



SNL
Number 43
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(April-December 2024)

SPARROW

newsletter



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SPARROW

Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women

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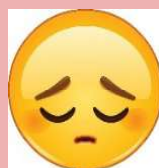
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EDITOR'S NOTE

We began our previous SNL 42 editorial note dated December 2023 that was posted in February 2024, wishing the readers a happy new year. And we promised the next Newsletter will be in April 2024 as our Newsletter is a quarterly. But a series of disasters struck us! In the first place, post-COVID mood all over was one of lethargy. People did not agree easily to do book reviews as they had their own post-COVID issues to deal with. We said, okay, if not April, we will bring it out in May or June. Then the rains happened and we had to deal with wet walls and computer breakdowns. And after that the roads have been dug up by the electricity department and the WiFi in the office began to play hide and seek with us. So, friends, this issue of SNL 43 that should have come out in April is coming out in November in two parts. The Main Section and the Book Review Section (Supplement) will be posted in the first part and the Homages Section (Supplement) will be posted after that. What can we say except a big sorry?



Hopefully the articles and poems in the main section and the book reviews will keep you engrossed till the second part (the Homage Supplement) is posted. In the Main Section we have an article by Veena Poonacha on the life and times of Boverianda Nanjamma. Born in 1935, Dr. Boverianda Nanjamma was a professional who reached great heights in her career as a statistician, researcher, teacher, and author. Based on an interview with her the article opens up a whole new world of women's experiences. Shameela Yoosuf Ali's story on what first world photographers do with their cameras to third world children and women will set the reader thinking about what it is when you are an eternal subject to the first world. There is also the article of Nivedita Louis on Christian women in the print industry. An article on musicologist and musician SAK Durga written in C S Lakshmi's column Musings of an Axolotl in *The Wagon Magazine* for its December 2016 issue has also been reprinted in the main section.

The poems in the main section can be called illustrations of Red River publications. In a way, SPARROW has become the repository for all Red River books thanks to Dibyajyoti Sarma.

The Book Review Section truly belongs this time to Semeen Ali and Kabir Deb. Thanks a million to the two of them especially Kabir Deb who wrote the long review of Red River books when Karimganj, where he lives, was caught in the floods and his wife was unwell. Semeen has done justice to Arunava Sinha's translations from Bengali and also Kalyani Thakur Charal and Sayantan Dasgupta's book on Dalit writers from Bengal. Malsawmi Jacob, Uma Shankar, Rohini Rajagopal, Pankhuri Agrawal, Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhury and K B Veio Pou have also made this section an important section of the newsletter reviewing recent autobiographies, and opening the Mizo cultural space and the world of Nagas by Easterine Kire, and other spaces including the space of Gandhi in the city of Mumbai.

The Homages Section is a section that calls for most amount of work as we want to remember all women, as far as possible, who are part of women's history. Their life stories and experiences, sometime well-known and sometimes quietly forgotten, tell us what our perspective should be when we write women's history.

Yes, our Newsletter has become a journal. And we are not sorry. But we will be more regular in future.

Happy Reading!



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COVER PAGE: Painting by Neela Panch

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Closing Time for Gregorian and Vedic Chants

—C S Lakshmi

When Leonard Cohen passed away recently, a good friend of mine, knowing I am not familiar with such music, sent me his 'Closing Time' to listen. I was deeply moved. He sent me more but 'Closing Time' kept playing in my mind. The warmth of his voice brought tears to my eyes the same way a classical song of the Indian music tradition would. It made me think that there is so much to music that one cannot fathom in a lifetime. And when that thought occurred, I remembered it was not the first time such a thought had occurred to me.



Two years ago when I was furiously doing some homework before interviewing Dr S A K Durga, who passed away as quietly as she had lived, on the 19th of November, 2016, and read details about her research, I realised I knew nothing about Gregorian chants which was her research subject and began to search the web to know what they were. I also realised much to my embarrassment, that I did not know anything about Vedic chants either, two oral traditions she had compared in her research although I was familiar with Thevaram hymns which were also part of this research. When I sat down to talk with her, as we reached the subject of her research, I asked with great hesitation, if she could explain the two chants to me. I have known temperamental musicians and musicologists, who would literally burn you to cinders with their unseen third eye of superior knowledge combined with justified vanity. Durga was like none of them. With that endearing smile of hers she began to demonstrate in her enchanting voice, to this musical novice that I was and still am, Gregorian chants and Vedic chants. For a while time stood still and even her cats lay still.

When I had framed my questions for the interview I was interested in her mother Lalithabai who was a

Harikatha artiste and disciple of Rajamanikkam Pillai. And Durga told me so much about her mother and her own musical journey. Being a Harikatha artiste was not easy in her mother's time. Even the 'Bai' to her name was in the tradition of other Harikatha artistes of those days like Banni Bai and Saraswathi Bai. But after her marriage Lalithabai did not continue her Harikatha performances but took to music for both her husband, who was a great connoisseur of music, and her marital home in Kumbakonam, did not approve of Harikatha which had many other connotations. But Lalithabai asserted herself in other ways. She was a Gandhian. So right at the entrance of the house would hang photographs of Gandhi and other leaders. Sometimes someone from the police would come and warn that the photographs must be removed and she would remove them for a while but out they would come in a few days.

Lalithabai began teaching her daughter Kumari Durga music from the age of eight. Later Durga learnt from Tirukkodikaval Venkatarama Iyer. Later, at the age of eleven she began her music lessons with Madurai Mani Iyer. At a young age she got married to her cousin as per her parents' wish for she had always gone by what they said and she became a widow almost soon after. Kumbakonam was not a place where relatives in the extended family would be kind to a young widow. Durga stayed at home for two or three years and then with her mother's support decided to study further. The entire family decided to shift to Chennai. For her post graduation studies in music in the Madras University, she chose voice culture. Durga specialised in studying voice culture at a time when not many were even thinking about it. Her own musical journey also continued with Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer and Balamuralikrishna. She also learnt Hindustani classical music from Ustad Mohammed Munnawar of Delhi. She did her doctorate studies in Wesleyan University on ethnomusicology under the great T Viswanathan, fondly referred to as Viswa. Her post-doctoral work which she

did at Yale University in the Yale Divinity School, was on comparative study of Gregorian chants and Vedic chants and Thevaram hymns.

The little I had found out about Gregorian chants was that they were plain chants credited to Pope Gregory I (r. 590-604) and that these were chants written by him at a time when there were no musical notations. Celebrated musician John Raymond Howell, who was associate professor of music in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences at Virginia Tech, University in Blacksburg, Virginia, says that there are some wonderful stories and legends associated with Pope Gregory I. He says there are paintings showing a bird singing chants into his ear as he wrote them down. There are also stories, he says, “of his sending out missionaries with instructions to bring back any new music they encountered, saying ‘Why should the Devil have all the good songs?’” Powell goes into the history of the Gregorian chants and the myths associated with the chants, but says that it would be best to call them plain chants. Where Vedic chants were concerned all that I knew was that they were orally passed on traditions of chanting the four Vedas and that they were recondite melodies which could be transmitted only orally with human intervention and could not be committed to books.

Durga made it all come alive for me in the course of our conversation. She did it with the ease of an expert but also with the warmth of a teacher who was trying to teach a complex subject to someone who may not be able to grasp it all. She repeated the technical terms, singing along and demonstrating each term. She explained how the Sama Veda and the Gregorian chants were chanted in a descending scale and that any melody, whether it is Western or Indian had what were known as syllabic, neumatic and mellismatic elements. When one note is sung per letter it is known as syllabic. When two notes per syllable are chanted it is known as neumatic. When several notes per syllable are chanted it becomes mellismatic. Rig Veda is syllabic, Yajur Veda is neumatic and Sama Veda is mellismatic, she explained. The Gregorian chants are in all these styles of singing. She also explained the ragas in which Sama Veda and Thevarams are sung. Sama Veda was sung in Karaharapriya but also in Sankarabaranam. Thevarams could be in the pann mode but also in ragas like Harikambodhi and Sankarabaranam. The highest point of this research Durga felt was her singing the Gregorian chants in the Marquand chapel at Yale University. It was the most exciting moment but also the most poignant and deeply emotional one for a Hindu was not only allowed to

enter the chapel at the time of worship but also sing the Gregorian chants.

Why did she not become a performer and why did she have to be a musicologist? A performer needed an entourage to accompany her when she performed, she explained. She needed a brother, an uncle or a mother to go with her to various performances. Singing over the radio was different but performances meant travel and someone who could negotiate payments, travel arrangements and so on. It was difficult for someone from a non-performing family to manage that if she happened to be a woman. Some women were lucky to have family members who accompanied them but in the case of Durga it was not possible. She did not see it as a big loss for she enjoyed the research part of it and the several books she has written are proof of how much she enjoyed doing research on a range of subjects connected with music and performance. She also wrote on music and gave regular lecture demonstrations.

Normally musicologists are seen as those who cannot sing but can theorise on music. Lalitharam Ramachandran, a connoisseur of music who writes on music and who had introduced me to Durga, narrated an incident about Durga during a lecture demonstration, which was so typical of Durga and her charming ways. Durga was giving a lecture demonstration on South East Asian music at the Music Academy in Chennai. The audio that she wanted to play just refused to open in the computer at the Academy. After a few trials she decided to sing them herself. Ramachandran met her later and congratulated her on her ability to sing other forms of music with effortless ease. She looked at him and said: ‘Did you think that musicologists couldn’t sing?’ with an unmistakable twinkle in her eyes.

There were celebratory events for Leonard Cohen’s music. One wishes that this December season in Chennai there is one to celebrate the music of Durga. And just maybe someone could sing the Gregorian chants and the Vedic chants in her memory. And maybe I could be in the audience to be transported to the time in her old house in Mylapore when she sang the Gregorian chants followed by a Thevaram and the Vedic chants. Blessed was that day when suddenly that old house with a musty smell became a magical space filled with music, with her cats cuddling up to her, bringing tears to the eyes of the listener. And I happened to be that fortunate listener.

Memories of S A K Durga written in C S Lakshmi’s column Musings of an Axolotl in *The Wagon Magazine* for its December 2016 issue. Reprinted with permission from the author.



Bull Ring and the Deep-Sea Green Eyes

—*Shameela Yoosuf Ali*

In the heart of this sprawling city, where the neon lights flicker like distant stars in an urban galaxy, there exists a place that dances on the boundary between reality and dreams. The Bull Ring.

Standing sentinel in the pulsating core of Birmingham's vibrant shopping district, the bronze giant, known simply as the Bull, is more than a landmark. It is a creature with a silent tale etched in the crevices of its metallic skin. This colossal creature, twice the size of a living bull, invites newcomers to pause, to stand before it, or even climb upon its metallic form, capturing the moment with a photograph. In winter, a whimsical touch adorns the Bull, donned in a red woollen shirt and a knitted beanie hat, creating a festive spectacle.

Behind the mask of merriment lies a tragic history, echoing the cruel practices of medieval bull rings found in many countries. In those times, first, they would release a bull inside the iron ring. Then, hungry dogs would be unleashed in droves, attacking the bull ferociously. Unable to withstand the assault, the bull would eventually succumb miserably. This cruel practice was used to be a pastime in medieval times.

The Birmingham Bullring, now a landmark, once neighboured butcher shops, where a belief was held that the meat of a bull subjected to such torment would be exceptionally tender. Thankfully, the practice was later banned, leaving the Bull a silent testament to a bygone era.

Birmingham unfolds like a silk saree, rich in hues and textures, every part a vibrant thread in the city's fabric. In the bustling market, vibrant with fruits, vegetables, yarn, and dazzling textiles, a fish market displays a vibrant array of colours. Tall buildings house, shops offering luxurious perfumes and clothing, along with bustling restaurants. Diverse human voices and faces fill the air, with callers proclaiming Islam through the soothing verses of the Qur'an on one side, while on the other, people call in microphones, urging all to turn to Christ today.

As one crosses the city centre, a symphony of aromas dances in the air – the heady blend of spices, the rich aroma of roasted coffee, and the enchanting whispers of perfumes that linger like a sweet melody.

Once hailed as Workshop of the World, Birmingham inscribes its vibrant history on every brick and alleyway. From crafting elegant fountain pens to forging powerful steam engines, the city has undergone a profound transformation, evolving from the clutches of starvation to remarkable prosperity. The surge of new industries and opportunities attracted a tide of migrants, shaping Birmingham into a multicultural metropolis that proudly claims its position as the second-largest city in the UK.

Amidst the lively pulse of the Bull Ring, I slip away, seeking solace within the doors of the Birmingham Public Library- A sanctuary of tranquillity amid the city's vibrant chaos. I harbour a deep affection for soft sounds, finding solace in their gentle embrace, akin to the comfort of listening to a roaring downpour in the middle of the quiet night. The library, with its expansive silence, amplifies the senses. Conversations unfold in hushed tones, the rustling of pages in the slightest breeze, the muffled footsteps of different footwear, and the delicate chime of bells hanging on the walls.

In the library, sunlight weaves a distinct art, filtering through tall windows to dance among the rows of books. Its rays beckon the soul to distant realms, casting a play of light and shadow that captivates the senses. Seated in quiet contemplation, I realise that within the library's embrace, there is more than just reading. There is an immersion into a world where scents intertwine with stories.

Libraries, much like people, possess their own unique fragrance. A blend of old books, polished wood, and the intangible traces of countless visitors. This aroma transports me back to the Peradeniya University library, with its centuries-old scent wafting through the cold air that breezes down from Hanthana Hills, carrying the earthy fragrance of Yellow Poui. The library becomes a vessel,

evoking memories and connecting me to moments spent within my old University library's sacred walls.

The quiet library has a partly open door, a secret passage to a world waiting to be discovered, hidden from everyone's view. It invites you to a place where time doesn't feel so strict and distant. As you read, the lines between past and present become blurry. You travel through the stories crafted by others and walk through the memories of your own life.

Today, the choice of what to read escapes me. Amid my memories, a book catches my attention – a large, inviting photo album resting gently on the table. Its simple yet bold cover proudly says, “Chronicles of Vision: Cameron McIlroy ‘s Journey Through the Lens.”

Eagerly, I cradle the book as if holding a kitten, gently placing it on the table. The weight of its broad pages promises a sensory journey. As I spread its story-laden sheets, charming pictures reveal themselves, each capturing moments that can make one close their eyes and allow their mind to melt. The journey begins, traversing countless narratives encapsulated in McIlroy's photographs; each is a window for untold stories.

At the back of the book were details about the photographer, Cameron McIlroy. He was the one who skillfully captured the famous poignant image of an Afghan widow with a veiled face. The image is reminiscent of the media frenzy following the 9/11 attacks, a picture etched into memory. The woman's magnetic, deep sea-green eyes seem to reach into the very soul, like pulling us towards an endless well.

Cameron, a versatile photojournalist, weaves captivating narratives through his lens. His photos are truly remarkable. I have seen the Afghan Woman's picture in an issue of National Geographic. Observing the unique perspectives he captures, I can't help but acknowledge my own photography attempts pale in comparison.

As I flip through the silky pages, one photograph stands out. A portrayal of a school classroom. Its allure transcends the constraints of time and space, casting a spell that brings my hometown, fresh in memory, to embrace me from afar.

During our first year in advanced-level classes, our school held a notable reputation in the district for high university admissions in Tamil medium. Boys and girls from other areas of the island, chose our school for their studies.

Our Commerce stream class was exclusive to girls, while the boys had separate classes. The uniqueness of our building, bordered by a school on one side and surrounded by fences on the other two, added to its charm. Beyond

the green trees, a refreshing breeze often swept through.

Situated in one corner of the school premises, our Commerce class enjoyed a cosy spot all to itself. In our younger years, Pathun Acchhi's house and shop stood on that side. I can still picture Achchi near her house and the fence, offering boiled Ceylon olives aka veralikai, lovi fruits soaked in salt, vadai, and hoppers. But, as with many things in life, Achchi's house vanished as time passed, making way for new buildings.

During the rainy monsoon season, teachers would sometimes skip the sessions and stay indoors. We would snuggle on the parapet wall, relishing the gentle rain, engaged in lively conversations. My palms would feel warm on chilly days. Rihana and Munshiba would often grab my hands and place them against their cheeks for comfort. Mazeena and Shamila would take turns singing Nagoor Hanifa's songs or the latest melodies from movies.

It was a Wednesday. Madar Deen Sir's class was in progress when we noticed a white man, accompanied by the school's deputy head, wandering through all the classrooms. The man wore khaki shirt and trousers, with a heavy bag slung over his shoulder. His broad, red face with a moustache reminded us of a character from an unknown English film. He greeted us with a wave as he entered our class, and we sat there, curious to see what would happen next. The photographer moved around, peeking through the short walls surrounding our classroom.

A satisfied smile illuminated his face. Haneefa Sir joyfully announced that our class had been chosen for the white man's photoshoot. Though we understood English, Haneefa Sir voluntarily translated each line for us. We were informed that the American photographer would capture us in the class, and those photos would grace the walls of prestigious universities worldwide.

A sense of pride rose within us, envisioning that the entire world would soon recognise our names. Despite the likelihood that the photographer selected our class on its excellent lighting and environment, our thoughts and pride soared high. The white gentleman set up his camera on a stand, changing lenses and capturing us from different angles. We didn't have our usual lessons that day. Khadija, our accounting teacher who arrived after Madar Deen Sir, seemed pleased, leaving her books on the teacher's desk with a light smile.

We struck poses we never did in class, like standing up and asking questions while holding our books apart, just as the photographer instructed. He even captured a moment of someone tapping a pencil on her cheek while

closely observing the teacher. He instructed me to keep my pen pressed at a specific point in my notebook. Back then, I used a maroon Hero fountain pen, and I still have the notepad I scribbled on that day. The black ink leaked onto the page, forming a small pool.

Amid it all, the teacher had to pose for photos while writing on the blackboard. Khadija Teacher, with her beautiful face and long braided hair, seemed at ease. She always wore chiffon sarees, draping the edge around her shoulder. Marhana the social studies teacher from the neighbouring class, was asked to replace Khadija teacher for some reason. Marhana Teacher donned a knee-length black jilbab. I still vividly remember Khadija teacher's dark face that day.

I think that white man preferred darker-skinned people a bit more. He photographed dark-skinned Kamila Begum and Mujmila alone. Like everyone else, they both had book bags, but they were leaning on the pillar with books in their hands. Kamila Begum later mentioned that the photographer had instructed her to pose like that.

An air of excitement lingered throughout the day. No one budged, even when the bell for recess rang. At all times, we wore our usual white uniforms, ironed pleated skirted dresses and trousers, along with a white round hijab that reached up to our wrists.

While we were still in school, we frequently revisited that splendid day. The whereabouts of those photos remain a mystery to this day. As time's relentless wheel rolled on, that once-vibrant day seemed to dim alongside our youthful zeal.

After school, I wandered, unsure of which field to choose. I immersed myself in community service for a while and pursued higher studies at the university. Also ventured into the field of journalism. Along the way, I took on roles in various educational institutes.

Occasionally, memories of that beautiful day would resurface. Yet, the photographer's name was not known. We could not ask for the name in that moment's excitement. Wherever I go, my mind searches for that photo, universities, institutions, and libraries, but it's nowhere to be found. The photos for which we eagerly posed seem to have vanished into thin air, leaving behind only memories.

Within the ancient walls of this library, time unfolds at a leisurely pace...

Every place has a story.

Every person has a story.

...

Suddenly, I see a photograph captured in a classroom. Oh my...

The very photo I've been looking for all my life.

Here it is, in A3 size, within this weighty photo book. It's one of the many pictures captured in our classroom. The photographer who graced our school that day was none other than the renowned American photographer Cameron McIlroy. Goosebumps prickle my skin.

There is only one picture. And fortunately, I am part of it. I gaze at the photo, my lips curving into a faint smile, years of penance flashing before my eyes. In this captured moment, I see the innocent faces of my peers, each on a divergent path now. Farsana, once vivacious and talkative, is now a school principal. Rimzia works as an office assistant at a women's college. Mujmila is an accountant. Athika and Nadha have become teachers at the same school. Shamila is a dedicated housewife and lives in our hometown. Mazeena manages a small home-based garment factory with four sewing machines. Sheeraz crafts beautiful, customised cakes from her home. Rihana entered marriage earlier than all of us, and it was a hard-fought love marriage. As for Fareeda, details of her life remain elusive, a mystery that she might have separated by freeing herself from an undesired marriage and living in another country.

I read the caption written beneath the photo.

'Secluded girls - a school in Kegalle.' The title, a cruel twist of fate, jolts me, and a sudden shooting pain pulses through one side of my head like lightning.

This photo and the words narrate a completely different story than our reality. Kegalle, a town ten to twelve miles away from our village, Mawanella, is predominantly inhabited by Sinhalese residents. The geographical location of our village, its people, and its way of life have no connection to the city of Kegalle.

We never perceived ourselves as outcasts or underdogs. Instead, we were ordinary teenagers attempting to carve our paths amid the currents of a male-dominated society. The youthful faces captured in the photograph have now matured, sculpted by the chisel of life experiences.

A smile tugged at my lips as I closed the thick book and placed it back on the shelf. It was the kind of smile that emerges when sadness permeates the mind. The magical moment painstakingly captured for the camera, that day of youthful spirit and companionship we shared, had now transformed. It struck me as a moment when someone from nowhere manipulated us like puppets and put us in front of the world.

I couldn't console myself by saying, 'Let the world think whatever it wants, but we know our reality.' A tempest of emotions swirled within me. Anger, sadness, and a torrent of conflicting feelings all at once. I picked up the book again, momentarily considering tearing away its pages as if to erase that history. After a while, I felt calmed down. Tearing a page cannot alter the course of histories created by such photographs. Even the deep sea-green eyes of an Afghan woman, consumed by anger, couldn't change it.

Leaving the library, I walk across the bustling bull ring, heading towards the bus stop to go to Birmingham City University.

A short story originally written in Tamil and Translated by the author herself into English.

Footnotes:

Achchi: A term used to affectionately refer to a grandmother or elderly woman in Sri Lanka.

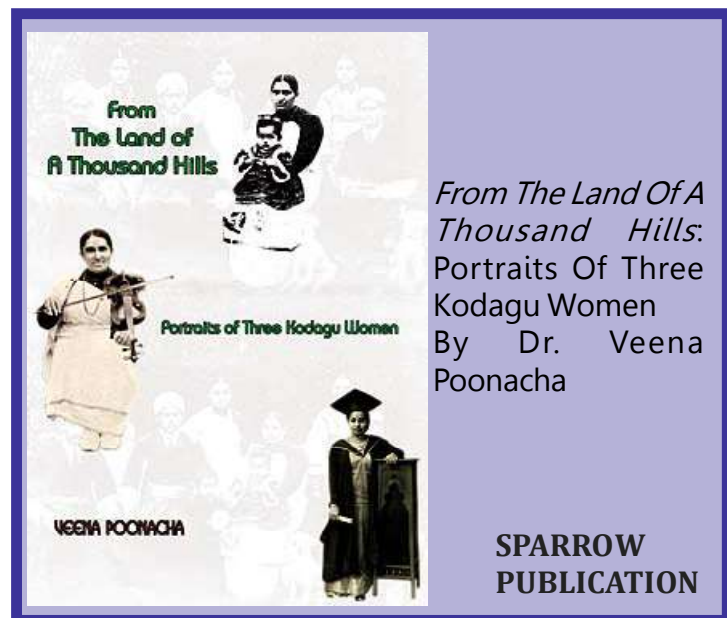
Veralikai: Ceylon olive is a fruit, Pickled and boiled Veralikai is a popular street food in Sri Lanka.

Lovi: A fruit also known as Batoko plum.

Vadai: A South Indian and Sri Lankan savoury snack made by deep-frying a mixture of lentil flour or ground pulses, typically seasoned with spices like cumin, curry leaves, and chopped onions.

Nagoor Hanifa: A well-known Tamil Islamic devotional singer and songwriter.

Shameela Yoosuf Ali is a journalist, writer, researcher and Editor-In-Chief of *FemAsia* Magazine.



Solvanam - Tamil Arts and Literature

Solvanam - Tamil Arts and Literature has republished some of the SPARROW booklets translation from Tamil volumes published in July 2001 in Solvanam YouTube channel.

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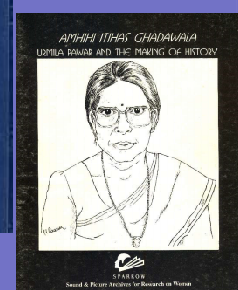
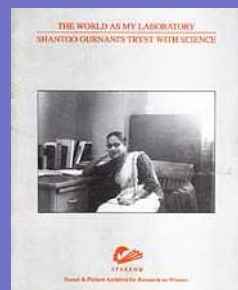
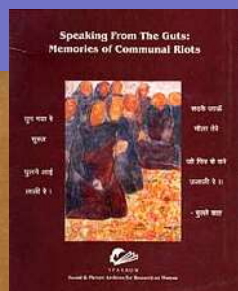
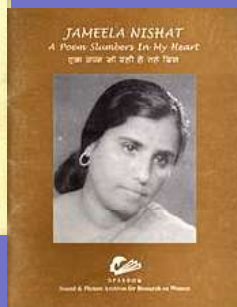
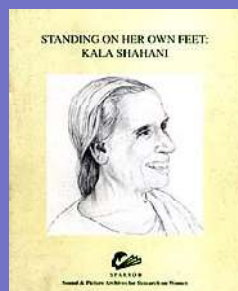
Standing on her own feet: Kala Shahani November, 1997.
The World As My Laboratory :Shantoo Gurnani's Tryst With Science April, 1998.

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.



In Her Own Words: The Life and Times of Boverianda Nanjamma (22 February 1935-31 March 2024)

—Veena Poonacha

Introduction

Dr. Boverianda Nanjamma is a woman of extraordinary brilliance, grace and charm. She was a wife, mother, grandmother and working professional who reached great heights in her career as a statistician, researcher, teacher, and author. After her retirement as Statistical Advisor and Director, Business Survey Methods in Canada, she returned to India with her husband Boverianda Chinnappa, an engineer by profession to undertake a post-retirement project of translating the Patole Palme written in Kannada and Kodava *thakka* into English and subsequently expanded her research interest to an investigation of the *ainmanes* of Kodagu. In doing so, Nanjamma and Chinnappa have left a rich legacy for the Kodava community which can never be forgotten. The lasting contribution that they have made can be appreciated in the context of the loss of cultural memories among the Kodavas because of the changed socio-economic circumstances of their lives. This life history of Nanjamma is based on an in-depth interview recorded 8 January 2021 and subsequently completed through a mailed questionnaire, which she answered in August 2022. I offer this interview to the Kodavas so that Nanjamma's life and work will never be forgotten. I only wish I could have documented Boverianda Chinnappa's life.

Nanjamma's Narration:

I was born on 22 February 1935 in Mangalore at the Lady Goschen maternity home¹ in Mangalore to Neravanda Ponnamma Nanjappa and Nadikerianda Subbayya. My mother was among the earliest group of Coorg girls who acquired university education. Her achievements were truly remarkable, because in those days very few Indian women were educated, and my mother had to travel from Mercara² to Bangalore by bus to catch a train to Madras. It was an overnight journey. My mother graduated from the newly established college Women's Christian College (Madras)³

with Philosophy, History and Geography and later completed her teacher's training from Lady Willingdon College (Madras).⁴ She was inspired by the nationalist ideals of the time and wished to dedicate her life to the service of the nation through education. The motto that she lived by was "Lighted to Lighten."⁵ She was a great teacher, who gave me a love for education.

Ponnamma's father, Neravanda Nanjappa from Kumbaladala village, was a Tashildar and later a Munsif. In those days the village Munsif (village accountant) was held in high regard and Ponnamma was deeply attached to her father. Her father died suddenly when she was away in college to write her final examinations. The family did not inform her of her father's death as they feared that she would return immediately without writing her exams. On her return to Coorg, just as she got off the bus in Madikeri, someone saw her at the bus stop and offered her condolences for the sudden demise of her father. This was a big shock to her, as she was very attached to her father. Since the financial condition of the family was not very good, she made up her mind that she would remain single, work, and support her family as a teacher.⁶

She had an older brother, called Kuttappa, who was also studying in the Madras Christian College and he took some time to complete his education. Mother got a job as a teacher in Dakshina Kannada district, and throughout her career, she taught in Mangalore and in Udupi. She supported her widowed mother for many years even after her marriage. In fact, that was one condition that she put forth when she agreed to marry my father.

My father, Subbayya (Mittoo) was from the Nadikeranda family. He was the son of Nadikeranda Chinnappa⁷ and had studied in Mangalore Government College, in Madras Christian College and at the Teachers' Training College, Rajahmundry. Subbayya had also decided to become a teacher and serve Coorg. He became a Gandhian and participated in the student protests in Mangalore during the Freedom movement, and courted arrest. He became a

vegetarian then. Later my elder brother and I too became vegetarians, because we noticed that he would not eat meat or fish. (My mother on the other hand loved non-vegetarian food!) My father had a charkha at home and taught us to spin cotton into thread. There is an interesting family story on why my father was called 'Mittoo.' The name was given to him by his father, my grandfather, in honour of Dadabhai Naoroji Mehta, the fearless critic of British economic policies in India. The name Mehta gradually became 'Mittoo.' It has since become a very popular name in Coorg for children.

My mother too was very good at spinning the charkha. When she was in Women's Christian College, Gandhiji and Kasturba visited the college. At that time, she and another girl who was also good at spinning were chosen to demonstrate their skill with the charkha. The story goes that Gandhiji put his arm around my mother and the other girl and said "But for this old lady behind me (Kasturba) I would have married both of you!"

The marriage alliance between my father and mother was first suggested to him by two of his very good friends when they were all studying in Madras. They suggested her name to my father as a beautiful, well behaved and educated young woman. They said that they would have liked to have married her, but did not have such an option because they were already engaged and could not break their engagements since their educational expenses were met by their future fathers-in-law. When my father told his father Chinnappa that he would like to marry Ponnamma, Chinnappa remembered seeing this girl as a young student studying in Madikeri Central High School and approved of his choice of her as a suitable wife. Chinnappa, who was a Revenue Inspector at the time, had been invited as a Chief Guest to a prize-giving function at the school. He remembered my mother because she had walked away with a pile of prize books stacked so high that he could not see her face.

My father, Subbayya, was introduced to my mother by her older brother and the families allowed them to go out and get to know each other. This was an extremely liberal and progressive action for the late 1920s and early 1930s. My mother had made it clear that she would have to support her family and that she would continue working even after marriage. My mother who was employed by the education department of the Madras Presidency was posted in the Mangalore and Udupi circle, because she knew Kannada. My father too had family responsibilities, especially after his father's demise in 1931. He therefore

opted for Coorg Education service, since he felt the need to support his widowed mother.

Their wedding in 1933 was very unconventional. All Kodava weddings those days were held in the *ainmane* of the bride/groom or in their parents' private house. However, my father, being a Gandhian, refused to have liquor served at his wedding. That angered the elders of the Nadikerianda *okeka* who refused him permission to conduct the wedding in the Nadikerianda *ainmane*. Undeterred, he booked the Students Hostel at the Madikeri Central High School where he was a teacher then, and his wedding was conducted there. That apparently was the very first time that a Kodava wedding was held outside the *ainmane* and set a trend for future weddings. His cousins, who did not want to miss the wedding, told their elders that they were going for a hockey match and booked a bus to attend the wedding!

My parents' married life too was every unconventional. My mother worked in Mangalore and Udupi throughout her life, while my father lived in Coorg and worked in the High Schools there and remained a support to his widowed mother. My father would come to Mangalore whenever he had holidays, and we would come down to Coorg during our school holidays, at least thrice a year.

Siblings

We are six siblings -- four brothers and two sisters. I was the second of the lot. My elder brother was born in 1934 and our youngest brother was born in 1948. My mother worked throughout her pregnancies. My older brother Uppi (Chinnappa) wrote the IAS exam and was chosen for the Indian Revenue Service. But by then he had a good job in a private company in Bombay and continued in the Private Sector all his life, working in Europe, Jakarta, and England. The brother next to me, Rana (Nanjappa) became an engineer, did his masters in Chicago, and worked in India and in the US. He now divides his time in retirement between Bangalore and New Jersey. I lost my next brother Tumu (Uthappa) who trained as a Doctor in Madras and in the US. He returned to Coorg and was practising in Ammathi, charging very little from poor villagers, when he passed away under tragic circumstances. My sister Maya (Mayamma), also a student of Women's Christian College, Madras, was interested in serving disabled children. Many years after her marriage and when her children were grown up, she trained as a teacher for children with special needs. Subsequently, she worked in Bombay for many years and later in Bangalore where she and her husband, a naval

officer, had settled after his retirement. When my youngest brother Nala (Ponnappa) who is 14 years younger than I was born, I was in SSLC. I would carry him, rock him to sleep in the cradle or on my legs singing classical Kannada songs that I was learning then or while reading a book. Nala has grown up to be very creative – first as an architect and then as a cartoonist. My mother used to say that he is creative because of my singing to him!

Those Growing Years

My earliest memory of my father is that of him carrying me on his shoulders, and I playing with his head. He was balding even then. As a child, I was supposed to be precocious, since I could learn very quickly. My mother started teaching me the Kannada alphabets when I was very young, and I could read Kannada when I was barely one and a half years old. I am told that when we had come to Coorg for a holiday, I was trying to read the Kodagu newspaper. My grandmother who saw me, assumed that I was repeating the alphabets by rote. My mother said that I was able to recognise my alphabets and made me identify the alphabets in the paper. My grandmother was so surprised that she remarked in Kodava *thakke*, “It is difficult to keep up with this girl.”

During one of our periodic trips to Coorg, my elder brother's ears were pierced, as was the custom those days. I remember him crying with pain when the holes in his ears got infected. My aunt who was visiting us then said, “He does not need them these days” and unceremoniously yanked out the pieces of wire that were used to pierce his ears, while he howled with pain. I had never heard my brother crying until then and remember being frightened and shocked.

As children we did not have many toys. However, Amma got a carpenter to make 100 blocks of wood each one inch each and eight or twelve wooden pillars about 6 inches high. We built houses and trains with the blocks, using cardboard for roofs and invented all kinds of games to play with them. I loved playing with the blocks. Later, just before Nala was born, we had a carrom board and enjoyed carrom. Nala was one year old, insisted on sitting on the board to play with us. Sometime then we had a Ludo board and a Snakes and Ladders board too. So, the games we played where those that children in India played in those days— Ludo, Snakes and Ladders, Scrabble and Hide and Seek.

In the evening after school, we would go and play in the maidan called Ajjarkaad. There was no parental

supervision. The maidan was a very large ground, where many children came to play. There was a small area cordoned off as a play area for smaller children, with swings, slides and see-saws; and my brothers played hockey and cricket. We loved to play there. The only rule that my mother had laid down was that we return home before sunset. I remember my brother and I glancing at the horizon as the huge red sun was setting, hoping that we could somehow slow it down, so that we could play a little longer.

My mother had introduced us to the joy of reading books at a very young age. We used to borrow books from the neighbours and read. Later, she joined a scheme, where for a small sum of money paid every month, she could choose books to buy at reduced price. I remember the volumes of General Knowledge that she bought with the scheme, which we children poured over. All of us loved to read and were voracious readers. In fact, some of the fights we had as children were for books and our favourite place to sit and read them. Our parents did not interfere in our fights and encouraged us to resolve them ourselves. Sometimes Amma was called as the referee. Some of my favourite books in English which I remember reading over-and-over again during my growing years were *Pride and Prejudice*, *Little Women*, *Daddy Long Legs* and *Anne Frank's Diary*. I also loved Kannada novels and some that I read and reread many times were *Marali Mannige (Back to Soil)* and *Chomana Dudi (Choma's Drum)* by Shivaram Karanth and A N Krishna Rao's novel *Sandhya Raga (Evening Melody)*. I was fond of poetry, both in English and Kannada.

Since my mother was a working woman, we always had hired help to do the housework. When we lived in Udipi we had a cow. Our house-help would get up early to milk the cow. Since there was no daily delivery of milk those days, every family had their own cow or buffalo. Despite having house-help we had to do some household chores. We had to make our own beds, iron our clothes. In addition, the boys had to heat up the iron with coal embers, clean the chimney lamps and trim the wicks every evening (that was before electricity came). They also had to get rationed supplies, buy groceries etc. from the shops, which they did on their bicycles. During holidays we helped our cook with making otti or dosa and with the grinding for dosa or chutney and we helped our mother as she baked cakes or made sweet dishes because we wanted to. In those days there was no electricity or tap water till the late 1950s so we had to draw water from the well. Electricity came to our house in Mangalore in the 1950s (when I was in college) and I remember the excitement of switching on the light.

Until then, we used chimney lamps and lanterns lit with kerosene, and occasionally petromax lamps in Coorg during a big family gathering.

During vacations in Coorg, with cousins, the boys fetched water from the well, helped in cleaning the well (an annual affair, organised by my father), brought chopped firewood to the house, and went to the market to buy provisions....we, along with our girl cousins, swept the house, did the dishes, made the beds, helped with the cooking being done by our grandmother and mother and aunts. Watching them cook and by helping them, I learnt the rudiments of cooking. There was no pressure to learn cooking. My grandmother simply declared to my father, "As long as she is not scared of fire, she will learn to cook when she needs to." It was only much later in Calcutta that I learnt to cook through trial and error. I learnt from friends and by requesting my mother or mother-in-law for recipes by mail. In our grandparents' house we had to join our brothers in fetching water from the well, bringing firewood to the house... And when the water in the well at home ran dry during the summer vacation, it was great fun forming a line to the school well with all our cousins and drawing and conveying pots of water to the house, passed on from hands to hands.

Our recreation was filled with simple fun, playing outdoors. As children we never even thought of seeing movies. However, once, when our grandmother (mother's mother) from Madikeri came to visit us in Udupi, she told us that she had heard of a Kannada movie on Sri Krishna and wanted to see it. Being well-versed in mythological stories (she told us those stories at bed-time) she wanted to see the movie. We all went with her to the cinema theatre in Udupi and saw the movie. For the first time, we all had ice-cream at the stall next to the theatre. Thereafter, since we enjoyed the movie, every time we went to Madikeri during holidays, my father would take us and our cousins to the cinema tent in Madikeri/Virajpet (there were no cinema theatres in Coorg then), and we would sit on the ground and watch whatever movie was on. That was when I saw my first Hindi movie. My father never cared for movies. He would leave us at the movie, go for a walk and pick us up when it was over to walk us home.

Education and Widening Horizons

I was probably four years old when I started my school education in St. Mary's Preparatory School in Falnir, Mangalore.⁸ My mother stopped teaching us at home once my brother and I were enrolled in school. This is because

she did not want to confuse us with different teaching styles, and she believed that we should be able to do our school-work on our own. She made us responsible for our own studies and never nagged us to study. Since the school was close to our house, we walked to school daily. I would leave early to school because I loved learning something new every day. I would also look forward to meeting an older girl who was a remarkable storyteller. She would tell us younger children to bring something to her each day—it could be a leaf, a twig, or a stone. She would then hold the item and weave a beautiful story around it. That is when my interest in stories and storytelling must have started!

One of my vivid memories during my Mangalore school days was wearing a white frilly frock (which my mother must have stitched for me) for the Governor's⁹ visit. All the school children had to wear white dresses and were given baskets of flowers. We had to strew flowers on the road as the Governor's car with its escorts drove by. I do not remember any other details about the event. When I was in the second class at school, my mother was transferred to Udupi, and I joined St. Cicely's Convent there.¹⁰ I enjoyed my school. We had to learn English, Kannada, Maths, Science, History and Geography. My teachers were very good and made learning interesting. As a result, I developed my love for education very early.

I was good in studies and was given a double promotion. As a result, I was only 9 years old when I reached class 5 and was the youngest in the class. I was then recommended for a second double promotion, but my mother told the school not to promote me as I was already young for my class. At St. Cecily's, I became a girl guide and learnt a lot of good values and habits from that movement. When we were studying in St. Cecily's, Amma had to go to Coorg to have her fifth child, Maya. Since it was the middle of school term, she enrolled the three of us (Uppi, Rana and me) as boarders at the school for a few months. That was an interesting experience. Most of the boarders were Catholics. We went with them to the Chapel on Sundays. Rana who was about 5 years old then insisted on walking up to the priest with his friends and having the consecrated Host placed on his tongue. On finding that it was tasteless, he spat it out. It was sacrilegious. He never asked for it thereafter. On another occasion we were sitting in the bench and having congee for breakfast, Rana fell into the large pot of hot congee that was kept on the ground next to him. That created a lot of commotion.

Our uncle visited us there once and brought us

chocolates. My elder brother did not want the nuns to know that. So, he kept them in his trunk and gave us one piece each after the nuns had wished us good night and left. The school had a very strong Christian influence. All the girls had to attend catechism class in the morning. We, Hindu girls, did not like to go for catechism and strongly objected to it. So, the school introduced Moral Science classes instead, for us. Those classes exposed us to the ideas of liberal thinkers and we were encouraged to question and debate those ideas.

My mother was interested in music but had no opportunity to be trained in music. When she was studying in Madras, she found that many of her Tamilian friends had learnt classical music and played instruments. She learned to play the violin from them. She ensured that all her children learnt music. Music fascinated me. A teacher would come home to teach me music. I learnt to sing classical Carnatic music, and play the harmonium, violin and veena. I did not play these instruments well, but enjoyed being able to play them. It also helped me to appreciate classical music better. I also learnt Kathak dancing. My brother would escort me to my Kathak classes. My teacher was a man called YS Bhat. He later went on to join Bollywood as a dance teacher.

My mother was transferred back to Mangalore when I was in the middle of the Fourth Form (9th class). So, the last three years of my schooling were at Mangalore Government Training School for Women where she taught.¹¹ Until then I had studied in co-educational institutions, whereas this school was only for girls. The school had a very good reputation for scholastics and other co-curricular activities. Since my mother was a teacher there, I did not have to pay fees. Some of the subjects we had to study in High School were English, Kannada, Mathematics, Science, History and Geography. We also had music, sewing and Hindi class once a week.

Our growing years were marked by World War II and the Independence movement was gaining ground. In school we used to have air raid practice when the siren was blown. It was also the period of shortages. Rice was needed to feed the army. What limited amount there was for the public was of poor quality and rationed. My father would bring some rice grown in our paddy fields packed in his trunk when he came to visit us from Coorg, although that was not allowed. As a child, I wore frocks but as I grew up, I preferred wearing long skirts as it was so much more comfortable and pretty. I started wearing saris only in my last year at school. The only cloth available was khaki or

coarse grey cloth (I forget its name – ARP? Air Raid Protection?). So, my frocks and skirts and blouses were made of those.

My mother's youngest brother, N N Appayya, who was staying with us in Mangalore and going to college, joined the army without completing his degree. My mother tried to persuade him to finish his BA first, but he did not listen to her. He regretted that much later when he was denied promotion beyond the rank of Colonel because he was not a graduate. He was stationed in Peshawar and Karachi at first. So, my mother anxiously followed news of the war. We children loved his visits on vacation when he brought us delicious foreign chocolates (army rations). Once, after a promotion he brought my mother her first wrist-watch, and a Parker fountain pen and paint box for me. Until then, I had only used dip pens with nibs that were dipped in liquid ink. Every school desk had a small round socket to keep our ink bottles.

Our parents were strongly nationalist. As a student my father had participated in the freedom struggle. He made sure we were aware of Gandhiji and his non-violent movement. We did not have newspapers or a radio at home. (I bought the first radio for us when I started working in Calcutta). My father kept abreast of events and told us about it. When India gained Independence, we were invited to our neighbour's house to listen to the radio, Nehru's speech etc. I was about 12 years old when India got her freedom. My neighbour and I decided to paint the national flag on two large drawing papers and we decorated our gates with the flags. It was all very exciting. There was a big celebration at school. All of us assembled in the playground where the national flag was hoisted, sang *Jana Gana Mana* and listened to speeches by the Headmistress and staff. A large group photo was taken.

My father influenced me a great deal. He had a natural flair for languages which he picked up easily. He could speak Kannada, English, Tamil, Hindi, Telugu, Malayalam, Konkani, Tulu, and Urdu, besides his mother-tongue, Kodava. I must have inherited the capacity to learn languages from him. Apart from Kodava, my mother tongue, I was fluent in English and Kannada as a child, and I could understand Konkani and Tulu. Later, I learnt to speak Malayalam, Tamil, Bengali, and Hindi. My father insisted that we learnt Hindi, because it was one of the major languages of India and became popular during the freedom movement. My brothers and I learnt Hindi in Udupi from a lady who taught it for free, and I passed the Prathamik Hindi exam. At school in Mangalore, where

Hindi was introduced as subject around independence, the teacher had no teaching skills at all, and none of us in the class cared for the language. I used to like Hindi, but later, took an aversion to the language because of the language politics. I realise now, how important the quality of our teachers was, in making us like the subjects that we were taught.

My father had several Muslim friends with whom he would converse in Urdu. Being a Gandhian, he taught us not to discriminate between people from other religions. In fact, the prayer song that he composed for us, which we sang (and still sing) every evening in front of the lit hanging lamp at home had the words:

ಅದಿ ಶಕ್ತಿಯ ವಿದ್ಯಾ ದಾನವ ಮಾಡು ಎಮಗೆ ಮಾತೆಯೇ
ವೇದ ಮೂರುತಿ ನೀನು ತಾಯಿಯೇ, ನಿನ್ನ ಸೇವೆಯ ಮಾಳ್ವೆವು
ಭೇದ ಜಾತಿಯು ತೋರದಂತೆ ಮನವ ಮಾಡಿಸು ತಾಯಿಯೇ
ಬೋಧಿಸೆಮಗೆ ನಿನ್ನ ಶಕ್ತಿಯ ಪಾದಕರಗ್ಲವು ಮಾತೆಯೇ

O source of power, gift us knowledge O Mother,
O embodiment of the Vedas, we worship you,
Teach us not to discriminate between faiths, and
Grant us strength, we bow at your feet O Mother."

My mother too was politically conscious. She took active part in the teachers' union. I remember once, when the school was closed because of teachers' strike, she was standing in front of the school leading the other striking teachers shouting slogans. This has made me politically conscious and I do oppose all forms of injustice.

When India got Independence in 1947, the medium of instruction was switched to Kannada. (All Government Schools had to switch to the regional language as the medium of instruction soon after Independence). It was a little tough because until then I had studied only in English medium, but soon enough I started enjoying learning in Kannada and developed a strong love for the language. All the subjects were taught in Kannada, except for science because our excellent Science teacher was a Malayalee who did not know enough Kannada to teach in the language. The school was given special permission to allow her to teach science in English. The maths teacher was magical and made the subject so fascinating that it quickly became my favourite subject at school. My mother taught us history and geography. She was a remarkable teacher and made those subjects come alive with her vivid narrative style. Until then, I had not cared much for history, regarding it as

a boring subject with names of kings and wars and dates to be memorised! Geography opened the world for me. I loved maths, science practical and geography. In school I used to take part in plays and singing. I used to play badminton, net ball, and racing, but I was not good at any of them!

One of the important study tips that my mother gave us was not to study very hard just before exams. She asserted that if the mind is tired, nothing that we studied would stick to the mind. In fact, when I was appearing for my SSLC examination, I would set the alarm-clock to wake up early, so that I could revise my subjects one last time. My mother would quietly switch off my alarm so that I would sleep longer. I passed my SSLC examination by the age of 14 and completed my master's degree by the age of 19. I passed my SSLC examination in 1949. With a second rank in Madras Presidency (which at the time comprised of nearly all of what is now Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh). I scored 501 out of 600, and boys passing by on the road would tease me, chanting "Bar Soap, Bar Soap" (because 501 was the brand name of the popular bar soap used to wash clothes!) The one who came first, Bhama Rangaswamy from Madras, became my classmate and friend in Presidency College Madras. She is now Prof. Emeritus of Maths in Chicago University.

Higher Education

I enrolled in St. Agnes College, Mangalore, for my Intermediate course of two-years in duration, before going to the University for graduation. I opted for Maths, Physics, Chemistry, English and Sanskrit because I liked these subjects and they were easy for me. My father however had suggested that I take Sanskrit as my second language because it is the root of many Indian languages and would be useful to know. He also said that if I was good at it, scoring high marks was easier because we had to answer the Sanskrit questions in English! As it turned out, I did well in the final exams with a high second rank in the University of Madras. I graduated with BSc. Honours, in Statistics, from Presidency College, Madras in 1954. It was a three-year degree course which was automatically converted to a Master's degree after a year. Those who had completed a two-year BSc course joined us in our second year, to do their Masters. I was the only girl studying statistics in the class of ten. I was therefore given some privileges in the class (such as being allowed to use the only available electrical Facet calculating machine). I would however wait for the classes we shared with the

mathematics students because slightly more than half the students of mathematics were girls and I could chat and have fun with my friends there. I did my post-graduate studies in Advanced Statistics at the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) in Calcutta, based on the recommendation of my professors. It was a two-year course, but I was admitted into the second year as I had completed MA in Statistics.

The professors of ISI were excellent. The internationally renowned Statistician Dr C R Rao¹² was the head of the Research and Training School at ISI. The topics were taught in a very different way from a traditional university. We had a lot of practical content to supplement the theory, and occasional open book exams. We conducted field-studies which were enjoyable. My favourite subject was the Sampling Theory. I was not good in Advanced Theoretical Statistics and did not care much for it. On completing the course in 1955, Prof. C R Rao offered me a coveted research fellowship in Theoretical Statistics. But I declined it and chose to work in the National Sample Survey (NSS) Department, which at the time was part of the ISI instead—a job that was satisfying to me because I could see the immediate practical benefits.

Marriage and Motherhood

I got married in 1962. My husband and I were cousins and friends. My husband is my father's sister's son, and according to Kodava custom such marriages are allowed. Our grandfather Nadikerianda Chinnappa had married his first cousin but such marriages are rare these days. I was 27 years old, and none of the offers that had come were considered as suitable. My being educated and working in Calcutta for about five years by then might have been a deterrent. I heard later that my mother-in-law suggested me to her son when he was in the USA, on the verge of getting a job. After marriage we were in Calcutta for three years and then in Madras thereafter. My husband, after completing his master's in North-Western University, Chicago, was offered a job with Union Carbide. He could choose to work in New York or in Calcutta. We were engaged by then and I was working in Calcutta. His parents, who had not seen him for four years wanted him to return to India. So, he came back to India and worked with Union Carbide. I have two daughters Kaveri and Gouri, born in 1963 and 1966. We lost one daughter born in 1965 when she was only 10 days old.

Managing Multiple Roles

I was allowed nearly six months maternity leave from the ISI. I had a lady to look after my elder daughter Kaveri, in Calcutta. Also, our Bengali landlady who lived upstairs kept an eye on them when we were away at work. In 1965, when my husband started another job in Madras, I resigned from my job and we moved to Madras. We decided that I would not work until our daughters were ready to go to school. I had a cook in Madras, and a lady to clean the house. The ISI offered me a job to teach at their Evening Course in Madras. I enjoy teaching. So, I started to work, teaching once or twice a week at the Evening Course. When I was teaching, my husband would spend the time with our daughters. They enjoyed that because he took them to the beach before picking me up after the course, and they would often have ice-cream or peanuts. My children were good children and they did not need much disciplining. The only time I punished Kaveri was when she, as a two-year-old child, bit her little cousin, Nandu, on his back, because he played with her toys and would not give them back to her. I shut her up in the play-room for a while and told her that she should not hurt others and that she should share her toys with other children. She understood that. Kaveri and Gauri did their Kindergarten and Elementary at the Montessori School in Kalakshetra, Madras (that was started by Madame Montessori herself). Kaveri had just started Middle School at the Besant Theosophical Society High School, when we left for Cambridge. They continued their schooling in Cambridge, and when we moved to Ottawa, they went to school there.

Scaling New Career Height

Going to Cambridge was more than a stroke of luck. I guess I was at the right place at the right time. After I happened to attend a seminar in the Economics Dept. of Madras University, I was offered a job to teach statistics at their journalism course, and to help with their Agricultural Studies projects as a Statistical Research Officer. I accepted the job, since Kaveri and Gouri were both in Montessori school by then. Mr. Farmer, a Prof. at Cambridge University, UK, came to Madras University to find local team-members for a project that he had initiated, to study the Impact of High-Yielding Varieties of Rice, in two comparative arid areas in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

I was recommended as the statistician for the project and worked in both countries with the British and Sri Lankan team members. Mr. Farmer sent a telegram to the Head of the Economics Department asking if someone, “preferably Nanjamma” could go to a seminar in Cambridge to discuss

the early findings from the project. By accident, the telegram landed on the desk of the Head of Department of History, who had the same name as the Head of the Economics Department. He saw my name in the telegram and sent it to me. I took it to my departmental head and he could not refuse permission, although he had wanted very much to go to Cambridge himself.

This was a stroke of luck! Later, Mr. Farmer got me a one-year fellowship at Cambridge University to write chapters related to the statistical analysis in the upcoming book on the findings of the project. I had to resign my job at Madras University to go. By then my husband too had resigned from his job—he wanted to start writing novels. So, all four of us went to Cambridge—a wonderful and very rewarding experience, during 1974 -75. Since both of us had no jobs to go back to, I applied for jobs wherever they were available. I had an offer from Singapore University, and one from Statistics Canada, the Canadian Federal Statistical Agency in Ottawa.

We decided to go to Canada. When we visited the Canadian Embassy in London, we were told that I could go, but not my husband and children, since he was the head of the family, not I. Back in Cambridge, over lunch at the common dining room, I told our friends about that, adding that that would not have happened in India, where an educated woman was treated the same as an educated man. A Canadian at the table, asked me for details about what had happened. She wrote a strong letter deploring it, to the Minister-in-Charge of Women's Affairs in Canada, and her MP there. Within days we got a telegram from London, asking us to go the Embassy to collect our visas for Canada! That was another stroke of luck. It turned out that the Government of Canada had indeed changed the rule a little earlier and a woman could be the head of a family – but the officer at the Embassy had not kept abreast of the change (See Appendix 1 for Nanjamma's Curriculum Vitae).

Children and Grandchildren

Living in Canada gave us many opportunities to travel and see the world. My work took me to international meetings, conferences, workshops, and teaching assignments. We tagged on a vacation at the end of the event, to see more places in that region. Occasionally we travelled on holidays. We loved the experience of visiting different countries with different cultures. My daughters graduated from Carleton University in Ottawa. Kaveri did her Masters in the University of New Hampshire in the

US. Kaveri has taken early retirement from her job as a Geographer/Economist with the Canadian Federal Government. Gouri gave up her job with the Canadian Foreign Service and has been working in a Montessori School in Vancouver which she and her friend now own and where they teach.

They were bright children. Kaveri was intuitively good in maths. When she was in Middle School in Canada, we were told at a Parent-Teacher meeting that she got the correct answers for her maths problems, but could not demonstrate the steps by which she got them – as was expected in the class/exam. So, she could not be given full marks. We were advised that after all she was a girl and should probably switch subjects. I was shocked and told the teacher that she was intuitively good at maths, and that we would not discourage her. I added that I was a mathematician myself. Gouri was a very friendly child and in Cambridge, she was always visiting our neighbours in the residential complex that we lived in, playing with her friends there. One of the ladies there told me that she would run her fingers on their piano and play tunes, although she had never learned how to play a piano. We started her on piano lessons in Ottawa.

We now have two grandsons, Nikhil and Vikram. Nikhil is a Financial Analyst, now on a self-declared sabbatical. Vikram works from home as a crypto analyst for different countries around the world. When Nikhil was young, he loved the small tree next to our house in Ottawa. He called it Shawn. When we decided to sell the house and move to India, he was worried that the next owners would cut it. So, he wrote “My name is Shawn. Please do not cut me” in bold letters on a placard and tied it up to the tree trunk so that it would be visible. He had heard that smoking was bad for health, and disapproved of it as a young child. When he saw a lot of cigarette butts near a hall where we went for a performance, he looked very sad. When I asked him, why, He said “Because all these people will die of smoking!” My husband, his grandfather, smoked occasionally when a friend who smoked visited us. One day Nikhil told us that he did not like that friend because he made his grandfather smoke. My husband gave up smoking altogether that day.

Vikram too was a warm and loving child. When we were leaving for India after one of our visits to Canada, Vikram asked me why my hair was turning grey? I told him that was because I was growing old. He asked me “Are you going to die in India?” I laughed and said “No.” He looked at my braid and said “See, the lower part of your hair is

black. You are not getting old.” When he visited us in Bangalore, he loved the taste of the wood apple he ate, and so he carefully took its seeds and planted them in our garden, and asked me to water it daily and let him know when it became a tree and had fruit! When leaving India after the visit, as we saw him off at the Bangalore airport, he was up in a glass enclosed hall and saw us waving at him from below. He blew moist breath on the cold glass and in the fog, wrote ‘BYE’ in letters inverted left to right, so that we could read it correctly!

Homecoming

We had always wanted to return to India for many reasons – India was home and we always wanted to come back and see more of India. We missed our siblings and relatives and wanted to live close to them. We wanted our children and grandchildren to have a base in India and experience our culture and ways of living. The most important reason was to complete the translation of our grandfather’s book, the *Pattole Palame* into English, a task that he had begun in the 1920s, but could not pursue because of his early death when he was only 56. We were inspired by our grandfather’s book, the *Pattole Palame*. Ever since my father gave us our grandfather’s hand-written draft of a translation of parts of the book, we wanted to fulfil his wish. We carried the precious draft with us to UK and Canada – but could not devote the time and effort required to do justice to it there. Besides, we realised that to translate it well we would need to be in Coorg to get the right context and meanings of the old words and phrases in the book that were no longer in common use. So, we returned to India and started working on it. That experience got us interested and enthusiastic about Kodagu and Kodava culture.

When we went to meet elders in Coorg in search of the meanings of old words in the Kodava language, we found that many of the elders lived in the *ainmanes* of their *okka*. We noticed that many of these old *ainmanes* were in a poor condition and some, we were told, were going to be dismantled. We wanted to make a list of all the *ainmanes* in Coorg to see how many were still standing and were functioning as *ainmanes*. Soon it became a much larger project and we collected information collected from all the existing *ainmanes* in Coorg. We prepared a draft questionnaire and tested it in a pilot survey of a few *ainmanes* to find what was the useful information that we could collect, during an hour-long interview. During the interview, many respondents volunteered information that was important to them about their *ainmane* and *okka*. They

told us about the temples near their *ainmane* and the *thakkame* or other responsibilities that their *okka* had in the temples. They often took us to the temples. As for ancient artifacts in the *ainmanes*, again, this was information that they volunteered. Often the artifacts were displayed in the central hall of the *ainmane*.

I guess, my experience as a survey statistician made it easy for me to plan the study and design the questionnaire. We also derived some simple descriptive statistics. As we travelled the length and breadth of Kodagu, we were captivated by the beauty of the land in all the seasons. The paths and roads we drove on were invariably rough and could only be negotiated because we had a sturdy Sumo car. On occasions, local people helped us extricate the tyres from a swampy patch. Sometimes we drove through meadows, across rocky streams, and up dangerous hill-slopes with no barrier on the open edge of the road. We were touched by the generosity of the people whom we interviewed in the *ainmanes*—they welcomed us, even though we were strangers who visited them without any prior intimation. They were kind and hospitable beyond expectation. They gave freely of their time to answer our questions, often volunteering very interesting information. We were invited to eat in their homes although we always carried our sandwiches and coffee for the day. They gave us fruit and vegetables from their garden. Once a family insisted that we join them in their lunch for the *maada* of an elderly person who had died recently. Many *ainmanes* were left open even when the inmates were out working in the fields or estates. We would walk in and call out before someone heard us, noticed our Sumo, and came back to the *ainmane*. There was no fear of thieves in the rural areas....

Footnotes:

1. The Lady Goschen Maternity Hospital (now known as the Lady Goshen Government Hospital) is the earliest hospital established in Mangalore. It was established in 1848 to provide modern medical facilities for the rapidly urbanising people of Mangalore and the district. It was refurbished in 1926 and named after Lady Margret Evelyn Goschen the wife of the governor of the Madras Presidency between 1924-26.
2. Madikeri. The names of places retained in this narrative are those in use during the British period.
3. In the 1920s and 1930s all the Coorg girls who aspired for university education went to either Women’s Christian College or Queen Mary’s College, Madras, as these were the only two women’s colleges available in the Madras Presidency.
4. Ponnamma was one of the earliest professional women from Coorg who had the courage of conviction to work outside the home. In doing so she opened the doors for other women. Lady Willingdon College is a private college established in 1919 to train teachers. It was named after

Lady Willingdon, wife of Lord Willingdon who was the Viceroy of India, 1931-36.

5. The motto 'lighted to lighten' that inspired Ponnamma's long and dedicated service to education was the motto of the Women's Christian College where she had studied. The College had a tradition during the valedictory function, when the students would take a pledge holding a candle that they would use their knowledge to lighten others.

6. The 1920s and 1930s were the period of the Great Depression across the world. As a colonized country the Indian economy was in the doldrums. The prices of agricultural produce were very poor even in Coorg.

7. Nadikeranda Chinnappa is the well-known author from Coorg. He has contributed significantly to the preservation of Coorg culture and folk literature through his remarkable work entitled *Pattole Palame*, published in 1924. This was the first attempt by the community to document their oral transmitted history and traditions.

8. The school referred to was possibly St. Mary's Preparatory School in Falnir that was established in 1932.

9. The Governor of the Madras Presidency referred to here was probably Sir Arthur Oswald James Hope, who was the Governor of the Presidency from 1940 to 1946.

10. St. Cicely's Higher Primary School was established in 1918, by the sisters of Apostolic of Carmel.

11. In the 1930s and 1940s St. Cecily's in Udupi had a high school, but St. Mary's in Mangalore did not. Nanjamma therefore went to Mangalore Government Training School for Women.

12. Prof. C R Rao (1920-2023) was one of the Indo American Mathematician and Statistician who contributed significantly to the growth and development of Indian Statistical Institution in Calcutta. He was a Fellow of eight National Academies India, U.K and USA and was the Emeritus Prof. of Pennsylvania State University, Chicago.

Appendix 1

Dr. Boverianda Nanjamma Chinnappa

(nee Nadikerianda Subbayya Nanjamma)

1954. M.A. in Statistics, Madras University.

1955. Post-Graduate Course in Advanced Statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta.

2006. Honorary Doctorate for contributions to the field of Statistics, Mangalore University.

Work Experience (1955-95)

1995: Retired from Statistics Canada in as Senior Advisor. Awarded the Career Excellence Award of the Department in 1996.

1987-94: Director, Business Survey Methods Division

1991-95: Chairperson of Statistics Canada's Employment Equity Committee, directing and encouraging employment equity measures in the Department.

1974-75: Visiting Fellow at the Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge University, England.

1971-74: Research Officer and Statistical Consultant in the Economics Dept. Univ of Madras.

1955-64: Survey Statistician in the National Sample Survey Dept., Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta.

1969-90: Statistical Consultant for various national and international agencies advising, planning and conducting sample surveys and data analysis in India, USA and Canada.

1956-93: **Teaching Experience** - Lectures and Workshops on

Survey Methodology, Sampling Techniques, Statistics, Statistical Quality Control, Marketing Research, and Quantitative Techniques in Planning for various national and international agencies, and Universities in India, USA and Canada.

Professional Experience:

Since 1982, Elected member of the Institute. International Statistical (ISI)

- Associate editor of the International Statistical Review, 1994-1995.

-Member of the ISI Publication Committee (1992-1997).

-Member of the International Committee on Women in Statistics (1995-1998).

-Member of the Advisory Board for the World Numeracy Project (1994-1999).

-Member of the Gregor-Johann Mendel Committee on Agricultural Statistics (1993-1997).

1973: founding member of the International Association of Survey Statisticians (IASS).

-Elected as President of the IASS (1997-1999)

-Chair of the Programme Committee for the scientific programme of the IASS at the 49th session of the International Statistical Institute in 1993.

-Member of the IASS Council (1991-1997).

Since 1976, member of the American Statistical Association (ASA). Elected fellow in 1993.

-Member of the ASA Survey Review Committee (1989-94).

1988-1995: member of the Statistical Society of Canada.

International Conference on Establishment Surveys:

-Member of the Organizing Committee, June 1993; and of the editorial committee of the monograph from the conference "Business Survey Methods" published by John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1995.

Survey Methodology Journal:

- Member of the Management Board (1987-1995).

Canadian Journal of Statistics:

- Member of the editorial panel for the Special Issue on Current Statistical Work at Statistics Canada, 1988.

CONTRIBUTION TO BOOKS

Chapters in:

-"Sampling Theory and Methods" by M.N. Murthy, Statistical Publishing Society, Calcutta, 1967.

-"A Guide to Research in Economics" edited by C.T. Kurien, Sangam Publishers, Madras, 1973.

-"Green-Revolution?" edited by B.H. Farmer, Cambridge Commonwealth Series, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977.

-"Business Survey Methods", edited by B.G. Cox, D.A. Binder, B.N. Chinnappa, A. Christianson, M.J. Colledge and P.S. Kott, John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1995.

PAPERS

Thirteen papers published in various statistical journals and texts. Other papers presented at conferences and seminars.

Prof. Veena Poonacha retired as Director, RCWS (Research Centre for Women's Studies) SNDT University, Mumbai.

Christian Women and their Contribution to the Print Industry of Madras in 19th Century

—Nivedita Louis

Introduction

19th Century saw the Industrial Revolution peak in Europe. However the best invention of mankind was made in the 15th Century by Johannes Gutenberg. He proved that mass production of printed material was possible and his Gutenberg Bible is believed to be one of the first mass produced material in print. As one can see, Christian scriptures were the earliest texts printed. The Print Revolution that started in Europe in the 16th Century was closely followed by the Tamil Print Industry in Europe. Tamil is one of the earliest non European languages in which a book was printed. In February 1554, *Cartilha em lingua Tamul e Portugues*, a prayer book in Romanised Tamil was printed in Lisbon, Portugal.¹

The first printed books in Tamil

Father Venantius claims that in 1582, Father Henri Henriques printed the first Tamil book *Flos Sanctorum* at Punnaikayal, where he established a printing press and he saw a copy of it printed by Joao De Bustamente in Rome.² The same is claimed by Anant Kakba Priolkar, as he writes that a copy of *Flos Sanctorum* printed in Tamil by H. Henriques at “Pescaria” (Punicale?) in 1586, is available in the Vatican Library.³ We also note that in a contemporary letter, dated December 24, 1576, Pero Luis, a Brahmin convert, was sent to Goa for arranging for Tamil printing.⁴ *Doctrina Christa* written in Portuguese by Saint Francis Xavier was printed in Tamil by Father Henri Henriques in 1578 at Quilon. It was named *Tambiran Vanakkam*. The handbook Confessionario and *Flos Sanctorum* were printed from Cochin Press in 1580 and 1586 respectively. Thus the earliest Tamil printed books were mostly the contributions of the Jesuit priests who came with the Portuguese to rule over India.

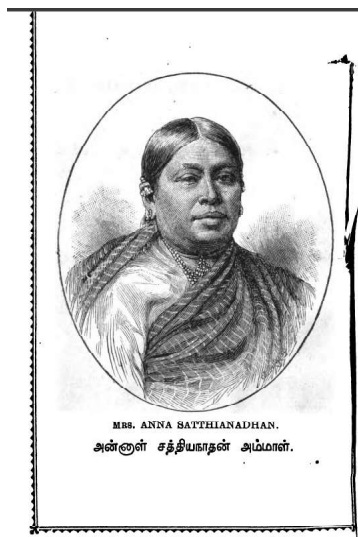
The first non religious work in Tamil is however the Tamil – Portuguese dictionary by Antao De Proenca printed in Ambalacaud in 1679.⁵ It took us more than a century after religious printing, to print a non religious book, even though the dictionary was to support the Portuguese missionaries in their mission work. Mass printing was made possible with the arrival at Tranquebar of the old wooden press from the Halle Mission in 1713 and the first tract *Akkijanam* was printed from it on 25 October 1713, by Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg.⁶ Though the Romish presses were established much earlier than the Tranquebar Press, it was the most long standing and permanent press that outlived the other press.⁷

The first ever published work of a woman – Pike’s Early Piety Tract

Though first tract in Tamil written by Ziegenbalg was printed in 1713, the first written work of a Tamil woman ever published was the Tamil translated tract of Pike’s *Early Piety*. It was written by Gnanadibum Ammal, the (adopted) daughter of Vethanayaga Sastri and published by the Madras Tract Society in 1854.⁸ It took almost 150 years after Ziegenbalg for a Tamil woman to publish a tract in Tamil. The proximity to the Reformation missionaries who established the first Malabar Girls’ Schools in Tranquebar⁹ paved way for women’s education in the Delta region. Gnanadibum Ammal was one of the earlier students who benefited out of the mission education and so was the woman who wrote the first print book in Tamil, Anna Satthianadhan.

Anna Satthianadhan and her *Nalla Thaay*

Anna Satthianadhan wrote the first ever book in Tamil which was published in 1862, called *Nalla Thaay*.¹⁰ The preface for the book holds a testimonial from the Madras



Christian Vernacular Education Society's Report 1862-1863. The testimonial states that *'The Good Mother is perhaps the first original work which has been published, written by a female. It is by Mrs. Satthianadhan, the daughter of the venerable Rev. J. Devasagayam, and the wife of a native Minister of the Church Missionary Society.'*¹¹

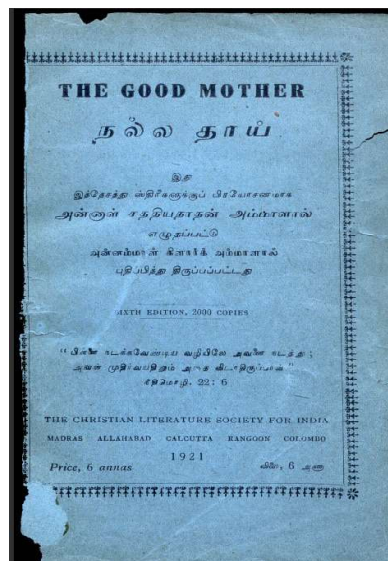
More details on the life of Anna Satthianadhan emerge from the biography her daughter Anna Clarke penned on her mother, *Life of Mrs.*

*Anna Satthianadhan.*¹² Anna was a fourth generation Christian, born on 30th April, 1832, as the daughter of Devasagayam John, the first native pastor of the Anglican Church. His predecessor Daniel Pillay worked under Hyder Ali and is said to have translated a few German books. Anna was named Annal Arokiyam. Her mother Muthammal was the granddaughter of the first Indian minister baptised by Ziegenbalg, Aaron. Young Anna accompanied her father in his pastoral work. In 1841, Devasagayam was made in charge of the Mrs. Blackman's Girls' Normal School at Kadatchapuram. It was here that Anna trained under Caroline Cuffley Giberne, the missionary who has left a wealth of information of her work in Tamil Nadu.¹³ One of the earliest portraits of Anna is by Giberne, who drew the young girl as a eleven year old and taught her languages and reading. She also dutifully left letters written by Anna and her husband W T Satthianadhan from which we can infer on her mission and Zenana work.

Anna was married to William Thomas Satthianadhan, a student of the missionary Cruikshank on 11th February, 1849. Anna assisted her husband Satthianadhan in his mission work at Srivilliputtur where he was sent to take over as missionary in 1859. It was here that Anna started a small school at her mission bungalow for the caste girls.¹⁴ This was probably the first school started by a Tamil woman for her sisters. In December 1862, WT Satthianadhan was ordained as Anglican priest in-charge of the Chintadripet and John Perreira's Churches. It was in the same year that *Nalla Thaay* was published. Researcher Eliza F Kent states that *Nalla Thaay* can be termed a sort of epistolary **mothering manual**¹⁵ on the model of U.S. and

British English-language advice books, and one of the first mothering manuals written in South India. *Nalla Thaay* set the definitive precedent for blending Tamil traditions of both literary and the popular, with new messages of childrearing.¹⁶ Some of the more arresting proverbs employed by Anna Satthianadhan have found their way into the reformist manuals of today.

Nalla Thaay – the book



The format of the book is loosely styled on the book *Mother At Home* by John S C Abbott. The chapters are devised as letters written by a sister to another. The book has been written for the betterment of all the women in the country, as it was the primary concern of Anna who wrote the book.¹⁷ If this country has to prosper, it has to be by the women of the country, more by its mothers and not its

men. 'Only good mothers bring up good children and through them the country will prosper,' writes Anna Clarke in her foreword to the book. There are 8 chapters in the book originally written by Anna and the last 9th chapter in the sixth edition has been added by her daughter. The chapters are titled 'A Mother's Duty', 'A Mother's Authority', 'A Mother's Difficulties', 'A Mother's Faults', 'A Mother's Instructions', 'A Mother's Reward', 'A Mother's Responsibility'.

In the very first letter, Anna stresses that the men work outside the homes and it is the responsibility of the women at home in upbringing the children with values and in piety. She talks against punishing the children and handling them with the right authority, to make them pliable.¹⁸ She narrates stories and real life incidents to stress upon her values in almost all her letters. She also goes on to stress being rooted to one's own culture and not to copy the European style of dressing.¹⁹ She however advises us to take a leaf out of the foreigner's lifestyle, to value time and appreciate all work, including menial work.²⁰ She also stresses the importance of women's education in the book, questioning

when Brahma's wife Saraswathy is sporting a book and is said to be educated what stops us from educating our women.²¹ She also quotes Tirukkural in her book to emphasise the fact that children behaving well would make the parents proud.

Anna and her Zenana Work



**Caroline Cuffley Giberne with her students,
PC: Cadbury Research Library**

Upon reaching Madras, Anna started a school for the caste girls in 1864.²² This is also confirmed in a letter written by Anna to Mrs. Giberne.²³ Her object in opening this school was two-fold not just 'educating the caste girls, but also attempt zenana visitation. This is perhaps the first school for caste girls in connexion with our Society in South India and I heartily wish that it would not prove a failure.' *Nalla Thaay* was written with this objective in mind, to reach out to the zenana women and take her agenda further.²⁴ In due course, the school with ten girls went on to become 500 girls in six schools and the three Hindu zenana women visited burgeoned to 320 women under her instruction in the zenanas. Interestingly, a Hindu widow assisted Anna in her zenana mission work.²⁵

The Saththianadhans visited England in 1878 and were presented to the Queen. She wrote a travelogue on her six months visit to England, she also wrote about the conditions and needs of her country women *A Brief Account of Zenana Work*, published by Seeley & Co., in 1878 on 14 years of her zenana work, while in England. Her health declined and she died on 24th October, 1890.

Tabitha Bauboo



The first Tamil women's periodical brought out by a Tamil woman was *Amirtha Vachani* and its Founder Editor was Tabitha Bauboo.²⁶ It was basically brought out to encourage her old students to study at home. Its main object was to spread Christian ideas, but at the same time give advice on various subjects and on practical life,

elementary notions which the Hindus lack completely. This sheet is exclusively written by Hindu women, who have become Christians and most of them have passed through the schools of the mission.²⁷ Tabitha was born on 8th September, 1845 to Chinnia Peter Kalnayagam's son Hosea Peter. Her grandfather was a native physician and an evangelist. As young Tabitha lost her mother, she was brought under the care of her foster mother. She was sent as a playmate to the American Missionary Isaac N Hurd, to play with his little son. Hurd brought her up as his own daughter, coached her in English and arranged to teach her Tamil through a native teacher. He took her on his inspections and found that she had a flair for teaching. He also took her to the American Mission Press where she learnt to compose, correct proofs, impose and print herself which helped her later in her own Sathiadeepam Press.²⁸

Amirtha Vachani

When Hurd had to move back to America, Tabitha was left under the care of Mrs. Anderson of the Free Church Mission and she was taught at the Mission School. The next year on finishing school, Tabitha was married on January 20th to missionary R M Bauboo, a widower who was in-charge of the Girls' Schools of the Free Church Mission. Starting from that moment, for 28 long years, Tabitha laboured voluntarily for women's education in Madras. She also took up zenana work and encouraged women to take up Government examinations. She also offered personal rewards for those who took up and passed the examinations. In 1871 she started the Madras Normal Girls Day School that provided with teachers to the other schools run by Bauboo.²⁹ It was to educate these girls who

passed out from her schools did she start *Amirtha Vachani* which was a periodical that commenced at Madras in 1865, an illustrated magazine for Hindu women. The principal contributors were said to be Native Christian women.³⁰

Amirtha Vachani today is a lost magazine, no physical copies of the same are available. However, we can find excerpts of the magazine in an unusual repository—the *Thathuva Bodhini*. *Thathuva Bodhini* was a magazine started by the Madras Brahma Samaj in 1864 by V Rajagopalacharlu and Salem Subbarayalu, published by K Deivasigamani. It was fuelled by the Madras visit of Calcutta Brahma Samaj leader Keshab Chandra Sen in February 1864. It carried descriptions of Vedas, explanations on Brahma Samaj songs, notes on Upanishads and was vociferous about women's education. In 1866, it also republished extracts from *Amirtha Vachani* pertaining to feminism.³¹ An article praising *Amirtha Vachani* appears in *Thathuva Bodhini*'s July 1866 edition. The article reads that *Thathuva Bodhini* is reproducing parts of *Amirtha Vachani* which like its name, Words of Nector, cannot be found elsewhere. An advertisement of *Amirtha Vachani* also is featured in the magazine. The advertisement mentions that the magazine is printed every second Saturday and its main objective is to inculcate good values and discipline among Hindu girls studying in the various Balika Pathshalas of Madras. The subscription of the magazine was 5 annas per year and 1 anna per month. Copies of the magazine could be bought by writing to the Free Church Mission Girls' Schools at Flower Bazar or Acharappan Street.³²

Thathuva Bodhini

அமிருதவசனிஎன்னு மொரு சிறு மா தாந்திரபத்திரிகை சிலமாநகரங்களாய் எங்களுக்கெட்டி. அதை காண மிகவும் சந்தோஷமடைந்தோம். இஃது ஸ்திரீகளின் பொருட்டு ஸ்திரீகளாலேயே எழுதப்பட்டி. அழகிய சிறப்புத்தமாய் அச்சிடப்பட்டி வருகின்றது. இதன் அழகிய நாமத்துக்குத்தக்கபடியே இதிலடங்கிய வாக்கு அமிருதமயமா யிருக்கக்கண்டு யாங்களடைந்த ஆநந்தத்துக்களவிலலை. இதிலுபபல உபயோகமுள்ள விஷயங்களைப்பற்றி யாவருக்கும் எளிதில் விளங்கும்படி அதி சுலபநிலையில் எழுதியிருப்பதுபொலவேறெவ்வீடத்தும்யாங்களிதுவரையில் பார்த்தோமில்லை. இதன் அழகும் மேன்மையும் இதை வாசப்போருக்கன்றி, சொமையாய் விளங்கமாட்டாதாயைல், இதிலிருந்து சிலபாக்கங்களை இப்பத்திரிகையிலேபிரசுரம்செய்கிறோம். இன்னும் இதைப்பற்றி விசேஷமாய் பிரஸ்தாபிக்கசமயமில்லாதபடியால், இஃது எல்லோரும் அபிமதித்துக் கொள்ளத்தக்கதென்றுமாதிரம் குறிக்கின்றோம். இன்னசந்தாஸ்பரமும், மற்றசங்கதிகளும், இப்பத்திரிகையின் வேறொரிடத்தில் காணலாம்.

Information on Amirtha Vachani published in Thathuva Bodhini

We also find an article by Gnanabaranam Ammal in the letter format popularised by Anna Satthianadhan, republished from *Amirtha Vachani* in April 1866 edition of *Thathuva Bodhini*. Interesting references to *Athichoodi*, a book of didactic one-liners for children attributed to the saintly Avvaiyar, are also made in an *Amirtha Vachani* article republished in September 1866 edition of *Thathuva Bodhini*.

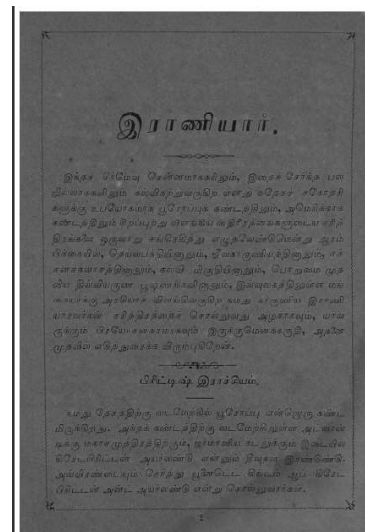
Tabitha's Zenana Work

Tabitha also started the Sunday School in connection with the Girls' Day School. Voluntary offerings of money collected from the Sunday Schools were spent for charitable purposes by Tabitha.³³ She had a well ordered Christian home, maintained an open house where any native Christian could walk in anytime for help. In her dress, general tastes, in her innermost feelings she was to the day of her death a genuine daughter of India. She always used the local language unless speaking to persons who knew no language but English. By her position, education, and natural gifts, she was eminently fitted to work for the promotion of free social intercourse between Europeans and Indians.³⁴

The Eastern Star magazine was printed by Bauboo at the Sathiadeepum Press and Tabitha was seen at the press encouraging compositors, correcting proofs and otherwise helping them. She was the Secretary of the Black Town Branch of the Madras Christian Women's Association. She was also the Delegate of Free Church Mission at Madras to the Decennial Conference, Calcutta in December, 1882 where she read a paper on the 'Women's Work in India'.

In December 1872, she wrote and published a book in

Tamil *Raniyar* (Life of the Queen). In the preface of the book she mentions that the book was written to supply a want and that it was written for young Hindu women leaving schools. She also writes that the book is a complete reply to all the objections raised against female education and living model for imitation of all educated women.³⁵ When R M Bauboo was made the pastor of the Esplanade



Church after Rajahgopaul, Tabitha assisted him. The couple's only daughter Little Caruna died in 1874. Despite the personal tragedy, Tabitha continued her zenana work and meticulously brought out *Amirtha Vachani*. She died of fever on 6th February, 1890.³⁶

Conclusion

One can draw many similarities from the lives of these two women. They married first generation converts, they were contemporaries and were mentored by foreign missionaries. If it was Ms Giberne for Anna, it was Hurd for Tabitha. They were carving the 'Tamil Christian Woman' identity afresh for generations to come. Both launched a valiant battle for educating their Hindu sisters. They found arenas to write and speak and built a generation that could express itself to the world. They wrote diaries, their kith and kin ensured literature on their lives were printed and published. They defied to conform to the colonial setting, but benefitted from it. Both the women laboured unconditionally for the new religion they embraced. They were nonconforming to the gender identity those days. They questioned the social order by treating all women equals. Above all, they built relationships cutting across borders, around the globe.

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This is an unabridged version of the paper submitted for 82nd session of Indian History Congress held on December 29,30 at Kakatiya University, Warangal.

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A Radiance of Nuns

—*Tsunma Sherab Khandro*

Tsunma Sherab Khandro attended March's Alliance of Non-Himalayan Nuns' Gathering in Dharamsala, India. Here, she shares her experience and her perspective on the many challenges today's nuns are faced with as they strive to uphold their vows, including lack of community and financial support.



Ven. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo with Participants of The Alliance of Non-Himalayan Nuns Gathering, Dharamsala, India, March 2024. Image courtesy of ANHN.

Nestled in the Himalayan foothills of Sidhpur village, just outside Dharamsala, India, Thosamling Nunnery is a fifteen-minute walk from the nearest dirt road. The narrow path from the village winds through acres of achingly green, low-growing wheat cultivated in paddies like rice.

We reached the village at 2:00 a.m. after a harrowing 16-hour bus ride from New Delhi. An early March thunderstorm raged outside. There were 11 of us, many in our sixties or older, and hiking through wheat paddies in the middle of a deluge seemed daunting to say the least.

Three at a time, we followed our guides' bobbing headlamps along the path, our hand luggage bumping along behind. The wind, rain, and thunder were deafening.

Standing at last in Thosamling's dining hall, soaked through, cold, and laughing, one of us said through chattering teeth, "Well, we know this Gathering must be important. That was like climbing the mountain to see the Guru!"

She was not wrong.

We were among the first of 37 non-Himalayan nuns (NHNs) to descend upon Thosamling in the early days of March. Representing 17 countries and all four lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, we'd come to participate in The Gathering, a three-week event created by the Alliance of Non-Himalayan Nuns (ANHN). "It's very unique, us coming together like this, very, very rare," said the trailblazing British nun Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, who was both a participant and guide during the Gathering. "I don't remember going to any conference or gathering where every single person was a non-Himalayan monastic."

With a disrobing rate of up to 75% among non-Himalayan nuns, the timeliness and importance of this first-ever international Gathering was clear. We had gathered to identify/ the complex, sometimes daunting factors leading to that discouraging statistic, "to collaboratively develop solutions for the challenges encountered by many Non-Himalayan Nuns today" (ANHN), and to experience—some of us for the first time—the strength and support of monastic community.

Monastic Bardo

The Alliance of Non-Himalayan Nuns was founded in 2014. At the time, it was an initiative brought to life by Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Geshema Kelsang Wangmo, and Venerable Tenzin Sangmo. A fierce advocate for nuns and an inspiration to Buddhist women everywhere, Jetsunma

was one of the first Westerners to take ordination as a Tibetan Buddhist nun. She famously spent twelve years in a secluded retreat in a Himalayan cave. Years later, she founded Dongyu Gatsal Ling, a beautiful nunnery for Himalayan nuns in India.

Non-Himalayan nuns, as defined by the ANHN, are ordained female monastics of any lineage of Tibetan Buddhism whose countries of origin are outside traditionally Tibetan Buddhist geographic areas (Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and North India). “Non-Himalayan Nuns in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition live in a kind of monastic bardo,” said Jetsunma, “They’re not supported by the laity or the lamas. There’s very little respect or appreciation that they’ve devoted their whole lives to the Dharma. They lose out on the pleasures of family life and worldly life and, at the same time, have very few of the joys of a true monastic life. They’re usually not living in a community. They’re by themselves. They can’t do the things which the lay people can do, but also they are not living a monastic life either.”



Ven. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo greeted by participants of the ANHN Gathering.
Photograph by Tsunma ND Dolma.

“The Himalayan nuns from Tibet and surrounds, on the whole, they’re doing okay now,” said Jetsunma in a 2022 interview with *Yoga Journal Australia*. “They are being supported and encouraged, they are in good nunneries, they are studying and so forth.” They are even supported to pursue distinguished Geshema or Khenmo degrees, which are the equivalent of a PhD. Non-Himalayan nuns, however, “continue to be overlooked,” noted Jetsunma. They experience a unique constellation of daunting financial, community, and personal challenges, which were some of the issues discussed during the Gathering.

Most NHNs reside in secular countries with an individualist rather than a communal, societal mindset. Thus, a cultural tradition of supporting spiritual or monastic communities is not present, and lay sanghas often innocently assume that non-Himalayan nuns receive financial support from their ordaining monasteries or lamas, which is not the case.

Some non-Himalayan nuns are forced by necessity to continue paid work in a lay setting and often must wear lay people’s clothing to do so—a heartbreaking compromise, as wearing robes is among our basic monastic vows.

Due to the lack of financial and communal support, many of us put off ordination for years—often into our fifties and sixties—so we can “afford” to ordain with a small pension or nest egg. Whatever our age at ordination, NHNs are often left to our own devices to figure out how to receive any sort of monastic training or financial support. “You get ordination,” said Jetsunma at the opening ceremony of the Gathering, “and the lama says, ‘Oh, wonderful, fantastic, great karma. Obviously, you must have been a monastic in your past life, and it’s very wonderful. Well done. Here is your Dharma name. Bye-bye.’ And that’s it.... For non-Himalayan nuns, what are you going to do? There is nowhere for us to go,” leaving a newly ordained non-Himalayan nun to fend for herself without any kind of support.

This may be in part due to the fact that when Buddhism came to the West, it was, for the first time, driven by and directed toward lay practitioners rather than monastics. “How can one live as a monastic within a situation which is totally or almost totally secular and still have a meaningful life as a monastic,” asked Jetsunma, “where often monastics find themselves alone, not even supported by having a community, and often considered quaint but irrelevant?”

A Place of Our Own

After two days of rain, we had our first sunny morning. Thosamling’s flowers, fruit trees, and cobblestone paths glistened; the Dhauladhar peaks behind were white with new snow. We’d finished morning prayers and filed out of the temple in ones and twos, some wandering to the dining hall or our rooms, others to the library.

Standing near the office, Venerable Tenzin Sangmo, abbess of the nunnery, watched the activity with intent blue eyes. Thosamling exists because of her. A quiet, formidable Dutch nun, Ven. Sangmo built the nunnery

almost single-handedly and radiates the kind of humility, level-headedness, and sheer grit needed for such an undertaking.

“So many nuns!” she said softly. “It is such a dream. Really. The realization of a dream.”

Twenty-four years ago, when His Holiness the Dalai Lama said it would be beneficial for non-Himalayan nuns to have a nunnery of their own in Dharamsala, Ven. Sangmo got to work. Within three years, she’d assembled funding, purchased land, and begun construction. His Holiness fully supported her efforts from the beginning and personally consecrated the nunnery upon its completion.

Thosamling was the perfect home for the ANHN Gathering. For nearly a month, we lived, practiced, and meditated together and attended workshops, discussions, and lectures (live or via Zoom) from luminaries such as Ven. Thubten Chodron, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Ven. Robina Courtin, Khenmo Drolma, Geshema Tenzin Lhadron, Lopon Pema Deki and others. We attended teachings at Dharamsala’s monasteries and centers and visited nunneries where we witnessed the fierce grace of our Himalayan sisters practicing debate.

“Before Thosamling,” said Ven. Sangmo, “non-Himalayan nuns had no place of their own. Now they have Thosamling. It is for them.”

The significance of Ven. Sangmo’s vision was driven home with sharp immediacy when one of our sisters became homeless during the first week of the Gathering. She’d recently moved to a new nunnery in Spain, managed by a lay center. She and one other nun worked hard to stabilize the nunnery, even investing their own money. She was excited to let other NHNs know about the beautiful nunnery by the sea and invite them all to live there. One morning, she received an unexpected text from the Spanish center’s management, informing her that they were closing the nunnery and repurposing the building, and she and the other nun had one month to move out.

One Table, Four Legs

From the beginning, the Buddha was committed to establishing a “Fourfold Sangha” of fully ordained monks, fully ordained nuns, lay men, and lay women. He said it was like the four legs of a table, making the Dharma very stable, and that as long as the fourfold Sangha endured, the Dharma would flourish. “The Buddha specifically emphasized the importance of the fourfold Sangha right from the start,” said Jetsunma. “That was his vision from

the beginning, it wasn’t that nuns were forced on him. He had that vision and expressed it to Mara right after his enlightenment, a balanced sangha of monastics and lay people of both genders.”

The demographic of NHNs at the Gathering ran the gamut of ordination. Some nuns had been ordained for as little as two weeks, others had been ordained for many decades. Levels of ordination differed as well. Two nuns held Rabjungma junior novice ordination with eight vows. The majority of us held Getsulma novice ordination, with thirty-six vows. At the moment, this level is the highest ordination officially allowed for Tibetan Buddhist nuns.

However, a small handful of us were *fully* ordained Bhikshunis, holding 354 vows. These Bhikshunis had gone outside the Tibetan lineage to receive their full ordination in the Dharmagupta (non-Tibetan) Vinaya, traveling to Hong Kong or Taiwan to do so. Until recently, this method was the only way any Tibetan Buddhist nun could become *fully* ordained.

However, in 2022, His Holiness the Je Khenpo of Bhutan—head of the Central Monastic Body in Bhutan—with the blessing of the royal family of Bhutan, offered full Bhikshuni ordination to 142 nuns. Only one of them was non-Himalayan. She was present at the Gathering. Accordign to Jetsunma:

“This [was] the first time, that full ordination has been given to a group of nuns in the Tibetan tradition. Occasionally in Tibetan history some high lama gave it to one or two women close to him, such as his sister, but never in such a public event. The king, the queen mother and all the royal family [of Bhutan] requested the Je Khenpo to please give full ordination to nuns. We have spent the last thirty or forty years talking about it; from His Holiness the Dalai Lama to the Karmapa, everybody talks about it. But this was the first time it was actually given, so it was a very auspicious occasion, and we [were] very joyful.”

Whatever our level of ordination, one question at the forefront of the Gathering became how to help the lay sangha understand the relevance and contribution of the monastic Sangha. “In the West, even in Dharma circles,” said Jetsunma, “they don’t understand the kind of life you are trying to live and how that differs from a very devoted lay life. What’s the difference? Why bother? So, what makes the crucial difference between a monastic and a lay person? And why is it, therefore, that we feel becoming a monastic was so meaningful for us?”

Most of us could not fully articulate *why* we’d wanted to ordain, we just knew we *had* to. Each of us described

an inexplicable, fervent yearning, often present since childhood or from the moment we'd encountered the Buddha Dharma; an urgent calling to make use of our precious human lives for the benefit of all beings.

Several of us could point to specific life events that had given us a final push toward ordination—usually a profound experience of impermanence. One of us had survived a hostage situation. Another had been clinically dead and brought back. Another was a survivor of multiple cancers. And yet another saw the death of her husband, mother, father, and two dogs, all within a few months.

Signs and Superpowers

Before he became the Buddha, young prince Siddhartha saw four “signs” that roused in him the unconquerable desire to find a path out of samsara, that motivated him to leave palace life. These signs were a sick person, an old person, a dead body, and a dignified, peaceful renunciate. The first three signs, examples of samsara's suffering, spurred the Buddha-to-be to find the end of suffering. But the fourth sign, the renunciate, was like a finger pointing at the moon, indicating the path.

Most of our Himalayan sisters ordain at a very young age, sometimes four or five. But NHNs ordain as adults and possess a great depth of sincere renunciation rooted in life experience. “You actually know what you're renouncing,” said Jetsunma, “as the Buddha did.... You have experienced everything which is said to be what makes life meaningful and recognized how meaningless it is. That makes our renunciation strong. Because we know. We know from genuine experience that that doesn't work. That there must be something more to life, and the dharma provides the answer. That's our strength.”

This, we came to realize, is why non-Himalayan nuns matter in the modern world, particularly in the West. We are that fourth sign. With our lives completely devoted to the study, practice and embodiment of Dharma, we can be that inspiration for

people suffering in cultures consumed by materialism, greed and imbalance, showing them through mere presence, a path of peace, compassion, dignity and joy.

Venerable Tenzin Dase, the tireless organizer of the Gathering, said:

The unique feature of non-Himalayan Buddhist Nuns is that we came into the vows and robes as mature women, not young girls who started in the nunnery system from an early age. We have life experiences that are very beneficial and relate with the experiences lay people face living in the world beyond the nunnery walls.

An immensely diverse and talented group of women, we each possessed a wealth of skills, devotion, and determination. We came from a range of cultures, personal backgrounds, Dharma experience, and lineages. We'd received years of training and education in Dharma and worldly institutions, colleges, and universities.

Ven. Dase continues:

We come from all walks of life: professionals, some with advanced degrees, nurses, artists, scientists, highly trained financiers, interior designers, professors, teachers, florists, mothers, grandmothers even!...In short, we can listen to, and empathize with, diverse experiences that people find themselves in. And while we cannot remove all the confusion, we can lean in with compassion and wisdom.

We began referring to our skills and experiences as superpowers and to formulate methods for bringing them onto the path for the benefit of non-Himalayan nuns, the Dharma, and all beings. We had great, inspiring role models

in Venerable Sangmo, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, and the many pioneering nuns we'd spoken with during our workshops. We began to build our own support structures to bolster and steady each other and to spread the word among our lay brothers and sisters.

Radiance

Midway through the Gathering, each of us received a blessing from His Holiness the Dalai Lama — a profound and, for some,



Author, Tsunma Sherab Khandro, meeting H.H. the Dalai Lama. Image courtesy of the author.

life-altering event.

On a sunny afternoon shortly thereafter, we sat in Thosamling's courtyard, sipping chai. We had been, for several days, playfully trying to come up with a collective noun for a group of nuns—like “pride” of lions or “flock” of birds.

On that afternoon, feeling filled with the blessings of His Holiness, we settled at last on “radiance.”

A radiance of nuns.

The phrase rolled off our lips and made each of us smile.

Our essence and our heart-calling, our path as non-Himalayan nuns, is to radiate the loving kindness, compassion, and peace of the Dharma while living in cultures desperately in need of it, to dedicate every single moment of our lives, every breath, and every molecule in our bodies to this luminous monastic calling, this strong and devoted sisterhood.



Tsunma Sherab Khandro is a nun in the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, though her profound root lamas are both Kagyu and Nyingma. A long time practitioner, the sudden deaths of her husband, mother, father, and two dogs—all within a few months—propelled her to take monastic ordination to make the best use of her precious human birth for the benefit of beings. Formerly a lobbyist for international human rights, a slam poet, and glass artist, Sherab Khandro now offers counsel to those experiencing grief and loss. She leads practices for both Nyingma and Kagyu Dharma centers, works for the welfare of non-Himalayan Nuns as a volunteer with the ANHN, and is currently writing a book on the luminosity of grief.

This article first appeared in the magazine *Lion's Roar* – Buddhist Wisdom for Our Time in the month of March 2024 and is reprinted here with permission from the editor. *Lion's Roar* is an independent, bimonthly magazine that offers a nonsectarian view of "Buddhism, Culture, Meditation, and Life."

<https://www.lionsroar.com/a-radiance-of-nuns/>



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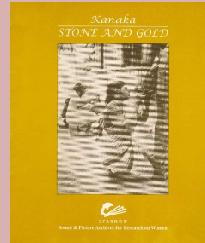
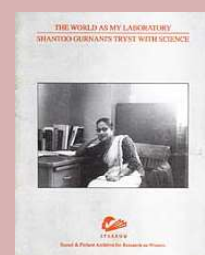
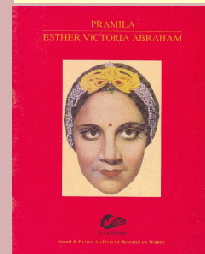
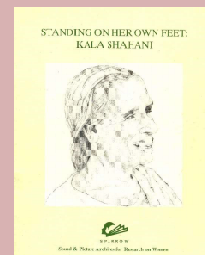
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Inspiring Stories of Women by Sound & Picture Archives for Research On Women (SPARROW) Listen to inspiring stories of women, whose lives are a testament to what a dream, fuelled by will, can do.

SPARROW is a non-profit committed to creating archives of oral history and visual material connected with women's lives and experiences which have remained hidden in the crevices of history, keeping their history alive through various media. It believes that positive change is possible only when we understand women's lives, history and struggles for self-respect and human dignity.

Giving below the PODCAST link of trailer launch and further details in different platforms
<https://www.sparrowonline.org/sparrow-in-audio/>
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Happy Listening!



SPARROW-R THYAGARAJAN LITERARY AWARD 2023

The genre chosen for this year's SPARROW-R THYAGARAJAN Literary Award 2023 was autobiographies, biographies and memoirs. The SPARROW Literary Awards are normally given to a woman and a man writing in Tamil and either a woman or a man for the non-Tamil language category. The SPARROW panel of judges this year were D I Aravindan, T Parameswari and Ambai for Tamil and our consultant as always, was poet and writer, Sukumaran. This year SPARROW decided to choose two men for the Tamil language award. They will be sharing the award. In the other language category, the language chosen was Kannada. The final award decisions were taken by D I Aravindan, T Parameswari and Ambai on the panel of judges.

The writers chosen in Tamil are Naseemunnisa, Vareethiah Konstantine and Thirukkumaran Ganesan for their books *Anbulla Anees* (Dear Anees) Kothai Pathippagam, 2019), *Kaiyaru Nadhi* (A River Deprived) (Kadal Veli Pathippagam, 2022) and *Kari Viruntum Kavuli Verrilaiyum: Saathiyinar Chutta Vadu* (A Mutton Feast and Some Betel Leaves: The Scars of Caste). In the other language category Shymala Madhav has been chosen for her autobiography *Nale Innu Kadide* (Tomorrow Still Awaits) (Bharathi Prakashana, 2021).

All the writers have honoured SPARROW and the panel of judges by accepting the awards.

The award citation for DR VAREETHIAH KONSTANTINE:

Coming from a coastal fishing family from Pallam in Kanyakumari, Dr Vareethiah Konstantine is a multi-faceted person who functions as a writer, researcher, activist, environmentalist and publisher. In appreciation and recognition of his book *Kaiyarunati* (A River Deprived) that is an honest, loving and poignant portrayal of a father with a daughter who is mentally afflicted, depicting his life and the life he lives as a care-giver, SPARROW has great pleasure in conferring on Dr Vareethiah Konstantine the SPARROW-R Thyagarajan Literary Award 2023.

The award citation for NASEEMUNNISA:

After being an avid reader all her life, Naseemunnisa, who hails from Tiruppur, decided to write her autobiographical details and family history as unposted letters to her grandson. In appreciation and recognition of her book *Anbulla Anees* (Dear Anees) that movingly describes in great detail, family history, lifestyle, society and culture, SPARROW has great pleasure in conferring on Naseemunnisa the SPARROW-R Thyagarajan Literary Award 2023

The award citation for THIRUKKUMARAN GANESAN:

Hailing from Tiruloki village near Thiruppanandal in Thanjavur District, Thirukkumaran Ganesan is a film director who is also a poet and researcher. In appreciation and recognition of his book *Kari Viruntum Kavuli Verrilaiyum: Saathiyinar Chutta Vadu* (A Mutton Feast and Some Betel Leaves: The Scars of Caste) that is a deeply distressing work that talks about the painful experiences of caste and its wounds in a forthright and genuine manner, SPARROW has great pleasure in conferring on Thirukkumaran Ganesan the SPARROW-R Thyagarajan Literary Award 2023.

The award citation for SHYAMALA MADHAV:

Hailing from Mangalore, Shyamala Madhav is a writer and translator. In appreciation and recognition of her uniquely written autobiography in Kannada *Nale Innu Kadide* (Tomorrow Still Awaits) that places the self in the context of the family but reads it in terms of the social and cultural history of the region, SPARROW has great pleasure in conferring on Shyamala Madhav the SPARROW-R Thyagarajan Literary Award 2023.

SPARROW-R THYAGARAJAN LITERARY AWARD 2023



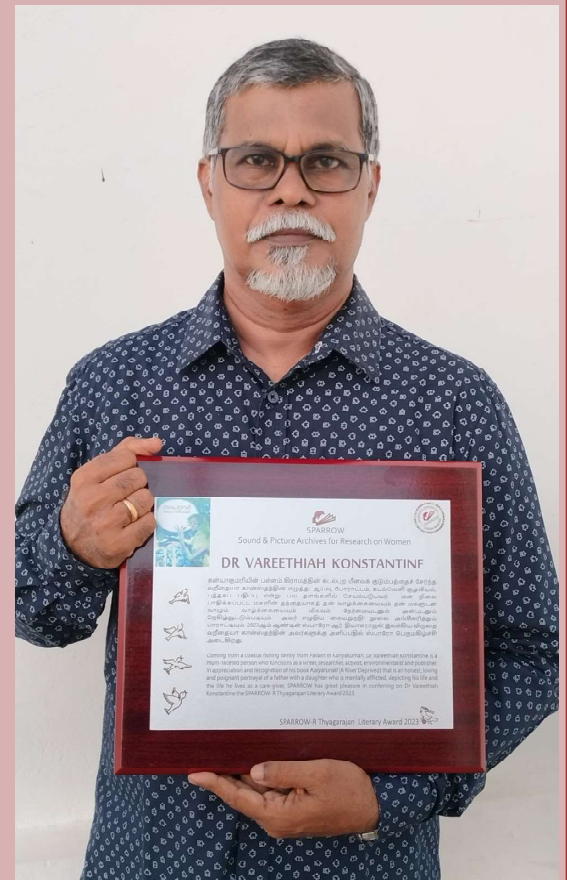
Naseemunnisa's *Anubulla Anees* (Dear Anees) is family history and autobiographical details as told by a grandmother to her grandson. It is a movingly written book in great detail which has not received the attention it deserves.

Naseemunnisa is a homemaker and not a writer but when she was over 70, and had lost her son, she felt the need to write down notes to her grandson about their lifestyle, society and culture for him to know about his family, so that he could remember his ancestors under all circumstances and also for him to tell his children. Her purpose was also to tell a younger generation person like him about Islam and its ways and its teachings in the way she has understood them and also to make him aware of the character traits of his ancestors. She wrote them down in an 80-page note book. Later she was persuaded by her family and friends to turn it into a book.

a father with a daughter who is mentally afflicted depicting his life and the life he lives he lives as a care-giver.

Dr. Vareethiah Konstantine, from a coastal fishing family (Pallam, Kanyakumari), is a researcher-activist, writer, editor, publisher, trainer and consultant on coastal resource politics and participatory development, a translator, columnist and counsellor. He has published over 30 research papers and authored /edited over 25 titles, six campaign booklets. As founder-publisher of Neidhalveli & Kadalveli Publishing houses, he has published 35 titles exclusively on the sea coast and its people. He was formerly Associate Prof. & Head Dept. of Zoology at St. Jude's College, Thoothoor. He has been bestowed with several awards for his works.

Vareethiah Konstantine's *Kaiyarunati* (A River Deprived) is an honest and poignant portrayal of



SPARROW-R THYAGARAJAN LITERARY AWARD 2023



Thirukkumaran Ganesan's *Kari Viruntum Kavuli Verrilayum: Saathiyinar Chutta Vadu* (A Mutton Feast and Some Betel Leaves: The Scars of Caste) is a deeply distressing book that talks about the painful experiences of caste and its wounds in a forthright and genuine manner.

Thirukkumaran Ganesan is from Tiruloki village that is near Thiruppanandal in Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu. He completed his D.F. Tech., Direction course in the Tamil Nadu Government M.G.R. Film and Television Institute, Chennai. He is currently an Assistant Professor in the same institute in the Department of Direction and Screen-play Writing. He has a post-graduate degree in Tamil and Sociology and an MPhil in Tamil. Currently he is pursuing research on the subject "The portrayal of Tamils and identity politics in alternate cinema" for a doctoral degree from the Thanjavur Tamil University. His first poetry collection entitled 'Nilaverikkum Iravukalil' (In the Nights of the Shining Moon) was published in 2007. He has with him two screen plays for which he is looking for a producer.

Shyamala Madhav's *Nale Innu Kadide* (Tomorrow Still Awaits) is a uniquely written autobiography that dwells lightly on the self and places it in the context of the family including the entire social and cultural history of the region

Born in Mangalore, Shyamala Madhav took to writing at an early age. Her first poem "Kadalina Kare" was published in "Rashtrabandhu", when she was just eleven. Married life brought her to Mumbai. Memoirs of her grandmother were published as "Amrithavarshini" in "Belli" in 1971. Her other works are Kannada stories, features, translated stories and travelogues in different magazines in Karnataka and Mumbai. Besides, she was the president of Srijana, a forum of women writers in Kannada in Mumbai for two years. Her translation and publication of 'Alamapanah', the Urdu novel of Rafia Manzurul Amin, was followed by translations and publications of many English classics like 'Gone with the Wind' 'Frankenstein', 'Jane Eyre' and 'Wuthering Heights'. Her translation of Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things' is awaiting publication. Under translation is M M Kaye's mega novel of epic proportions, 'The Far Pavilions'.



ACCEPTANCE NOTE NASEEMUNNISA

SPARROW organisation gives literary awards every year for different genres. This year's genre is autobiography and biography. A few days ago, writer Ambai conveyed the news that my book *Anbulla Anees* (Dear Anees) has been chosen by the panel of judges for the SPARROW Literary Award for this year. For choosing the book of this simple woman, I thank Ambai, SPARROW team and the panel of judges. *Anbulla Anees* was not written with the intention of getting it published as a book. I lost my eldest daughter Farida to cancer even when she was a little girl. And later, I lost my son Nizar too to cancer after he was a grown man, had got married and had given us a grandson. To get over our loneliness my husband and I left Tiruppur and went to live with our daughter Nagina. That is when I began to write this.

I felt like telling my grandson all about the kind of family ours was, our ancestry and our lifestyle and about how our life was in harmony with all the communities around, to tell him stories about our grandparents and siblings. Since, after my son's demise my daughter-in-law went to live with her parents and had got remarried and my grandson was living with her, I thought of writing down the stories I could not tell him directly. I began to write in a note book.

I casually mentioned during a conversation to Naan Rajamagal who is on Facebook about what I had written in a note book, and she expressed her interest in reading it. After reading it she wanted to bring it out as a book. She hadn't set up Kothai Pathippagam then. So, I spoke to younger brother Shahjahan and got it published by Udumalai.com. In May 2018, the book release function took place in Coimbatore. The second edition was published by Rajamagal through her Kothai Pathippagam. And that is the book that has been selected for the award now. So, I thank Rajamagal alias Thenmozhi who is responsible for my writing coming out as a book.

My younger sister Shamim typed what I had written in the note book. Another younger sister Fahim suggested some corrections and ideas. Younger brother Shahjahan tweaked the language of the text, did the layout and got it ready for publication. I thank Chidambaram of Udumalai.com for publishing the first edition. For understanding the content of the book and writing an

introduction I thank Liaqhat Ali Kaleemullah and for writing a note of appreciation, I thank Dr Anbuselvan, who is doing research on cancer and who is like my dear son.

Although I have written this work there are many who are responsible for it. Those from my parental home, my marital home, my relatives and friends—the experiences with all of them have made this book possible. Fortunately, all my life I have had good friends and relatives; I could see only good in them. There is no one without faults. But if one sees only faults no relationships are possible. So, I would like to see only what is good in people. And that is what I have recorded. If one reads the book, one would come to know that many people have been helpful to me, my parents and our family, without considering religion or caste. I have recorded details about everyone I remember.

Due to social and economic reasons a lot of changes have come about in the family as an institution. Joint families are almost becoming extinct. Such changes are unavoidable. Alan Ibn Karija says, "Know your lineage. It will help you to live with your near and dear ones." I also feel that although we are compelled by circumstances to be nuclear families or live far away and get separated, all of us must maintain our friendships and relationships. That is what I have said in this book; that is what I emphasise. This is because I am not just me but have been created by people around me.

Since I think this way, I always try to keep in touch and stay connected with everyone. I feel that I have somewhat succeeded in my efforts. This an autobiography. However, through events detailed here it is possible to understand something about the society of those days and its economy.

Although this has been written for Anees, this book is for all the relatives, friends and all those around. And now through this award it belongs to everyone.

Having been only a voracious reader throughout my life, I attempted to write for the first time. After the second edition of *Anbulla Anees*, I have written a second book *Aadhaab Baavjaan*. It was published last year.

Once again, I offer my thanks for recognising the work of this simple woman and selecting it for the award. I congratulate the other awardees. I am sure I would get an opportunity to read their books.

Vanakkam.



ACCEPTANCE NOTE DR. VAREETHIAH KONSTANTINE

It's a great honour that my work *Kaiyarunati* is adorned with the 'SPARROW Literary Award 2023'. The news of the award arrived when I was going through a very tough time. Diagnosed with Aplastic Anaemia, my spouse, C Jesintha, had been admitted in the oncology ward at Believers Church Medical College Hospital, Tiruvalla. We were ill-prepared to face a combat like this. Just three weeks, and everything had changed. Like a tornado sweeping me off the ground by the wink of an eye...

My spouse was my lifeline; the greatest blessing after my mother. Choosing to be invisible behind my public face, she always remained my strength. We shared everything—dreams, home chores and cooking as well. While I appeared to be a person of strange ways and tastes to most people around me, as years passed, she began to understand my perceptions and the ideals I chose to live by. And, on my part, I stood by her through thick and thin. 36 years of togetherness—at this point of my life, I feel we have lived a life worth living. We had few secrets between us; with home and finance ministries safe in her hands, I had the luxury of time to travel, research, read and write, besides teaching.

I bought a new car back in 2014. The idea was to take her and our children occasionally on tour. It never happened. On superannuation, we moved to Chennai to take care of our newborn grandson. After Covid Pandemic, I returned to my native land, looking for a weather that is more friendly to my ailing eyes.

As a caregiver to a disabled daughter, I've come through many a bad patch—yet this loss was too much to bear. Maybe, time has something else to offer me.

I thank the members of the award panel and SPARROW for recognising this small piece of writing. I also congratulate the other awardees and look forward to reading their books.



All SPARRPOW Newsletters are available online. You can download from [www. http://www.sparrowonline.org/newsletters.htm](http://www.sparrowonline.org/newsletters.htm)

ACCEPTANCE NOTE THIRUKKUMARAN GANESAN

I have never considered myself a writer. I feel that when an innocent person like me experiences the pain and wounds meted out by casteist minds and the mental struggles and longing for equality and justice and the disappointments at being rejected, in my opinion, there is no other way to articulate my questions and my anger that arise regarding the society than writing. After any analysis what remains of me is love.

To understand me and the feelings of my fellow human beings the casteist society does not need the intellectual vision of Ambedkar; just a little bit of love is enough. What I write is a plea for such love, equality and brotherhood from society. That is what I attempted through my book *Kari Viruntum Kavuli Verrilaiyum: Saathiyinar Chutta Vadu* (A Mutton Feast and Some Betel Leaves: The Scars of Caste).

In the last one year this book has received a lot of appreciation and good reviews and earned me the love and friendship of many faceless readers. And now, in 2023, the book has got me the SPARROW Literary Award as well. For giving me this award and recognising me and honouring me as part of the literary world, it gives me happiness to express my thanks and love to the SPARROW organisation and the writers Ambai, D I Aravindan and T Parameswari who were on the panel of judges. I am eternally grateful to Kalachuvadu Publications for publishing this book and making it available easily all over the world.

I would like to thank at this time, my professor and guide T Vetrivelan who has taught me the depth and vastness of contemporary Tamil literature. He wrote a great foreword for the book which boosted my confidence at a time when I was confused about publishing it at all and writer and screenplay writer, Annan Thamizhprabha who released the book and spoke about it at the book release function held for this book last year as part of the Madurai Book Fair, Annan S J Sivashankar who received the first copy of the book and “Muzhavu” literary forum that organised an event in Kumbakonam to introduce the book.

I am duty bound to offer my thanks and love to eminent writers Pavannan, Aravindan Kannaiyan, Chamas, Perumal Murugan, Professor Gurusamy, Subramani Ramesh and countless Facebook friends and comrades who wrote

appreciating the book in magazines and on the web. And heartfelt thanks to those who called me and congratulated as soon as the award was announced like Aravindan Kannaiyan who called me from the US and warmly congratulated me, writer Annan Stalin Rajangam, Director Annan Pa. Ranjith, and others who continue to congratulate me on the social media.

This first award comes as a climax to my literary efforts and I would like to dedicate it to my god-like father Ganesan who went through great struggles to bring me up but did not live to see the rewards, and who lives eternally in my memories. SPARROW Literary Award has given me the inspiration to continue writing with enthusiasm and passion. It is now my obligation to work towards making humanism flower through my literary writings and my film scripts. My love and thanks to all. I congratulate the other awardees. I look forward to reading their books.



ACCEPTANCE NOTE SHYAMALA MADHAV

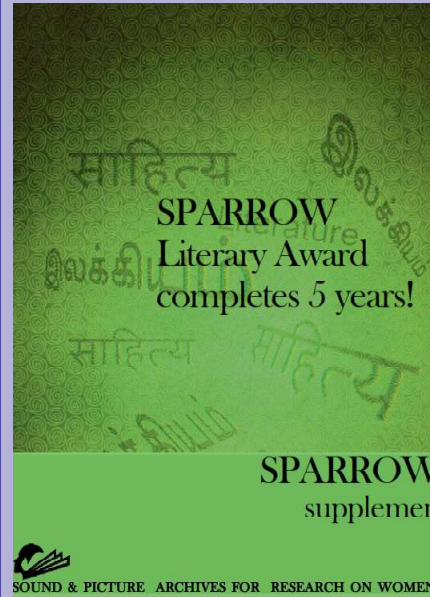
It makes me happy to know that SPARROW has chosen my Autobiography, *Naale Innu Kaadide* for the SPARROW Literary Award in the Other Language Category.

Despite several awards received in the past this particular award given by an organisation that archives women's history and life makes me a bit nostalgic and makes me want to walk down the memory lane. My father, Narayana Uchil, was an educationist and reformist and mother U Vasanthi, worked as PT and Guiding teacher at the Besant National Girls School. It was my great grandfather Louis Kannappa whom we used to call as Kanati (one who wears thick spectacles) who was the first inspiration for my foray into writing. He was the founder of the first Konkani periodical *Dirven*. Louis Kannappa had done his M A in English Literature from Madras University and L.T. degree served as the Principal of Government College Mangalore (presently University College). He also served as District Education Officer of Dakshina Kannada District. He was also the first rank holder for St Aloysius College, Mangalore, in Maths and Latin language. My grandfather taught Maths to my brother and introduced me to English literature. I feel that my foray into writing

and translation has happened because of my family. I have done many translations of English classics but Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*'s protagonist Scarlett O'Hara's motto "Tomorrow is yet another day!" got etched on my mind and my autobiography *Naale Innu Kadide* expresses the same meaning. I have tried to convey the hope and positivity that I think I feel whatever the crisis in my life, in the title and in my autobiography.

I humbly accept the award with great pleasure, knowing that my book has reached the readers and is being recognised. SPARROW has given me the opportunity to understand women's lives through its archives when I carried out translations and transcriptions and got to know more and more about enlightened lives.

My salutes to all the women power working behind SPARROW and of course, leading the same. It is a great honour to be recognised by dear SPARROW. I congratulate the other awardees and hope I will have the opportunity to read their works.



SPARROW - R Thyagarajan Literary Award programme began in 2014. In SNL 38 supplement we have given all the acceptance speeches of the writers who got the awards from 2014 to 2019 for the acceptance speeches were not just formal speeches but stories the authors told us about

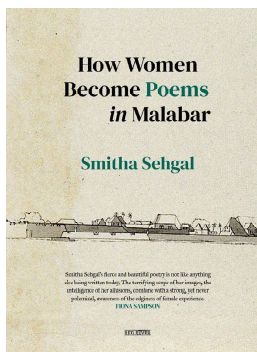
themselves, their life and their writing which we felt, must be documented.

Giving below the link

<https://www.sparrowonline.org/newsletter/>

How Women Become Poems in Malabar

Tucked away on the seaward road,
Mr P's convenience store
sold everything between
comic books and betel nut,
a wall fan hummed, a powered mixer
brimmed with mango pulp.
On a tangy noon,
we stood in front of candy jars —
the doe-eyed girl and me.
Her mother spent nights with strange men
without alibis, town rumoured,
her father lay slow churning in his alcohol vomit.
We stood in front of candy jars —
the doe-eyed girl and me
busy counting caramel-flavored toffee.
'Father is a teetotaler,' announces a customer,
wide grinned.
She blanches but smiles anyway,
chasing flies resting on her bare feet,
voiceless.
Years later
someone says
the doe-eyed girl eloped with the mule driver.
That her mother, whom I mostly saw stricken,
pale under the harsh sun,
a pool of grief in eyes,
an ironic smile on thin hard lips, plaited hair,
limp brown drape with white flowers,
died of a broken heart.
How women lived and died in our seaside town,
how we turned them into poems.



***How Women Become
Poems in Malabar* by
Smitha Sehgal**

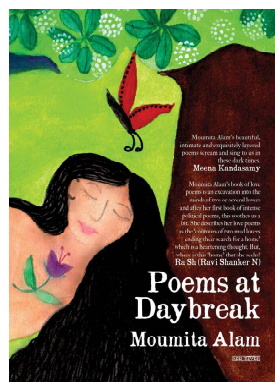
Home is a Song

Home is the fragrance of
my mother's hair
and the impending night
enveloped in the smell of the bluebells,
raw tea leaves and the scent of pulao.

Home is the lazy noons
I sleep soaked in my childhood dreams
while my daughter's novice artistic hands smear
watercolour on the white pages.
I faintly hear a small chat
between the milkman and my mother about his
gaon,
my mother's half-baked Hindi
not a hindrance to the emotional sharing
of joys and longings.

Home is the melodious evening.
The crickets begin their song
and the fireflies dance in rhythmic sparkles
in the bamboo plants.
The dipping morning rains from the
bamboo culm set in the falling song,
the day dies in the womb of night.

Home is the radio
my father listens and tries to visualise
the horrors of war and the rising prices
with his blind eyes.
And the mooing calf prompts
the milkman to leave the conversation midway
as he rushes to milk the cow.



***Poems at Daybreak* by
Moumita Alam**

My Old Story

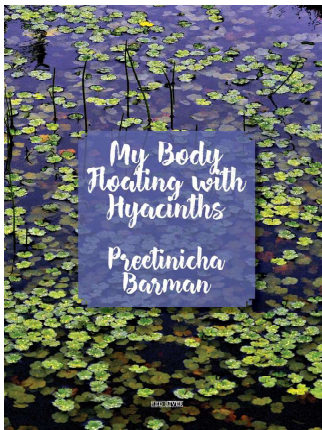
One day I will tell you
my old story, and
the ghosts of my giant ancestors
would leap up the ancient well.

You'll hear the evening prayers
of my great-grandmother
emerged from the dilapidated temple,
harmonising with the medley
of the thunderous drum,
the forceful cymbals
and the high-pitched conch.

You would wonder how these have
made carvings in the passages
which border the half-asleep walls
of the abashed mansion.

Gushing up through the pages
of my stories
they would all stare at you
and your lustrous novelty.

You may not believe my story,
for you don't believe in ghosts,
but if you visit the narrowing scraps of our yard,
you'll see the marks of a vanished well
and a crumbled cattle-shed;
the neighbouring night jasmine tree
still carries its ancient fragrance.



*My Body Floating
with Hyacinths* by
Preetinicha Barman

Knowing in Patel Nagar

I can smell my neighbour's soap;
houses are that close in Patel Nagar.
Antiseptics and detergents
intersect nonchalantly
as our bathrooms step onto each other.

One day we might meet,
put faces to the non-white noise,
exchange borderline pleasantries
without mentioning 'I know you use Pears.'

But right now, let's not get bothered about
the sounds of someone gargling
or throwing up in another building.



*Maximum Love in Patel
Nagar* by Paulami
Sengupta

★★★★★

**Once a SPARROW
decides to FLY
HIGH, the SKY is
the LIMIT!
The LARGER and
BLUER the SKY,
the BETTER!**

Grandmother

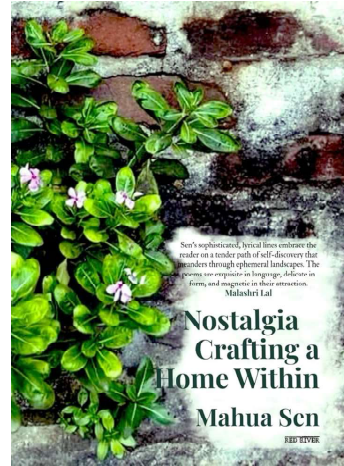
a sonnet in the embrace of nostalgia

I still hear the faint chime of my grandma's bangles,
As they whispered secrets in their rhythmic dance,
A river's gentle swish, a memory that entangles,
Childhood treasures amassed in timeless expanse.

Her visage, as the full moon, radiant and small,
Crisscrossed by the etchings of time's tender lore,
Her eyes, deep pools of wisdom, enthralled us all,
Unravelling sagas of Esther, Judah and tales of yore.

I'm ensnared in the gossamer threads of yesteryears,
Yearning for tales spun with suspense, forever prime

In the labyrinth of days, where simple joys were our dearest cheers,
Her lap, a sanctuary from life's tempestuous climb,
Basking in the warm hues of nostalgia's tender tears,
Chasing memories like the cherished verses of a timeless rhyme.



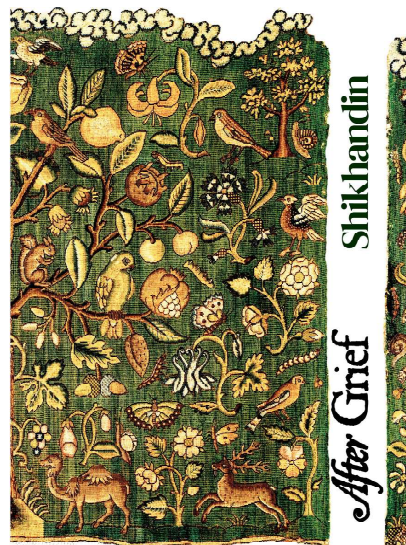
***Nostalgia Crafting a Home Within* by Mahua Sen**

Bury me in sand

Bury me in sand
Forget about me.
Let salt wash away the flesh.
Let all the soft parts disintegrate
So nothing remains,
Save bare, bleached bones.

Don't bother to remember me at all.
A dinosaur skeleton
Would have told a better story.

So, do I regret this life?
No not really.
It never was extraordinary enough.
It merely ebbed and flowed,
Waxed and waned, Much like the tides on a shore.
Nothing less nothing more.



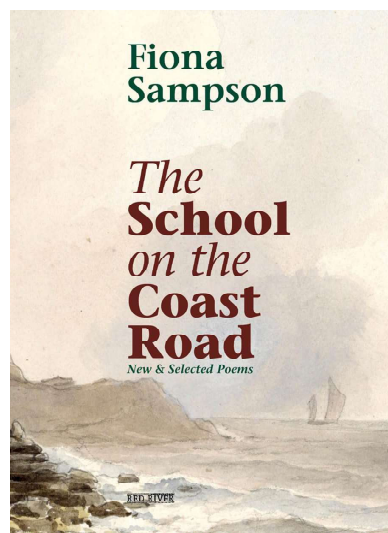
***After Grief* by Shikhandin**

The Days

Today a fog lay
all day on
the wide water
shine and stop
song mute
I can't see
even by clear
water whether
I should act
or is the grace
in submission

should I watch
or let the light
fall into fog
my duty was
to clean the lens
but revelation
is so loud

it is not
altogether
clear to me
it is not
clear at all
what I should do
at the river



*The School on the
Coast Road* by Fiona
Sampson

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mission*