs in 19 Indian languages. Apart from Hindi and Tamil, she has sung songs in Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Urdu, Marathi, Bengali, Bhojpuri, Tulu, Gujarati, Haryanvi, Assamese, Sanskrit and Oriya. She has performed in India and abroad extensively.

Vani has won so many awards that it would be difficult to

list all of them. Suffice it to say that she has won National Film Awards for the Best Female Playback Singer thrice. She has also received State awards from Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat and Odisha. And when the celebrations for her prestigious Padma Bhushan award had not even begun Vani Jairam passed away. She lived only four years after her beloved husband Jairam’s death that happened in 2018. Every time the school kids sing “Humko Mann ki Shakti Dena” Vani Jairam will come alive from those young voices.

—C S Lakshmi

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A Life of Her Choice: Jeyalakshmi Ammal (15 October 1931-11 February 2023)



Some women live extraordinary lives quietly doing what they think is right and living their lives on their own terms. My grandmother Jeyalakshmi whom everyone fondly called Jeya was one such person. She became a member of the Communist Party in the fifties and worked for the Party. My grandfather, Thiruvaikavur

Ko. Pichai was also a member of the Communist Party and a translator. My grandmother was an Iyengar from Kumbakonam and a divorcee and my grandfather belonged to the intermediate caste; he was from the Padaiyachi, Vanniyar community considered most backward caste. He was a widower with a twelve-year-old daughter. That daughter was my mother. They got married defying caste restrictions. My grandmother gave up her family to marry him and they had a non-ritualistic marriage under the Special Marriage Act. They had three sons and a daughter and all of them had inter-caste marriages. When her third son was a babe in arms she went to prison with him.

Jeya was also an active member of the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW). She had formal training in Carnatic music. When senior comrades like K T K Thangamani, A M Gopu, Dahanushkodi Ramasamy and many others would request her to sing she would sing Bharathi songs in her resonant voice. She was an avid reader. She had a deep interest in literature. She was very close the late writer Thanjai Prakash.

She was my inspiration and I idolised her. She used to take care of anyone who was sick, diligently like a trained nurse with a bright face without complaining or grumbling or

making it appear like a big deal. I feel that my grandfather living up to the age of 96 was mainly because of his love for my grandmother and the love and care with which she tended to him. For the past few years, she suffered from dementia and was bed-ridden. She was the last link to our family's earlier generations. That link got broken on the evening of February 11th. Yes, my grandmother Jeya passed away at the age of 92. We bid you farewell with tears, in your journey to eternity.

—B Jeevasundari

B Jeevasundari is writer and an activist.

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Lalita, the Beautiful and Playful: Lalita Lajmi (17 October 1932-13 February 2023)



Artist and painter Lalita Lajmi, who pursued her art for five decades passed away at the age of 90. She died as the oldest woman artist and printmaker in India. She was born in a middle-class family involved in the arts in Kolkata. Her father was a poet and her mother was a polylingual writer and she was the sister of Guru Dutt, a great film-maker. Shyam Benegal, the film-maker was her cousin. She grew up in Bhowanipore. Lalita Lajmi's uncle B B Benegal, who was a commercial artist from Kolkata, introduced her to painting as a child when he brought her a box of paints. He also sent her work for a competition in which she got a prize for the first time.

Lalita Lajmi was a self-taught artist. In the early sixties, to support herself financially, she taught in an art school. She also worked with disabled and underprivileged children. Later she taught at Campion School and Convent of Jesus & Mary in Mumbai for over two decades and later completed her Masters in Art in J J School of Art. Her first painting exhibition was as part of a group exhibition in Mumbai in the Jehangir Art Gallery. At the same venue, she also held a solo exhibition in 1961.

In the late seventies she started doing etchings, oils and watercolours. Her paintings in the 1990s began to have social content depicting relationships between women and men and the underlying pressures and stress in those relationships. They depicted the anxieties and struggles in role-playing and the agony and ecstasy of love.

With a career spanning five decades, Lalita has held several exhibitions in India and abroad. She has also been talking about art all over the world. She also showcased her work in the Graphic Workshop of Prof. Paul Lingerine in Mumbai and two of her etchings were selected for "India Festival" 1985,

USA. Her work has been displayed in various famous art galleries all over India including Prithvi Art Gallery, Pundole Art Gallery, Apparao Gallery, Hutheesing Centre for Visual Art, Art Heritage, Gallery Gay, Germany, Prints Exhibition at Max Muller Bhavan, etc.

In 2007, she made a guest appearance in Amir Khan's film, *Taare Zameen Par*. She worked as a graphic artist in the Hindi movie *Aghaat*.

She was married to Captain Gopi Lajmi. Her daughter, Kalpana Lajmi, was an independent filmmaker who was diagnosed with kidney cancer in 2017 and died on 23 September 2018 at the age of 64. It was a great loss for Lalita Lajmi because more than a daughter, Kalpana Lajmi was her friend and companion.

In his February 14, 2023 tribute to her in *The Hindustan Times*, rightly named "A View into Her Soul", Sumesh Sharma writes about her retrospective which opened on 12th January, 2023 exactly a month before her death. He says this retrospective was richly deserved for she was "the only woman to have turned the gaze of the muse on herself. Until her, women had only been depicted as nude anatomical studies by male painters." He refers to a watercolour she did in 2012, where "she depicts herself lying down in a funeral chamber with several performers dancing around her, each with a distinct resemblance to her." Her art involved self-portraits where she was many people in different spaces and situations. Her alter ego remained Frida Kahlo till the end.

Sumesh Sharma says, "Perhaps she drew her strength from the oleograph portrait of Parvati or Gauri, located on the threshold of her kitchen and living room." And Sumesh is not wrong when he adds that she "embodied the indigenous idea of the mother goddess devoid of the terms of patriarchy." Lalita is the name of Parvati, self-willed and independent, and Lalita Lajmi stayed true to her name till the end.

—Asmita Deshpande

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A Vamp in a Film on a Goddess: Bela Bose (01 January 1943-20 February 2023)



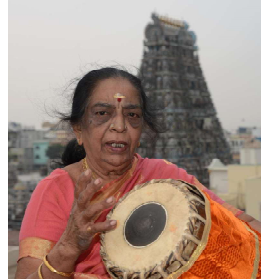
It is not always the artistes in the lead roles in the films who make the films successful. The artistes who play small roles or character roles in the films can also contribute to a film's success and get appreciated for those roles. Bela Bose was one such artiste. Her role as a villainous sister-in-law in the blockbuster *Jai Santoshi Maa* (1975)

was a big success. Bela Bose was born on 1st January 1943 in Kolkata. Her father was a cloth merchant. After the financial crisis which wiped out their family coffers, her family shifted to Mumbai, then Bombay. After her father died, she began her career as a group dancer in films to support her family, and she continued to work in films after finishing her education in the 1960s. She played the role of a glamorous dancer, seen dancing in a group behind stars like Helen and Aruna Irani, among others, in a number of films, including *Bhagam Bhag* (Running Around, 1956) and *CID* (1956), until her first big break came when she performed a dance number with Raj Kapoor in the 1959 film *Main Nashe Mein Hoon* (I am Intoxicated) and began to be recognised in the Hindi film industry. Three years later, in 1962, Bela Bose landed her first starring part in *Sautela Bhai* (Step Brother), alongside Guru Dutt, and went on to act in several other films, including Shammi Kapoor's *Professor* (1962), Bimal Roy's *Bandini* (The Bound, 1963), and Lekh Tandon's *Amrapali* (1966). She appeared in about 150 films during her career. Bela Bose changed her name to Bela Sengupta after marrying Ashish Kumar, her co-star from *Jai Santoshi Maa*. Actress and dancer, Bela Bose was also trained in classical Manipuri dance form. She was a multifaceted individual who wrote poetry, was a skilled painter, and state-level swimmer. She had served as the President of the War Widows Association under the aegis of Smt. Mohini Giri. In recent years, the actress had been quite active on social media, sharing old images from her film sets on Facebook and Instagram. She passed away after a cardiac arrest at MGM hospital in Vashi on Monday, 22nd February 2023. She is survived by her son and daughter and grandson.

—Sharmila Sontakke

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The Chapu that Brought Peace to the Mind: N S Rajam (1939-28 February, 2023)



SPARROW had made a list of artistes to interview and we have lost two of them already. One was Parasala Ponnammal for whom we wrote a homage in our last SNL and now we have lost N S Rajam, the mridangam artiste. Fortunately, I could meet the legendary Neela Ramgopal and spend an afternoon

and an evening talking to her. N S Rajam stayed in Mylapore and later in Mandaveli with her son, and I did not stay far away from there the last two times I was in Chennai and yet I could not meet her. She passed away on February 28, at the age of 84.

Rajam was born in Thiruvapur, into a musical family that cherished classical music. The well-known mridangam artiste Azhiyur Ramamritham Iyer, was her grandfather. Late Dr. N Ramani, the much-acclaimed Carnatic flautist, was her brother. What is fascinating is that Ramani took up flute and Rajam, his sister, picked up the mridangam. She trained under Thiruvapur Rajagopala Iyer, fondly known as Kunju Iyer. She must have been a child prodigy for she had her arangetram at the age of eight. She also sang and played the veena. In a significant career she even accompanied male artistes like Trichur Ramachandran. She has also accompanied renowned artistes like M L Vasanthakumari and D K Pattammal. For seven decades she has also been a much sought after teacher who has trained students in India and also in Singapore where she was for five years teaching at the Temple of Fine Arts.

She used to stay at the T S V Kovil Street in Mylapore and many who passed that way could hear the beats of mridangam. On January 2, 2011, 60 Carnatic women musicians came together in a musical event called Sthree Thyagaraja Pancharatnam. It was an all-women performance organised by Mudhra. It featured vocalists, mridangam artistes, violin, flute, veena, mandolin and tambura artistes in a one-hour plus concert. Vocalist Visalakshmi Anandakumar had conceptualised it along with Radha Baskar, vocalist and treasurer of Mudhra. N S Rajam, then 72 years old, was also part of this event and at 72, she still thought that not just concert-playing but such events were also fun to be part of.

She was actively performing and teaching till the end. In 2019 Layodaya had organised a Thani Avarthanam (Solo playing) event called Gurusamarpanam in honour of Maha Kumbakonam Sri. M Rajappa Iyer known as Laya Pita, at Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore. The person they invited to do the solo playing was none other than N S Rajam. Rajam, at

the age of 80, came and gave a solo performance, the sound of her mridangam resounding in the hall.

Not many may remember or know, and even I did not know, but Lalitharam, the one-man music encyclopaedia, who is SPARROW's friend and patron, gently reminded me that I may want to mention that it was N S Rajam who appeared on screen as the mridangam player in the Tamil movie *Avvai Shanmukhi* (1996).

N S Rajam was honoured with a Kalaimamani by the Tamil Nadu government. They say that the sound of her chapu, the vibrating tone heard when played on the mridangam, with the small finger on the right-hand side, between the black patch and the outer layer, with the tone completely in sync with the tone of the tambura, was a melodic and spiritual experience which soothed the mind and brought immense peace. Maybe we will continue to hear it from her son Nagai Narayanan, an equally appreciated mridangam player.

C S Lakshmi

MARCH 2023

Singing Her Way through Life: Neela Ramgopal (25 May 1935-1 March 2023)



It was with great hesitation that I had approached Neela Ramgopal, known as Neela Mami to all, for an interview with her for SPARROW. I had approached her through my good friend Lalitharam. She agreed immediately. It was in the month of June last year. When we reached her place, she opened the door looking gorgeous in a silk sari and a matching blouse, her face radiant with a smile so special to her. She spoke holding back nothing and looking at the photographs when I asked her teasingly, "Mami, do you buy a new sari for every concert that you give?" she laughed good-humouredly.

Neela Ramgopal was born in Kumbakonam and named Neelothpalambal after the presiding deity at the Thiruvapur temple. But in 1947 her family moved to their village Thyagarajapuram. She went to school after the 8th Standard in Thiruvaidaimarudur. She completed her school studies in 1950 with very good marks but did not go to college. She stayed at home till 1954 and moved out of that place only after her marriage at the age of 19.

Neela's father was a violinist but he played the instrument just for his pleasure. He never taught any of his children. But famous musicians like Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer did visit the family and there would be a lot of musical discussions. But she and her siblings did not have the opportunity to learn from any of them. Neela and her sister were put under a music teacher, Neduntheru Sadagopalacharya, only to prepare them for the customary bride-seeing event where the girl was supposed to sing a song before the prospective groom and his family. But during many other social events like marriage, festivals or temple festivals Neela and a group of girls used to sing.

Neela's marital family was a family of connoisseurs of music. Living in Chennai exposed her to many concerts and it was later when her husband got transferred to Bangalore that during one of her trips to Chennai during the December music season that she found her guru N M Narayanan. Later she also learnt from T K Rangachari. Her music idol was M L Vasanthakumari whom she adored for the kind of nuances she brought to music with her imaginative use of the alapanai, neraval and swara prasthra. She liked MLV so much that she imitated her and used to sing like her. The news reached MLV who once rang her up and asked her if she would like to sing with her in a concert as an accompanying artiste. Neela Mami was thrilled and she did sing in a few concerts with MLV. But soon she realised the limitations of such imitation and began to create a style of her own.

From 1965 onwards Neela Mami has been giving concerts in Bangalore and all over India and abroad. She also taught music and was considered a music icon of Bangalore. With six other friends Neela Mami formed the Sapthaswara group, a musical group of singers who enjoyed singing together. Neela Mami was a grade AIR artiste. More than 700 students had been trained by her and many awards came her way including the Madras Music Academy Sangita Kala Acharya Award (2011), Sangeetha Surabhi Award (2015) from Nadasurabhi Cultural Association, Bangalore, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (2016), Gurukripa Award 2017 from the Shankar Mahadevan Academy, Sangeetha Vedantha Dureena Award (2017) from Sri Ram Lalitha Kala Mandira, Bangalore, Kanchana Shree Title 2018 from the Kanchana Shree Lakshminarayana Music Academy Trust, Bangalore, to mention a few.

Many more accolades like Sangeetha Chudamani Award from the Rama Seva Mandali, Bangalore, Best Performer Award from Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai, Best performer Award from Madras Music Academy, Gana Prakeerthi Award from the Nagarkoil Trust, Sangeetha Kala Samragini Award from the Ramakrishna Gaanasabha, Karnataka Kalasri award from the Karnataka State Government Sangeetha Nrithya

Academy kept pouring in throughout her life in appreciation of her music and her teaching of music.

“As a guru Neela Ramgopal is known to inspire, encourage and guide her students with care and affection. She has established an organisation named ‘Neelambari’ for her students. She has also published a book of 50 Tamil compositions in the Kannada script,” says a note on her in the Sruti Foundation Home page.

Lalitharam has recalled many instances of her excellent music and her good-hearted humour. During the years when the Kaveri water dispute was at its height, there was a felicitation for Neela Mami. Someone who spoke that day said, “Listen, we have sent music from the shores of Kaveri so generously to Bangalore, at least for that gesture could you not send some Kaveri water this side?” He was referring to Neela Ramgopal coming to Bangalore from the Thanjavur region. Lalitharam says, “He may have been joking. But it is not an exaggeration to say that Neela Mami was truly a bounty that Bangalore received.”

There was also the instance of an overdue award being given to her by a well-known old music association in Bangalore. It was given to her just a few years ago. Lalitharam says he cannot forget how she accepted the award. Normally people would mouth words like they may not be worthy of such an award. But Neela Mami is made of a different mettle. She climbed the stage with her usual poise and dignity and said with a happy smile: “I am very happy to receive this award. In this happy moment I would like to give you all my heartfelt blessings.” She had indicated with her smile and her blessings that the award had come too late but there was no bitterness. She had taken it with her usual good humour.

As a connoisseur of music, Lalitharam also says that the ecstasy derived from listening to her sing cannot be described in mere words and one can only say like Thyagaraja said of the joy of seeing Rama: *Elagi ni vivarimpa lenu* (It cannot be described exactly that it is this way). He also recalled the incident when we went to talk to her. We wanted to also record how she had survived cancer. When we asked her, she had no objection to talking about it. We asked her what type of cancer she had survived. “That... it was... something in the stomach; I underwent chemotherapy. Something like that it was.... That was a long time ago, isn't it?” she said and added, “If it were a song, a javali or a pallavi one can remember it immediately. These things don't remain in the mind...” and laughed.

SPARROW will preserve your private papers carefully Neela Mami! We loved your interview and your photos in different beautiful saris! You are a great artiste and also a great human being. In whichever dimension you are, there

will be music and laughter. So full of spirit and laughter. They don't make them like you anymore, Neela Mami!

—C S Lakshmi with inputs from Lalitharam

A Woman Who Chose To Be Independent: K Ramalakshmi Arudra (31 December 1930-3 March 2023)



Ramalakshmi Arudra was much-acclaimed writer who was married to the legendary writer Arudra (Bhagavatula Sadasiva Sankara Sastry) who was a multi-faceted person. He was an Indian author, poet, lyricist, translator, publisher, dramatist,

playwright, and an expert on Telugu literature. He was also known for his works in Telugu cinema as a lyricist, dialogue writer, and story writer. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1987. Ramalakshmi Arudra was no less talented. She was born in Kotnandur and got her graduate degree from the University of Madras. She began to write in 1951, much before she married Arudra. She studied English, Telugu literature and ancient Telugu literature. As sub-editor for the English section of *Telugu Swatantra*, she did many translations. She married poet and literary critic Arudra in 1954. She was associated with many women's welfare organisations. She also wrote under the name 'Ramalakshmi Arudra'. She also wrote stories for films.

Arudra and Ramalakshmi lived in Hyderabad and they have three daughters. Arudra passed away in 1998.

With a writing career that began in 1951 Ramalakshmi wrote many novels, *Vidadise Railu Ballu* (Separate Rail Tracks, 1954), *Avathali Gattu* (The Other Bank), *Merupu Tiga* (Lightning Rod), *Thonikina Swargam* (Fallen Paradise, 1961), *Manani Jaya* (Honourable Victory), *Animuthyam* (Pearl), *Kasthuri* (2001), *Panduranguni Prathignja* (Panduranga's Pledge, 2010), *Pelli* (Wedding, 2013), *Ee Taram Pilla* (This Generation, 2014), *Na Kuthuru Feministu* (My Daughter is A Feminist, 2016) and *Hema* (2017), being some of them. She also brought out two short story collections: *Addam* (Block, 2007) and *Oka Jeeviki Swecha* (Freedom for a Human Being)

At 92, Ramalakshmi was one of the literary luminaries in Hyderabad. But she had her share of scandals also. At the end of 1979, a Telugu film *Gorintaku* (Henna Design, 1979) (later made in Hindi as *Mehendi Rang Layegi*) was

released and had completed about 80 days of a fairly successful screening. But *Cine Herald* published an article by Dr Vasa Prabhavati, a lecturer in a women's college, who said that the movie had borrowed freely from Ranganayakamma's novel *Ide, Naa Nyaayam* (This is My Justice!). She concluded that the movie was certainly a plagiarized version of Ranganayakamma's novel with a few superficial changes. Ranganayakamma, a well-known novelist herself, filed a case against the writer of the film story, the director and the producer. The writer was K Ramalakshmi who denied any knowledge of the novel when an article she had written in the late sixties reviewing Telugu novels in which she had particularly praised Ranganayakamma for this particular novel was produced as evidence. Needless to say, Ranganayakamma won the case.

Equally scandalous were the interviews she gave a few years ago to the journalist Telekapalli Ravi currently doing the rounds on YouTube which were full of gossip about the Telugu film world talking about affairs that the various early stars had. She revealed personal details which she was privy to in the interviews talking about Shoban Babu and Jayalalitha and so many old stars. While some thought they were bold many others thought they were not in good taste.

She was honoured with the Gruhalakshmi Swarnakankam (Gold Bangle) award instituted by the *Gruhalakshmi* magazine, an award established in 1934 to honour women for excellence in literature and social reform. She also received the Kala Ratna (Swan) Award from the government of Andhra Pradesh in 2016.

Ramalakshmi remained active writing, communicating with people and meeting many activists till the end.

Dhiruben Gordhanbhai Patel (29 May 1926-10 March 2023)



Dhiruben Patel was a writer whom all of us admired. The volume in which we have a dialogue with her and a story of hers is going to be published soon. We thought she would live to see it. But she has passed away. She was a much admired literary novelist, dramatist, storyteller and translator. Dhiruben Gordhanbhai Patel breathed her last this morning, she was 97.

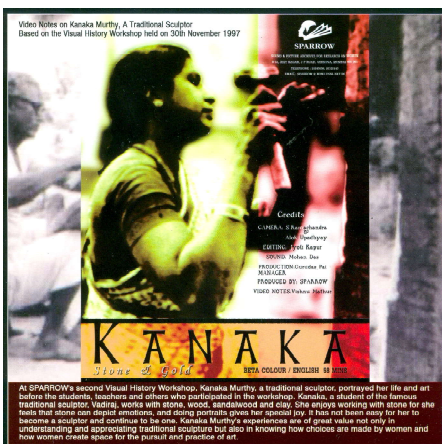
She was a prolific writer who occupies an eminent position in Gujarati literature. She was born in Baroda on 29th May 1926. Her father Gordhanbhai Patel was a journalist with the *Bombay Chronicle* and her mother Gangaben Patel was a freedom fighter. She has a Master's in English and taught in a college in Dahisar in the sixties and later taught English literature at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. After a brief period of working with Anand Publishers she founded Kalki Prakashan, in 1963-64. She edited the Gujarati journal *Sudha* from 1966-75. She was President of Gujarati Sahitya Parishad from 2003-2004.

She has a large body of work of short stories, novels, plays, poems, children's books and translations. Her novel *Agantuk* (Visitor, 1996) which won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2001 was translated into English in 2011 as *Rainbow at Noon*. *Kitchen Poems* written in English in 2002, was later translated into German and Marathi. One of her plays *Bhavni Bhavai* has been made into a film.

She has been honoured with several prestigious awards like Ranjitram Suvarna Chandrak (1980), K M Munshi Suvarna Chandrak (1981) and Sahitya Gaurav Puraskar (2002), both given by Gujarat Sahitya Akademi, and Nandshankar Suvarna Chandrak and Darshak Award in 1996.

Her demise is a great loss for Gujarati literature and also a great loss for SPARROW.

C S Lakshmi



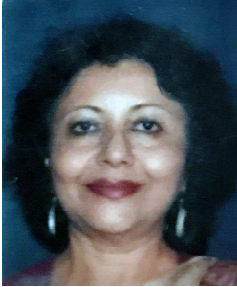
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The Power to Love: Anna Sujatha Mathai (1933/1934-16 March 2023)



When a poet passes away, one suddenly begins to remember snatches of her poetry read sometime, somewhere. Suddenly a fever grips you to find out what was the last thing she wrote. That is how I came across her article in *Punch* magazine dated January 31, 2021, where she talks about her recent illness and how despite her illness she managed to

“snatch some poems from the dark.” The article entitled “Hints in a World Caught Between Living and Dying and other poems”, has poems meant especially for the *Punch* magazine which will be a treat for anyone who would make an effort find it on the web.

Anna Sujatha Mathai completed her BA (Honours) degree in English Language and Literature from Miranda College. Her post-graduation in Social Studies was done at the University of Edinburgh. She worked in England in her chosen field for a few years.

She began to publish from the seventies onwards. Her well-known books include *Crucifixions* (1970), Writers Workshop, Calcutta, *We the Unreconciled* (1972) Writers Workshop, Calcutta, *The Attic of Night* (1991) Rupa Co. New Delhi, *Life-on my Side of the Street* (2005), Sahitya Akademi (Women Poets showcased for 50th Anniversary of Sahitya Akademi) Edited by Keki Daruwala and *Mother's Veena and Selected Poems* (2013) Authorspress, New Delhi. Her poems have also been part of many anthologies.

On June 5, 2015, on the Tumblr blog she wrote a beautiful poem called “Eyelids” and the byline said: from your friend who is very sad. The poem spoke about her enacting her own death many times over. At the age of 89, on 16 March 2023, there was no enactment. What can be a better tribute to her than to remember that poem where she was only enacting her own death?

Eyelids

*I enact my own death
many times over.
On my eyelids darkness sits—
Although love has been my way.
I have walked through streets of violence—
I enact my own death many times over.
Things I never possessed
besiege me every day.*

*Those who sought to hold me
I was torn cruelly from,
Those my heart yearned for
Were swept afar.
Those I wished to clasp to me
Walk helplessly away,
Or become the cruel stranger
Who mocks the only power I have
The power to love.*

—C S Lakshmi

The River that is Life: Sarah Thomas (15 September 1934-31 March 2023)



Anyone familiar with Indian literature would know about the eminent Malayalam writer Sara Thomas and her works. Although she began to write only from the age of 34, she has written 17 novels and more than 100 stories. Her *Narmadipudava* (The Ritually Pure Sari) which spoke about the travails of a young widow, was honoured with the Kerala

Sahitya Akademi awards in 1979.

Her first novel *Jeevidhamenna Nadi* (The River that is Life) was published in 1968. Her novel *Murippadukal* (Scars) that was published in 1971 gave her an important status in Malayalam literature. *Manimuzhakkam*, directed by P.A. Backer is an adaptation of this novel. Some of her other works have also been adapted to the screen. Her own favourites from her works are the novels *Daivamakkal* (Children of God) and *Grahamam* (Eclipse). *Daivamakkal* is the story of a Dalit boy and his struggles in life as a degraded human being. The novel was translated into English by Sosanna Kuruvilla as *Daivamakkal* in 2006. *Grahamam*(Eclipse) is about a boy from Kerala and the German girl he is in love with and the torment they underwent in Lebanon.

Sarah Thomas received the Kerala Sahitya Akademi award in 2010 for overall contribution to Malayalam literature.

Even though she was a writer who was very well-known Sarah Thomas was a quiet, unassuming person. She left the world as quietly as she had lived her life. One hopes more of her books are translated into English and other Indian languages.

—C S Lakshmi

Jinni Goes Quietly: Janaki Viswanathan (August 1929-31 March 2023)



My very dear friend and SPARROW's ardent supporter, (Solvanam) Ravishankar's mother Janaki passed away at the age of 93, in the US, with her only son beside her. She had been bedridden for long and the end came peacefully and quietly. She was there one minute and the next minute she was not, wrote Ravishankar in his message. She would have been 94 in

August. Janaki got married in 1947 or 1948. She lived for a couple of years in Bombay with her husband Viswanathan, in a chawl, a tenement building, in Jame Jamshed Road, Matunga. In 1950, about six months after Ravi's birth she was widowed. Her husband, who must have been a wonderful person, wrote a letter to his father-in-law, lamenting the fact that he was dying and leaving his wife and child destitute, adding to his responsibilities as a father. He apologized to his father-in-law.

She had become a widow at the age of 20 and had worked as a teacher and brought up her son. The *Pregnyai* magazine that Ravishankar brought out in the seventies with a group of friends with me joining in whenever I came from Delhi, had its "office" in the front room of Ravi's house in T. Nagar, in Mahalakshmi Street. It was the house of Ravi's maternal grandparents actually and Ravi and his mother lived with them. Ravi, myself, Veerachamy and Paravi used to gather there in the evenings. We worked but we also had a lot of fun. Ravi used to call his mother Jinni and we also called her that. Even if all our ruckus troubled her in any way, she did not show it on her face. Occasionally she would come out with some sarcastic comment or the other as was the wont of Kumbakonam people! Ravi would explain it to me. Those were the days when we talked, argued and had terrible fights. How sweet those days were! Jinni was there then. Last time I met her, in her usual teasing way she said, "Lakshmi, you have become old; so have I!" and laughed. Farewell, Jinni. You underwent much suffering. Now mingle with nature slowly.

—C S Lakshmi



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The larger and bluer the sky, the better!*



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APRIL 2023

**The Curtain Comes Down: Uttara Baokar
(5 August 1944-11 April 2023)**

Uttara Baokar was a prominent and much-admired actress in Hindi theatre. She was born in Sangli, Maharashtra. She began her career on the Marathi stage. In 1965 she joined the National School of Drama in Delhi as a student. She was trained by the eminent theatre director Ebrahim Alkazi. She performed as Priyamvada in

Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* directed by Ebrahim Alkazi. She joined its repertory in 1968, playing the lead for many years. She did varied roles in plays like *Mukhyamantri*, *Mena Gurjari*, *Tughlaq* and others. What gave her an edge over other actors was her formal training in music. She could portray with ease characters that required to sing. She had a resonant and distinctive voice. As our Sapru House hostel was close to National School of Drama, during my years in Delhi, I have seen many of the stage performances of Uttara Baokar. When the well-known Tamil writer Indira Parthasarathy's play was translated into Hindi and performed, Uttara played the lead role and there is a scene when she has to falsely assert that she is happy. I was stunned when Uttara Baokar's voice actually broke when she repeated the line, "Main kush hoon." (I am happy).

She was a consummate actor whom one never got tired watching. Important parts enacted by her include Jasma in Shanta Gandhi's *Jasma Odan* in 1968, Grusha in *Khadiya ka Berat* (Circle of Chalk) in 1968, from Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Polly in *Teen Take ka Swang* in 1970, from Brecht's *Three Penny Opera*, Shilavati in Surendra Verma's *Surya ki Antim Kiran se Surya ki Pahli Kiran Tak* (From the Sun's Last Ray to the Sun's First Ray) in 1974, Binni in Mohan Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure* (Fragmented) in 1976, Gandhari in Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha Yug* (Blind Era) in 1977, and Desdemona in Shakespeare's *Othello* in 1983.

In an interview given to Subash K Jha in 1999 for *The Tribune* (March 28), the otherwise very private person Uttara, has spoken about her life in acting. She talks about being active on stage till 1995 and later coming to television. She says: "Earlier on, television wasn't such an "alive" medium. There was only Doordarshan. I was doing some work there but theatre remained my first love. It still is my first love. In the Repertory company there were many other good actors who were doing wonderful work. But with the passage of time television become a predominant medium. Its existence

couldn't be ignored. My stage colleagues in Delhi began shifting to Mumbai. There came a time for me when I could no longer make a living out of acting on stage." Asked if an economic need drove her to television she says: "Partly yes. But there was more. Television offers a much wider scope of reaching audiences than theatre. Besides, I got to play challenging roles on television, like that of a nagging mentally unstable wife to Dr Shreeram Lagoo in DD's *Upanyas*. Even before *Upanyas* (Novel) I did roles in Kavita Chowdhary's *Udaan* (Flight) and Govind Nihalani's *Tamas* (Darkness). Both were highly appreciated." But Uttara's heart was in theatre and in the interview, she admits that theatre will remain her first love. Television did not give her the creative satisfaction of theatre. But she admits that there was more work for actors in television. "I get the opportunity," she says, "to play different roles, like the one of the flippant Aunt Pinky in *Banegi Apni Baat* (It Will Work Out) which I really enjoy doing. However, the quality of the output leaves much to be desired. The serials that I did earlier on Doordarshan were of a far superior quality. I'm doing just a selected few serials where I've different, substantial roles. These keep me busy for 15 days a month. That's all the work I need and want. I don't want to get into the multi-shift rut. To be honest Television isn't all that fascinating for me." And she adds: "I honestly miss doing theatre. Serials just don't give me the same satisfaction. I've done wonderful plays and roles in theatre. That kind of involvement is missing on television. I do enjoy doing a serial occasionally, like Asha Parekh's *Kora Kagaz* which I'm doing right now. Though it's a mother-in-law's role it has a certain dignity and dimension to it. I'm enjoying playing this role."

One can understand her deep love for theatre because apart from acting she had also directed Jaywant Dalvi's *Sandhya Chhaya* (Evening Shadows) in 1978. Apart from Television, working with film directors Shyam Benegal and Govind Nihalani within the television format made her entry into films possible. She worked in Shyama Benegal's Television series *Yatra* (Journey) in 1986 and Govind Nihalani's Television film *Tamas* (Darkness) in 1988. In her interview to Subash K Jha she talks about her film experience: "Earlier I had the opportunity to work with Mrinal Sen in a serial called *Kabhi Door Kabhi Paas*. (Sometimes Far Away and Sometimes Close). That's how he came to know about my work. When he offered me the role in *Ek Din Achacnak* (Suddenly, One Day, 1989) I grabbed it. Another mother's role that I did was in an award-winning Marathi film called *Doghi*. These are the only two notable feature film I've done. I'm not interested in doing insignificant roles in films. Every role should be worth my while Some filmmakers did offer me mother's roles in conventional commercial cinema. I refused these offers. Now I'm playing Ajay Devgan's mother in Govind

Nihalani's *Thakshak* (1999). It's a small role. But I enjoy working with Govindji."

She also acted in other films like *Sardari Begum* (1996), *Rukmavati Ki Haveli* (Rukmavati's Mansion, 1999), *Dor* (The String, 2006), *Aaja Nachle* (Come, Let's Dance, 2007) *8x10 Tasveer* (8x10 Painting, 2009) *Lessons in Forgetting* (2012), *Samhita* (The Script, 2013), among many others. Two films that she did with Sumitra Bhave and Sunil Sukthankar—*Vaastupurush* (The Guardian Spirit of the House, 2002) and *Doghi* (Two Sisters, 1999)—were much appreciated films.

Uttara did not stay in Mumbai. She stayed in Pune and that also kept her away from the hustle and bustle of both the Mumbai city and the film world. For someone who played the famous mother's role in Mrinal Sen's film, Uttara never got married and had a family of her own. Subhash K Jha does ask her if she is a family woman and her answer is frank and to the point: "If by family woman you mean marriage, then, no. Basically I'm a loner (laughs). After I finish my work, I go home. I brood or read. I stay with my father. I don't much care for attending parties; socialising. I worked at a hectic pace for 30 years, I was so consumed by theatre that I hardly had time for myself. Now I'm making up for lost time." She also adds that somehow marriage never happened and that she does not miss not being married. "Because I've many friends of both the sexes. As for missing out on the experience of marriage and motherhood, there are so many things that one doesn't experience firsthand. It doesn't make me incomplete as a human being or as an actress..."

Uttara was ailing for sometime and on 11th April, the much-loved actor, breathed her last in a hospital in Pune.

Food As an Expression of Love: Nooramma (Date of demise: 14 April 2023)



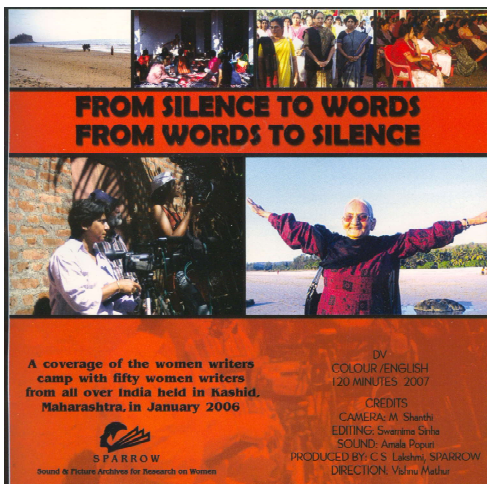
Transgender women like Revathi, Priya Babu, Narthaki Natraj, Asha Bharathi and Kalki Subramaniam have generously shared with us their transgender experience and the complexities of the body in the film *Degham* produced by SPARROW. SPARROW has been closely following various developments in the life and work of many in the transgender

community. In our earlier Newsletter we had paid homage to Sangeetha, a transgender woman who was running a kitchen, who was murdered. It was with great interest that we viewed a post by Mangai Arasu who has been actively working with transgender women saying that "there are transwomen-run kitchens that cook biriyani regularly and on orders in Coimbatore and surrounding districts. This tradition has a legacy of at least seven generations. They tell us stories of community living across religions and castes and genders. They also tell us that their lives have amazing stories of many loves, shared joys and deep friendships across generations." This was written to introduce the play *Nooramma: Biriyan Durbar* directed by Srijith Sundaram, a play that talks about the politics of food. At the end of the play was an interview with the real Nooramma then in her nineties, a veteran transwoman who used to run a biriyani kitchen in the Coimbatore area. The play was based on many like her. This was an image different from the image we have of the transgender community begging, dancing or doing sex work.

On 14 April 2023, a tribute was put up on the Facebook by Srijith Sundaram on behalf of the Trans Community Kitchen, Kattiyakkari and Nooramma: Biriyan Durbar Team (Chennai). The tribute was to Nooramma, the person who had inspired the group to write and perform a play with *Nooramma* as its title. A translation of the tribute from Tamil is given below:

With great grief in our heart, we would like to share the news of the demise on 14 April 2023, of Nooramma, who was a treasure trove of the history of the transgender community. She was a leader among the transgender community and she was always gentle and loving towards us. Not only did she share her story with us she also supported our efforts to turn it into a play. She allowed us to use a lot of her personal

C S Lakshmi



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belongings for the play. The play, *Nooramma: Biriyani Durbar*, was created as an amalgam of all the stories shared with us by many transgender women cooks like Nooramma. This play has been staged in many different venues. Her demise is a loss to the transgender community and to all of us. The play *Nooramma* will continue to tread the historical path that Nooramma has left for us as a legacy.

During the pandemic period in 2020, a group of activists—Shankari, Priya, Kala, Dayamma, Kaaviya, Sowmiya, Sowndharya, Preethi, Sandhya and Sharan Karthik—and Srijith Sundaram got together and set up two kitchens, one each in south and north Chennai and called it The Trans Community Kitchen. Those who worked in the kitchen making food and serving otherwise were all paid and in the pandemic period The Trans Community Kitchen fed 65,000 people like those in hospitals with no means to access food, their families, those who came to bury their dead, the attendants at crematoriums and so on. They also said a prayer for all of them who were making lonely departures from this world, unattended and often unmourned. The *Nooramma* play had an on-stage installation built from the tributes paid to the dead.

Nooramma who was the initial inspiration for the play has passed away but has left behind a rich legacy of memories of sharing food and love to all regardless of who they are.

—C S Lakshmi with Srijith Sundaram



***Ahvanam*: An Invitation from the Heart: Samayam Samrajyam Lakshmi (5 February 1949-17 April 2023).**



A*hvanam* was a monthly magazine that was started in April 1993 and lasted till July 1998 for five and a half years. S S Lakshmi, its editor, passed away on the 17th of April this year. In a tribute written in *dishadaily.com* (“Apurupa Editor S S Lakshmi,” 25 April 2023) Dr Nagasuri

Venugopal recalled his memories of the magazine and the editor. He said that there had been other magazines in Telugu that had had a good readership like K I Varaprasad Reddy’s *Haasam* on music and humour and Nanduri Parathasarathi’s *Rasamai*. But *Ahvanam* was different from all these. Its editor was a woman and it came from Vijayawada. In the editorial of the first issue Lakshmi wrote that she had started the magazine to promote free thinking, goodness with natural courtesy and good taste. The monthly magazine published a novel every month. Old novels like *Animuthyam* (Pearl) of K Ramalakshmi were reprinted. Novels of contemporary writers were also reprinted like the novel *Godugu* (Umbrella) by P Satyavathi. The magazine contained matter on art, music, sculpture, science, gender, health, modern woman and scientific vision for children. Dr Nagasuri Venugopal had done several book-reviews for the magazine and had written science article under the title “Sodhana.” Lakshmi herself had no journalistic background but the magazine had an advisory board of eminent scholars. The editorials Lakshmi wrote for the magazine were published as a 150-page book called *Antaranga Parimalam* (Inner Fragrance) in February 2010 by her publishing house Raja Publications. In the foreword she said that the foundation of her mental world was laid by her father. “Actually, it was only until the age of 8 that I saw my father. After that he was not in this world. It must be said that the impression he made on me at that young age shaped my character and gave me a unique personality. Shades of his personality remained alive in me as if I knew all his tastes, habits and ways of thinking, as if only his physical body had died; his thoughts providing me with infinite excitement and mental peace.” She said that she had not even completed her high school education. But what she had, she said, was her “emotional strength.” The magazine was started inspired by S V Bhujangaraya Sharma. He used to speak on Vijayawada Akashvani on epic heroines like Shakuntala. Lakshmi had put together all his talks in a book called *Deepamalika* in 1989.

On April 5 2022, Chandra Latha, wrote on the Facebook page about *Avahanam* and Lakshmi. She said that in the early days of the nineties, from Krishnathiram, a silent literary wave

took the Telugu journalism to a new shore. She wrote about how the magazine serialised Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* translated into Telugu. She said that in the Telugu literature environment of those days, *Avahanam* was like a lighted flower garden. In reply to her Lakshmi had written about her childhood and love for literature. "I have a lot of fondness," she wrote, "for literature since childhood. Pandillapalli was near my father's village Vetapalem. Whenever I went there, I used to get books from Vetapalem Saraswata Niketanam library and read them. There is no one in Andhra who does not know Saraswata Niketanam library. I never thought I would run a literature magazine like *Avahanam*." Lakshmi said that it was just a coincidence that she ran the magazine and mentioned the scholars on the advisory board as the real ones who made the magazine. They were the ones who wanted the magazine to firmly stand as a magazine for human values. She mentioned the distinguished artist and writer Suryadevara Sanjeeva Sev as the real reason for the magazine receiving so much praise. It was another great scholar, Bhujanaraya Sharma, who blessed her and told her that she was capable of running such a magazine. Her lonely struggle was supported by many literary friends. She said she was happy her hard work was not in vain.

Lakshmi never went on stage and gave speeches for she said she could not really speak nor did she seek awards. Her husband Rama Rao had retired as Assistant Commissioner of Police. He had passed away about fifteen years ago. They had three sons and a daughter. She had lost her second son Raja when he was ten years old. In fact, she had named him after Suryadevara Sanjeeva Dev (1914-1999), mentioned earlier, who was a philosopher, painter, writer and poet. He was a visionary renowned as a multi-talented person, a polyglot and fine art critic, whom she admired a lot. So, she had named her son Sanjeeva Dev Raja.

SPARROW requested well-known writer P Satyavathi, a close friend of S S Lakshmi to write a note on her and she obliged us with a warm and affectionate note on Lakshmi with the title, Dear Friend *Ahvanam* Lakshmi. We have given it below:

Everyone's life has its ebbs and flows and they have their impact on the concerned person's emotions and social behaviour. But some people are ever smiling with dignity and poise, whenever we encounter them. Such a pleasant woman was Samayam Samrajya Lakshmi who was dearly called *Ahvanam* Lakshmi. The Magazine, *Ahvanam* that she founded and edited became her surname. Thirty years ago, one beautiful evening she came searching for me to become a friend until death parted us. A cheerful, self-confident person she was. She was an admirer of Chalam, a great Telugu writer, who wrote for women and was ostracised by the society

for his radical thinking. A voracious reader, a music and cinema lover and very forthright in expressing her opinions. That was our common bond. The seed she was bearing in her brain gave birth to the child *Ahvanam* soon. 1990s was a beautiful period in our lives. The first issue of the monthly magazine *Ahvanam* was released with great enthusiasm and passion for serious literature. She made me one of the members of the Advisory Board and I was part and parcel of the group. We made it a point to publish stories of eminent writers and also encourage new writers who had the flair for writing to write. Many stories now recognised by critics as some of the best ones were published in *Ahvanam*. She handled the finances and circulation herself. Lacking big circulation, advertisements, funds, patrons and buyers *Ahvanam* had to be closed with a huge financial loss. But literary people still cherish the standards it had maintained. Renowned flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia gave a free concert in Vijayawada to help *Ahvanam*. She managed her home, raised children like any other woman but kept her interests and passion for music and literature alive. She was a person who knew no compromises, and she spoke in an assertive voice. She made 1990s the decade of *Ahvanam* and a memorable one too. She has her own place as a good editor in Telugu literature. Till late I was bragging that "age is a 'just' a number" but now that Lakshmi, younger to me, has left me I have come to realise that age is really a number but not 'just' a number. We writers love her and regret our inability to sustain the magazine.

—P Satyavathi with C S Lakshmi



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A Friend to All: Chandita Mukherjee (20 April (1952)-18 April 2023)



The 21st Madurai Film Festival 2019 organised a retrospective of Chandita Mukherjee's films and also a Master Class by her. The Festival's note introduced her as a film maker, science communicator, researcher, teacher, team builder, traveller and covered her life and body of work thus:

"Chandita Mukherjee has been making documentary and short fiction films since 1975. Born in Tokyo, she grew up in Japan, India, Poland and the United States, returning to India as a young adult. A graduate of Delhi University in Sociology, she did her post-graduate studies in Cinema Direction at the Film & Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune.

From her student days, she originated a number of projects centred on communicating science-technology-society issues to the public. Among these is *Bharat ki Chhap*, on the history of science and technology on the Indian subcontinent. This series of 13 films of 50 minutes each, was made by a full-time team that researched, scripted and carried out the production from 1985 to 1989 with the guidance of leading scientists and historians. The series was telecast to critical acclaim on the national network in 1989.

Her awards include:

Bharat ki Chhap was awarded the French international award for science communication, the *Prix Jules Verne* in 1989.

Ravi J. Matthai Fellowship for social communications of the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, 1989-91.

Rajat Kamal, National Award for best short fiction film, for *Totanama, the Twelfth Night*, an episode of the medieval story cycle *Tuti-nameh*, produced by the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, 1992.

Rajat Kamal, the National Award for best scientific film of 1994 for *Another way of learning*. The film was also awarded the Rajat Kamal for best audiography in a non-feature film, 1994.

Special Jury Award of the Rashtriya Vigyan Chalchitra Mela, of Vigyan Prasar of Govt of India, for *Maths for Sum or Maths for All?* The film highlights experiences in making mathematics accessible to children across India, 2014.

Best Documentary in the one-hour category at the 2nd Asian Short Film Festival, 2019, in Kolkata, for *Displacement & Resilience: women live for a new day*. The experience of

women in conflict zones, their enforced migration and the experience of exile and resettlement is the subject of this film.

Chandita has travelled extensively across the subcontinent, and has an intimate knowledge of different cultures and environments and an ear for languages. She is a trainer and organiser of meetings, workshops, and training courses working with voluntary groups and institutions involved in communication, development and educational work in various parts of India.

At present she heads Comet Media Foundation, a non-profit group dedicated to the making of educational communications in a range of media."

The note covered facts about her life and work in a fairly comprehensive way and yet, Chandita was much more than all this. Her profile on the web talks of her as a self-employed filmmaker working collaboratively with educational organisations and Institutions of learning whose film work explored the connections of science-tech, culture and society. It also mentions an important part of her work which was that she was the founder of Learning Ladder, a gathering place in the Fort area of Mumbai for children's books and unusual toys. This space had a focus on learning and here they held workshops, book fairs, storytelling sessions, meet-the-author gatherings and other events which promoted books and reading.

As a person Chandita meant different things to different friends. A friend (Tanuja Chaturvedi) who met her a few months ago over lunch, wrote about how Chandita recalled her days in FTII and Ritwick Ghatak, her teacher, and how they spoke about *Totanama*, the film she made with the students of NID. Anajali Monteiro who had worked with her in the



early years wrote about their many adventures, from the coal mines in Kamptee to popular science work in Nandurbar. She also posted a beautiful photograph of them together taken at a tent photo studio, during the Mahim Dargah Urs mela, circa 1978, taken on an old box camera.

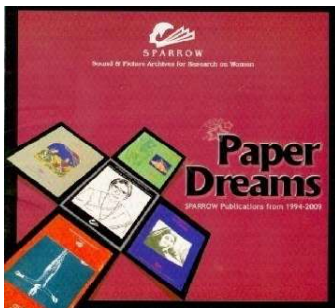
At SPARROW we would like to remember her as the spirit behind the workshop with Maya Rao which Chandita was going to film for us. Not wanting us to go through any trouble she arrived at the venue (Multipurpose Hall of SNTD) with cream-coloured curtains and everything else that she needed. The shooting in Delhi in Maya's house was similarly excellently



organised, everything within the shoestring budget of SPARROW. The workshop came alive with Chandita's presence combined with that of her friend Maya Rao and the film contains the spirit of the workshop and the creative spirit of Maya Rao. Over the years, we did keep in touch with Chandita and when she wanted the film on Maya (apty titled *Maya Vismayah* by us) for her Madurai Retrospective we sent it to her and although it was her own film she sent us a generous donation, a gesture that all of us appreciated. She also remembered to invite us for the VAICA (Video Art by Indian Contemporary Artists) event in Mumbai in 2019 held at the Museum, Max Mueller Bhavan, G5A and Godrej Culture Lab. This was an event where she had collaborated with Bharati Kapadia on making a festival of videos by visual artists, many of whom were women.

Just when we were thinking that we should do one of our CONVERSATIONS programmes with Chandita, she passed away just two days before her birthday. There is nothing that one can say, except that somewhere, in some dimension, her laughter will keep resounding.

—C S Lakshmi



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Keeping Promises: Pamela Chopra (19 February 1948-20 April 2023)



Pamela Chopra was a producer, film writer and also a playback singer. She was married to the well-known producer Yash Chopra. She was born in Lahore, Pakistan and brought up in an army atmosphere as her father was

in the Indian army. She grew up in Mumbai where she pursued her education. She was interested in music from an early age and was trained in classical music. She pursued a career in music and has sung many songs for Hindi films in the 1960s. She also enjoyed singing at weddings and in women's groups and also in her husband's films. She also wrote scripts with her husband for films apart from co-producing some of his films. A film she produced on her own was *Aaina* (Mirror, 1993). She has sung many songs but people remember her solo number "Khud se jo wada kiya tha" (What I promised Myself) that she sang for music directors Shiv-Hari for the film *Silsila*, with lyrics by Nida Fazli.

After Yash Chopra's death in 2012, Pamela took over as the chairperson of Yash Raj Films, which has since produced many hit films under her leadership. Pamela was known for her philanthropic activities. She worked with many charitable organisations and supported many causes like healthcare, education and women's empowerment.

Her contribution to Indian cinema has been recognised with many awards. She was honoured with National Film Award for Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment for the film *Veer Zara* (2005), Screen Award for Best Film for *Veer Zara* (2005), Filmfare Lifetime Achievement Award (2008), Zee Cine Award for Lifetime Achievement (2008), Sansui Lifetime Achievement Award (2010), FICCI Frames Excellence Awards for Contribution to Indian Entertainment (2013), IIFA Lifetime Achievement Award (2013), Producers Guild Film Award for Best Film for *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* (So Long As Life is There) (2013) and Stardust Award for Lifetime Achievement (2013). In 2018 she received the Padma Bhushan award, for her contribution to Indian cinema.

Pamela passed away a day after she turned 75, after living a life where she managed to keep all her promises.

—C S Lakshmi



A Deaf Lawyer Who Could Hear the Deaf: Saudamini Pethe (26 September 1977-22 April 2023)



It was a bit shocking to see the headlines announcing Saudamini Pethe clearing All India Bar Exam (AIBE) and condoling her death referring to her as a deaf lawyer. One always thought “hearing impaired” or “disability” was more respectful. But on reading about her inspiring life one found out that she preferred to be called Deaf with a capital ‘D’ for she

felt that words like ‘disability’ and ‘impairment’ had negative connotations.

Saudamini Pethe was the first Deaf lawyer with the Bar Council of India. Born in Dombivili, to Vishwas Sant, a former assistant manager with RBI and Mrudula, Soudamini grew up hearing, reading, and understanding languages. She had become deaf at the age of nine due to very strong medicines given to her when she was afflicted with meningitis.

Saudamini Pethe enrolled with the Bar Council Delhi, in November 2022. By then, she had married Yashdeep Pethe (43), who was also Deaf and was posted in Gujarat as an Indian Oil Corporation executive, and had moved to Faridabad. She pursued LLB at the Institute of Law and Research, Faridabad and completed her course in August 2022, after which she got enrolled with the Bar in November.

Speaking to newspapers after her enrolment Saudamini had said that she wanted to fight for the rights of the deaf and create awareness among the deaf about their rights. She was at that time the director of the All-India Foundation of Deaf Women and a trustee at the Access Mantra Foundation.

The Logical Indian, an independent and public-spirited digital media platform, wrote about her enrollment with the Delhi Bar Council. (Laxmi Mohan Kumar, “Signing for Rights! Meet Saudamini Pethe, First-Ever Deaf Advocate to Enroll with Delhi Bar Council,” 16 December, 2022) in glowing terms excerpts from which are given below:

“...In a first, the Bar Council of Delhi has made way for a deaf advocate—Saudamini Pethe, who will now be at the forefront to advocate for the rights of the hearing impaired and help make the legal system of the country more accessible to them. The 45-year-old would be placing her arguments for trials in Indian Sign Language (ISL), and an interpreter would be speaking on her behalf.

“Before her enrollment as an advocate, many believed it impossible for the differently abled community to take up roles within the legal profession. Proving that they can

represent cases in their own language, Saudamini seeks to be an inspiration for the specially-abled community to join the Bar and the Benches to contribute to the cause of their community....

“Saudamini lost her hearing capacity after being affected by meningitis and taking strong medicines to tackle it at the young age of nine. Not considering her hearing challenges to be a barrier, she went ahead and completed her master’s in the English language from Mumbai University and began working as a documentation executive at the Noida Deaf Society. Until then, she used to communicate with people using techniques such as lip-reading and writing responses. It was only after joining the Deaf Society that she picked up Indian Sign Language (ISL) and began signing her thoughts and ideas.

“She then pursued LLB at the Institute of Law and Research and enrolled with the Bar Council in the capital city by November. Saudamini now aims to use her legal degree to advocate for deaf rights and make it possible for the community to gain equal access in every aspect of life, from education and health care to most importantly, justice....

The Chairman of Delhi Bar Council, Senior advocate KK Manan, said, “We have given the license to her to practise, which is rarely given in such a situation. But we would like to settle her so that she can stand on her own feet.” They hope that the opportunity will enable Saudamini to earn a livelihood for herself and her family and open many more doors for the deaf community.

“All along her journey, Saudamini has faced many communication barriers and challenges due to the lack of accessibility in schools, colleges, public transport, and every other aspect. Language played a crucial role in her life, which is also why she believes that words like ‘disability’ and ‘impairment’ place negative connotations on the community and build a social barrier. Explaining this issue further, she spoke of her hardships while enrolling as a lawyer with no communication access available at the Bar.

“I was surprised to find that there was neither any category for the disabled in the bar council form nor any relevant quota. I seriously feel this needs to be addressed on a national level,” she conveyed. Throughout the procedure, she had to borrow her son’s time in order to have someone by her side to interpret the official formalities, filings, and meetings with the authorities. With her enrollment, she hopes to bring a change within this system and ensure the differently abled community is not denied access to any space.”

The New Indian Express published PTI news report on 16 December 2022, in which Saudamini had spoken in great detail about herself and her commitment to the cause of the Deaf. Communicating with PTI through WhatsApp messages

she had said, “I also want to spread more awareness, and empower the deaf by equipping them with the knowledge of their legal rights and become capable of ensuring that these rights are fulfilled. I want to inspire more deaf youth to join the legal profession and contribute to the cause of the deaf.”

It is when one hears it from Saudamini herself that one realises how little one knows about the real everyday needs of the deaf and the rights that have to be theirs as citizens. *Behan Box* did a very informative article on abortion and the differently abled (Shreya Raman, “India’s Laws Fail to Uphold Abortion Rights of Women with Disabilities,” 11 November, 2021). It began with the case of Arpita Roy Sengupta, whose parents, much against her wishes, had arranged her marriage at the age of 22, with a deaf person like her. She could not complete her graduate studies. Eventually when she became pregnant, her doctor did some tests and spoke to the mother-in-law while she was asked to stand outside. Later her mother-in-law gave her some tablets and within the next few days Arpita had bled heavily and lost her baby. Her mother-in-law had given her abortion pills because she had found out that the baby was a girl. Arpita’s family and the doctor had violated a bunch of laws with regard to abortion but Arpita did not know about the laws.

Saudamini had spoken very clearly to *Behan Box*, a platform whose mission is “to transform journalism by centering voices, concerns, aspirations and achievements of women and gender diverse persons through in-depth and evidence-based reportage and storytelling,” on the subject. “Since there is no direct contact between the medical professional and the patient who is a deaf person, there is no confidentiality”, Saudamini had told *BehanBox* through an interpreter. “If a woman wants to get an abortion and her parents or family are against it, how can she get it done? Even if she goes to the hospital alone, the doctor will ask her to come back with her parents or family members.” This had happened to Arpita also when the doctor, during her consultation, had told her to step outside. “They would always prefer a family member to communicate on our behalf, which is not appropriate at all,” Saudamini had said, “It is not ethical. You are discussing the health condition of a person without even communicating with that person. This leads to misinformation and is dangerous. The interpretation needs to be done by a sign language professional who can interpret with clarity what the doctor is saying.”

How strongly Saudamini felt for the plight of the hearing impaired, can be seen in a moving article she wrote in *The Caravan* in 2020 (“An open letter to our deaf daughter from Palwal,” 8 October 2020) when on 25 August, 2020, a ten-year-old deaf girl was kidnapped, raped and murdered in Haryana’s Palwal district. Her body had been found with her

eyes gouged out and her face smashed with a heavy object. *The Caravan* introduced the article thus:

On 25 August, a ten-year-old deaf girl was kidnapped, raped and murdered in Haryana’s Palwal district. Her mother, sister and brother are also deaf. The Times of India reported that when her family tried to register a complaint with the police, they were turned away. Crimes against deaf and mute people, particularly sexual crimes against deaf and mute children, are common in India. In the past year alone, such cases have been reported in Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Jammu and Kashmir, among many others. Deaf and signing activists argue that the government’s failure in providing easy access to specialised teaching techniques for deaf and mute people keeps them unable to communicate effectively and stop such crimes. Saudamini Pethe, a law student and activist for the deaf community, who is Deaf herself, writes an open letter to the minor who was murdered in Haryana.

As Saudamini has not lived to celebrate her AIBE results (the results came after her death), her letter to the deaf child who was raped and killed, is worth reproducing in full here for in that she spells out what needs to be done and maybe some women’s rights groups, gynecologists and other medical personnel and lawyers can take this further. Saudamini writes her article as a moving letter to the deaf ten-year-old child:

My dearest deaf daughter,

I am left with nothing but a feeling of helpless anger and an abyss of sadness, due to the cruel incident of rape and murder of an innocent soul such as yours.

I, as an empowered Deaf woman, cannot accept this fate for you, given the fact that you were raped and killed by unabashed predators. What am I to do? I know of your vulnerability, your inability to protect yourself, which these rapists have exploited through their act, by demonstrating a manifestation of the pure patriarchal and criminal mentality that tells them they can get away with it. A deaf child who cannot express or communicate was an easier target for them to rape and murder, and still roam scot-free.

When I reflect on what could be and what should be, I am left in awe of the enormity of the issues underlying such an incident. My mind is overrun with innumerable unanswered questions of how and why, and the means of preventing anything like this from happening ever again. I am writing this letter with a ray of hope that all the concerned stakeholders—parents, educators, local administration, police officials and Indian society at large—will understand the dire need for early intervention, prevention and empowerment of a deaf child, regardless of gender.

You were living with your parents in the slums in a small village in Haryana. You probably had no street lamps, no CCTV cameras or any other facilities that ensure the security of women, securities we enjoy in some metropolitan cities. These men, who lured you into the nearby fields to commit this heinous crime, lived next door. You ventured out into nearby fields with a young man whom you knew for years, whom you saw on a daily basis, not knowing that his friends were already waiting there to exploit your trust and innocence.

You were not able to hear the conversations happening around you. You were not able to communicate even with your own parents, not having access to a language in which to converse with them. Were you supposed to know, on your own, the existence of demons behind their friendly faces?

Your mother, also a deaf woman, was herself cocooned in her world with no access to sign language. Your family, and society at large, could not teach you to beware of such happenings. For years, unable to express herself or have any say in the matter, your mother sat there, veiled, without words or signs. Your siblings—a deaf sister aged seven and a brother aged three—roamed around, with no awareness of the tragedies that could occur.

Where does that leave us? Are we, as members of the deaf community, supposed to take this incident as just another happening and move on? Could your family learn from this and take care of your siblings by introducing them to the signing community? Could they enrol them in an education centre for deaf children? Or should we also raise our voice, protest, publish and advocate a change in this society? How many of them will be able to hear us? Will society ever understand the gravity of the situation, the complexities underlying this horrendous crime?

I wonder what could have changed had you been enrolled in a Deaf education centre all along? Would you have learned more, communicated more? Maybe you could have gained confidence watching more Deaf individuals like you communicating with ease. Maybe you would have become aware of a lot more. And maybe, just maybe, you might have been able to save yourself from the clutches of your attackers.

If you had a hearing mother, maybe she could have made you more aware. But then how did a similar incident take place in Chennai, where 22 men raped an 11-year-old deaf girl? Why was she unable to communicate to her mother for six long months when she went through this? Could the family have helped teach her to be able to communicate better? Will other families expose their children to the deaf and signing communities, instead of keeping those

like you cocooned and overprotected? Wouldn't that make you more aware, wouldn't it empower you?

The whole situation is related to how deaf people are perceived in society. How long will deafness be perceived as a taboo and kept hidden from society, or answered with quick-fix short-term solutions? Will these solutions truly empower the likes of you? Or could a peer-to-peer environment, meeting Deaf signers and realising you are not alone, have made you confident and improved things for you? When will your family, your educators, doctors and society at large accept this truth and make the changes that we so desperately need? How many more daughters like you have to be victims for society to realise the necessity of finding and implementing peer-to-peer environments as a solution?

The what "should be" done aspect of this whole situation makes me dizzy. When I imagine the numerous perspectives that we as educators hold, the differences of opinions about the correct ways and methods to educate and truly empower a deaf person, I feel completely exhausted. The clashing perspectives on learning sign language and gaining identity, or learning to speak and merge with the hearing community are complex and tedious. The voice of Deaf and signing activists are rarely heard in making such decisions.

We live at a time when in this country, a new National Education Policy has been announced. Indian Sign Language is going to be "standardised" the policy says. The real need of the hour is to accept the variety and richness of Indian Sign Language, its dialect and its grammar. We, the Deaf and signing community, need to create wide spread awareness about the strength and usability of ISL, and to the fact that it gives an identity to the Deaf.

The education system is undergoing drastic changes even for those with hearing and without disabilities. Should we stop at giving you cochlear implants and speech therapy and say you have been empowered, or should we go further? Should we give you bilingual education in ISL and a spoken language? What about accessibility of awareness campaigns meant for the disabled community? Will these be providing true access to information on prevention of rape and self-defence training to disabled children and women? Will the media understand the issue and provide equally accessible information for all by abiding accessibility guidelines when broadcasting important news?

It wrenches my heart, my dear child, to say goodbye to you, with our future still blurry. This has shocked the entire Deaf and signing community deeply. We are organising, we are fighting, so that there has to be no woman who suffered what you did. This gives me a ray of

hope that your spirit will get the justice it deserves. I hope the criminals get the harshest punishment for their crimes, so much so that no one in the future dares to see any deaf person as vulnerable. This injustice has happened because innumerable deaf women like you lack access to empowerment, and are still vulnerable to such inhuman crimes. I hope against hope, that the fight for justice, for empowerment and independence will rage on, against all odds and create a brave new world for our Deaf community someday!

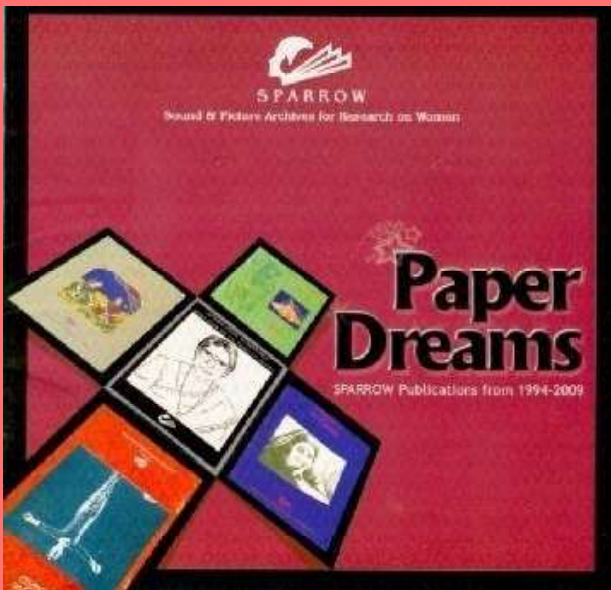
Till then, may you find peace in the thought that your tragic and humiliating death might awaken Indian society's humanity and your life will not go worthless!

With deepest love,
Saudamini Pethe.

Saudamini passed away on 22 April after complaining of breathlessness. True to her name, she was a bolt from the blue. In her short life she has worked relentlessly for the cause of those cannot hear. It is a pity when death takes away such precious lives.

C S Lakshmi

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MAY 2023

A Bridge Between Two Languages: Chevalier Madanakalyani Shanmugasundaram (5 October 1938-11 May 2023)



A bridge has just collapsed... Pondicherry, a former French colony, has known many male scholars and writers who have contributed to create a cultural bridge between Tamil Nadu and France. While their names are paraded in history, one woman is left behind. Even though the French government honoured her with the

titles of Chevalier and Officier, the general public does not know her.

Born on 5th October 1938 in Pondicherry, Madanakalyani Shanmugasundaram fell in love with words at a young age. Without respite, she quickly set about building a bridge between her mother tongue and her adopted language. Author of several books in Tamil and French, she was awarded the prestigious title of Chevalier dans L'Ordre des Palmes Académiques for her literary work and for her work as a teacher of Tamil for 41 years at the Lycée Français de Pondichéry in 2002. The second French honour of Officier came in 2011. The French honour came two years after she was conferred with the Kalaimamani title by the Puducherry Government.

Among the many books Madanakalyani wrote, there was a very significant book translated from French to Tamil: *Puthucheri: Oru Vanigathala Oorin Varalaaru (History of Pondicherry, a Mercantile City)* which was brought out by the French College. Considered one of the most academic, it was unfortunately neglected by her peers and by the scientific community. Madanakalyani had said in an interview, that only 27 copies of this monumental work had been bought.

Madanakalyani collected folk songs of Pondicherry and published them both in Tamil and in French translation. In an article that appeared in *Hindu Thamizh Thisai* (28 August 2016) Madanakalyani has said that in the Cantaloupe, Mauritius and Reunion Islands there lived Tamils who did not speak Tamil but still followed some customs. She heard them sing the Tamil folk songs "Maraiyamman Thalaattu" (Lullaby for Goddess Mariamman) and "Maduraiveeran Alankara Sindhu" (Ballad of Maduraiveeran) without knowing the meaning. So, she began translating the various folk songs into French.

As part of her translation efforts, she translated the folk stories orally transmitted in and around Pondicherry into

French and it was printed in France entitled *Contes tamouls de pondichery. inde du sud* by Karthala in 2003. In 1982 she translated Bharathiar's poems supported by the Government of Pondicherry. In 1988 she took up the translation of *Siruthondar Puranam*, the story of one of the Saivite saints. In 1999 she chose to translate *Sakkiyar Puranam*, the story of another revered Saivite saint. The stories of Vikramadithiya, Indian folk stories, poetry of Bharathidasan were also rendered into French by her. She also took from contemporary Tamil literature what was popular and appreciated. Thus, she translated the most popular fiction writer Sujatha's *Karaiyellam Shenbagapoo* (The Shore is Full of Champak Flowers) into French.

She felt that young French students must know the Tamil epic *Silappadhikaram*. So, she rendered it into French entitled *Cilappatigâram d'Ilangôvagigal pour les jeunes* (Silappathikaram of Ilangovadigal for Young People) for young people to read and published it herself in 2013. She translated from English to French the book *The Aspects of Tamil Culture* by Dr Kothandaraman, former Vice-Chancellor, Chennai University, as *Les aspects de la culture Tamij*. She also published selected French poems into Tamil entitled *Thooral* (Drizzle). Bringing into Tamil the poems of Poet Baudelaire, Victor Hugo, La Fontaine, Apollinaire and Rimbaud were all part of her linguistic zigzag.

The book *Britannicus* by French dramatist Racine was translated by her into Tamil in 1974, titled as *Veezhchi*. What she was best known was for her translation of *La Peste* (The Plague) by Albert Camus as *Kollai Noi* (1999). She is also remembered for her translation, of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* that she did along with V Sriram into Tamil, as *Kutti Ilavarasan* published by Cre-A (1981). Sahitya Akademi published her translation of Balzac's *Le Pere Goriot* as *Thanthai Gorio* in 2012.

She was the Joint Secretary of Puthuvai Tamil Sangam, and was involved in all its literary activities for many years. Writing about Madanakalyani in *New Indian Express* on 6 November 2004, blogger Nandhivarman wrote, "In Pondicherry there lives a humble woman Chevalier who has not caught the due attention of feminist writers and media." He quoted the Tamil research scholar in charge of Bharathiyar Museum, Dr N Sengamala Thayar saying, "It is high time that the women litterateurs of Tamil Nadu gave due recognition to Madanakalyani."

Madanakalyani is undoubtedly, one of the greatest literary figures that Pondicherry has known. Faithful to its tradition, death does service to these great people who during their lifetime are not recognised among the living. But now that this remarkable scholar is no more the bridge she has built between Tamil and French must be brought to light and given

due recognition. That is the least one can do after years of ignoring her excellent work.

—Ari Gautier

(Born in Antananarivo in 1965, Ari Gautier is a French writer and poet of Indo-Malagasy origin. Dedicated to giving Pondicherry its rightful place on the French literary map, Ari Gautier is committed to increasing Indian-francophone literature's visibility in the world. He currently lives in Oslo.)

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The Outburst: Dr Kumud Somkuwar Pawde (18 November 1938-31 May 2023)



'Breaking Barriers' is the title of the narrative of Dr Kumud Pawde included in the book, *Feminism as Experience: Thoughts and Narratives* by Dr Neera Desai, where she has given a detailed interview to Dr Neera Desai on 10 November 1990. Kumudtai did break many barriers of caste and gender.

Kumud Somkuwar was born in 1938 in a Mahar family in Nagpur. Her family was not like other families of the then Maharashtra. Her father was working in a lawyer's office and very liberal in thinking. He himself wanted to learn but because of socio-economic conditions he could not study more. He made up for his lack of knowledge through advanced formal education by becoming an avid reader of books. But he knew the importance of education. And he never differentiated between a girl and a boy. So Kumudtai started going to school. In the school she experienced discrimination because she was Mahar. Later when it came to getting admission in 'Bedekar School', a Brahmin school, Kumudtai was refused admission although she had scored excellent marks. Her father had to resort to using threatening language with the authorities to get admission to that school. Though she was good at studies and other extracurricular activities she was treated differently because of her caste.

She wanted to take Sanskrit language because she had read that Dr Ambedkar had been denied the opportunity to learn Sanskrit because he was from a lower caste; Kumudtai was determined that she should learn it come what may. Many refused to teach her assuming that she would be reading religious and sacred books. Some refused saying since she was good at studies, she should become a doctor, which would be helpful to people of "her caste". One of her

neighbours wondered how she could learn it when there was no one to guide her from their own community. Despite all these different reactions, with the help of her school teacher Gokhale Guruji (Gokhale Sir) she took Sanskrit and later did MA in Sanskrit from Morris College (presently Nagpur Mahavidyalaya).

Kumudtai learning Sanskrit and mastering that language was something not approved by the society. After her MA in Sanskrit, she tried to find a job as a teacher but for two years she could not find a job. She wrote a letter to Babu Jagjivan Ram who was a Minister in the Central Government at that time. The letter was forwarded to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. From Pandit Nehru she not only received Rs 250 as prize money but also a telegram directing her to meet the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Yashwantrao Chavan. When she met him, he advised her to do PhD in Sanskrit. Kumudtai retorted, "Saheb, if you cannot give me a job, tell me frankly. Research is a result of mental well-being. How do you expect me to have a healthy mind on an empty stomach?" She remained unemployed for two years. She got married to Motiram Pawde, a social worker from Kunbi Maratha caste. Kunbi Maratha caste belonged to the category of Other Backward Classes (OBC) which was a caste higher than hers. Two months after the marriage she got a job as assistant lecturer in a government college. Sometime later she wrote a story entitled "The Story of My Sanskrit." It was published by Gangadhar Pantawane in his *Asmitadarsha* magazine. She had ended the story with the line, "It was Kumud Pawde who was given the job, not Kumud Somkuwar!"

Her marriage with Motiram Pawde was also opposed by many because of the caste difference. When the marriage took place there were many protests from many quarters. They tried hard to prevent the marriage. They even kidnapped her husband and hid him in a secret place. The protest was from both the sides. But somehow they got married. After marriage her father-in-law would not drink water in her maternal home. He would not even touch his grandson. Such was the influence of caste on him. Initially she was happy with her career as a college lecturer, her home, her reading but because of her activist husband, her reading on social issues and her own experiences, she slowly moved towards activism. She started writing on several social issues. Then she joined the movement for inter-caste marriages and took active part in it with her husband. This was just a stepping stone to getting involved in the women's movement. She recognised that Indian women were humiliated and neglected, yet she did not agree entirely with some of the arguments put forth by the feminists regarding the institution of family. She strongly believed that relationships between husband and wife must be balanced—dominance

by either was not good. Kumud did not join any established movement and firmly believed that academia was a platform which she could use to direct thoughts and perspectives on gender empowerment. She was committed to the Dalit cause and was one of the founders of National Federation of Dalit Women.

In her autobiography *Antasphot* (The Outburst, 1981), she writes in great detail about her experiences and the barriers and obstacles created in her life, by various people and socio-political institutions and how she overcame them during her life's journey. The death of Kumud Pawde is a great loss to the Dalit movement and to all those committed to eradication of caste. Dalit women struggling for dignity, justice and economic empowerment have lost a great mentor who stood by them all these years.

—Sharmila Sontakke

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IN COLLABORATION WITH
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND CULTURE STUDIES
MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

JUNE 2023

An Imparter of Love, Compassion and Knowledge: Dr Harshada Rathod (1953-13 June 2023)

Feeling extremely sad that our dear colleague, Dr Harshadaben Rathod passed away on 13th June 2023. She was a great asset for Maniben Nanavati Women's College as well as the SNTD Women's University and was serving on many important Committees of the University till her demise. Her valuable contribution and commitment to empowerment of girls

through education was unique. Not stopping at paying their fees, she took personal interest in their lives, making them feel important, boosting their morale, building their self-esteem and confidence, all without being intrusive. Similarly, she mentored young teachers and staff in a gentle manner; she was never bossy or intimidating. Under her supervision many women scholars completed their PhD dissertation. She led a simple life and financially supported the education of innumerable girls throughout her life.

Fond Memories

I have fond memories of teaching at the Economics Department as an adjunct faculty MA and MPhil courses during the early 1980s when she was the sincerest student in the class. She was full of idealism and adhered to Gandhian values of simplicity, earning by the sweat of your brow (*pasine ki kamai*) and high morals. Harshadaben became my colleague when I joined as a regular faculty in 1988 at Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDTWU, Juhu Campus. She had enrolled for a 6 weeks course on 'Women in Changing India' to prepare for the foundation course introduced in 1990. She proactively took part in all activities—discussions, group work, poster making, singing, writing and reviewing. She stood out for her commitment, work ethics and honesty of purpose. After that it was always inspiring to work with her. She had close association with the Economics Departments of UG and PG Courses of all affiliated and conducted colleges of SNDTWU and the University Departments in Mumbai and Pune.

Simplicity, Sincerity and Honesty of Purpose

She was sincere, devoted and punctual in rendering her services, both as a principal of Maniben Nanavati Women's College and as a member of several decision making bodies of the SNTD Women's University. She was an excellent

planner as well as an administrator who was a leader by example. She raised the benchmark of work ethics by putting in maximum effort for all her tasks. It was witnessed in everyone's love for her and an overwhelming response on email, WhatsApp, Facebook as well as the responses received from teachers, staff, scholars and past students shared during the *In Memorium* at the SNDTWU on 15-6-2023.

During her Principalship at Maniben Nanavati Women's College, Vile Parle (W), Dr Harshada Rathod implemented excellent innovative programmes:

- Carefully curated study tours
- Education with entertainment programmes
- Staff-development and gender sensitisation workshops
- Research writing workshops for teachers
- Innumerable inter-collegiate events such as research paper competition, GenderLogues
- Debates on the contemporary challenges faced by India and our planet
- State-National-International seminars/ conferences within and outside India
- Documentary films on socially relevant themes
- Establishment of Centre for Gandhian Studies
- Commemoration of National Book Week, Environment Day, National Human Rights Day, International Women's Day in collaboration with local women's rights organisations, Men Against Violence and Abuse, cultural groups and Literary fora.
- International conferences in collaboration with Asian Universities
- Annual magazine of the college, SRUSHTI, in which students and teachers wrote essays, poems, personal testimonies, achievements.
- Courses such as BMS, BAFI
- International peer-reviewed journal, Research Horizon
- Gym for students
- Summer camps
- Career Development Centre
- Add on course on journalism

High Standard of Work Ethics

Harshadaben had an unmatched energy. I remember working with her on Fee-Structure Committee of SNDTWU in which two of us were assigned to come up with new fee structure for 350 aided and unaided courses taught in around 300 colleges and 5 campuses spread across India. For each course, we had to interreact with the Principal, Director and Head to understand the support system and its costs. Harshadaben would painstakingly make notes based on geographical location of the college, university department, facilities provided in terms of laboratories and equipment,

provision of ICT enabled services and e-library access and then decide the amount for each segment of the fee structure. She believed that we cannot arbitrarily decide, sitting in the headquarter without consulting the course coordinators and the management.

Compassionate Colleague

For me, she was 'a friend in need'. During the last 2 years of nursing my paralysed father, she not only gave useful tips and shared her experiences of looking after her ailing parents but also helped by personally carting a heavy box of hygiene products (in bulk) from the wholesale market in her neighbourhood. She never thought that it was beneath her dignity to personally carry the huge box from Ghatkopar to the college from where I would pick it up.

When the Mumbai police conducted 'Operation Help' and rescued thousands of trafficked girls who were housed in 13 shelter homes of Mumbai; as a principal, Harshadaben opened the doors of the college for those girls who were eligible for admission; and some of them were admitted to the junior college. She did this without any publicity and also while maintaining confidentiality about their painful past. These girls in difficult circumstances were given one-to-one counselling, hand-holding in teaching and care for their dignity and safety. Now, several of them are leading respectable lives. I was most touched by this compassionate and life-changing action on the part of Harshadaben.

Quest for Life Long Learning

Harshadaben was always ready to learn from newer challenges. When she was appointed as member of Ethics Committee of Nanavati Hospital, she would go through all medical documents painstakingly, refer to sources from the internet to understand medical terminologies as she could not discuss confidential matter with outsiders. She imparted the same spirit of life long learning among her students, staff and teachers. As a principal, she ensured that teaching and non-teaching staff progressed in their respective fields by learning new skills and knowledge of contemporary challenges in higher education. She not only encouraged the staff development but also gave full facilities and if needed, financial support to the staff to complete their courses of skill enhancement for efficient administration and record keeping. As a result, her college was the first to come up with MIS (Management Information System) for automatic record keeping in the Cloud and conducting online exams.

For her students and PhD scholars, she played the role of mentor, guide and philosopher. It was an amazing experience working with her as she touched our heads and hearts. She set an example of a good human being, helpful

colleague, proactive administrator, honest institution builder and hardworking researcher. She had bare minimum personal needs, believed in the dignity of labour and nurtured the younger generation with generosity of heart. She was a GIVER—of kindness, knowledge and support. Dr Harshada Rathod has made a permanent place in our hearts. She will be remembered as an ideal teacher and a role model for the academic community. Let your energy mingle with nature, dear Harshadaben.

—Vibhuti Patel



Titli Udi: Sharda Rajan Iyengar (25 October 1933-14 June 2023)



A veteran singer Sharda Rajan Iyengar died at the age of 89 after losing her battle to cancer. She hailed from an Iyengar family and was inclined towards music from childhood. Raj Kapoor spotted Sharda performing during an event in Tehran, Iran. He was so impressed with her voice that he immediately offered her the song *Titli Udi* in his movie *Suraj* in 1966. The song was a big hit and became a highlight of her career. Though the song became big hit, she could not get Filmfare Award of that year for there was only one award for playback singer and Mohammed Rafi's song *Baharo Phool Barsao* received the award for 1966. But from then on Filmfare started giving two awards for best playback singer: one for male singer and the other for female singer. Thus Sharda made history. Thereafter Sharda was nominated four years in a row (1968-71) for best female playback singer and she won the Filmfare Award for Best Female Playback Singer for the cabaret *Baat Zara Hai Aapas Ki in Jahan Pyar Miley* (1970). In a short span Sharda won two Filmfare awards. She sang under many great music directors such as Shankar from Shankar-Jaikishan duo, Usha Khanna, Ravi, Dattaram, Iqbal Qureshi and others. She sang with singers such as Mohammed Rafi, Asha Bhosle, Kishore Kumar, Yesudas, Mukesh, Suman Kalyanpur. She sang for many leading heroines of 1970s. She was the first Indian female singer to record her own pop album in India with *Sizzlers* which was released in 1971 by HMV. Her contribution to film music was not limited to singing but she also composed music for some films such as *Maa Behen Aur Biwi*, *Tu Meri Mein Tera*, *Kshitij*, *Mandir Masjid*, and *Maila Anchal*. She also contributed as a lyricist with the name Singaar for the song *Ek Chehra Jo Dil Ke Kareeb* for the film *Garam Khoon* (1980).

Other than Hindi she performed songs in Telugu, Marathi, Gujarati. A duet *Hiravya Hiravra Rangachi Zadi Ghanadaat*...she sang with Jayawant Kulkarni in a Marathi film *Tee Mee Navhech* (1970) was so popular that no fun trip gets completed without this song. In 2007, she released her album *Andaaz-E-Bayan Aur*, featuring her own compositions based on Mirza Ghalib's Ghazals.

Sharda was not one of the top playback singers but she had her own fan followers and they will never forget her.

—Sharmila Sontakke

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The One Who Loved Friends: Jayashri Deshpande (19 November 1945-15 June 2023)



Jayashri was a year junior to me in the Department of American Studies in the School of International Studies in JNU. Before it got merged with JNU in 1970, the School of International Studies had been Indian School of International Studies, an academic institution founded in 1955 by Pandit Hriday Nath Kunzru, Prof.

A Appadorai and Professor M S Rajan under the auspices of the Indian Council of World Affairs. Its office and library were located in Sapru House on Barakhama Road and the hostel was right behind Sapru House in the same compound. This is where Jayashri and a whole lot of us stayed till we shifted to the Godavari Hostel in what we then called the new campus. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the life of many of us was nurtured and built in Sapru House. Our teachers were unorthodox and so were many of us from different states who were put together in Sapru House. Jayashri and I together unlearned many things we had learnt before reaching there and we enjoyed the process. There were many evenings when we sat at the hostel steps facing a small garden and tried speaking in Spanish as Spanish was a foreign language we had to learn. Often, for a difficult word, I would slip into Tamil and Jayashri into Marathi! There would be bursts of laughter after that. Sometimes I would tell her a story I was planning to write and she always accompanied me when I went to Connaught Place to buy my weekly Tamil magazines. Once when I fractured my leg playing badminton and Jayashri and I rushed to the hospital, she pestered the doctor asking him if I would be okay and if I would be able to dance because I was a dancer. I remember the doctor got irritated and shouted, "Yes, yes, yes!"

We chose different paths in our life. She chose to teach in

Lady Shriram College. She was also Vice-Principal later and also the hostel warden. She got a Fulbright fellowship and went to the US for a year to continue with her research in American Studies. I preferred to do independent research and not in American Studies. But we stayed in touch. She kept in touch with all her friends and I have gone to LSR and spoken to her students and also spent time at her place in the LSR campus before and after her marriage. She got married late in life. The story of her marriage is a very interesting one. Her mother-in-law and her mother were good friends. If I remember right, her mother-in-law who had passed away, came in her mother's dream and told her, "Why don't you get your daughter married to my son?" And then he came to LSR and met her. He was a widower but his teenaged children accepted Jayashri easily. It became her family and that is how she came to have a home in Mumbai.



Jayashri Deshpande, Vasanti Damle and C S Lakshmi

We kept in touch and met once in a while. Accompanied by Vasanti Damle, she came to SPARROW in 2016 and we decided that we would meet regularly now that we were getting old! We decided to meet somewhere midway and met at Bandra for lunch. We had lunch laughing and joking and talking about Sapru House much to the shock of younger people in the restaurant who probably thought ladies of our age should not be laughing so loudly and having such fun! After a leisurely lunch we went to an ice cream shop and ordered ice cream all of us were not supposed to eat! When Vasanti passed away last year Jayashri and I decided to meet in November. Our birthdays are just two days apart. In Sapru House we used to celebrate it together mostly except when we had fought which we did often! She had gone to the US to visit her daughter, and news came that she had had a massive heart attack and passed away. This November will feel heavy for me. Spread your warmth and love wherever you are, Jayashri!

C S Lakshmi

Actress in a Supporting Role: Shanta Tambe (1933-19 June 2023)



With the death of Shanta Tambe Marathi audience lost an eminent actress who had acted in supportive roles of the yester year Marathi films. She started her acting career by acting in dramas of Desh Bandhu Natak Mandali, a theatre troupe. Then due to the family conditions she started acting in films. She acted in many films of 1960s such as

Chandal Chaukadi (Nuisance Making Quartet, 1961), *Mohityanchi Manjula* (Manjula, Mohite's Daughter, 1963), *Sawaal Maza Aika* (Listen to My Question, 1964), *Molakarin* (Maid, 1963), *Bai Mothi Bhagyachi* (A Woman With A Big Fortune, 1968). She acted with the great directors of then Marathi film industry, such as Bhalji Pendharkar, Dinkar Patil, Anant Mane. Later she also acted in films like, *Songadya* (Imposter, 1971), *Asla Navara Nako Ga Bai* (Don't Want This Kind of Husband, 1977), *Don Bayka Phajeeti Aika* (Listen the fun of having two wives, 1982), *Mardani* (Brave Lady, 1983). She passed away due to old age at 90.

—Sharmila Sontakke

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Teacher and a Writer: Prabhavati Purohit (25 March 1927-20 June 2023)



Writer, teacher and wife of Marathi short stories writer K J Purohit passed away at the age of 96. She was from Amravati, but came to Mumbai in the 70's. She was teaching Marathi and English at R V Technical School at Khar. She has written three books *Motha Ghar* (A Big House), *Savalya* (Shadaows) and *Vechak Vietnami Katha* (Selected

Short Stories of Vietnam). *Motha Ghar* is a collection of 15 articles she wrote in daily *Loksatta*. These articles are autobiographical in which she writes about her huge maternal house at Chandrapur, the people around her, the different maids who worked for her, and an article on her husband. This collection of her articles was published on her 75th birthday. *Savalya* is a collection of biographical sketches of people around Prabhatai. Prabhatai and her husband visited Vietnam thrice to visit their daughter, house where she came to know about people, their culture which she liked very much. She translated a few legends and folk stories of Vietnam in Marathi and published her third book. Compare to her

husband Prabhatai wrote only three books, but the first two books of her shows a cultural picture of a middle class educated family of mid-20th century. And her contribution as a teacher is also invaluable.

—Sharmila Sontakke

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Facing Autumn: Sowmya Beedu (24 April 1979-22 June 2023)



Sowmya Beedu was a student of Kalakshetra; she played the veena and often posted on music and discussed ragas and songs with her friends. She was active on Instagram in the name of Rudra. She was also a painter and a Tamil poet. She was a yoga teacher as well, on whom many depended. She had also set up an Art School

called Step In and she described it as "a place where your creativity is valued more than words!" She had some very talented students who got recognition about whom she posted on her page. Sowmya had been ill for a while and had gone for an intestinal surgery and she passed away on 22nd June. She had written a poem on the biography of a leaf that should learn to face autumn which was translated by Sri N Srvatsa. The original Tamil poem which is like an epitaph by itself, and the translation with a few changes is reproduced below:

சருகின் சரிதை

பச்சைப் பச்சைலென்று
பச்சைக்கும் பச்சையிலை
பச்சையைத் துறக்கையில்
பரவச நிலையடைகிறது...!
நிறம் துறந்து
உரமாகும் முன்
இலையைத் தயார்படுத்தவது
எதன் வேலை...?
வேளை வந்ததும்
உதிர்காலத்தை எதிர்கொள்ள
கிளை இலைக்கு
போதனை செய்யுமாம்...!
குருத்து அரும்பு
துளிர் தளிர்
கொழுந்து இலை
சருகென்பது ஏழாம்நிலை...!
மஞ்சளைப் போர்த்தி
வர்மிலிபனை அணைத்து
கீரிம்சனைத் தழுவி
பழுப்பாசிச் சருகாவாய்...!
தன்றிறைவை உணர்த்தி
நிறங்களை வைத்துப்
படிப்படியாகப் பற்றைத்துறக்கக்
பாடம் எடுக்குமாம்...!
அண்ணாந்து பார்த்து
காற்றுக்குக் காத்திருந்து
கிளையிலிருந்து விடுவித்துச்
சரிந்து சறுக்குமழகு...!
உருண்டு சென்று
இறுதியாக ஓசையெழுப்பி
மண்ணில் புரண்டு
பூமியில் புதையும்...!

#ருத்ரா #ஸௌம்யா_பீடு

- சினை - ஞானம்
- நிறங்கள் - பருவங்கள்
- காற்று - ஈசன்/ காலம்
- பூமி - இடுகாடு

Biography of a Leaf

The green leaf
glistening in a vivid viridian
attains the state of ecstasy
when it gives up greenness...!
Whose duty is it
to prepare the leaf
before it relinquishes colour
and becomes fertiliser?
When the time comes,
the branch would
teach the leaf
to face autumn...!
Terminal bud, papilla,
sprout, tender shoot,
tender leaf, leaf
and dry leaf which is
the seventh stage...!
Wrapped in yellow,
embracing vermilion
and hugging crimson,
you will turn brown
and become a dry leaf...!
Teaching self-fulfillment,
Based on colours
it'd teach how to renounce
step by step...!
Gazing upwards,
waiting for the wind,
detaching itself from the branch,
the beauty of slipping and sliding...!
It'd go tumbling,
making noise in the end,
roll in the dirt
and get buried in the earth...!

Sowmya's key to metaphors:

- Branch: Wisdom
- Colours: Seasons
- Wind: God / Time
- Earth: Graveyard.

—C S Lakshmi

JULY 2023

**A Daughter of Lilavati: Dr Mangala Narlikar
(17 May 1943-17 July 2023)**

Eminent mathematician and educationist Dr Mangala Narlikar, the wife of astrophysicist and writer Prof. Jayant Narlikar, passed away in Pune due to recurrence of cancer, at the age of 80.

Mangala Narlikar was born as Mangala Rajwade on 17 May 1943. In school and college, she was a bright student and won the middle-school and high school scholarships given by the government. She was interested in studying mathematics. She completed her BA with mathematics from the University of Bombay in 1962 and MA (Maths) in 1964 with first rank and also won the Chancellor's gold medal. After that she joined the school of mathematics at TIFR for research. Just after she was promoted to be a research associate there, she got married with the well-known astrophysicist Dr Jayant Narlikar in 1966. After marriage they moved to Cambridge, England, where Prof. Narlikar was working. In Cambridge she attended some graduate lecture courses and also taught a course and supervised some undergraduate students. But she could not pursue her research for she was busy setting up a home and also looking after two daughters.

In 1972, they decided to come back to India to be with her ageing parents-in-law. Dr Jayant Narlikar became professor in TIFR and got accommodation across the street from TIFR. Mangala again started attending lecture courses and started working in Professor Ramachandra's group on analytic number theory. It took her a long time to get her PhD because she had to bear the responsibility of two ageing parents-in-law and two daughters. She got her PhD in 1982 from the University of Bombay. By that time their third daughter was also born.

After obtaining her doctoral degree, she continued to work with TIFR from 1982 to 1985 as a Pool Officer in the School of Mathematics and published a few papers. She also taught MPhil students of the Department of Mathematics of University of Bombay. In 1989 they moved to Pune where she worked in the mathematics department of the University of Pune (now Savitribai Phule Pune University). Prof. Jayant Narlikar became the founder-director of the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) in Pune set up by University Grants Commission in 1988. In their tribute to Dr Mangala the IUCAA said that Dr Mangala was the strongest supporter of IUCAA's founder-director Prof.

Jayant Narlikar and that she was thus instrumental in the birth and evolution of IUCAA.

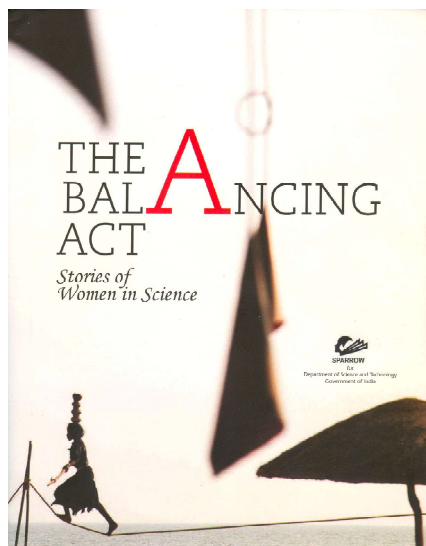
After Prof. Jayant Narlikar's retirement he accepted the invitation of College de France for their Annual International Chair (2003-2004). They were in Paris for a year and without any familial responsibilities. Dr Mangala considered this a very memorable one. Both she and her husband visited many countries. She wrote about these visits in her book *Pahilele Desh, Bhetaleli Manase*, (Countries Visited, People Met, 2012). Dr Mangala was a proponent of rationalism and scientific attitude. Mathematics was her passion but she was equally passionate about reading, writing, travelling, cooking, arts, sewing clothes for her daughters and other household activities.

Teaching mathematics to bright students as well as those who dreaded maths, interested her. Apart from writing a few books on introductory mathematics, she also contributed to the revision of the math syllabus for school students.

In an essay published in *Lilavati's Daughters: The Women Scientists of India*, she describes herself as a part-time scientist. On her combining her profession with looking after the household functions she wrote: "My story is perhaps a representation of the lives of many women of my generation who are well-educated but always put household responsibilities before their personal careers."

We have lost another daughter of Lilavati who was an eminent mathematician but yet considered herself only a part-time scientist.

—Sharmila Sontakke



**SPARROW
PUBLICATION**

Farewell Comrade Sivakami: R Sivakami (Date of demise 25 July 2023)



It was the year 1992 News came that her brother Nandagopal had been taken to the Annamalai Nagar police station in Chidambaram for interrogation and had hanged himself. Agitated by the news when she went there it was found that he was brutally beaten up by the police and hanged. His wife Padmini who had gone looking for him was shattered.

(She had also been gang raped by the police) Comrade Sivakami and her husband Raja realised that only CPM party could fight against this atrocity. They contacted the Party.

I went along with other comrades to the police station. Comrade Sivakami and others told us about the atrocities. There was Nandagopal as a dead body inside, the crowd that had gathered outside after hearing about the police atrocity and the police who claimed it was a suicide in-between... One of the comrades told the crowd, "Are you watching all this as if it is a show? Are police special in any way?" and the crowd began to throw stones at the police station. The first stone that hit the police station was from the hand of Sivakami.

Kadalur district secretary Comrade K Balakrishnan and Jhansirani, secretary of the district women's association intervening in the matter and the protests that followed and police being punished due to the determined struggle of the Communist Party (Marxist), is a known history. For this victory in getting justice there was a lot of struggle and often we slept in the Party office fearing attack. The dedicated support of comrades from the villages around Chidambaram was tremendous.

Through all this Comrade Sivakami stood firm. She warded off attempts to buy her off; withstood threats that she may be in danger and comments that there was nothing she could do against the police. Whatever they said, was countered by Sivakami and her family who stood determined, with the reply: "The Marxist Party will take care of us. We will fight come what may. It is better to die than to surrender." That was the kind of family her family was.

We got introduced to Sivakami then and later she became our comrade for always. She always came forward with her family, to do Party's work. The way she addressed us as comrade used to sound so different. In 1995, there was the Party's district meeting and I don't remember a single day that Sivakami did not turn up for going around her area to collect funds. We used to go from house-to-house for fund

collection. All those who came for fund collection ate at her place. There would definitely be fish curry. Even as we used to go out for the day, she used to call out to her eldest daughter and say, “Shankari, everyone would come for lunch in the afternoon. Prepare the food.”

She would be the first person to pay the annual levies. She would enthusiastically pay the annual subscription for the newspaper *Theekkathir*, give donations to the party and take the responsibility to give travelling allowance to those who come for the meeting. Although her husband Raja worked as a foreman in the sanitary section of the Rajah Muthiah Medical College, for all the Party meetings Sivakami and her husband would always come together. Many of us worked together with them. Later, due to main responsibilities for the district I had to be in Chennai for many years and also move to Kadalur and Pondicherry. Whenever I met them in some Party events Sivakami and Raju spoke to me affectionately. When she fell ill, I met her twice. Even though she was tired she spoke with her usual enthusiasm.

And now I see her lifeless body laid to rest in a glass case. My mind goes back twenty-five years. Memories of her work and her supporting the Party till the end arise like waves in my mind. If after the death of a person we have something to say about them, that means they have lived.

You have lived comrade Sivakami. Farewell. Salute to you.

—S G Rameshbabu
(From his Facebook Post on 26 July)

An Art Historian of Medieval India: Kavita Singh (5 November 1964-30 July 2023)



Those who are regular visitors to the Jaipur Literature Festival would know how Kavita Singh’s brilliant talks on Mughal paintings kept her audience glued to their seats.

Kavita was former professor and dean at the School of Arts and Aesthetics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University. Kavita joined JNU in 2001 and was the co-founder of the School of Art and Aesthetics. Her area of specialisation was Mughal and Rajput schools of painting and the history and politics of museums. Before she joined JNU, she was a research editor in Marg Publications and also a visiting guest curator at the San Diego Museum of art. She was involved in many art projects. One of them was a three-year project from 2009-2012 called *The Temple and the*

Museum: Sites for Art in India which she did as a partner at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz of the Max Planck Society with Professor Dr Gerhard Wolf and Hannah Baader.

Much recognition came her way in the form of fellowships and scholarships. In 2018, she was among the six important researchers that Infosys chose for an award. She won the Infosys Prize by the Infosys Science Foundation in the humanities category for her “extraordinarily illuminating study of Mughal, Rajput and Deccan art as well as her insightful writing on the historical function and role of museums and their significance in the increasingly fraught and conflicted social world in which visual culture exists today.”

Kavita Singh died of cancer at the age of 58. Her 59th birthday was just three months away. In the years that life gave her as an art historian, she touched heights that very few could. Her death is a loss to everyone who would like to understand art and its links with cultural and national identities.

—C S Lakshmi

A Banyan Tree falls: Vaduvachi (1921-30 July 2023)



She had a body like the sturdy acacia tree. If she got up in the morning at 3:30 a.m. she would go to bed at 8 p.m. She would collect at least one sack full of unwinnowed grains enthusiastically. She was adept at cutting grass, transplanting, weeding and threshing. She was so simple-

hearted that she would not differentiate between women and men. She was a generous person and would open her little string bag and with a smile give my elder sister and me hundred rupees or fifty rupees to buy books, slippers or snacks.

When my father built a house, she carried the building material and never revealed that her neck began to hurt badly. All this because she wanted my mother, her younger sister, to live well. Such a large-hearted person she was.

Periamma’s death after that of my father and mother taught me a lot of things. There are those who live only for their children but my Periamma came to our village with her husband and son so we could live a good life. She became a banyan tree to all of us when we were growing up and found happiness in a simple life.

Today Periappa is no more. Her son is also no more. Only

her daughter and I remain as what she has left behind.

The Kaveri basin, the shores of river Kollidam and the agricultural fields would have a lot of stories to say about her. Ever since I remember, she would only wear the voile sari I would buy for her for Diwali. She would wear it and smile her sparkling smile.

Today my family link is like a house without a roof. Periamma was the one who gave an identity to my dignified life. My taste buds yearn for her dried fish curry.

On July 30th, at the age of 102, she mingled with nature. Periamma Vaduvachi is no more.

—Aranga Mallika

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AUGUST 2023

A Dragonfly's Empathy: Sneha Belcin (1997-28 August 2023)



For those who followed her on the Facebook and other social media platforms she was a vivacious and dynamic person who was outspoken and a person who did not hold back her punches. She was a journalist, an activist and a filmmaker. Caste and gender were the issues that kept her active and alive.

She had joined the *New Indian Express* only in March this year, as part of their digital and video team. Even those who did not know her remember her for her forceful article which was a strong critique of the Vetrimarani movie *Viduthalai Part 1*. Before joining *New Indian Express* she was part of Neelam Productions of film director Pa. Ranjith.

Sneha grew up in Nagercoil and Coimbatore. She got her degree in Prahladrai Dalmia Lions College of Commerce and Economics in Mumbai. An avid reader and a writer she wrote poems and blog posts under the pen name "Kaartumbi" in her blog Kaartumbi.blogspot.com. Thumbi means the dragonfly in Tamil and the dragonflies just start coming out after the rains and kaarthumbi means the dragonfly of the rainy season.

Early in her career she joined the *Covai Post* as a reporter and later joined the Neelam Productions as a creative producer. Her weekly satire series were exclusively aired on the company's YouTube platform. One film of hers that Neelam social channel released that caught a lot of attention was the film *Savundu* that spoke about the power politics

between a policeman and a person from a marginalised community. Dalit rights, trans rights, mental health, cinema and culture were other issues that she engaged with. Her *Munnurai* series addressed several issues including the Me-Too Movement and its gender politics. Mental health was something that she spoke on often but despite her mentioning it many did not realise the seriousness of her struggle with BPD (Borderline Personality Disorder) and hence her suicide came as a shock to many. In a touching tribute written in *Dinamani* newspaper by her mother, which has been translated into English by Gladwin Emmanuel in *New Indian Express* on 8th September 2023, her mother speaks about her daughter. Some parts of the tribute are reproduced below:

As if she had foreseen her leave-taking from this earth, through the month of August 2023, Sneha kept nagging me to stay close to her. She refused to eat pleading with me to feed her. She asked me to plait her hair like a schoolgirl. During the nights, she slept hugging me tightly. She woke up at odd hours to watch the video of superstar Rajinikanth's speech as she was working on a project that was to take a critical look at Rajinikanth and his politics....

Books were her life. She loved reading. She hunted down the books of Dr Ambedkar and read them. She wrote a lot. As much as possible, she recorded her thoughts on video....

She was only 16 when she began to jot down her thoughts. Every New Year's Day, I used to gift a diary to Sneha, her younger sister Shwetha, and their father. Sneha filled those diaries with her writings. She wrote little about herself. She had a far-reaching vision of social issues. As an individual, she stood up to challenge the evils of society. She expressed her thoughts on social concerns in poems that were beautiful and wise at once. And I ended up as one of her many admirers.

I lost Sneha's younger sister Shwetha, who at the end used to be frightened even by the sound of the shutting of windows, on April 2, 2016, at the age of 14. During those distressing times, whenever I broke down, Sneha stood right next to me, holding my hands and wiping away my tears. She was my sole strength. She took me to beaches where we let the tides wash our feet.

Thus, Sneha helped me overcome the loss of her sister to a great extent.

When I look back, there was a time when Shwetha and Sneha used to huddle close to me as they fell asleep on my right and left sides during the night. Today, I am overpowered when I realize that Sneha is no longer with me to help me overcome this loneliness and loss. My heart wishes to believe that she is still working in Chennai and she will come back to me soon.

Sneha, till the end, wrestled to set herself free from the medical condition called depression. She even sought medical help to get rid of depression. When she was alive, I didn't realize that depression is an illness. I thought it was merely an expression widely used by the young people of this generation. Her passing away has made me realise that depression is a killer. Depression is not an issue of a particular individual alone....

Maybe not willing to live on this earth of mortals she has left to live among angels. I rue the loss of the light of her intelligence that lit up my path and that of many others.

Dear daughter, I bid adieu. When we meet amid the stars you so loved, we can discuss what happened after you left over a cup of black tea."

Her poems and articles on her blog were sensitively written and were on varied subjects that included the city of Mumbai and the many different harassments women go through as those who live and work in cities. In one of her posts, she writes a letter to her sixteen-year-old self. A very unusual letter where she is talking to her younger self. She tells her sixteen-year-old self in Mumbai, to get on with life:

"... You are going to starve. But you will find out that is nothing to be afraid of. You will proclaim that creators aren't scared of poverty, creators celebrate poverty. By the way, you are going to invent a lot of two minute dishes. Bread upma - like never before - will be a hit.

You will miss home. But you will realise clouds and trees are your home. Maybe you are a bird. Be a graceful eagle. It will be a terrific combination. You are going to have a lot of heart breaks. You will be

lonely. But your love will teach you that loneliness is what makes you a creator....

But, you are going to meet some awesome people, who will practically alter your lifestyle. You will be very grateful to them. They will teach you 'the agree to disagree' philosophy. Initially, you will be stubborn, you won't let anything get to you. And, unlike home, you won't have to brush and bath daily. You won't have to wash your clothes daily. You can skip baths. You will love that.

And, you must write more. 19-year-old you is angry you spent years infatuating. Your vulnerability is going to be more visible to you. You are still learning to hide that. You will have plans to shame Mumbai before you leave, but you won't. You will miss that crazy city.

—19-year-old (and wont age anymore) Sneha."

One poem of hers that gives a hint of what she was going through was posted on October 29, 2019. It is a poem that haunts you for a long time. It is called "A Dragonfly's Empathy."

*I meet myself often.
I extend my hand and I shake it awkwardly.
I notice my quirks and try to start a conversation about it.
I hope desperately I don't come off as a rude person to myself.
I prepare a wicked green tea for the guest, that is myself.
I watch me drink the tea and burn my tongue, so I leave the
room to avoid the embarrassment.
I tell myself about the movie that has been resonating in me,
recently.
I watch myself listen to me talk about the movie with wide
eyes.
I smile at me.
I wait for me to break the silence.
I stare into my eyes to let myself know it's cool if I am boring.
No, I never did any of that.
I have never met myself.
I have never been kind to myself*

—C S Lakshmi

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SEPTEMBER 2023

A Quiet Music: Vatsala Gopalan (28 December 1932-10 September 2023)



Tribute to Amma. Whatever one's age, a mother's death brings sadness and emptiness when it happens. Even if it is not entirely unexpected but when it happens the heart refuses to accept it.

Yesterday, my mother Vatsala Gopalan passed away. She was ninety. She had a totally fulfilled life with a wonderful husband and children. She suffered from dementia the last few years and became like a child. She passed through many stages of that disease and finally became like a silent saint with nothing to speak. Her death gave her a release. But we, her children, are immersed in grief.

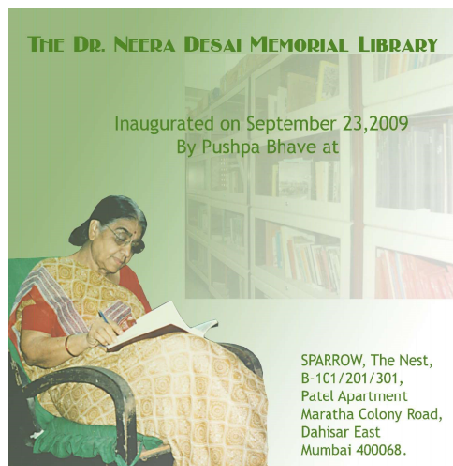
The last two days have been filled with memories of her. Her efficient way of functioning, her cooking, all these things have been rising like waves in the mind. She loved reading English and Tamil novels. She was a very good singer. When she was 80, she composed songs and wrote notations for them with the ragams and sang them and we released C.D.s of her music.

Her world consisted of us three, her children, and our children.

However, all these bonds and memories vanished from her mind like autumn leaves.

Adieu, Amma! Our reverential salutations to you!

—Radhika Parthasarathy



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The Gita Mehta Sutra: Gita Mehta (1943-16 September 2023)



In 1979 when Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola* came out mocking the westerners who sought instantaneous spiritual enlightenment through a guru in India, many of us who belonged to Gita's generation and who had seen such westerners could relate to the book. That was when we began to find out who Gita Mehta

was and came to know about this multi-faceted personality who was a writer and documentary filmmaker. War and conflict were the areas of her interest and she had covered the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. From 1970 to 1971 she was a television war correspondent for the US television network NBC. She was daughter of Biju Patnaik, a freedom fighter and Chief Minister of Orissa. She had studied in India and in the UK. She was married to Sonny Mehta, former head of the Alfred A. Knopf publishing house, in 1965.

Karma Cola was followed by other books. In 1989 came the novel *Raj*, a historical novel based on India's struggle for independence. In 1993, Gita Mehta published her third book, *A River Sutra*, a collection of stories about how love links people and the holy river Narmada. In 1997, was published *Snakes and Ladders: Glimpses of Modern India*, a collection of essays and her personal view of India and its many different aspects. The first chapter of this book "Freedom's Song" in the archived page of *The New York Times* will be reprinted in our next newsletter. In 1998, came *Mountain Sutra*. In 2006 was published the illustrated volume *Eternal Ganesha: From Birth to Rebirth*, where Gita Mehta explored the ubiquitous nature of Ganesha, the much-loved Hindu god. Her books have been translated into 21 languages.

Gita Mehta again became prominent in news when she declined the Padma Shri awarded to her in 2019. She wrote to the government saying, "I am deeply honoured that the Government of India should think me worthy of a Padma Shri but with great regret I feel I must decline as there is a general election looming and the timing of the award might be misconstrued, causing embarrassment both to the government and myself, which I would much regret. Her turning down the award, was because her younger brother Naveen Patnaik of BJD (Biju Janata Dal) and BJP were political rivals in Odisha. Her refusal, at that time, was seen as a snub and insult to the government and an anti-national gesture.

But Gita Mehta, the writer, remained a respected writer in the minds of all. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among

those who condoled her death: “I am saddened by the passing away of noted writer Smt. Gita Mehta Ji. She was a multifaceted personality, known for her intellect and passion towards writing as well as film making. She was also passionate about nature and water conservation. My thoughts are with Naveen Patnaik Ji and the entire family in this hour of grief. Om Shanti.”

Laila Tyabji wrote a touching homage to her on her Facebook page on 17 September 2023, worth reproducing here to show yet another facet of Gita Mehta:

Laila Tyabji’s post on 17 September 2023:

“So very sad to hear of Gita Mehta’s death. Brilliant, beautiful, sparky, witty, always in stunning iridescent sarees, a wonderful writer and conversationalist; but also, that rare commodity, a wonderful, perceptive listener.

Gita was at Cambridge when my eldest brother was up at Oxford, and they used to meet then. I knew her later on her visits to India—with her brother Naveen, and at Mani Mann’s.

Once, in the early 1990s, together at a very glittering dinner party at the French Embassy, she asked how I was, and I replied that I was a little discombobulated having just come back from rural Bihar that morning. The contrasts between my two worlds were almost too much. The champagne we were drinking would support the entire family of the women I’d been working with for a month.

In answer to her questions, I told her more of the tribal tussar spinners who lived in a state of perpetual bondage. Having taken on a loan of 500 rupees for a family funeral or wedding from the local moneylender with interest rates of 40 to 50 % they then struggled to pay off the interest by working at spinning yarn for him 7 days a week, with no hope of ever getting paid. The phrase “Bonded Labour” had suddenly acquired meaning. And it was a life sentence.

It was my second visit to the area; brought there by a young local activist, a follower of Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave. Our dream was to teach the women to weave the yarn they spun, so they could earn as well as survive.

“How much money would it cost to pay off their debts?” Gita asked. I did the math; 100 women x approximately Rs 500 each.

“I’m writing another book at the moment. I’ll give you the royalties when it’s published, then you can pay off that horrible man,” said Gita. We resumed our meal and chat and I thought no more of that moment of impulsive warmth.

Months later I got a letter from her American publisher, “I am instructed by Mrs. Gita Mehta to pay you the sum of....” We were flabbergasted at her generosity and her remembering that fleeting conversation so long ago.

With the money from *A River Sutra*, Dastkar was able to not only pay the women’s debts and secure their freedom, but set up a weaving and natural dyes project, getting a young intern from NIFT to work with the women, teaching them how to weave lovely sarees in subtle earthy tones. These became the rage in Delhi, seen and sought after everywhere, selling in lakhs at our bazaars. “A sari that works equally well at a cremation or a cocktail party”, was one Delhi socialite’s sincere but rather macabre compliment!

How Gita laughed when I told her this. Characteristically, even 30 years later, she would always ask about the women and how they were faring. And about Dastkar’s current work.

Gita is unforgettable anyway, but every time I see *A River Sutra* on my book shelf, it reminds me all over again of that generous gesture made without fanfare, and the love and thanks those women in Bhagalpur owe her.”

Gita Mehta’s sutra was enduring love, respect and compassion for the people and the land she belonged to. Her books and the life she chose to live clearly illustrate that.

—C S Lakshmi

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A Lotus that Bloomed in the Swamp: Saroja Vaidyanathan (19 September 1937-21 September 2023)



They say lotuses bloom in swamps. Saroja Vaidyanathan had to deal with swamps in the society that tried to pull her down questioning her art. But a lotus makes even swamps its home.

Saroja had mastered both dance and music learning from the best of gurus. She trained in

Bharata Natyam at the Saraswathi Gana Nilayam in Chennai and later under guru Kattumannar Muthukumaran Pillai of Thanjavur. She studied Carnatic music under the legendary Professor P. Sambamoorthy at the University of Madras. She also did her DLitt in dance from the Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, Khairagarh. She set up Ganesa Natyalaya in 1974 in Delhi and her art and her work have been recognised in many ways. But she achieved all this despite the restraints of marital life and the constant criticism of those around who looked upon dance as not a “respectable” art.

Saroja got married in her teens to a highly placed government officer and her marital family did not approve of her dancing. But she got permission to teach her art. It was when her husband was posted in Delhi that she set up the Ganesa Natyalaya although her husband had misgivings about it. But Saroja was determined and Ganesa Vidyalaya found a place in the Qutub Institutional Area in 1988. The students there are taught dance and also Carnatic music to give them a good grounding in dance. They are also taught Tamil and Hindi.

Saroja is known for her choreography of full-length ballets and some two thousand Bharatanatyam items. She set to dance some of the songs and poems of Subramania Bharati. She has also written books on Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam. With such a sincere commitment to the art she loved, many honours came her way. She accompanied the then Prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee during his visit to the ASEAN summit in 2002 and undertook a cultural tour of South East Asia. Saroja was conferred the Padma Shri in 2002 and the Padma Bhushan in 2013 by the Government of India. She is also the recipient of the Sahitya Kala Parishad Samman of the Government of Delhi in 1991. The Kalaimamani title was bestowed on her by the Tamil Nadu Eyal Isai Nataka Manram in 1999. She was conferred the title of ‘Bharata Kalai Sudar’ in 2006 by the Pollachi Tamil Isai Sangam and received the Sangeet Natak Akademy award in

2008. She has also been given the titles of Natya Tilakam and Natya Kala Bhushani.

She has left the legacy of her dance with daughter Rama Vaidyanathan and her granddaughter Dakshina Vaidyanathan Baghel, both of whom are well-known dancers.

C S Lakshmi

NOVEMBER 2023

Writing Stories to Break Norms: P Valsala (4 April 1938-21 November 2023)



P Valsala, awardee of Ezhuthachan Purskaram, the highest literary award of The Government of Kerala, breathed her last on 21 November, at the age of 85. A cardiac arrest took her away. “I very much wanted to write so I had to manage my time very well, finding time to write. Our society thinks the primary duty of a woman is

toward her family,” Valsala had said once. In spite of being a homemaker and a working woman, teacher by profession, she has written 17 novels and 25 short story collections. She was a social activist and chairperson of Kerala Sahitya Akademi. She was fondly referred to by everyone as Valsala Teacher. Even though her stories mainly focussed on the marginalised of the society, she has written children’s literature too.

Thakarcha (Destruction, 1969) her first novel itself was nonconforming to the novel formulae dictated by ‘popular weekly culture’ which ruled the literary scene at that time. It portrayed the destruction of an undivided family through the memoirs of two characters. *Nellu* (Paddy, 1972), her second novel which spoke about the tribal life in Wayanad area of Kerala got her more attention. It was made into a movie by the national award-winning director Ramu Kariat for which Valsala was one of the screenplay writers too. But at the end she was not satisfied with the movie version. *Agneyam* (Of Fire, 1974), her third novel, is one of the best tragedies written in a poetic language that portrays the victory of a widow brahmin woman over the evils of social curse by single handedly establishing her own estate by migrating to a tribal village in the fringe forest lands, only to be sacrificed in the fire of Naxalism. In 1976 Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award was conferred on her for the novel *Nizhalurangunna Vazhikal*

(Paths Where Shadows Sleep, 1975) which has a pathbreaking theme of a young orphan girl brought up by her grandmother and married off to an invalid landlord, disentangling the marital knot and finding love and life in a young man. "This is not a story, this is a poem," stated noted Malayalam poet Vyloppilli.

Her short stories speak about the stress women undergo caused by urbanisation and relocation and erosion of social values, with an underlying nostalgia for loss of wilderness and serenity of the land. Her stories for children also bear the mark of her superior writing in terms of form and content.

—Aravind Vadaseri

Aravind Vadaseri is a Tamil writer and a translator from Malayalam



The Woman Who Stood Her Ground: Fathima Beevi (30 April 1927-23 November 2023)



Fathima Beevi, was born in 1927 in Pathanamthitta, Kerala, which was part of the Kingdom of Travancore then to Annaveetil Meer Sahib and Khadeeja Beevi, and she belonged to the Rowther Family. No one would have imagined that a quiet girl like her was really made of steel. She rose to unimaginable heights in her life and career.

Fathima Beevi is regarded as a person who broke down gender barriers to become the first woman to become a judge in the Supreme Court. She was also the first Muslim woman to be elevated to this status. But Fathima Beevi had many firsts in her life. In 1950, she was the first student to complete a degree in law with full marks in all subjects and enroll herself as an advocate and she also excelled in the bar council exams; in 1958, she appeared for the competitive exam conducted by the Public Service Commission and stood first and joined the judicial services as a munsiff. There were more firsts to follow. She was the first woman member of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal and later, in 1983, she was the first Muslim woman to be a judge in the Kerala High Court. In 1989, she became the first woman judge in the Supreme Court of India. She retired in 1992 and in 1997 was appointed as governor of Chennai.

Her tenure as governor was a controversial one. She rejected the mercy petition of the four prisoners involved in

the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. People had hoped that she would pardon them as Article 161 of the Constitution allows the Governor to pardon. She further complicated matters when she swore in a disqualified Jayalalithaa as Chief Minister in 2001. She defended her action saying that the majority party in the state assembly had chosen her as its leader and that she was justified in swearing her in as the Chief Minister. However, two months later, after the midnight arrest of the DMK President M Karunanidhi, the Central Government, not happy with her report on law and order, called for her resignation for not abiding by the constitution and the laws of the country. There were talks about her being nominated for the position of President of India but Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam was ultimately proposed by the NDA Government.

Fathima Beevi remained single all her life dedicated to her career. Politics is not everyone's cup of tea and Fathima Beevi's political career may have been mired in controversies but her colleagues in the judiciary were full of admiration for her. An article in the *The Hindu* (U Hiran, "Justice Fathima Beevi, who broke down barriers to become the first woman judge in Supreme court, is no more," 23 November 2023) quotes K.Narayana Kurup, former acting Chief Justice with the Madras High Court, who said, "She fitted in with the classical definition of a judge as given by Socrates. She was patient in hearing and sober while considering cases. She used to give her answers wisely and decided things impartially. The entire Bar liked her."

Fathima Beevi opened the doors to many women to take up law and leaves behind a rich legacy of a woman who quietly proved that a woman can achieve what she wants if she is determined to do so.

—C S Lakshmi

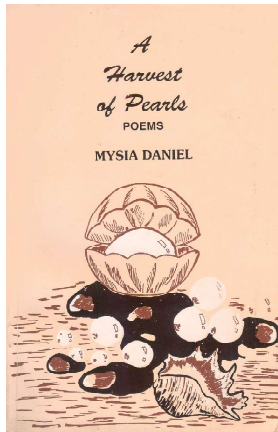
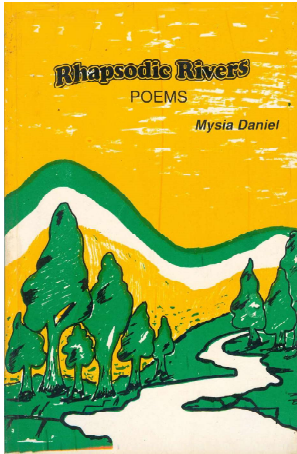


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DECEMBER 2023

Death of A Rhapsodic River: Mysia Daniel (1945-5 December 2023)



In 2017 I had written about Mysia Daniel and her poems after meeting her. Never thought it would become a tribute for her in 2023. Mysia Daniel was a teacher, a poet and a translator. She translated writer Ponneelan's well-known Tamil novel *Marupakkam* as *The Dance of Flames*. She quietly breathed her last on 5 December 2023.

Rest in peace, Mysia. What I wrote in 2017 I offer it to you as my tribute:

This time in Nagercoil I met Mysia Daniel. Mysia Daniel had a stroke sometime back and is not very mobile but is full of high spirits when she talks to you. Her voice is soft and soothing and when she speaks and laughs it almost sounds like a little tune with silver bells. Mysia is a year younger than me and is a poet and was a lecturer in English at the Women's Christian College, Nagercoil. She grew up in Singapore and is a recipient of several awards from I. B. C., Cambridge. Apart from poetry she likes directing, acting and staging English plays, loves Western classical music and enjoys gardening.

Mysia gave me two of her poetry collections. One of them is a book of sonnets, *A Harvest of Pearls* and in the introduction, she mourns the fact that mankind has moved away from the Platonic ideals of beauty and truth that enriched the poems of Keats. She says this book of poems is to "reaffirm her faith in the noble destiny of man in love, beauty and truth" for as James Barrie said, "to have faith is to have wings." The sonnet form has been

rejected as obsolete by many but Mysia says she found the sonnet form most suitable to write about her reflections on life and death. Although, William Carlos Williams, according to her, had called the sonnet form "amputating a crab to put him in a square box" she says, "you can always measure the crab's vital statistics and create a box to accommodate him, legs and all." *A Harvest of Pearls* has several sonnets on women like Cassandra, Cleopatra, Cinderella, Iphigenia and Magdalene and there is a poem dedicated to Keats himself. The one on Venice is so full of longing to visit Venice but also full of apprehension if it is still the city the poet dreamed of.

*I have visited you often in dreams
Wading through your high waterways, or hung
Like the moon on such a night when Dido
With willow in hand longed for Venus' son
To warm her pillow once more. Your bridges
With sighs of breathless lovers and broad cries
From gondolas tempt me still. Those famous
Halls of flamboyance and haunts of caprice
Call me. Venice of old times do your beams
Now with the qualities of mercy echo?
Or have you become like other cities
Crowded with crime and cursed avarice?
What if I came to you but found no fun
From all that romance under the Italian skies?*

Cities changing giving in to greed and avarice of people turning into centres of insensitive business and people losing their sensitivity is a running thread in all these poems. She also writes a poem about Kanyakumari that was once a virgin shore which has lost its ancient glory and become a place that has been trampled by many for various reasons of capitalising on its beauty. In the other book of poems, *Rhapsodic Rivers*, which was her first published book, Mysia says, her "endeavour has been to choose words that would set to music the human spirit." The poems in this book do flow like the river, sometimes slow and sometimes gushing, and contain the tones of music, rising and falling. They talk of flowers, of the miracle of a child, of war and peace and about how as the world changes, so much is lost. The poems are wistful and often talk of nature gone waste because of lack of sensitivity. One poem "Walking Home" is about walking back from school with the colours

and sounds of verdant fields, hills and clear pools walking along with you. It is a poem that is a kind of lament on how much of nature we can't see any more and how much our children have lost.

The poem talks of times when children "lured into the lawless way home" "let the ripe colours coil round" their "countenance in opulent orchards."

*... We heard old seasons tame tree and time
And teased the evenings escaping in scarlet
song....*

Then the poem talks of our children "walking no more with leap and leisure, gathering treasures from fertile hills and furtive woods." They have all been replaced with concrete jungles of steel, mortar and fumes telling us,

*That we have arrived in toxic triumph
To salute with bawdy banners the dying earth
And celebrate man's dominion over plastic
demons...*

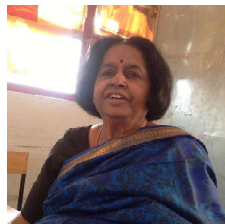
*There are no more wide-open spaces
To loiter with fallen fruit or look for roots
Of secret springs and hideout of animals.
We cannot bequeath to our young
The earth smells of haystack and grain.
The bounty of cattle on a thousand hills.
They'll not inherit the thrill of encounter
With wild flowers or fledglings.
Burdened with culture, our children
May not hear the river rocking time in ripples.*

Many may see Mysia as an old romantic who cannot deal with change. The trouble is living in a city like Mumbai and seeing so much of sea with traces of oil and the beach that is so difficult to keep clean, I also wonder often if my children can watch the sea with fishing boats moving with a setting sun in the background, for as long as I do every day from my window, when they grow up. We have gained a lot but maybe we have lost much too. In many ways, Mysia and I, have the same feelings about certain matters.

—C S Lakshmi

■■■■■

A Life Well Spent: Ramamani Sundar (19 October 1946-18 December 2023)



Ramamani Sundar, a writer who was writing a series on autism in *Amudhasurabi* magazine passed away in Delhi, at the age of 77.

Ramamani is the daughter of the eminent writer "Sunda" (MRM Sundaram). "Sunda" had been in charge of BBC's *Tamilosai* programme in London for two and a half years when he interviewed many visiting Indian celebrities. Among the essays and short stories that he wrote with London as their location, *Mary and the Mahatma*, published in Tamil (*Dinamani Kadir*) and English (*The Illustrated Weekly of India*), has remained exceptional in terms of its theme and style. He wrote the biography entitled *Ponniyin Pudalvar*, of Kalki Krishnamurthi, a freedom fighter and founder and editor of the magazine *Kalki*, and became a known name all over Tamil Nadu.

Ramamani Sundar had close associations with Kalki Krishnamurthi's family. She considered me also her brother and invited me to speak at the Sunda Centenary programme. Whenever I went to Delhi meeting her and spending time with her discussing various things was an enjoyable literary experience. And she never failed to meet me whenever she came to Chennai.

Ramamani faced great trials in her life. She managed to come out of the grief of the untimely death of her husband Sundar that had shattered her completely. Sometime ago she had gone through heart surgery herself at Mumbai. Before leaving for Mumbai, she rang me up and told me she felt like taking leave of me before travelling to Mumbai. I was deeply moved by her words.

Life had put before her the immense challenge of her son Bharat whom she took great care of. She wanted to admit him on a permanent basis in an institution for those affected by autism. But she has passed away before her intention has been accomplished.

She was a tireless worker; a student of the eminent writer Indira Parthasarathy. She wrote very interesting stories. Her story has won a prize in the *Amudhasurabi* Short Story Competition. Writer Maalan and I were discussing this story just the day before her demise. I was happy her story has remained in people's memory for such a long time. She had even contributed a story to the latest Diwali issue of *Amudhasurabi*. Apart from *Amudhasurabi* she also wrote regularly in *Dinamani*.

I requested her to write a series on autism and she readily agreed and began to write it immediately. After she sent us a few chapters we had made an announcement about the series in *Amudhasurabi* which pleased her a lot. Her determination is admirable because she sent us all the chapters of the series

wasting no time. She not only sent us the chapters but also the relevant images for each chapter searching for them from the web. The series will appear in *Amudhasurabi* even though she is no more.

On 22 December 2023, a condolence meeting was held in Delhi Tamil Sangam in memory of Ramamani Sundar. Delhi Tamil Sangam's Associate President P Raghavan presided over the meeting. General Secretary Ira. Mukundan, K V K Perumal and Smt. Satya Ashokan paid tributes to her.

The memory of Ramammani Sundar's will always remain in the hearts of *Amudhasurabi* readers.

—Thiruppur Krishnan

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Seeing God in Women's Smiles: Dr V Mohini Giri (15 January 1938-19 December 2023)



On 7 May 2016, V Mohini Giri was conferred the Degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa* by the College of Social Sciences and Law, University College of Dublin. The introductory address delivered then by Professor Colin Scott put in a nutshell the entire life of Dr V Mohini Giri, devoted to embrace the pain and suffering

of others. In his address he said:

Born in Lucknow, Dr V. Mohini Giri is a graduate of Lucknow University, the University of Delhi and G.B. Pant University, from which she received her doctorate. Dr Giri is a social worker who has dedicated her life to understanding and enhancing the conditions for women in India, a mission for which she has achieved the highest international recognition nationally and internationally.

Dr Giri's career has embraced academia, public service and social activism, with a strong unifying concern with the rights and opportunities of women and children.

In her academic career Dr Giri established the Department of Women's Studies in Lucknow University. Dr Giri's widely cited publications offer a systematic analysis of differing dimensions of

inequality facing women in India and include *Emancipation and Empowerment of Women* (1998), *Living Death: Trauma of Widowhood in India* (2002), *Deprived Devis: Women's Unequal Status in Society* (2006).

With regard to public service Dr Giri's expertise and experience has been drawn on by government extensively. She was chair of Delhi State Social Welfare Advisory Board between 1987 and 1990. She chaired the National Commission for Women, between 1995 and 1998 and used this role to focus on developing initiatives which empowered women. More recently she has led on the development of a National Policy for Senior Citizens.

It is in the field of social activism that Dr Giri's most significant contributions have been seen in the building and deployment of civil society capacity in India. She founded the War Widows Association in 1972 following the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. She established the North Indian branch of the Guild of Service, established in 1979, as an advocacy body for the rights of women and children to education, employment and financial security. The Guild of Service has had a very significant impact across India over many decades. Dr Giri has emphasised in her social activism that all who engage are agents of social change. Empowerment is found wherever people act and are supported to act to enhance their society.

As a social activist Dr Giri has been at the centre of campaigns around political rights for women and gender justice. She has been centrally involved in the development of education and micro-financing for women in India. Dr Giri has recognised that, in the development of grass roots organisations to support women—it is not simply a matter of building the capacity and confidence of women, it is very important to secure also the participation of men. This approach finds an echo in the contemporary HeforShe campaign of the United Nations, which seeks to engage men as agents for change in women's equality.

Dr Giri has been very active in the campaign for reservation of seats in the lower house of the Indian Parliament for women. This campaign can be

traced back to the foundation of the Women's Indian Association in 1917, one of a number of women's organisations in which Irish women played a significant role at the early stages. While the percentage of women representatives remains very low by international standards Dr Giri has been central to ensuring the issue remains at the forefront of political debate both nationally and locally in India.

Dr Giri's international contributions to civil society organisations have included being a founding trustee of the Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia, and her membership of the board of the New York based Hunger Project. She was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Indian Government for her outstanding contributions to social service in 2007.

Mohini Giri has spoken about her life and the challenges she has had to face in society. Quoted in an article in *The Hindustan Times* (Sreya Deb, "AGELESS ACHIEVERS: My greatest achievement is bringing smiles to women's faces," *The Hindustan Times*, April 15, 2023) Mohini Giri says, "My father passed away when I was 10. He was the founder of the political science department at Lucknow University. Six months after his passing, my mother was told that we could no longer live at the bungalow provided by the university. She was told that she had to wrap up her life, take her seven young children, and vacate. That was the first time I encountered what a struggle it was for a widow living alone and raising seven children." This was when Padma Bhushan Mohini Giri's sensitivities towards widows began to come alive. "Although my mother had a doctorate in music from Bhatkhande University, she was not empowered enough to undertake the day-to-day activities handled by the man of the household in those days."

Speaking about her social work to *The Hindustan Times*, Mohini Giri says, "The 1971 war happened, and as the daughter-in-law of the President, I had the opportunity to visit all the hospitals, and meet with all the jawans who were injured or dying. They said to me—'Mrs. Giri, don't look after us now as we are dying, take care of the ones that we leave behind.'"

Helping and rehabilitating widows has been her important mission in life. She went all over India, to Tirupati, Vrindavan, Puri and Varanasi to see widows leading miserable lives, laid out by traditional rules of life. Mohini Giri took these widows under her wing.

She combined her senior citizens home and the centres for underprivileged by making the children interact with the

senior citizens on a regular basis so that loneliness did not make both of them depressed. Her rehabilitation homes in Vrindavan, Kashmir and Rajasthan work on these principles of sharing love and care. The women in these rehabilitation homes don't remain idle. They have their own enterprises which are doing very well.

It is not that she was not accused of breaking cultural values and tradition of the country. Any woman going against what is considered a traditional role for a woman has had to face such accusations. She encouraged 15 widows to wear jhumkas and colourful clothes and when she continued to speak of accepting all faiths and communal harmony, she did face very harsh backlash. When she went to the Tirupati temple, eggs and tomatoes were thrown at her.

Women's organisations which associated with her like All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA), All India Mahila Sanskritik Sanghatan (AIMSS) and All India Coordination POW-PMS-IJM have paid tribute to her in very moving words saying, "We recall with affection and pride the many occasions when Guild of Service, led by her, joined forces with other national women's organisations to raise their voice against growing attacks on women's rights even in the recent years. We pay our heartfelt respects to her memory which will always remain with us as a shining example."

In the same interview given to *The Hindustan Times*, after narrating the story of her social work, Mohini Giri says that she was now going to leave this world with great satisfaction. That she passed away seven months after saying this makes her words seem prophetic. No one can deny that she encountered death as a woman who had spent all her life in the service of others.

—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.

JANUARY 2024

Body, Soul and Wealth Dedicated to Music: Dr. Prabha Atre (13 September 1932-13 January 2024)



The doyen of Kirana Gharana is no more. It is a big void in the world of Indian classical music. There is hardly any Hindustani classical music enthusiast who has not listened to *Tan Man Dhan Tope Varun* (Body, soul and wealth I have given) of Raag Kalavati or *Jagu Mein Sari Raina* (I stay awake the whole night) of Raag Maru Bihag sung by Dr Prabha Atre.

Prabha and Usha both sisters were interested in music, but never thought to pursue it as a career. There was no one in the music field in their family and both the parents were school teachers. They belonged to a middle-class family. But once in her mother's illness somebody suggested to her mother to listen to classical music to feel better. That's how Prabha started learning classical music. It would have remained as only a hobby but again a family friend suggested to her father that Prabha must continue her music training under the tutelage of Sureshbabu Mane. So Prabha Atre received training from Sureshbabu Mane for six years and after his sudden demise she started learning from Hirabai Badodekar. She learned music in a traditional Guru-Shishya style. She also acknowledged two great artistes who influenced her music, they are Amir Khan Saheb for Khayal style and Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan Saheb for Thumri. While learning music she also used to give performances wherever her guru used to take her and she also acted in Marathi Musical dramas. At the same time she completed her Bachelor of Science and later completed LLB from Pune Law College. In music she completed Sangeet Alankar (Master of Music) from Gandharva Mahavidyalaya Mandal and Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London (Western Music Theory Grade – IV). She later also earned a PhD in Music. Her thesis was titled *Sargam*.

Learning, taking more and more training, practising, performing—Dr Prabha Atre was not limited to this. Her greatness is beyond that. She not only taught classical music in India and abroad but also wrote many books in which she put down her thoughts about classical music such as 1. *Swamayee* (Marathi and Hindi, 2016) 2. *Suswarali* (Marathi and Hindi, 1992), 3. *Along the Path of Music* (2005) 4. *Enlightening the Listener* (2000). She wrote books of music compositions: 1. *Swaranjane* (2016) 2. *Swaranginee* (2016)

3. *Swararangee* (2016). She also invented new Raags such as Apurva Kalyan, Darbari Kauns, Patdeep-Malhar, Shiv Kali, Tilang-bhairav, Ravi Bhairav, and Madhur-kauns.

There are so many other music related activities Dr Prabha Atre was involved with. She was the former Assistant Producer at All India Radio. She was Professor and Head of the Department of Music of SNDT Women's University. She was also visiting professor at many international music institutions and universities. She was Chief Music Producer and Director for 'Swarashree' Recording Company since 1981. She was Member of the Advisory Panel of the Central Board of Film Censors, Mumbai in 1984. She established some years ago *Swamayee Gurukul* in Pune through which she tried to combine traditional Guru-Shishya style of teaching music and contemporary classroom teaching.

Her extraordinary artistry and creativity was acknowledged by many prestigious awards like the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1991, Kalidas Samman, Dinanath Mangeshkar Award, Hafiz Ali Khan Award, Dagar Gharana Award, Lifetime Achievement Award by Pune University and many more. She was three times Padma Awardee. (Padmashree in 1990, Padma Bhushan in 2002 and Padma Vibhushan in 2022).

Around 1992, she started an annual *Pandit Sureshbabu Mane and Hirabai Badodekar Sangeet Sammelan* (music festival which is now called Gaanprabha Hridayesh Festival). This is one of the prestigious music festivals of Mumbai which takes place in January.

She had also written poems and published a book of poetry: *Antahswar* (Inner Music, Marathi Hindi and English, 2016).

Few lines of one of her poems describe musical notes thus:

*Practice of Notes
Like line drawn on water
Disappearing
While Appearing*

Dr Prabha Atre passed away while the Gaanprabha Hridayesh Sangeet Sammelan, which she had started, was going on in Vile Parle, Mumbai, from 12th January, where she was supposed to perform on the final day.

—Sharmila Sontakke

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