



SPARROW
SOUND & PICTURE
ARCHIVES FOR
RESEARCH
ON
WOMEN

SPARROW

newsletter

SNL Number 36

October 2017

Publication Number 89

Published by

Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women

The Nest, B-101/201/301,

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—C S Lakshmi, Charanjeet Kaur



Leelaji, my maid was talking about stretching the cooking oil, consuming it less. "Arre Bhaiyya, aaj kal ke khane mein kya hai? Shaam ko chotti si lauki dekhe, subeh usse injection de ke

yeh bada kar dete hain. Bhains bhi injection pe doodh deti hai. Kaash bachhe bhi injection pe thoda bade ho jaate, kam se kam hum Ma Baap ko kaam to kam karna padta! Hindustaan aise hi to Umrika banega."

(Brother, what is in the food now-a-days? In the evening you see a small bottle gourd, by morning with an injection they make it huge. Even buffaloes milk upon injections. Wish even small babies grew on injections, at least we parents won't have to work so hard! That is how India will become America.)

[Editor's Note]

This issue of SNL has been delayed and the reason is that we got carried away with the books we were reading. In fact, the issue has become a Book Review Special and we are not going to apologise for we thoroughly enjoyed working on it. Our lead article this time is by Charanjeet Kaur who has written on Piro, the first Punjabi woman poet associated with the Gulabdsi dera. From this issue onwards we will be carrying one lead article on women, religion and spirituality as an attempt to explore women's role in our cultural heritage.

The books chosen for review in this issue cover a wide variety of subjects ranging from history of a city like Ahmedabad to an imagined diary of Kasturba and from a book for children to the politics of violence in which women become the targets.

The homage section always takes the longest to write for we don't want the homages to be just RIP kind of short condolences but we want to celebrate the life of women who were poets, writers, actors, musicians, activists, politicians, scientists and academics and have showed us the way to continue to work, act and fight for justice. The saddest to write this time was that of Gauri Lankesh, the fearless journalist who was shot dead by unidentified assailants recently. All of us familiar with her writing felt deeply for her demise.

Our special supplement this time carries excerpts from dialogues with writers Urmila Pawar and Bama. And the cover cartoon on the irrepressible Leelaji, is by Lakshmi Karunakaran.

Voices from a Tomb That Was—Piro, the First Punjabi Woman Poet

‘She was “exceptional” in her agential command over her life as in recording aspects of it for posterity, not to speak of the various boundaries she crossed, including the religious. At the same time, through her narrative Piro gives us a sense of her time and its culture, significantly allowing us to see how a woman could speak and what she could speak of. Though Piro’s deviance can shed light on what may have comprised “normal” in her time, significant, too, are the attempts at erasing her, or “normalising” her through maternal metaphors by some contemporary Gulabdasis’ —Anshu Malhotra



The tomb of Piro Preman and Gulab Das,
Chatian Wala (Kasur), Pakistan



The commonly known image of Piro and Gulab Das

I first came across Piro’s name, in the context of a book on Sikh shrines in Pakistan—Haroon Khalid’s *Walking with Nanak* (2016). A Google search on him showed up the story of Gulab Das [1809?-1873] and Piro [1832-1872] and some pictures of a dilapidated tomb in Chathain Wala village, Kasur district in West Punjab, in which were interred together two bodies of the two lovers/poets/religious/spiritual leaders—Gulab Das and Piro; during partition, the Gulabdasi Sect had to leave Pakistan and they migrated to Hansi, in Hisar district of modern Haryana; the tomb itself was slowly reduced to a ruin because of the neglect of the Government of Pakistan, being out of reach for the devotees of Gulab Das. But the site at which it stood and the village of Chathian Wala itself, have stories to tell; and these are the voices that Piro helps to retrieve.

The discovery of her compelling poetry was hailed with enthusiasm. The first mention of Piro in literary circles was made by Devinder Singh, ‘Vidyarthi’ when he published a brief article in *Khoj Darpan*, in 1974, ‘Panjabi di Paheli Istri Kavi’—more than a hundred years after her death in 1872 at the age of 40. This article established her as the first Punjabi woman poet, and gave Punjabi literature a woman’s voice in the 19th century, much before Amrita Pritam came on the literary scene. As Anshu Malhotra, who has worked extensively on Piro, in her latest book, *Piro and the Gulabdasis: Gender, Sect and Society in Punjab* (2017) says, ‘I had struggled to hear women’s voices. The famed fertile land of Punjab had proven to be singularly barren in fructifying its women’s expressions in written and published forms, and I had to strain my senses to read a few discordant notes’. Malhotra’s two earlier papers, ‘Theatre of the Past: Re-presenting the past in different genres’ (2014), the occasional paper she wrote for Nehru Memorial Museum Library and her critical commentary ‘Telling her Tale? Unravelling a life in conflict in Piro’s *Ik Sau Sath Kafian* published in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* (2009), set the stage for her more extensive research in bringing the life and times of Piro and the Gulabdasi sect into the limelight. Two plays based on her life—*Piro Preman* (1999) by Santokh Singh, who wrote under the pen name Shahryar, and *Shairi* (2004) by Swarajbir, flesh out the basics of the story she tells in *Ik Sau Sath Kafian*; in fact, it was Shahryar who first discovered the hand-written manuscript

of the *160 Kafis*, based on which he developed his play. *Shairi* brought the Piro story into greater prominence in 2004, when it was staged by the two theatre groups, 'Manch Rang Manch' in Amritsar and 'Ajoka' in Lahore. In addition, Vijender Das of the Gulabdasi *dera* at Hansi, has compiled *Sant Kavritri Ma Piro*, as the 'official' corpus and it has been published in the *Devnagari* script to enable it to reach a wider readership. The *dera's* version obviously focuses more on her spiritual journey and her spiritual relationship with her Guru Gulab Das, rather than the other 'unsavoury' details of her story. The focus in the *dera* version is on Piro as the spiritual 'Mother' and a guru in her own right, second only to Gulab Das in the *dera* hierarchy.

The absence of Punjabi women writers for such a long time in a culture which is rich in poetry is most surprising; beginning with Baba Sheikh Farid (12th century) going on to all the Sikh Gurus from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh (1469, birth of Guru Nanak to 1708, the death of Guru Gobind Singh) and Baba Bulleh Shah (1680-1757), are poets of a high order before the 20th century; and the question that still needs to be looked into is: what about some other women's voices which, perhaps, are waiting to be discovered? Some names have emerged, women who wrote in the *Gurmukhi* or the *Shahmukhi* script—Nurang Devi (almost the contemporary of Piro and according to Raj Kumar Hans, the first Punjabi woman poet, consort of the first Dalit Punjabi saint-poet—Sant Wazir Singh), Dai Phaphal Hafzani (1800-1872), Jeevan Khatton Nikkami (1835-1898)—both of whom apparently wrote lullabies; after Piro, the poets who have come to light are: Sahib Devi 'Arori', Bilqis Akhtar Rani, Zeenat and Imam Bibi of Pothohar, Bibi Makfi (b1872), Hajan Noor Begum (b1888), Karam Bibi Aajiz (b1893). But, unfortunately, not much is yet known about these pioneering writers.

Piro's (her name was Pira Dittee, presumably) early life is largely a matter of speculation. Ostensibly from a poor family or maybe a land owning family, orphaned at a very young age, she was sold into the *vesva* (prostitutes') bazaars at Lahore by an uncle. Her main work is her autobiographical *Ik Sau Sath Kafian (160 Kafis)*, which may be considered as a micro-narrative, because it tells the story of a few years of her life: from the time she was a courtesan at Lahore to the time of her acceptance in the *dera* at Chathian Wala. In addition, there are three other *Siharfis*, a *Painti*, *Sanhji Siharfi* (co-authored with Gulab Das) and *Raag Sagar*—poems and songs set to various ragas; since most of her work was written after her initiation as a Gulabdasi, it needs to be located within the *dera* culture of Punjab, which is still rampant.

The Gulabdasi sect, founded by Gulab Das, belongs to the hedonistic and materialistic tradition, and it housed a number of women devotees, especially after Piro had been initiated into it, and the acceptance of her relationship with Gulab Das. It must be pointed out at this stage that the concept of the Guru is central to Sikhism; and even after Guru Gobind Singh abolished the idea of the living Guru and stipulated that '*Guru Granthji Manyo*' (From now onwards, it is the Granth Sahib which is the Guru of the Sikhs) and '*Baani hai Guru, Guru hai Baani*' (the word of God as contained in the Holy Granth is the word of God, and hence the Guru), the many *deras* in Punjab and its surrounding areas, point to the need which people feel for a 'living' Guru. Most of these *deras* and sects continue to believe in Sikhism or Hinduism, but they also have their own Gurus to interpret the religious precepts; their religious identity is not negated by being the followers of a *dera*, though mainstream Sikhism is opposed to the *dera* culture. So, the Gulabdasi sect would be within the framework of Sikhism, but also would owe allegiance to its founder and its current head. The first such sect was the *Udaasi* sect founded by Guru Nanak's son Srichand, and today Punjab has about 9000 [unofficial figure, the official estimate is 3000] such *deras* [big and small], the most influential among them being the *Nirankaris*, the *Radha Swamis*, the *Namdhaaris*, and *Dera Sacha Sauda*. The future of the last one is now uncertain after the recent arrest of its Head, who calls himself Sant Dr Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh Insaan, for rape, the violence following his arrest and the ensuing succession conflicts.

So what do we learn of Piro from the *Kafis*, which is the more authentic version of her life compared to the fictionalised accounts of the plays and the sanitised version of the *dera*? Though autobiographical, it is not the story of her whole life. These verses limit themselves to the narration of her struggle to leave behind her four amorous relationships—including the one with Elahi Bukhsh, an Artillery Commander in the army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, her meeting with Gulab Das, the conflicts at his *dera*, her relationship with him and her spiritual awakening, including the acceptance of her poetic genius by her guru and by the Gulabdasis. In the *Kafis* she refers to herself as a *vesva*, a low caste woman (*sudra*) and a Muslim. All three factors are against her when she goes to meet Gulab Das and seeks to become his disciple. But, Elahi Bukhsh, persuades her to rejoin him; when she goes back to Lahore, the religious *mullahs* and *qazis* berate her for her conversion to the Gulabdasi Sect (which is neither Hindu nor Sikh, but which takes inspiration from both) and declare her as a *kafir*. She does not deny these charges of conversion, but she also refuses to reconvert to Islam, castigating the *mullahs* in language which is unsparing and, perhaps, even lewd, while staking a claim for women to be included within the fold of religions.

*They make false religions making false promises
Snipping the penis and the moustache they call themselves Turks;
Hindus are made by wearing the sacred thread and keeping the topknot
Women can't be made thus, they are both wrong
(kure majab banaut kekar kure dave)*

The *Kafis* also record that she is forcibly taken from Lahore to Wazirabad, where she is imprisoned, and kept under the surveillance of a woman called Mehrunissa. Then, she befriends two women—Janu and Rehmati—who help her to send a message to Gulab Das, and who immediately asks two of his disciples—Gulab Singh and Chattar Singh—to rescue her from her captors. When she comes to the *dera*, she is initiated into the faith and writes *kafis* in praise of her Guru, and the sect. The philosophic and spiritual tenets followed by the Gulabdasis also form a valuable part of the 160 *Kafis*. Once she finds her place at Chathian Wala, she emerges as a spiritual leader in her own right. Her relationship with Gulab Das does create conflict in the *dera* because the devotees take time to accept a *vesva*, a Muslim and a *sudra* as part of them. At her death, Gulab Das (who dies eight months later) decrees that they be interred in the same tomb, in keeping with the Heer-Ranjha tradition of undying love that lasts beyond the grave. In the 160 *Kafis*, Piro invokes the Sita image of purity and devotion as a response to the hostile stance of her critics who could not easily accept the intimacy of the relationship between her and Gulab Das:

*As Sita's release was secured by Ram by force
Piro asks satguru to bestow on her his magnanimity.
(Siya kaidon Ramji yun ballai chhadai
Piro upar satguro tiun ho hushai)*

Her relationship with Gulab Das is depicted in the *Kafis* within the bhakti tradition in which the Guru is essential for the salvation of the human soul:

*Come friends let us consult together
The ocean is of unplumbed depth, say which way shall we swim?
Piro says [the] Name is my boat and Guru my boatman
He'll blow the breeze of love and we'll encamp on the other side
(Aao milo sahelion ralmil kariye)*

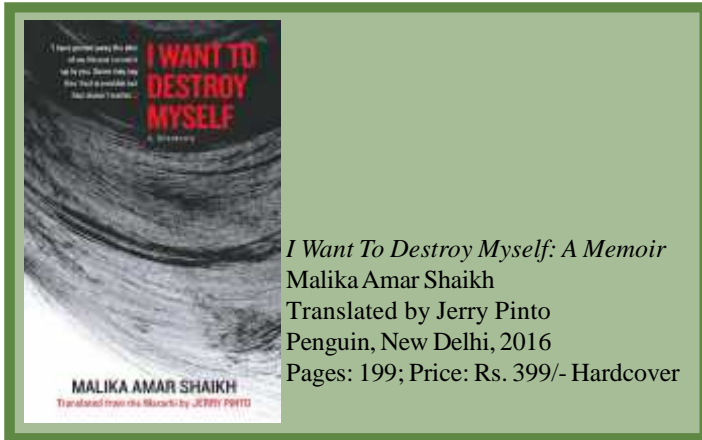
[All translations quoted are by Anshu Malhotra]

Academically, the most exhaustive, retrieval, comprehensive and critical work on Piro has been done by Anshu Malhotra, who is a Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. Much of the information in this introductory article on Piro for SPARROW has been culled from her NMML (Nehru Memorial Museum & Library) Occasional Paper, 'Theatre of the Past: Re-presenting the past in different genres' (2014), and her extensive critical commentary 'Telling her Tale? Unravelling a life in conflict in Piro's *Ik Sau Sath Kafian* published in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 46, 4 (2009): 541-78, SAGE. The primary source on which Malhotra's analysis is based are *Ik Sau Sath Kafian* and *Kafian Likahyte Mata Piro Kiyon*, Ms 888, Bhai Gurdas Library, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. Apart from Anshu Malhotra, Veer Vahab of Fazilka, has written an Introduction to Piro's poetry based on her MPhil dissertation. Malhotra's book *Piro and the Gulabdasis: Gender, Sect and Society in Punjab* [2017] can be seen as the definitive critical work and perhaps the only one, in this area till now. Many of the *Kafis* have been translated by her in this work, and a complete translation of 160 *Kafis* and the poems/ songs of Piro is really needed now.

I would like to conclude this brief account with the succinct comments on Piro's poetry made by Anshu Malhotra: 'Piro told her own story. Rather she told one story among the many stories of her life that she could possibly tell. To her, in retrospect, it may have been the most important story of her life. So she worked carefully on crafting it. Epic characters, Bhakti saints, Sufi poetics, Pauranic women became the templates she used, as she filled it with characters—her mighty guru with his marvellous powers, some disciples who pitched in her rescue, her antagonists and religious authorities, her friends and source of succour. She legitimised the place she came to occupy next to her guru'. About her poetry Malhotra says, 'Piro's voice [is] recondite and elliptical in its allegorical, allusive language, yet forthright and scathing in its condemnation of societal codes of caste, gender, and religious behaviour'.

—Charanjeet Kaur

Translating Pain and Relationships



I Want To Destroy Myself: A Memoir
Malika Amar Shaikh
Translated by Jerry Pinto
Penguin, New Delhi, 2016
Pages: 199; Price: Rs. 399/- Hardcover

Jerry Pinto's translation of the iconic *Mala Uddhvasta Vhachayyas*, - *I Want to Destroy Myself* captures the turbulent, vibrant times in Maharashtra and the conflicting relationship between the well-known Dalit poet Namdeo Dhasal and his wife, in stark, ruthless honesty. Emotionally, it seeks to disturb the somnolent, laid back attitude within us to pain, suffering, inhuman physical and emotional tortures, while drawing the picture of a woman's strength and resilience. The Translator's Introduction lays out the compulsions for this Autobiography to be translated. In 1964, 'The book came out to near universal acclaim, but once the first print run was over, the book vanished'. The Introduction also documents the travails undertaken by Pinto to find just one original copy. On reading it, he feels that the struggle to trace it was well worth it, and that it is a book which MUST be translated.

The *Memoir* is a record of the delicate fabric of the social ethos of the 1970s, intertwined with the ever evolving man-woman relationship, conjoined in a doomed marriage. The book can be read in terms of the social fabric and the tumultuous interpersonal and intrapersonal relationship between Malika and her husband, Namdeo Dhasal. They come from a totally mismatched background. Both carry, simultaneously, their respective upbringing in turbulent times, namely, the Dalit Panthers Movement, spearheaded fiercely by Dhasal himself.

Malika's cocooned childhood with her father—poet, singer and communist leader Shahir Amar Sheikh, is vividly portrayed. The impact of the communist movement in Maharashtra, in the early 1960's, lays bare the hopes it raised in the minds of the people. The personal debilities suffered by the child Malika is well juxtaposed with the political atmosphere of the times. The school life and the academics are interspersed with her going

around with her father to his popular public performances. The poet budding within the child, comes out, drawing out the artistic sensibilities in her. The lull and numbness following the tragic death of Shahir in an accident in 1969, when Malika is just twelve and which hit the family hard is well captured. Similarly, the social fabric buzzing with the Naxalite Movement, her sister's marriage to Anil Barve, a Naxalite, the Naxalite Movement getting entangled with the Dalit Panther Movement, Anil Barve and Namdeo Dhasal becoming buddies—these are the high points of life which bring her closer to and increase her infatuation with Namdeo Dhasal. Though just 14, there are no objections to Malika's marriage as the family atmosphere is socially vibrant and liberal and both are poets. The iconoclast, Dhasal, was breaking all established moulds to become a visionary for the Dalits. The romantic aura of the Dalit Panthers made political waves in all other political parties, too.

Dhasal, coming from a downtrodden background, carried all the traits of abject poverty: abusive language, uncouth behaviour, a strong patriarchal hostility to women. She tells us how his poetry, using raw, almost abusive language and challenging the norms of 'genteel' poetry, created a sensation in literary circles. There is no bias or bad mouthing of Dhasal in the *Memoir*, and she does not undermine his poetic genius and contribution in any way. The person one sees is a visionary, having the capacity to mould a movement, to take on a system fearlessly and emerge as a hero for the Dalits of the time. In the background is the woman who has to bear the brunt of the chauvinist world which he typifies. The sacrifices of Malika, a romantic by nature, are taken for granted in the male-dominated social world. Serving tea and meals to the activists without the required finances to fund them leads to a life of deprivation, and then to emotional turbulence and disenchantment and marital discord; the sex life of the couple comes across as a nerve wracking experience. She lives constantly with daily bodily and emotional abuse, leading to the excruciating pain of birthing. She is prey to suicidal tendencies, since she has to deal with a festering body, nervous breakdown and severe depression. The rapid degeneration of Dhasal into a lecher, drunkard, irresponsible father, sinking into a self-created quagmire, along with the Dalit movement he steered, adds to her misery as she is made conscious of her subjugated status all the while, as inhuman tortures render her existence unbearable.

The narrative is not always chronological; rather it is episodic. Jerry Pinto has kept the racy pace of the

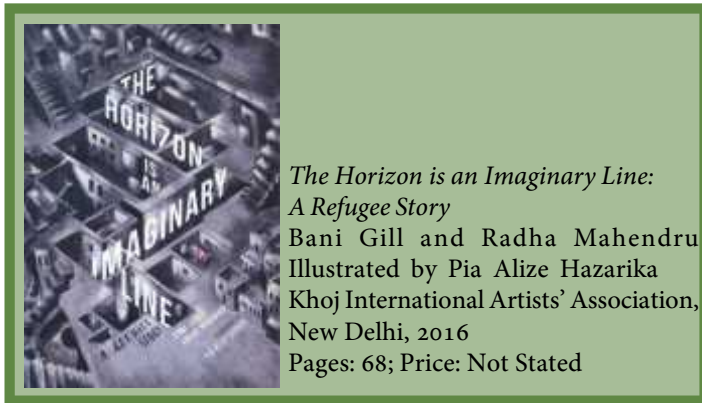
'My Life cannot be made over to anyone, not even Namdeo Dhasal'

narrative, doing full justice to the poetic outpourings. Truly, the narrative reveals the horrors of a woman trapped in a ruthless set up. A mother who's willing to disown the father, legally, for her son's custody. The translation *I Want To Destroy Myself* captures the angst and the trauma, the sensitivity of the mind of the writer, in language that does not intrude and yet captures the essence and poetic power of the original. The book leaves an indelible impression on the mind, in every sense. A woman's story told in her own voice, with honesty, in a controlled and yet, graphic manner.

—Sujata Tandel



Refugee Stories



The Horizon is an Imaginary Line: A Refugee Story
 Bani Gill and Radha Mahendru
 Illustrated by Pia Alize Hazarika
 Khoj International Artists' Association,
 New Delhi, 2016
 Pages: 68; Price: Not Stated

Many of us know only about Somali pirates but nothing really about Somalia or for that matter Somalians in India. The graphic book *The Horizon Is an Imaginary Line: The Refugee Story* by Bani Gill and Radha Mahendru which tells us the story of Maryam Jama Mohamed, a refugee from Somalia and through her story, the story of refugees in India.

The book is partly designed as an infographic. THIAIL, according to the blurb, 'puts into perspective several myths and assumptions about the "refugees crisis" and India's ambiguous role within the global refugee regime.' The book is an outcome of the engagement of Khoj, an International Artists' Association, with the Khirkee community. Those who know Delhi know that there are several urban villages like Hauz Rani and Chirag Dilli. Khirkee village begins at Saket and through a maze of alleys goes up to Malviya Nagar. It used to be once part of the Tughlaq city of Jahanpanah (14th century) but now is in the midst of a concrete jungle. The idea for THIAIL came from several workshops of Khoj and the book engages with issues of forced migration, alienation and belonging. Somalia was created in 1960. It was a former British protectorate and was an Italian colony. It had a military regime headed by Siad Barre which was overthrown in

1991 and collapsed into anarchy. There were rival warlords and the country was torn into fiefdoms which were clan-based. Only in 2000 a unity government was formed which was backed by the international community. But the northern regions of Somalia and Puntland broke away. A coalition of Islamist Shariah courts seized Mogadishu, the capital and a large part of the southern region. Ethiopian and African Union forces intervened and a new government was established in 2012 but there is still the problem and challenge of Al-Shabab insurgents who owe allegiance to Al-Qaeda. And it is this that has led to the refugee crisis and the story of Maryam.

We need to know this to empathise with the story of Maryam. Maryam was 16 when her father was killed by the Al-Shabab in 2009. Although her Hooyo, her mother, did not tell her so, Maryam knew that her father's murder would change her life forever. One night her Hooyo told her to get ready to leave and she and her siblings, Abdul and Amina, left with her for what she described as a long journey. It was the first time she was taking a flight. She thought she was going to be far away from gunfire and explosions and that she would be able to study. She wondered where they were going. Was it to France, Germany or Italy? Finally they land in New Delhi. While the struggle with UNHCR is on for a refugee card she sees an India that is not a part of Bollywood films. She is called a Habshi, a name for African and Abyssinian slaves, pirate, Kaala, whore, cannibal, Negro, monkey, cockroach, parasite and similar names. She struggles to get a job and a roof above her head while the UNHCR procedures are on to find them a country. Finally five years after they arrived in India, her Hooyo and Amina and Abdul leave for Minnesota. Maryam cannot go with them for they have found a strain of TB in her blood. Maryam is still in Delhi. She is living with a Somali family that has come to India for medical treatment. She has applied for a long term visa which will give her the legal right to work in India. She speaks regularly to her family. Abdul and Amina are going to school and her Hooyo has found a job in a warehouse.

Maryam is a semi-fictional character who has emerged from the narratives of many others. The figure of the African "outsider" in the Khirkee extension area took shape when Bani Gill with her ongoing PhD work on migration and refugee flows from Africa to India and Radha working with Khoj had a chance meeting. The result is an extremely informative book which not only deals with statistics of migration but also the emotions of those who are forced to live in a country they have been dumped into, where their colour, their existence and their country of origin become the butt of jokes.

—C S Lakshmi

The Body as a Weapon



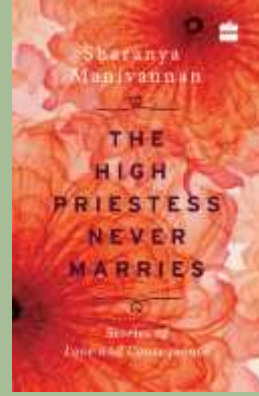
Pennudal Perayudham
(Woman's Body, A Great Weapon)
Pudhiyamadhavi
Iruvaatchi, Chennai, November 2016
Pages: 120; Price: Rs.100/-

This book is a collection of essays on women, issues concerning women and attitudes towards women's life, expression and the various ways in which women's body becomes not only her weapon to fight but also the site of discussions, debates and resolutions. The essays cover a wide range of issues, like how closely women's body is associated with nature and how women's menstrual blood and menstruation itself is part of an age when there was worship of the female element, on women saints, about breast tax that was existent in the Travancore kingdom and how an Ezhava woman cut her own breasts and placed them as tax, about gang rapes of women in Congo and how there are long queues of women outside hospitals for stitching up torn vaginas, about Jewish women and the custom of purifying baths after menstruation, sex change operations, politics of the body and phallocentrism, divorce and the Indian male, Periyar and his views on uterus-centered lives of women and reproductive rights of women, the existence of necrophilia as a ritual in Indian culture (she even quotes an aphorism of Thiruvalluvar to make her point), about woman's language emanating from her body, and finally, a tongue-in-cheek article on how buffaloes are discriminated against and how for her discrimination of any kind is symbolised by the buffalo. These essays have been written for online magazines, literary magazines, seminars and special issues. The themes they cover are themes we are familiar with but such essays in Tamil are not the regular ones that appear in popular magazines or newspapers in Tamil. Putting these essays together as a book serves the very good purpose of many different issues reaching a readership that normally does not get to read or discuss these issues which talk of women's existence as both defined and defiant bodies.

—C S Lakshmi



Liquid Prose



The High Priestess Never Marries: Stories of Love & Consequences
Sharanya Manivannan
HarperCollins, Noida, 2016
Pages:285; Price: Rs. 399/-

Sharanya Manivannan's *The High Priestess Never Marries: Stories of Love and Consequence* is another first from her. Her earlier publications include a children's book and a collection of poems. Her stories have been variously viewed as "liquid prose" and as "bold" adventures in language. They here revolve around the need to understand desire and the implications it has on relationships. Within all subsumes a tendency to identify love and sexuality in their intersections and exclusivities. These first person narratives are animated by a quest for self in its joys and miseries of togetherness and distance, companionship and solitude.

The collection opens with the story "Self-Portrait Without Mythology". The woman in the story describes herself in second person, a voice that arguably becomes the portrait of the reader too. The self that emerges is multi-faceted. It is expressed in the figures of a "a teenage vampire" and "a fearsome and fabulous crone". The figure thus established recurs in almost same attributes in each of the stories. This is a woman who lives in the condition of several sexual relationships, of superstitions, of astrology, and of a fine attention to appearance. The subversion of life and love that this character upholds is a process that most of the other stories revisit.

Several such prose poems in their plotlessness appear in the book. In the story "Nine Postcards from the Pondicherry Border", the woman writes to her former lover/beloved and what she has to say reads like a meditation on love. She has met another man in the city, a drummer and her relationship with him forms an occasion to reflect on multiple ways one loves multiple people.

The (women) characters stand up to a critique of marriage and a championing of love in the dilemmas the conventional relationships pose to women in particular, but to people in general. In the story "Cyclone Crossing", the characters lay bare what it means to marry: "No one could husband you. Do you know what the word means?"

At best he is your permanent lover.” What might seem radical is the confidence with which the women in the stories confront the consequences of love and of an inability to find and keep love on their own terms. The woman in “Sandalwood Moon” says, “. . . if I could not teach you how to love, I would teach myself how to live alone.” In an optimal usage of a gendered view of relationships, many of the characters, especially in the prose poems seem to be asexual too. They call to mind Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body*—there are no names or barely any physical descriptions. The individuals who populate the stories and who think the thoughts belong to a general persona. While some of them are clearly articulated as feminine, many are not. This apparent asexuality becomes quite telling on the conventional relationships and the effects that they produce.

The presence of Tamil in Sharanya’s English (not always accompanied by explanations or translations) stands out in her voice. There is no attempt to mark Tamil as not-English through italics or quotes. Interestingly, the English explanation in some places is in italics. That signals towards a unique understanding of the sexual and the textual in the stories. Apart from highlighting the role of language in sex, it works towards detaching the subject from the possible excessive intellectualising in English.

There is a similar outlook towards a decentering of explanation in the way spaces, Chennai, predominantly, but there are other cities, villages and locales too, are referred to in the stories. The environment, built or otherwise, suffices to simply be, without any pretensions towards becoming background or foreground. The person and the space are independent yet interlinked coordinates of each other. As one character puts it in the story “Mother-tongued”: “You are in Pondicherry, and all of Chennai is wilting with desire.”

The poetic appeal of the stories lies in images like licked eyes and kissed elbows. These images are an integral part of exploration of female/feminine desire. They form a consistent angle on libido and relationships—that marriage or monogamy are claustrophobic, unnecessary institutions; that conventional morality needs to be confronted; or that infidelity can be “so damn hot”. Manivannan looks at possibilities outside “ordinary domesticity” and “unchallenging contentment” in the “disorientation of multiple relationships”.

The author has very intense ways of depicting acts of love—“speaking with bodies”, “speaking in tongues and in terrible clichés”, “making love in mother tongue” or “quavering solar plexus”. These are small glimpses into galactic dimensions of experiences that sex constitutes in its offerings of “uncompromising pleasure”.

The women of the stories articulate their being and a consciousness of its alterity. A man moves from one region

to another but a woman merely migrates from “household to household”, “keeper to keeper”. Virginity is not a state of body, but of being. The worshipped linga is not about sex. It does not seal the vagina but is seen coming out and so what it depicts is the vagina giving birth. This sexual and procreative simultaneity is present in suckling and ravishing of making love too. Underneath these statements of sexuality, there is an acknowledgment of yet another truth—“the spirit of love is bodiless; only its performance is corporeal.”

The intersexual dynamic is an important part of the public and the social, as the stories help us see. Among its comic truths of this dynamic, Sharanya finds that “all Indian men are secretly terrified of women. It’s the state of the nation.” These insights have their intrasexual perspective—too like a character (in one of the stories) who can enjoy her mother only like a “bullfight”, that is, “from a distance”.

The story which gives the volume its title is representative of such takes on the gender analytic. The woman in the story is comfortable with relationships but not with marriage. She is conscious of what she wants and she is remarkable for her ownership of her choices and their consequences. All the stories echo the simplicity behind such brazenness. The volume is cherishable for its sensuous reading of longing and empowering for its imagination of spaces where this longing is embraced.

—Soni Wadhwa



SPARROW Congratulates!

Congratulations to Nayanjot Lahiri for winning the prestigious 2016 John F Richards Prize for her book *Ashoka in Ancient India*. Nayanjot Lahiri is a Historian and Archaeologist and a Professor of History at Ashoka University.



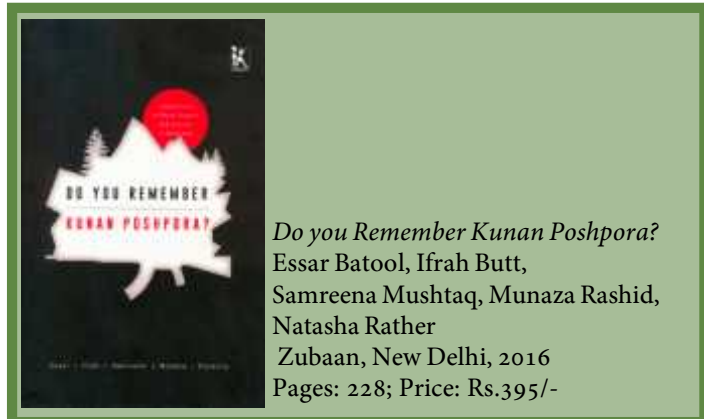
Indian journalist **Malini Subramaniam** has been conferred with the International Press Freedom Award in November 2016 for her reporting from the Naxal-infested Bastar area. She is one of the four journalists felicitated by the annual award for their commitment to a free press.



Congratulation to Hyderabad-based research scientist **Dr Prathama S Mainkar** for receiving the OPPI Woman Scientist Award in November 2016



Remembering Kashmir, Remembering Violence



Do you Remember Kunan Poshpora?
 Essar Batool, Ifrah Butt,
 Samreena Mushtaq, Munaza Rashid,
 Natasha Rather
 Zubaan, New Delhi, 2016
 Pages: 228; Price: Rs.395/-

This book is part of a Zubaan series on sexual violence and impunity in South Asia. The women’s movement had dealt with the issue of rape when the Mathura rape case was revived to show how men in authority can use women’s bodies. Mathura rape case was a custodial rape where the rapists were acquitted and in the aftermath of the verdict in 1979 which said that Mathura had consented to the intercourse, many women’s groups were formed to directly deal with the issue of rape and finally it led to legal reform the most important of which was that the burden of proof was shifted from the accuser to the accused and provisions were made for tougher sentences when rape was established. The rape and death of Thangjam Manorama by the Indian army in Manipur in 2004 had sparked widespread protest in Manipur and led to the by now well-known naked protest of middle-aged women against the Armed forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). While compensation was finally announced for Manorama’s family the rapists and killers themselves went unpunished. The Nirbhaya case in 2012 raised several issues of how we deal with rape and justice and again galvanised a protest movement. But many of us had not even heard of Kunan and Poshpora, two villages in Kashmir. This book takes us back to a cold February night in 1991, when a group of soldiers and officers from the Indian Army entered two villages apparently seeking out militants who were supposed to be hiding there. They pulled the men out and while the men were being tortured the women from the age of sixty to thirteen were subjected to rape. That the Indian Army could rape more than fifty women from two villages and get away with it is the reality this book attempts to elaborate through personal accounts of the journey of a group of young women who are the authors of this book who reopened the Kunan Poshpora case. As Urvashi Butalia, Laxmi Murthy and Navsharan Singh say in the introduction, while it is true that efforts are still being made to adequately address sexual violence and caste, male and transgender sexual violence and the

violence on queer communities, sexual violence at urban workplaces and gruesome rapes and murders in rural areas, mass rapes such the Kunan Poshpora rapes cannot be and should not be forgotten. Reading the book is a traumatic experience and the book recreates the event and examines the long term impact of trauma on those who endured rape in a narrative fraught with emotions, anger and painful memories that refuse to go and keep surfacing. The book is also about the long fight the affected people of the villages have taken up for justice. While insurgency and the violence it brings with it has to be dealt with the stories of what it does to women and how they become victims in this process are stories that cannot remain hidden.

The Kashmir valley has many stories. Kashmiri Pandits left Kashmir on another fateful cold night in 1990 when loudspeakers blared the message to Hindus and Sikhs to convert to Islam, leave the land or die. While all stories have to be told, sexual violence inflicted on women in a situation of insurgency and how this sexual violence is dealt with impunity is a story that needs to be told repeatedly for the public memory is short.

—C S Lakshmi

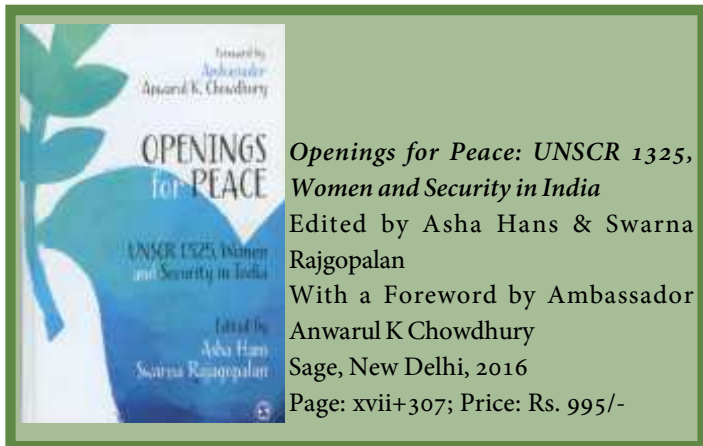


Felicitations of Maithreyi Krishna Raj & Book Launch of *Re-Presenting Feminist Methodologies* at Bangalore University, 13 June 2017



Maithreyi Krishna Raj
 One of the Founder Trustees
 of SPARROW

Being at War, Working for Peace



Openings for Peace: UNSCR 1325, Women and Security in India
 Edited by Asha Hans & Swarna Rajgopalan
 With a Foreword by Ambassador Anwarul K Chowdhury
 Sage, New Delhi, 2016
 Page: xvii+307; Price: Rs. 995/-

It is frightening to admit that ‘we’re always at war’; but war, proxy war, intra-national, international conflicts, ensure that we have learnt to live with feelings of insecurity and impending disaster, and accept them as normal. Right from aggressive language to riots, to terrorism, to skirmishes, to surgical strikes, to pogroms—killing of civilians in the name of a ‘larger good’ is viewed as inevitable, a necessary evil or even ethical, by the perpetrators of violence, in any nation, community or group. Seen as part and parcel of a ‘global patriarchy’ in this book, the contributors look at how to create ‘openings of peace’ which can be possible only with the active involvement of women, across the board, in peace initiatives. As Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury says, in the Foreword, the UNSCR 1325 takes as its article of faith the conviction that ‘women—even the humblest and the weakest—have contributed to building the culture of peace in their personal lives, in their families, in their communities and in their nations’.

Openings for Peace: UNSCR 1325, Women and Security in India, brings together a variety of voices—academic and activist, which discuss the significance of *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, a report prepared in 2015 by the UN to mark the completion of 15 years of the passing of Resolution 1325 by the United Nations in 2000. Focussing on the Indian situation, the contributors take a look at how relevant this document has been to India, the progress and relevance of National Action Plans (NAP) as

envisaged by UN, in the Indian context, the need to take a grassroots-level approach in peace building initiatives and, particularly, conflict zones in India which require interventions, and the involvement of women in larger numbers.

Apart from the Foreword, the Introduction to the volume by Swarna Rajgopalan and her Chapter ‘The 1325 Resolutions: From Thought to Action’ lay down the basics of the Resolution and the Report in the context of national and international conflicts and indicate that feminist agency, civil society and individual women have to take the onus of working on the WPS project. ‘This anthology ... twins a discussion of the WPS (women, peace and security) resolutions with a discussion of militarism, exploring the relevance of the resolutions in settings that are not deemed “conflict”’, she says. Soumita Basu also takes a look at the implementation of 1325 in India and emphasises that civil society will have to play a much larger role in it. Amrita Patel, Paula Banerjee, and Asha Hans discuss the situation in the North-east, the imposition of AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act), the success of women’s activism in spite of state opposition and also opposition from human rights workers. Citing oral records and case studies, like that of Ms Lungmilla, who has been reduced to a vegetative state after having her skull fractured while participating in a rally protesting against the construction of the Mapithel Dam in Manipur in 2008, to prove the dubious role of the state and the double victimisation of women in such uprisings, they argue that while NAPs will contribute to peace and security, it is local initiatives which will have a lasting and more effective impact. Ritu Dewan, Rekha Chowdhary and Vibhuti Ubbott, in their essays on the situation in Kashmir, present the gendered perspective and the locating of women’s agency, underlining the need to go beyond the victimisation narrative. Though not an organised force, women, through necessity took to public and political life, becoming instrumental in legitimising the insurgency movement in Kashmir and also becoming support systems for their families; they cite Mushtaqul Haq, who states: ‘Illiterate women, whose sons, spouses, brothers or fathers were serving jail sentences in different parts of Kashmir and India, began to follow their legal suits, contacted lawyers, got to learn about the draconian laws under which their loved ones were imprisoned, got exposed to the legal

There is no line between peacetime and wartime, we’re always at war. Turn on the TV, everyone’s talking in prison camp slang: the politicians, the businessmen, even the president; kickbacks, bribes, siphoning... Human life—you can just spit and rub someone out. Just like in prison...

(Svetlana Alexievich, in *Second Hand Time*, 2013, 2016)

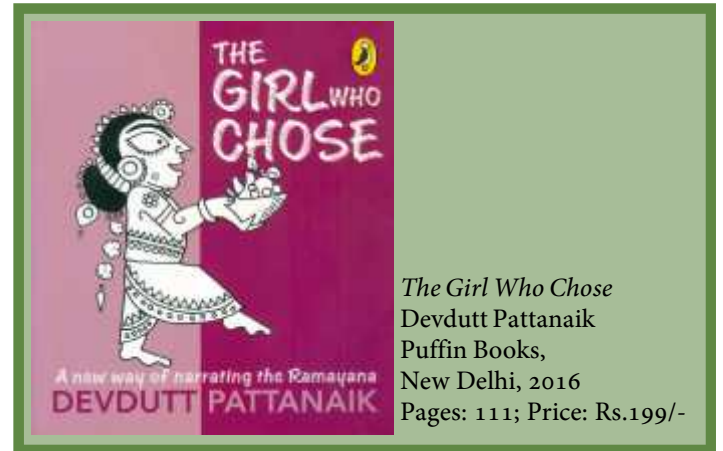
clauses and knew which judges were hearing the cases. They began to visit various jails, torture and detention centres and travelled to alien places, which provided them diverse exposure, and they are well aware of the location of prisons, courts and cheap hotels to stay during which their trial was going on’.

Ila Pathak, Saumya Uma, Betty A Reardon and Asha Hans take a larger perspective, in the light of communal disturbances, People’s Action Plans (as against State initiated National Action Plans) and the need for a paradigm shift in promoting women’s peace and security. Ila Pathak (and after her death, Saumya Uma, who edited and revised her essay) refers to the Kandhamal riots in 2008 in the light of the 1992 and 2002 riots, in which violence against women included not only rape and other forms of sexual violence, but also the pitiable conditions in the relief camps, in terms of accommodation, food supplies, nutrition, sanitation, relief material health, education, trauma—as parameters which come within the ambit of violence, and become extended metaphors for war. And, of course, the inordinate delay in judicial procedures. This essay concludes with the assertion that Resolutions 1325 and 1820 [of the UN] ‘are potential tools to strengthen advocacy initiatives for women’s rights in contexts of communal violence, at the preventive, protective and curative levels.’ Apart from equality in terms of equal distribution of resources to women, it is important to look at gender equality in terms of ‘transformative change’ of institutions, which will involve the restructuring of institutions along more equal lines, is one of the powerful messages that this anthology sends out. Participation, Prevention and Protection of women emerge as the three core pillars in the quest for WPS, in Betty Reardon’s view.

In the context of rising militarism and militarised violence, it is important to open up new areas of creating peace initiatives and work for the ‘transitioning from the cult of war to the culture of peace.’ That is perhaps, why the slogan for the Global Campaign on Women, Peace and Security launched by the UN in June 2014 is ‘If we are serious about peace, we must take women seriously.’

—Charanjeet Kaur

Being Sita



This delightful book is a book for children and young people. It presents Sita as a woman who knew her mind and who made choices. It details the five choices she makes in life: the first is to go with Ram to the forest, the second to cross the Lakshman Rekha, the third to wait for Ram to come and take her from Lanka, the fourth to decide to go with Ram after the war when he tells her she is free to go anywhere, and the fifth when she decides to go down into the earth and not go back to Ayodhya when Ram requests her to come with her sons. Interspersed with information on many different Ramayanas and their authors and illustrated with drawings with comments, the book would bring joy to any child who reads it. The book does not end with any moral but with the observation that there are some who are obsessed with rules like Ram, there are those like Ravan who don’t care for rules and there are those like Sita who follow rules sometimes but are also capable of making their own choices. Whatever one decides to do, there are consequences. Ram, Ravan and Sita reside within you and around you, but as human beings we are bestowed with the capacity to make choices and we must choose in a way that we help others. That observation will make a child think and maybe learn to look within.

—C S Lakshmi

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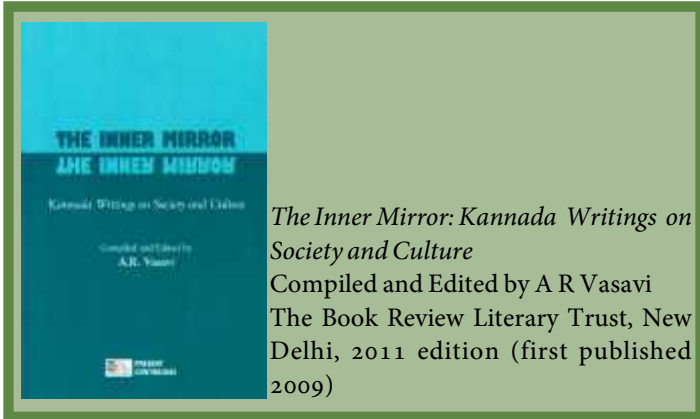
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Speaking to the World in Kannada



The Inner Mirror: Kannada Writings on Society and Culture

Compiled and Edited by A R Vasavi
The Book Review Literary Trust, New Delhi, 2011 edition (first published 2009)

There are many voices in our country which don't get heard by those outside their state, because they are not in English or Hindi and are not translated. They don't get heard by academicians, who are mostly exposed to academic writing in English, and much of the theory on culture and society even about India is taken from the West. A R Vasavi has put together translations of contemporary writings in Kannada by men and women of different social backgrounds that draw from their personal experiences and oral and folk traditions and classical literature. The title is taken from Shri Simpi Linganna's comparison of the repository of knowledge reflected in folk songs and proverbs to an inner mirror reflecting the inner life of the people. The essays deal with issues of caste, gender, culture, religion, nationalism, economy and language. These essays were originally lectures, newspaper articles and conference papers, now collated and translated,

D R Nagaraj discusses the two types of Kannada nationalism, the 'fear-centred' which is aggressive toward other languages and cultures and the more inclusive, 'spiritual' one. K V Narayana in his essay 'Kannada Pride, English Prejudice' writes about the crisis facing the Kannada language as it is being gradually unused in the fields of administration, education, communication etc. G. Rajashekar examines how an incident of molestation in Puttur takes on a communal colour.

Religion, spirituality and mythology is an integral part of Indian and Karnataka culture. The playwright and poet Chandrashekar Kambar talks about the gods and goddesses of Shivapura, 'the world's first village', created by and named by an incarnation of Maya. He delves into the stories behind the goddess Mari or Karavva (black mother), and the myths of Yellamma and Mathangi, suggesting that these show the superiority and power of the female goddessess. Also part of the mythology are the fearsome Sedumaris who have power and authority to possess and curse and are offered sacrifices of arrack

and meat. Those wanting supernatural aid in murdering someone invoke these goddesses, who also protect them from falling into the hands of the police. But the Sedumari will help only if the murderer performs the funeral of the victim, usually with the help of a kidnapped, blindfolded village priest. The Yakshis, nymph-like beings who live in banyan trees are more benevolent and inspire artists and musicians. All these myths are accompanied with real-life stories of villagers who are devotees for whom mythology is not an abstract academic subject but every ritual, every god and goddess is a matter-of-fact reality of everyday life. The clash between age-old beliefs and modern civilization is explored by U R Ananthamurthy as he speaks of the annual nude worship of the goddess Renukamba, in Chandragutti, by men and women of all ages. He lets us in on a discussion he had had with those for and against the practice including a feminist activist who is scared that it would lead female nude worshippers into prostitution. He speaks of his own dilemmas with religion and spirituality and how in spite of his own democratic socialism and conscious rationalist purpose, religious elements have crept into his stories. He discusses the writings of many Kannada literateurs including Kuvempu and Shivram Karanth who seek to explore this conflict between the traditional and modern, rationality and religion, the urban and rural, West and East, myth and reality. Rahamat Yarikere writes about the community absorbing into the region's tradition the history and customs of other tribes, other religions. How some Islamic traditions, and rituals are absorbed in certain Karnataka regions by the larger Hindu community, acquiring folk dimensions. This syncretism is seen in music and Islamic rituals, but seen as 'corruption' by fundamentalists and dismissed as Islamic folklore by others.

Another section of this book deals with caste. Baragur Ramachandrappa, looks at how some opportunists have been using the caste system for their own benefit, and calls for the use of reservation in a responsible manner, without it being an instrument of class exploitation. According to Mogalli Ganesh, the role of English and globalisation shaped by English has been instrumental in the progress of Dalits, opening them up to ideas from around the world and not necessarily destroying their customs and mores. Devanoor Mahadeva compares the repression, cruelty, violence in the Indian caste system to apartheid in South Africa. He also expresses his sadness that the intelligentsia think that untouchability is a problem only for the lower castes, not affecting other castes and classes.

In the section on women, Veena Bannanje, the lone female voice in this book besides the editor A R Vasavi, ponders on 'unconventional' achievements of women, and

concludes that there are almost none. Reflecting on patriarchy in the culture, she recalls questioning her own father, a Sanskrit scholar after his lecture on the concept of continuity from father to son. He said that the women's role and fulfillment lies in helping man find his continuity, the question of her continuity doesn't arise. She writes of her own discontent about discrimination against women, the work that her mother did, not being considered work and how gender consciousness and awareness of the body differs among the classes, and the choices of women when it comes to procreation. She also explores the idea of growth outside traditional frameworks, and whether achieving 'success' like men is an achievement and how those spiritually enlightened have transcended gender hierarchy. Freedom, not only for women but men too, is when they achieve freedom of the self and becoming a person of love and unselfishness.

The literary critic, H S Raghavendra Rao in reflecting on 'Creativity and Women' tries to place it in the framework of work and leisure, not just confined to artistic or literary endeavours. There is a need to redefine concepts of creativity and art. Notions of vulgarity and decency, driven by middle-class morality, are big factors in restricting the expression of women and dalits. Art and literature created by women, especially in folk traditions, are marginalised. Most women in our country, he said, are denied a space for self-expression, even in their sexuality. They have little freedom to enjoy even their leisure time and passive entertainment like watching television is one of the few avenues open to women and 'acceptable'. The woman can not and will not spend money on herself, even if she earns it outside the house. Trying to learn something new or a hobby will be difficult as the woman fears familial and societal disapproval, and of course, guilt within, being conditioned only to focus on the family and children. He also says that interaction between the women's movement and women's creativity is needed; they should derive their energy from each other.

Professor T R Chandrashekara, who specialises in development studies, writes in an article published in 2008, when the BJP government was in power that the development of women is not a matter of obligation but a right, one that is not inherited but has to be acquired through effort. Bemoaning the under-representation of women in the State Assembly, he tries to analyse the government's attitude towards women's development. He cites the example of Sushama Swaraj who had been visiting Bellary for the last 7-8 years only to take part in Vara Mahalaxmi celebrations but not bothering to meet underprivileged, overworked women in the region. The government only promotes welfare schemes and

programmes trying to meet the daily needs of women but not those that try to challenge traditional relationships and rights of women. Opportunities to fulfil their dreams or meet their goals are not part of the notion of women's development according to the Karnataka government whose ruling party is all about conserving tradition and cultural and religious practices. The religion and worship that gets promoted too is not that of the masses, not that of the lower classes and dalits. Women are seen only as homemakers and mothers and any attempt at feminism is said to result in the collapse of family and society. Chandrashekara questions why it is only the woman's responsibility to stop the family from crashing and not the man's and why are only women equated with family. Also, there is nothing biological about women doing domestic work and no reason why men need not participate in it and in taking care of their children. Women are expected to earn outside the house, but still handle the house and children single-handedly. Further, due to the glorification of tradition and the family system, so many women are silent about domestic abuse and violence, because they know that they will not get much support from the government, or the police or even their own parental home.

In the last section on modernity and development, K V Subbana, the theatre specialist and guiding spirit behind Neenasam, observes how development in Karnataka, for e.g. dams, was destroying land and livelihoods. Much of the time higher education led to children leaving the villages for good, impoverishing the villages. He sees girls from the rural areas now in urban factories live like automatons in terrible working and living conditions. But of course, migration to cities is also necessary for some to escape caste oppression and poverty. He shares how cultural memory which is in our bloodstreams can be illuminated by works like the play *Gokula Nirgama* which he examines. The village youth of Gokula are eager to accompany Krishna to Mathura, just like the present day youth want to migrate to the city. Murari Ballal laments the indifference of the people of Dakshin Kannada District. Modernisation and liberalisation has rendered them soulless, disinterested in social and cultural issues or social justice. Modernity is a source of liberation for some but the impact is immense. The impact of the West and the Middle East, where many go for employment, and of cities like Mumbai on the rural areas has resulted in a mixed modernity. In aping the upper classes, the people of the district have lost their distinct identity. Modern education has been mediocre and ignored much, resulting in literature that is mediocre. Modernity has resulted in the loss of traditional systems, skills, and the traditional vocational knowledge base. Also there is now

among the people a religious overzealousness with communal overtones. Lifestyles have changed and are not ecologically sustainable anymore.

The writer, K P Poornachandra Tejaswi also highlights the problems that modernisation brings. The rural landscape is changing with large-scale conversion of agricultural lands into non-agricultural, as they become the property of multi-nationals and the corporate sector. We are adopting Western technology but displacing lakhs of peasants. Land is now perceived not as a way of life but as a production process and the farmer as a mere agent. The dilemma that farmers face is whether they should continue with small plots which bring them hardly anything or sell them for good sums. The problem is that if they sell, they are now without their hereditary employment, and because of lack of knowledge neither do they invest their money wisely and reach a worse state. Agricultural science too does not relate very well with the rural masses. Other effects of modernity are that many caste-based traditional occupations are destroyed and there is large scale migration to the city. Education has only succeeded in alienating rural youth and their goal is 'government service'. Most peasant movements have not been too effective and he does not think that Gandhian idealism or Marxism or socialism is a solution.

These Kannada writings let us know the specific issues and problems of the region, it is not just theoretical but peppered with real-life experiences. Though it is sad that the writing of only one woman is included here, it is to be noted that the men have written sympathetically and not patronisingly about women's issues.

—Priya D'Souza

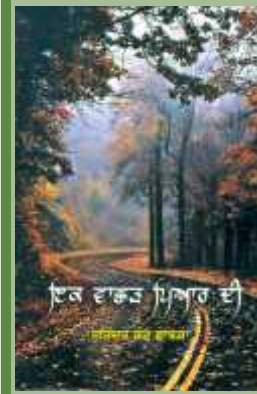
Sad Demise

Vilas Sitaram Dhuri

(April 26, 1962-March 21, 2017)

Vilas Sitaram Dhuri, who joined Mouj Prakashan as a young boy of 16 after the death of his father who had also worked in Mouj Prakashan, passed away on March 21, 2017. Dhuri, as we called him, has been helping us with layout and printing of SNL right from the first issue. The first few issues of Annual Report were printed in different presses. When we decided to give it to Mouj Prakashan, it was Dhuri who took it upon himself to do the layout and printing of the Annual Report. His death has come as a shock to all of us in SPARROW. We will miss him a great deal and I don't think we can work on the future SNLs without thinking of him and his kind and warm ways.

Tyranny of Domescity, Shrinking Spaces



Ik Wachad Piyar Di
(A Passing Shower of Love)
Surinder Kaur Chhabra
Sangam Publications, Patiala, 2017
Pages:151; Price: Rs 150/-

Nearly three years after my retirement from my College teaching job, I was one day very pleasantly surprised to get a call from Surinder Kaur Chhabra, a friend and colleague who headed the Sociology department of the College ever since I had joined it in 1978 to the time of her retirement. After her retirement we lost touch for some time. But she was often in my mind because I would remember the conversations we would have occasionally on social issues, particularly about the position of women in the Hindu and Sikh communities. Her social insights would often lead me to alternative readings of literary texts. I also knew that she wrote occasionally for Punjabi and Hindi magazines, that she translated from Punjabi to Hindi and that her talks had been broadcast in the programme *Nari Jagat* of All India Radio, Bombay.

So, when she told me last month that her first collection of Short Stories *Ik Wachad Piyar Di* had been published, I was not surprised. I had always sensed that she was seriously into writing: coming from an academic and literary background, sister of the well-known Punjabi writers, Pritam Bailly, Rajinder Kaur and Jagjit Singh, and the daughter of enlightened parents—who placed quality education above material pursuits,—it was but natural for her to turn to fiction to express the concerns that had always been close to her mind—as a person, as a teacher and as a social scientist.

Ik Wachad Piyar Di has a substantial 35 stories, centred around the lives of urban, educated, middle class, professional women, who continue to remain in the grips of a patriarchal system, in which they have to negotiate their little spaces. Here we come across women handling alcoholic husbands, fathers and brothers, insensitive sons and daughter-in-laws, economic deprivation, daughters forced into jobs that do not empower but merely add to the family kitty, while continuing the oppression of women caught in the tyranny of domesticity and its shrinking spaces. Yet, nothing very dramatic happens in any of the stories: they talk of day-to-day routines, small incidents

which would pass by without being noticed, but which contribute invisibly, perhaps to the painful texture of life. And she tells these stories with gentle irony. ‘Trikon Vistaar’, (‘Triangular Growth’) in some ways reminiscent of Premchand’s ‘Kafan’ is narrated from the point of view of the sister, Sapna, who sees her three alcoholic brothers,—failures in marriage, education or professions—sit beside their dead father, convincing themselves that this is not the time for them to drink; eventually, the Triumvirate, as she calls them, of Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh—coax themselves into believing that they need a drink to help them cope with their sorrow on the death of a redundant father, and that after this last time, they will give up the bottle. Sapna watches this ‘3D show’ as she calls it, knowing that the family has been scattered beyond redemption. It is interesting that the names of the characters are so neutral—Jyoti, Mahesh, Sapna, Shalini – as if the writer is suggesting that these are stories which do not limit themselves to any culture, region or community.

Surinder Kaur locates individual stories in larger contexts by showing parallel stories around her. In ‘Koi Hai?’ (‘Anyone There?’) Rima, the central character, is in for severe disillusionment when she goes to the US to be with her son and daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law resents her very presence and her attempts to be of some use, especially in cooking meals for her son. Totally shaken, she and her husband return to India. Very ordinary happenings these are—so common, perhaps. But this story takes off from two other narratives—one in which the indifference of the families of her neighbours—Subodh Kar and Mr Karve—are narrated. Apparently unconnected, the three stories are woven together in one thematic string.

All the stories deal with emotions, sometimes raw emotions, and some of the narratives are about bitter experiences. But the bitterness of the experiences never becomes overpowering because of the bare and matter-of-fact style she uses. Even when she talks about extreme harassment at the workplace, as in ‘Karahat’ (Repugnance), there is no element of melodrama: ‘There were only two options available to Nidhhi now. She could either simply give up her job and forget about it; or she could take up the challenge and fight it through.’ (Translation mine) Of course, when it combines with greater forces that cause conflict in the characters’ personal and professional life, emotions abound; but the restraint in expressing them remains intact. In ‘Escort Service’, she talks about a young girl who, after trying her hand at more ‘respectable’ professions, because of her dire financial straits and family responsibilities, has to take up this kind of job which will pay her well.

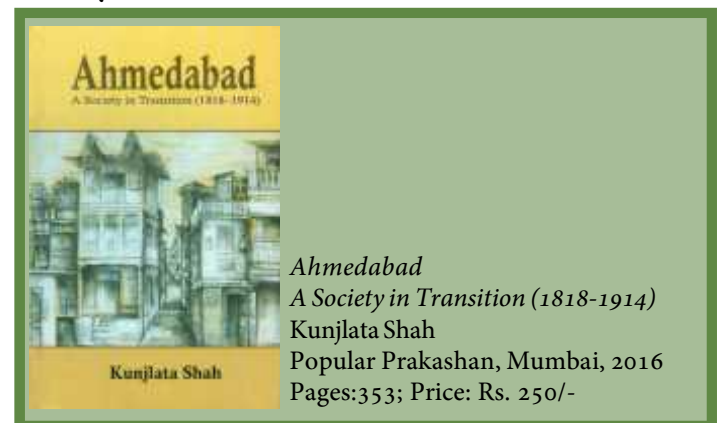
In spite of the sense of irony and the non-dramatic use of language which informs most of the stories like ‘Wapsi’, ‘Sangharsh’ (one of the finest stories in this collection which is set in a mental health asylum) ‘Uh Aje Vi Jinda Hai’, (‘Still Alive’) there is a fine sense of human bonding in a story like ‘Ik Wachad Piyar Di’. The deep bond of friendship between the two women—the college teacher, Rupa and the pupil, Snehal—point to layers of understanding between them and the new maturity and understanding with which Snehal comes back to meet Rupa after she is married.

This is a first book, and one hopes that the many manuscripts that SKC has in her notebooks and diaries will soon see the light of publication. Meanwhile, this is a sensitive book which is calling out for a translation.

—Charanjeet Kaur



A City and Its Stories



Dr Kunjlata N Shah, the former head of the department of history at SNTD College, Churchgate has traced the urban history of Ahmedabad in the transitional period (1818 to 1914) when the city was being industrialised under British colonial rule. In this period education for women was slowly introduced and caste barriers were slightly torn down. With the introduction of the railways, European goods flooded the markets in Ahmedabad and many people lost their livelihoods, but some merchants like those in the cotton and opium trade flourished. By 1914, Ahmedabad was a modern industrialised city with textile mills and other factories. Shah examines the dynamics of social and cultural change and the role played by reformers, literary persons, educationists, merchants and industrialists.

Caste dominated the social, cultural, religious and economic life of the people of Gujarat. In the early 19th century, customs like dowry and female infanticide in

certain castes continued without interference from the British and they let most disputes be settled by the caste leaderships themselves. The mobility of Hindu and Muslim women was limited and they only went out for religious gatherings. There was very little interaction between women of different religions and even castes, only very slowly did it change, and not for all.

The British did not make any effort to bring in social reforms initially. But in 1848 Alexander Forbes and others founded the Gujarat Vernacular Society to promote the Gujarati language and learning and modern ideas; and together with western education and some liberal sections of the press influenced societal life greatly in Ahmedabad. Many Gujaratis influenced by Western education tried to bring about socio-economic reforms including establishing schools for women.

In the 19th century the educated men from the upper classes took the initiative in improving the status of women, for e.g. social reformers like Dalpatram, Mahipatram, Umiashankar, Nilkanth and Bholanath Sarabhai who was the first to educate his daughter and daughter-in-law. Voluntary associations were a major influence—some promoted women's education like Gujarat Vernacular Society (GVS), Prarthana Samaj and National Indian Association; Ballagna Nishedhak Mandali sought to prevent child marriage, and Purnavivah Uttejak Sabha to encourage widow remarriage. The reformers knew that forcing legislation would be counter-productive and worked with caste organisations, some of whom slowly started reforms within. For e.g. people from within the Kadva Kanbi caste which was famous for female infanticide passed a resolution limiting monetary and other exchanges during weddings, etc. to protect their daughters.

Ahmedabad was the first place where women's education in Gujarat started. GVS started the first girls' school in 1850, also managed eight trust funds which were instituted for the publication of books useful to women and concerning women, and other trust funds to endow scholarships to encourage girls to study. Even though there was an impact, most people were still scared to send their daughters to school fearing societal disapproval. Till 1914 there were about 22 municipal primary schools with 2411 girls plus 10 more private ones, and only one secondary girls' school with 130 girls. Of course, Shah notes that generally the educationists' main objective in educating women was to make them better wives, mothers and homemakers. Other achievements by GVS were a separate library for women in 1908, an elocution competition for women, which attracted contestants from all over Gujarat and examinations for continuing education to encourage women who had left school to restart education. The Bandhu Samaj was founded in 1902 to

encourage literature for women and it started a women's magazine, Sundri Subodh. Shah also details the different newspapers, journals, community and caste journals and the role they played in disseminating progressive ideas, but still overlooking the interests of the depressed castes and classes.

Only in the last decade of the 19th century did women leaders emerge. Vidhyaben Nilkanth and her sister Sharadaben Mehta, the first graduates from Ahmedabad were involved in many literary, cultural and social organisations. Vidhyaben had much support from her husband for her studies, and took 11 years to graduate because pregnancies and domestic duties kept interrupting. Later Nilkanth was with her in the forefront of many social and even political organisations. Dr Motiben Kapadia who was appointed doctor for the Victoria Jubilee hospital also started a nursing school to train nurses. Her other interest was in pioneering amateur theatre and musical concerts in which Hindu and Parsi women and men participated. Sulochanaben Desai, herself widowed at 17, started institutes to help widows to be economically independent Vanita Ashram. Also there was Ansuyaben Sarabhai, a labour leader under Gandhi's guidance who started schools and night schools for labourers and their children. And in this period Harkunvar Sethani financially supported the GVS-run girls school. Parvatikunvar, the wife of the foremost social reformer Mahipatram who wrote her biography, was very courageous and supported her husband when he was ostracised by his caste. She went against societal norms by travelling in an open carriage, wearing footwear and carrying an umbrella, which even rich, upper-caste women were not allowed to.

In 1887, the Gujarat Ladies Club the first organisation was founded by women, Miss Mary Sorabjee and her sisters, promoted social interaction between women of different communities, European, Parsi, Jewish and Christian. There was also another ladies' club run by the Bholanath Institute which had sports etc. and organised community events and garbas. Ahmedabad women, who were mostly apolitical, slowly showed an interest in the Swadeshi movement and many then with Gandhiji's encouragement became freedom movement leaders at the national level. Also within the castes, women started organising programmes for their own women, trying to popularise reforms.

Before the proliferation of textile mills, many middle-class housewives used to spin cotton yarn on the spinning wheels in their houses, and earn a little. Hindu women from the lower castes were employed in various manufacturing processes in silk and brocade industries and later on in textile mills. Women used to work long

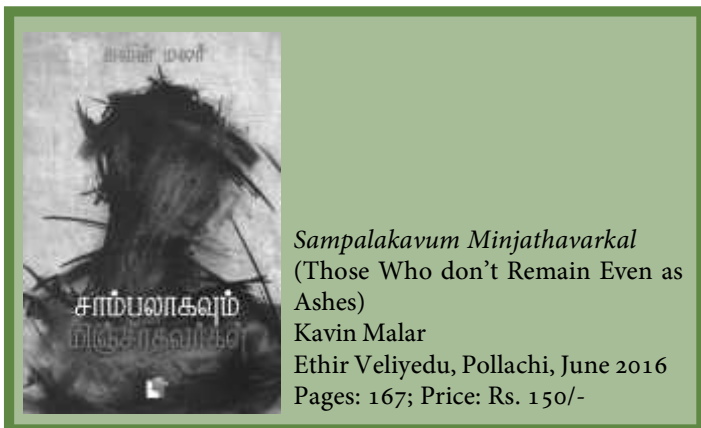
hours with men till their working hours were restricted to 11 by the Factory Act, which resulted in many mill owners firing women. With no crèches, infants of workers stayed with their mothers and a survey showed that more than 70 per cent were administered opium by them. Among the upper castes, few women started entering Ahmedabad's Female Training College for primary school teaching, which after some initial hesitation admitted widows too. Soon there were women with different religious and caste backgrounds there, including six Muslim students in 1914. Dr Motiben Kapadia's school for nurses ensured that some women entered the nursing profession

Dr Kunjlata Shah has extensively researched archival materials, articles from newspapers, periodicals and caste journals, legal documents, autobiographies and annual reports from local institutions. She has also looked at oral tradition in folk songs and stories and also interviewed elderly residents for this book. Though the book contains a lot of detail and research, it is very readable and not full of jargon and theoretical language and will be a great boon to those in Women's Studies.

—Priya D'Souza



Memories of Caste as Violence



Sampalakavum Minjathavarkal
(Those Who don't Remain Even as Ashes)
Kavin Malar
Ethir Veliyedu, Pollachi, June 2016
Pages: 167; Price: Rs. 150/-

Kavin Malar is a journalist who won the Laadli award for the year 2013-14. She has won many other awards for her incisive articles on LGBT issues. This book is a collection of her articles on the issue of caste in Tamil Nadu written for various magazines. They come under the category of investigative journalism where she has gone to a particular area where caste atrocities have taken place and has personally interacted with the affected people and organisations and lawyers working for their benefit and has also visited police stations to get further details. Most of the essays are on caste atrocities where Dalits have been affected. Kavin Malar

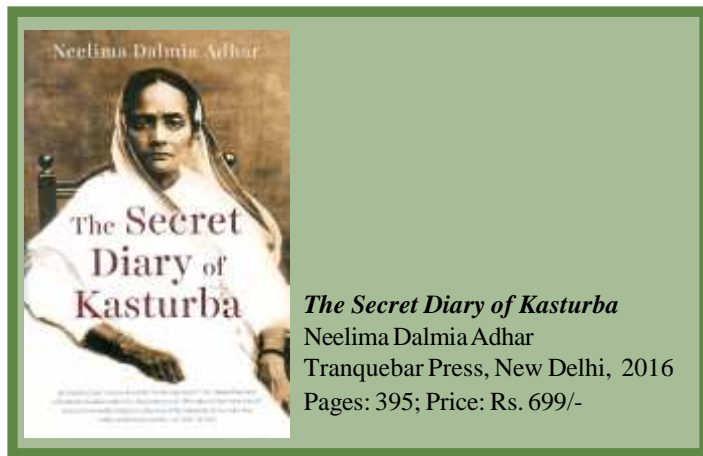
gives graphic details of Dalit villages burnt, of police atrocities on Dalits, deliberate investigation delays, sexual molestation of women (there is the heartrending instance of police attacking an entire Dalit area in the name of conducting a search, looting their houses, molesting their women where, a young thirteen year old girl sobs saying that her school had been closed that day and that if only she had gone to school she could have escaped molestation by the police) and one story after another of inter-caste marriages where the boy is a Dalit and the girl is from the Vanniyar caste where either both of them or one of them is killed by caste fanatics. Brutal murders of daughters by their families even after the daughter has had two children to punish her for marrying a Dalit, of poison being poured into the ear and nose of a girl who refuses to drink poison and several other gruesome instances of murders that have taken place including that of Ilavarasan whose marriage with Divya and his subsequent death which went in the name of suicide became a hot subject discussed in the media. The essays also talk of Paattaali Makkal Katchi which has played the role of fomenting caste hatred against the Dalits and how these caste murders have been on the rise despite many activists trying to deal with court cases and with the Prevention of Atrocities Act itself. There are also essays on government policies and budgets dealing with the lowered castes and three essays on religion; one on the Babri Masjid issue, the second on Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and the third one on secularism which asks if secularism is really being practised by the government in Tamil Nadu and its various bodies and by the various political parties that talk about secularism. Maybe because these essays have appeared in popular journals Kavin Malar has not been able to do deeper analysis taking several factors into consideration. However, the essays cover a wide range of issues concerning caste both in government policies and in the incidents that took place in the years between 2011 and 2016. The title is a very poignant one which reflects a particular incident when two persons in love were killed and cremated by the village with not even their ashes to be found.

—C S Lakshmi



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Imagining Kasturba



The Secret Diary of Kasturba
Neelima Dalmia Adhar
Tranquebar Press, New Delhi, 2016
Pages: 395; Price: Rs. 699/-

Many years ago, when I came across *Kasturba—A Life* by Arun Gandhi, I was really happy because it would fill in so much about her that remains outside the public domain. Yes, it was an important work and brought Kasturba Gandhi into prominence; but Arun Gandhi too had to bemoan the fact that the wife of the most documented, most widely photographed and most widely-recorded leader, the Mahatma, remained in the shadows and much cannot be unearthed about her. Neelima Dalmia Adhar in the present book, *The Secret Diary of Kasturba* tries hard to fill in the gaps that persist; not only by using the time and tested methods of research in history, but also by using her own sensitivity and imagination to go under the skin of this woman who lived in the heart of the political and social conflicts which he and she were part of, and yet her role, decisive as it has been, has been submerged in the staggering literature about the freedom struggle and the lives of the people who led it. The near invisibility of women in the movement is something that has been recognised only recently; as such even this kind of imaginative rendering of the life of Kasturba Gandhi is most welcome.

Historically, Neelima Adhar has got her facts on the dot and those who are familiar with the life of Gandhiji will follow the journey from his childhood to his death without any surprise. The making of the Mahatma in South Africa (so meticulously documented in Rajmohan Gandhi's *Gandhi Before India*) and his journey in India from Champaran to Independence and Partition, and his final martyrdom, form the base of this exploration. Even the personal conflicts that dogged the Gandhi family—his less than admirable behaviour with his wife, his imposition of his diktat on her and on his sons, his excruciating and unresolved bitterness with his first born Harilal, his bizarre sex experiments, including his vow of celibacy with his wife, his 'spiritual marriage' with Rabindranath Tagore's niece, Sarala Devi Choudhurani all these are

already a part of the Gandhian lore and legend. For those not familiar with this history (and sadly, there are many in India who would fall into this category—most people's knowledge of 'Gandhiana' is based on hearsay, on what has been learnt from school textbooks, at best from Richard Attenborough's film, and at worst, today, from FB trivia and social media forwards), this book would be a good introduction. For others familiar with the lore, the Diary format and the impressionistic and emotional tone of the work will provide insights which one may or may not agree with, but which will help in raising more and more relevant questions, underlining the need for greater research and the tapping of more hidden and unidentified resources and documents. If they exist, that is.

There are two aspects of Kasturba which emerge strongly in the book: personal and political. The explorative focus remains on the personal. It is, essentially, the story of a woman whose destiny as the spouse of the much-revered leader was often at odds with her own beliefs and needs. It is, no doubt, a life steeped in the tragic. The famous episode of cleaning the chamber pots has become symbolic of the many challenges she faced as a high caste, religious Hindu woman, who has to go against her caste and class affiliations often; the picture that emerges is of a woman who is at the receiving end of her husband's radical ideas, a man who is given to violent fits of temper and who shows extreme insensitivity towards the feelings and rights of others. The hurts, nay assaults, she faces are real; but, again, the intense and abiding love between the couple is also a high point of this depiction. And Adhar portrays this love story with a mix of the sensuous and the overwhelmingly emotional.

The Secret Diary of Kasturba, dwells upon the family life of Kasturba, right from her birth. She comes across as the woman who holds the family together, in South Africa, in Bombay, in Rajkot, in Sabarmati Ashram, in Wardha, and in all the journeys Gandhiji undertakes. The central tragedy of the life is the dissolute life of Hiralal, which is presented in heart wrenching detail, so much so that often it appears that this is an account of *his* life seen through the eyes of his mother. Of course, the father is subject to blame and it is his insensitivity to Harilal's aspirations which emerges as the main cause of his dissipated life. Images of the doomed Hiralal are what you take away from this work: Harilal denied the British legal education he so desires, Harilal trying his best to become a part of the Gandhian struggle in South Africa and the brief success he meets. Harilal's anguish when he sees that his younger brother is forced into celibacy for 12 years because of his brief dalliance with two girls of the Ashram (their hair is also cut off because Babu believes that it was their hair which tempted Manilal in the first

place), his rancour when Bapu derides him for the fourth pregnancy of his wife... these are images that are conjured by Kasturba, and which continue to haunt after the last page has been read.

But there are gaps that remain. The final impression that I have about this book is that it has shown the way to the many stories that remain to be told about this powerful woman. Her active political life has just been touched upon in a matter-of-fact manner. For example, she is imprisoned for 90 days in South Africa. Now there is rich material here, which needs to be discovered: who were her companions in prison? How did they cope with the hardships? What strategies did they adopt to keep their morale high? What was the routine in the prison like? How did it impact her and the other women psychologically and materially? There is a diary waiting to be discovered/ written here too. Again, in 1918, Kasturba was active in Champaran: 'I left Champaran in the spring of 1918, a proud and contented woman. My persistent efforts had brought about significant changes in that primitive village,' she says. Well, here is work that has been glossed over by history. Woman's work, or rather women's work—for Kasturba must have definitely roped in other women who would have been her partners. This has been lost, probably, in official records, or it has not been found worthy of being recorded. Neelima Adhar has shown the imaginative way to retrieve this period and public space which these women must have occupied. Kasturba has many, many more stories hidden deep within her soul, which this book hints at. They need to be told.

—Charanjeet Kaur



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

Women Chose, Women Demanded, Women Created, Women Rebelled

We Put Them All Under One Roof And Called It SPARROW

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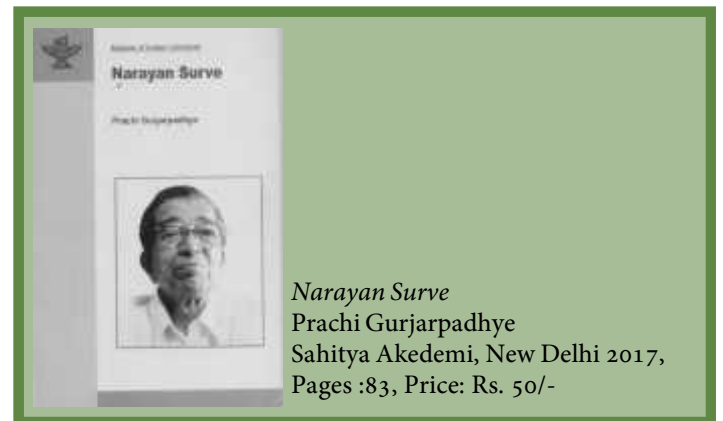
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A People's Poet



The monograph on Narayan Surve (written in English) by Prachi Gurjarpadhye is part of the 'Makers of Indian Literature' series that is being published by the Sahitya Akademi since several years. Although the book is intended to be a primer for non-Marathi readers about Surve's literary oeuvre, Gurjarpadhye manages to broaden its limited scope by imbuing it with a certain degree of wholesome literary critique. There is so much written on Surve that it was not easy to achieve this balance.

The monograph is divided into five main parts: 'Life', 'Times', 'Themes' (of the poems), 'A People's Poet', and 'The Home and the World'. Apart from these there are two other sections: Conclusion and List of Sources. The chapter 'Times' familiarizes us with the cultural zeitgeist of the sixties and its important signposts—such as the textile mills that were central to the economy of the colonial town of Mumbai, the proliferation of the BDD chawls after 1920, the Labour Movement in Girangaum (Surve's birthplace), the era of the Little Magazines, the first Dalit literary conference organized in 1958, the Dalit Panther Movement, the Progressive Writers' Association and the Samyukta Maharashtra movement—in order to help us understand their influence on Surve's poetry. The indefinite strike of the textile mill workers in 1982 and the dawn of the Liberalisation-Privatisation-Globalisation (LPG) era also find a mention in this section. The poem 'Mumbai', with which this chapter concludes, evokes nostalgia about the history of the city and makes it a particularly engaging chapter.

Another chapter deals with the themes in Surve's poetry. The poems included in small sections, titled 'Poetry as Sacrilege', 'Characters', 'Irony', 'Love', 'Revolution', to highlight these respective themes, give us a panoramic view of Surve's literary landscape. The section titled 'Revolution' has become lengthier than the other sections but its extensive nature is perhaps necessary to give the readers a fuller understanding of Surve's political philosophy.

The rest of the chapters highlight those poems of Surve where he attempts to connect the local with the global. Other significant details—like, a description of a book edited by Surve ‘Comrade Dange: Bhartiya Rajkarnatil Vadal’ (Comrade Dange: A Storm in Indian Politics); a comprehensive list of all the national and international poets that Surve translated; discussions of his poems ‘Maharshtrachya Navane’ and ‘Dnyaneshachya Nagara’ (the author links the latter with the anti-colonial struggles in Cuba, Vietnam and Congo); discussion of the poem ‘Virat Shram Suryachya Savlit’ (with reference to the Workers’ Movement in 1959; a mention of how Surve deliberately included a poem on Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar by V V Shirwadkar (Kusumagraj) who was a Brahmin poet, in his collection of Dalit poetry; the critics of Surve—are strewn throughout the book. The book constantly reminds the readers that although Surve was a product of Girangaum—the world of the proletariat in central Mumbai, the cultural environment of Girgaum—the upper caste bourgeois world in South Mumbai also held an attraction for him.

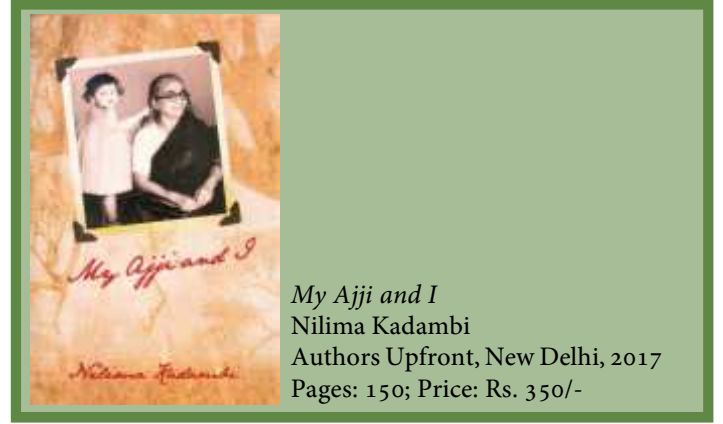
In a literary career spanning five decades Surve produced 160 poems. The epilogue contains a judicious evaluation of Surve’s literary trajectory. According to the author, “Surve’s poems were not addressed to the literate, intelligent and sensitive urban reader sitting in his drawing room, but to the intelligent and sensitive listener, sitting in any backyard or standing at any street-corner in Maharashtra, taking a momentary break from a hard life.” Despite this monograph being primarily intended for non-Marathi readers it holds equal importance for Marathi readers as well. The diction used in the monograph is simple and lucid. The medium of English is used with the same ease with which one uses the mother-tongue.

At a time when the cultural scene all across India resembles a state of anarchy, it is indeed very heart-warming that a monograph on a Marathi poet like Narayan Surve, who was a People’s Poet and who lived by leftist political thought, should be published by the Sahitya Akademi and that too in English. Such a publication definitely transcends literary-cultural boundaries and lifts one’s morale. One must acknowledge that the monograph succeeds in meeting Sahitya Akademi’s objective of initiating a cultural dialogue across languages. Especially in the Indian context when Marathi authors are becoming increasingly monocultural this publication is, indeed, a timely event.

—G. K. Ainapure

(Translated from Marathi by Rohan Kamble & Prachi Gurjarpadhye)

Grandmothers and Their Tales



My Aiji and I
Nilima Kadambi
Authors Upfront, New Delhi, 2017
Pages: 150; Price: Rs. 350/-

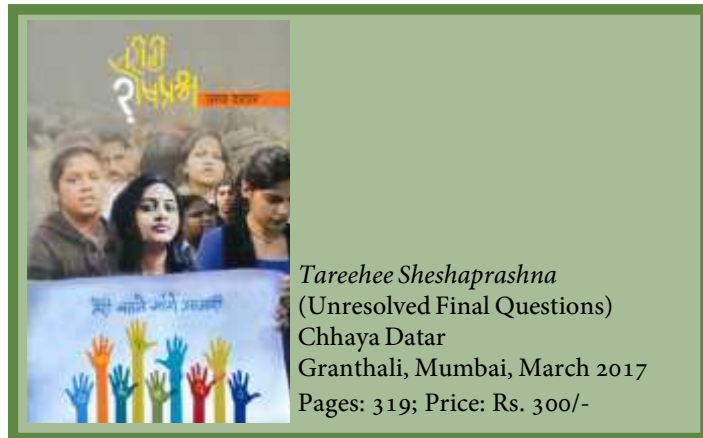
M*y Aiji and I* is an attempt by Nilima Kadambi to link her life with that of her pioneering grandmother who was a doctor and also someone who rose against the social restrictions of her times. She was known by different names at different times in her life—Akutai Chitnis, Rakhmabai Kotnis and Sarladevi Khot and her amazing life needs to be told. That her granddaughter has chosen to do it is appreciable. Akutai was born in 1897 in Maharashtra in a poor farming family, as the second child. Her mother had one more daughter eighteen months later but Akutai’s father died soon after. Akutai was sent to live with her grandfather who was a loving person but got his granddaughter married at the age of nine as was the custom those days. She becomes a widow in a couple of years and how she managed to reach Karve’s Stree Shikshan Samstha in Hingne in 1915 to pursue her studies and become a doctor and how she marries Dr Gopalrao Khot and later moves to Africa with him is a story that would be considered fiction if her own granddaughter were not writing this. Dr Gopalrao Khot was a social reformer of those days and he was invited to speak at a public gathering in 1928 where he spoke about widow remarriage. Akutai got up and told him it was easy to talk about widow marriage but difficult to follow it in one’s own life. She challenged him if he would marry her, a widow and a doctor. Gopalrao said, “Yes” and received a standing ovation. It is not as if Akutai’s life was a bed of roses after that. She goes to Africa with her husband and both the doctors do dedicated service there. Akutai’s life is an inspiring story. Nilima makes her life the centre around which she weaves her own life and that of many in her family interspersing it with comments on people of Akutai’s times like Savitribai Phule who also died of plague like Akutai’s father, Maharishi Karve and the way life was lived in those days. She also includes comments on present times and there is a constant back and forth in the style of presentation of Akutai’s pioneering life. In this effort to contextualise

Akutai's life in her own times and present times and include her own life as an extension of that of her grandmother, Nilima makes a sincere effort. But often the comments on present times and her own life, even though they are valuable, intrude upon the ongoing story of Akutai and the thread of the story gets broken. The book has some valuable photographs and by the time we finish the book it is difficult not to fall in love with Akutai and admire her for living her life the way she did.

—C S Lakshmi



Questions that Remain



Tareehi Sheshprashna is a docu-novel of 40 years of the Women's Liberation Movement in Maharashtra.

The book combines documentation and fiction and presents a summary of the women's liberation movement of the last 40 years (1973-2013). Chhaya Datar has used the platform of a group called Sheshprashna (inspired by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's last novel written in 1931, *Sesh Prosno* (*Shesh Prashna* or *The Final Question* centered around Kamala, an independent woman) to recall and document many events and discussions about diverse issues tackled in the feminist movement. She calls this work a docu-novel.

Chhaya Datar retired as a professor in 2011 from the Department of Women's Studies at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. All this while, she was haunted by her own memories and this haunting is reflected with full strength in the pages of her docu-novel. The narcissism of men that exists in its present form has been propounded, over the ages, through different cultural symbols, religious practices, ceremonial vows, rituals and customs. That it is ingrained in the personality of men is evident in their behaviour, language, usage of profanities and sexual humour. Chhaya strongly believes that because men are

responsible for caging women under the pretence of cultural norms, rape is often used, without hesitation, as a weapon to settle disputes in religious and caste wars. She openly writes about women's sexual issues and fantasies from her own experiences and while she does this, she does not lose track of the central issues at stake nor does she border on obscenity. Instead, she writes sensitively about a world that is sadly repressed. Chhaya has, throughout her life, firmly adhered to the leftist ideology which she believes remains unrivalled. Her unique views are evident from her telling of stories about the women's liberation movement.

The stories of friends Nirmala, Charu, Lalita and Sadhana highlight these views with much clarity, intensity and precision. Lesbian relationships, the new perspective on the institution of marriage, and experience of communal conflicts are described in the chapter on Muzaffarnagar to Mumbai. Chapters with descriptions of sex workers, sexual desires of these friends are memorable and render insights into the feminist mind. She has also touched upon the new stream of Dalit feminism and its need for a separate identity. The final chapter "Takeover" shows how younger women in the Sheshprashna group are planning to go ahead with new activities to achieve the feminist vision of liberation. Working with men with the help of men's groups is declared as the next phase of Sheshprashna group.

Without going into the definition of patriarchy, Chhaya has shown how patriarchy works. Particularly, the chapter on the discussion about rape and the laws which were modified because of the pressure of the movement, provides insight into the power men hold over women through violence. Both nature and society are arranged in a way that demands both men and women to live together, strive to find happiness and progress together. However, men instead of co-existing, have entrapped women by enforcing religious customs upon them. A woman is entrapped by everything—religion, caste and creed. Even when these factors are no barriers in their lives, they still have to face the male ego, hatred and sexual harassment in social or professional situations.

It appears that many women have made women's liberation movement a lifelong activity. Of course, there is a criticism that the epicentre of this movement has always been in cities like Pune and Mumbai. It is also often denounced as an upper-class Brahmin women's movement, especially of women with a leftist ideology. In spite of these attacks and criticisms that have essentially sought to destroy this movement, it has stood strong and firm. As a result, many families in urban areas of Maharashtra, have started treating women with some degree of equality and justice. These ideas have seeped

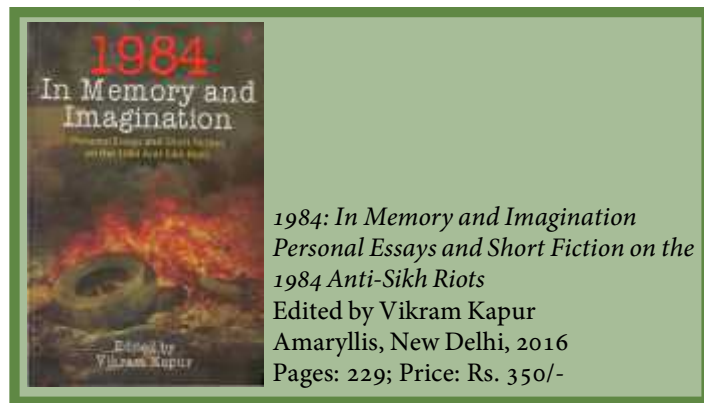
into other strata of society too. The chapter on Lalita's experiences on working with rural women represents the slow penetration of these ideas into the rural minds.

The aggressive state of this struggle and its befitting battle cry has caused an upheaval in the world of men. Whatever little honour women are now treated with and whichever laws have been enacted, the credit for this goes to the women who started this struggle forty years ago. Even if the change is imperceptible, the world of men will never be the same and traces of this are visible in the language of the new generation.

—Shreekant Saraf



India's 1984: Some Narratives



'In this Camp, there were ten to fifteen thousand people who had ten to fifteen thousand stories to tell. And there were as many people from the camps at Trilokpuri, Uttam Nagar, Shahdara and their adjoining colonies.'

– Ajeet Cour in 'November 1984'.

A new book on the 1984 happenings in Delhi is always one too less, because there are so many stories still waiting to be told; Vikram Kapur presents seven personal accounts (In Memory) and seven short stories (In Imagination), written with compassion and seeking to explore diverse perspectives of the cataclysmic events. The accounts are clearly emotional and the sense of hurt, and even despair, can be keenly felt in all of them. On the other hand, there is also the sense that in the darkest times, when all structures and systems fail the common people, it is the humane elements that provide the much needed succour and the healing touch that is the key force in restoring sanity. Also, as Vikram Kapur says, 'One of the functions of the written word is to force a culture to remember'.

Thirty three years after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 31 October 1984, and the mayhem that followed, the facts that have been emerging through personal narratives (oral histories), fiction and investigations by some journalists and commentators like

Sanjay Suri and Jarnail Singh, are chilling and clear: the security guards who killed her – Beant Singh, Satwant Singh and Kehar Singh – were induced to act as a revenge for Operation Bluestar in June, the same year; the sense of outrage against Operation Bluestar (and later on Operation Wood Rose) was deeply felt by the Sikh community, leading a long time loyalist of the Nehru-Gandhi family like Khushwant Singh to return his Padma Vibhushan Award; the Golden Temple was attacked on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev when the number of pilgrims to the Gurdwara was bound to be very large; the aftermath of 31 October lead to the orchestrated killing of about 3000 Sikhs in various parts of the country; the leaders of the Congress were the forefront managers of this exercise; though identified by many witnesses, these leaders have escaped punishment or even indictment; as many as nine Inquiry Commissions, especially the Ranganath Mishra Commission and the Justice G T Nanavati Commission, have produced documents in which the testimonies recorded and the conclusions reached are at odds with each other. What has been tried to be passed off as a spontaneous reaction of grief at the assassination, the testimonies reveal is actually a well planned and meticulously implemented pogrom.

The images that continue to haunt after 33 years are also embedded in the consciousness of the nation: about 3000 dead; Sikhs being dragged out of their homes and killed brutally by swords, lathis and set fire to, with tyres around their bodies; the forcible cutting of the hair of the boys so that they could escape; the rape and often gang rape of women; the burning of houses and property; the perpetrators of the sectarian violence often being people known to and friendly with the victims; the 10 rehabilitation camps across Delhi, which were wound up in unholy haste within 15 days, before the survivors could really find their feet again; the painful conditions of the camps and the deliberate apathy of the personnel manning them; above all, the vacant eyes and lost expressions on the faces of a community which had till then enjoyed a kind of special place in the Indian republic as being valiant and brave; the needle of suspicion that pierced the community at this time suddenly making them realise that their name has now been identified with sedition and murder; and a large number of people across India actually believing that Operation Bluestar and the November 1984 killings were justified.

It is in the backdrop of this political and 'imagistic' scenario that the 14 narratives of this book document the trauma. Here are the evocative stories of the loss of innocence and the 'political initiation' of a young RizioYohannan Raj, who, begins learning of the political realities of the subcontinent, from radio reports and TV

images and the talk of the elders discussing the killings as they happen in the first fortnight of November 1984. Preeti Gill speaks of the fact that with a cosmopolitan upbringing outside the state of Punjab and not 'wearing' the obvious signs of Sikhism, she is suddenly made aware of her identity. Identity, she learns, is not just how you see yourself, but how others see you and construct it for you. Hartosh Singh Bal and Kirpal Dhillon as journalist and Police Official, respectively, document more objectively the role of the state machinery and the apathy of the media and its connivance in supporting and disseminating the state sponsored 'lies' regarding these events. Humra Quraishi wonders why there has not been a collective cry for justice and 'why should only the Sikh community alone demand justice for all that was destroyed and demolished?'. For Rana Chhina, it marked 'a personal rite of passage'. 'I quickly realised', he says, 'that it was futile to try and explain what I had gone through to those who were not there. Friends were sympathetic, but were unable to fathom the extent of the trauma that the experience had caused'.

The seven short stories in second section of the book reflect much of the narrative of the first section and enlarge the frame of reference for the mayhem, giving it a greater universality and validity. The agony of Operation Bluestar is paralleled on an individual level when boys' hair has to be cut to save them: Ajeet Cour's narrative ends with three stories of the survivors – and two of them are about the emotion and the passion attached to the turban and the hair which symbolise Sikhism. The young Sardarni at the Camp is distraught: 'The factory and the house don't matter. The Guru bestowed them and he has taken them back. He knows best. He will look after us. He will grant them again. But Kaka's locks! Haaye!' Again, the old Sardar who has not been accepting any food or clothing at the Camp, breaks down when a turban is offered to him. This connects with hair, as intrinsic to being a Sikh forms an important part of N S Madhavan's story, which is rich in empathetic details: When the nuns tell Amarjeet that the only way to save them is to cut Juggy's hair short, they also pay attention to the fact that the skin colour on the forehead (which would be fairer since it would be covered by the turban or patka) could be a giveaway; in this house of the dying, life is granted by the monastery at considerable risk to the inmates themselves.

The stories which deal with betrayal by friends and neighbours also indicate the commercial and selfish motives behind some of the killings. In Madhavan's story, 'When Big Trees Fall' the neighbour, Ramji, who leads the assault on Amarjeet's family, has had an eye on their iron store for a long time; in Pratyushka's 'Dried Apricots Smell Like Dead Fish' Lalaji, again a neighbour, is part of the gang which rapes Phullo and kills her husband and

three other members of her family, also has an eye on their property. Then there are stories about the mob psychology that criminalises a normal, humane person like Ashok in Mridula Garg's 'The Morning After'; the Mother and her son Ajay manage to save the boy Sarabjeet, who is hidden in their house, but learn that overnight Ashok has joined the killers, and this the mother realises just moments before she herself is killed by the mob. Garg also explores how suspiciousness grows in the mind of Sarabjeet, who while hiding, begins to wonder whether the Mother and son are actually trying to save him or trap him. It is the faith in humanity that is the casualty in the case of Sarabjeet and Ajay, and Ashok's mother.

Vikram Kapur's 'Trilokpuri' which is set in 2011, when Mohammed, a Muslim goes to watch a cricket match at his Hindu friend's house and the sight of a politician who was a key figure in the 1984 riots, and who is in a position of power now, reminds him of his own tryst with the mob in 1984. In Preeti Gill's account, her husband is stopped and questioned about his Sikh identity; similarly, in 'Trilokpuri' Mohammed too has to prove to a mob which is buying for the blood of Sikhs, that he is a Muslim before he is let off; he does so by dropping his pants.

Perhaps amongst the most nuanced stories is Jaspreet Singh's 'The Perished and the Saved', in which the Professor, who has come back with his students from an industrial visit to Solan, is massacred on New Delhi station as soon as he alights from the train and the student-narrator, Raj Kumar, learns that his father, a high-ranking Police Officer, has been actively orchestrating the violence and the murders. The poignancy of the story is heightened by the fact that the suave Nelly, under police 'protection' does not open her door when he comes to meet her. It ends on an eerie, frightening note:

"I have already done what the men asked me to do. Now go home", she repeats. "We are safe".

Like the Partition, 1984 is also an ongoing experience. In Harish Narang's 'Among One's Own', the protagonist, Harjeet, after losing trust in his friend Durjan Dass, moves to Amritsar, where he believes he would be safer, only to be killed in a terrorist attack; Pratyaksha's story and Aditya Sharma's 'Karma' speak of a future: the first one of a closure through forgiveness and expression and expiation of guilt and the second through an act of kindness which leads to marriage. No doubt, these are stories of trauma and the 'othering' of the Sikh community. There has been no closure yet. The stories also do not speak of a closure, but of a deep fear that has taken root in the minds of a community, which perhaps for the first time could relate to the othering of the Muslims and Dalits in India.

—Charanjeet Kaur

Kamala: A Long Life of Commitment to Humanity



Kamala Ramakrishnan with her husband S Ramakrishnan and some friends



Donating library after her husband Mr. Ramakrishnan's death



Kamala Ramakrishnan with her Family

Kamala Ramakrishnan
(1 March 1923-17 December 2015)

In August this year we were thinking of freedom fighters and looking up our documents on some of them. I remembered my meeting Dr Kamala Ramakrishnan who passed away in December 2015. I particularly remembered her because I had met her on 15th of August 2014. She was 91 and said her memory was failing her but clearly remembered so many things about her life. Kamala was born in 1923 at Pathein (also known as Bassein) in Burma where her father, a doctor, was posted. Later in 1936 she came to Chennai and studied in Sarada Vidyalaya. In her school days itself she was influenced by Gandhian ideas. Gandhians like Visalakshi from Chennai and Chenchaiyah and his wife Subadramma from Andhra who were active Congress people with leftist leanings had a great influence over her. In fact, she along with other students went on a procession when Nehru was arrested.

In 1941 when the city of Chennai had to be evacuated Kamala had to go to Trichy. She discontinued her studies in Queen Mary's and joined Holy Cross College in Trichy. The Quit India Movement was about to start. The students were very active but it was a Jesuit college and it was not easy to go out. Kamala got seriously involved in the movement despite the college rules. Kamala and another friend who was her namesake Kamala Ramaswamy and Rajalakshmi used to go and attend meetings. It was one year of hectic political activity after which she returned and joined Madras Medical College. It was at this time that Chenchaiyah organised a meeting for Subash Chandra Bose in T Nagar. Kamala recalled that not many people attended the meeting but that Subash Chandra Bose gave a powerful speech. Kamala was very much impressed. Soon after he went to Burma to mobilise people. It was in MMC that she became an active member of Madras Students' Organisation (MSO), a student wing of the Communist Party. And it was here that she met S Ramakrishnan later known as SRK. It was difficult to concentrate on studies because of political activities but she managed to pass her first year of medical studies. But she did not stop her MSO activities. In 1943 during the Bengal Famine she was part of the delegation that went there to study the famine.

After her first year in medical college, she and S Ramakrishnan wanted to get married but her father was dead against her involvement in the Communist Party. But some communist leaders came and convinced her father. Communist Party leaders and even some Congress Party leaders like Radhabai Subbarayan and Rukmini Lakshmipathi came to attend her marriage and give her moral support. She continued her studies although she lost one year due to her neglect of studies. Her husband was touring and doing the write-ups for *Janashakthi* which was launched as a weekly. Kamala was not very active but was not completely inactive. She did go on a demonstration when Gandhiji fasted, she remembers.

She had a child which died soon after birth and then she had her second child in 1946 and another child in 1949. She somehow managed to complete her medical studies. Later when she was doing her House Surgency, a daughter was born. She practised for a while in Chennai and then they shifted to Madurai and took over the practice of Dr T Janaki, whom she admires even now, situated in West Masi Street, and this is where Kamala practised as a gynaecologist and obstetrician for 40 years and was known as a doctor of the common people, especially the mill workers. Her husband studied further and became a lecturer and continued to write for newspapers.

Around 1983, Kamala shifted base to Chennai. She also visited Moscow and Estonia along with her husband and took part in the World Peace Council in Denmark. As her daughter R Geetha was an active participant in Penn Urimai Iyakkam, the women's rights movement in Chennai, Kamala also became an active supporter of the movement.

Kamala lived a long and full life actively participating in every aspect of the nation's politics. Yet, when she died on 17 December, 2015 there was just a paragraph in *The Hindu* and the life history of a 92-year old freedom fighter, an active supporter of a Communist Party member and a doctor of the working class was taken away from the pages of the history of the nation.

—C S Lakshmi



SPARROW Literary Award 2016

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

Eminent Tulu writer, Dr Suneetha Shetty gave away the awards to Kulachal M Yoosuf for his translations from Malayalam to Tamil, Gowri Kirubanandan, for her translations from Telugu to Tamil. Payani (Sridharan Madhusudhanan) for his translations from Chinese to Tamil. We missed Payani (Sridharan Madhusudhanan) an Indian diplomat currently posted in Beijing, who could not attend the function. His award was sent to him later. The well attended literary evening concluded with a very enjoyable music session by Reshma Gidh.

SPARROW congratulates the awardees and thanks them and Dr Suneetha Shetty for their gracious presence at the function. Here are some of the photos of the event.



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



Chief guest Dr Suneetha Shetty addressing the gathering



Performance by Reshma Gidh



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

The Nightingale of Kashmir: Raj Begum (March 27, 1927 – October 26, 2016)



Raj Begum was known as the melody queen of Kashmir. A story goes that actor Dilip Kumar heard her singing once in the seventies and said that so long as Kashmir had Raj Begum Kashmir's mesmerising voices will not die. She was born in 1927 in Srinagar. Her father was Ghulam Rasool Sheikh of Magarmal Bagh. There is no information on her mother but one wonders if Raj Begum got her musical talents from her mother because she started singing at a very early age. Later she began to sing at weddings. With the Naya Kashmir Movement in the forties that aimed at converting Kashmir into a constitutional democracy from an absolute monarchy, there were several voices that came up to express their feelings in many different ways. Raj Begum's was one of them. When Radio Kashmir began to introduce Kashmiri musical programmes in 1954, Raj Begum, introduced by the well-known folk singer Ghulam Qadir Langoo, began to sing in Radio Kashmir and she was one of its star singers till 1986 when she retired. Raj Begum had a deep, captivating and haunting voice and she is remembered for some of her sad songs which people say still echo in the valley. At the age of 21 when Raj Begum took the decision to be a professional singer it was a decision taken much against her family for women did not even come out of the house during those days and women performers were seen as those with low moral caliber. Later she married Qadir Ganderbali, who was a DIG Police with the Jammu And Kashmir State. In his tribute to her in *Daily Excelsior* Maharaj Kaul says that Raj Begum's uninhibited way of singing in her high-pitched, sonorous voice broke all barriers associated with women's singing and ushered in a new freedom for women. When he met her and asked her if she had faced opposition she had told him that her husband had forbade her from singing publicly but that she had protested and that he had allowed her to perform. Raj Begum sang in many genres like folk, religious, light, romantic and ghazals. It is said that she met Begum Akhtar once who told her to sing ghazals. There is no record of exactly how many songs she has sung—some say she had sung some thousand songs—but music lovers of Kashmir remember her as one of the greatest modern Kashmiri singers along with Naseem Akhtar and feel that like Dal Lake she is a symbol of Kashmir. She was honoured with the Padma Shri in 2002 and received the Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 2013-14 and has been a recipient of many more awards. But like most artistes in this country who receive awards but no monetary rewards, Raj Begum also lived a life where

it was difficult to make both ends meet after the death of her husband, according to Maharaj Kaul. A soulful, resonant voice of a woman that expressed the emotions of many and brought solace to many has died but its echo will remain in the Kashmir valley. This delayed tribute is for all those who still remember that voice and for all those who should know about that voice.

—C S Lakshmi



A Reclusive 'Bhuleshwar ki Bhawani': Jayawantiben Mehta, (December 20, 1938- November 7, 2016)



Jayawantiben Mehta who passed away at the age of 78, seems to have been a reclusive person, in spite of her active career graph as a senior BJP politician. She was born in Aurangabad, Maharashtra, in a middle class family to Dwarkadas V Kapadia and Vijaya Kapadia; she was married to Navinchandra Tulsidas Mehta and they had two children – a son and a daughter; she rose to be the Union Minister of State of Power in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Cabinet. Apart from these few details, nothing much is traceable about her personal life. Her political life, however, has clearly marked milestones: Member of the erstwhile Jana Sangh, elected as a BMC Corporator in 1968, imprisoned for 19 months during the Emergency in 1975, along with other opposition leaders, MLA in Maharashtra for two terms, nominated as Member of the National Executive of the BJP in 1980, appointed as All India Secretary of the BJP in 1988, elected to the Lok Sabha in 1989, 1996 and 1999, President of the Mahila Morcha of the BJP (1991-1995), Vice President of the BJP (1993-1995). Popularly known as 'Bhuleshwar ki Bhawani', Jayawantiben is also remembered for having defeated the Congress strongman, Murli Deora, in her South Mumbai constituency in the Lok Sabha elections. A powerful orator and social worker, she has recorded her work in her autobiography *Samayo Sathe Sathe* (translated as *Marching With Times* in 2012) and *Ek Avirat Yatra* (2010). It is when we come across a woman with such a public profile professionally, that the significance of archival work and the necessity of recording the lives of people comes home to us strongly, once again.

—Charanjeet Kaur



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

Born to Fly: Vanavan Madevi
(December 25, 1981 – January 15, 2017)



Vanavan Madevi discovered at the age of ten that she was not entirely healthy and could not stand or walk easily. It took a while to find out that she suffered from muscular dystrophy. She along with her younger sister Iyal Isai Vallabi who also suffered from muscular dystrophy decided to help people suffering from similar ailments and the result is Aadhav Trust set up in Salem. The Aadhav Trust was set up in the year 2009 especially to help the people who are affected by muscular dystrophy. But it is also involved in other social welfare activities and environmental awareness programmes. The trust has organised awareness camps on muscular dystrophy in many cities like Salem, Erode, and Tirupur. The camps have provided wheel chairs, tailoring machines and the very poor were provided beds and other basic necessities. The Aadhav Trust also provides scholarship for poor students. A short film *Nambikkai Manushigal* (Women of Hope) was made by Geetha Ilangovan on the two sisters and their work. Vanavan Madevi's twenty six years of personal struggle with muscular dystrophy ended on January 15th 2017 at the age of 36 but she has left behind the Aadhav Trust and her sister and a group of young dedicated medical students and others who will carry on the work she has begun. Her body was buried in the Aadhav trust building compound which she built almost singlehandedly. Written on the wall in her room in Aadhav Trust are words of hope which she has left for others:

*You have come with the boon to touch the sky
Some people who don't like you
May want to trap you in a net
Or shoot an arrow to destroy you
Or cut your wings to restrain you
But know one thing
You are born to fly...*

—C S Lakshmi



Willfully In the Shadows: Gita Sen
(October 30, 1930-January 16, 2017)



Like many talented women married to celebrated husbands, the life of Gita Sen, wife of Mrinal Sen, is overshadowed by his reputation. But she has been a veteran actress in her own right. Right from her first film, *Dudhara* in the late 1940s, she went on to play significant roles in

Calcutta 71, Ek Din Pratidin, Akaler Sandhaney, Aarohan, Kharij, Chalchitra, Khandhar and Mahaprithibi and World Within, World Without; she has also acted in Ritwick Ghatak's *Nagarik* and Shyam Benegal's *Arohan*. Her association with Utpal Dutt's Theatre Group was also strong; but she always took a step backwards when it came to sharing the limelight with these stalwarts. As Shoma Chatterjee in her tribute says, 'Film Festival buffs might have chanced upon the quiet, smiling and petite sari-clad lady, ... who, perhaps, willfully quit acting, first on stage, then in films directed by men other than her husband and finally, even in her husband's films'. Daughter of a freedom fighter, who died at the age of about 35, Gita had to shoulder the responsibility of her impoverished mother and two younger siblings at the age of fifteen. Her son Kunal avers that it was perhaps this experience that made her put herself last; it was always family first for her: maternal family, husband and son. Their needs always took precedence over her own career, and made her reject film offers from the likes of Aparna Sen. But when she died at the age of 87, after a futile, month-long struggle with a cerebral attack, her quiet but steady reputation as a fine actor was very visible by the number of people who paid their respects. Again, in the words of Kunal Sen, 'I think we could have seen more of her talents if she was a little more self-centred, but it is hard to say how it could have affected our family life'. Such sacrifices which women make almost as a matter-of-fact routine, and which remain unacknowledged by family and society, are so much a part of the life of women artists!

—Charanjeet Kaur



A Life Studying Fungi: Dr Anjali Roy
(April 30, 1930-January 22, 2017)



Dr Anjali Roy died quietly in January 2017. Had one not sat down to pay tribute to a life dedicated to science one would not have known what the word Mycology meant. Mycology is "the branch of biology concerned with the study of fungi, including their genetic and biochemical properties, their taxonomy and their use to humans as a source for tinder, medicine, food, and entheogens, as well as their dangers, such as toxicity or infection." And Dr Anjali Roy spent her entire life studying different kinds of fungi. She was born in 1930 in pre-Independence Bangladesh at Rajshahi. She graduated in Botany from Presidency College at Calcutta. She also did her PhD from the University of Calcutta under Dr S N Banerjee's guidance and also did her DSc from the University of Calcutta. Her research later under Dr Mildred K Nobles was on wood

decaying polypores. Later she worked with Dr Arti Das of Bose institute to study chemical reaction of polypores. She did research on medicinal fungi at the School of Tropical Medicine, Calcutta. She did research in well-known institutions like Royal Botanical Gardens, Great Britain and Estonian Institute of Zoology and Botany based in Tartu, Estonia.

Dr Anjali Roy has many authoritative research papers on the subject. She co-authored the book *Polypores of India* with her student Dr A B Dey. Dr Dey named one of the polypores after her as Roypores to honour her. Both of them also created a database of Aphyllophorales, which includes chiefly saprophytic fungi typically with shelflike bodies. She retired as a professor at Vishwabharati University, Shantiniketan. Savitribai Phule Pune University had honoured her for her contribution to science. Mycology is not a subject that many science students turn to these days. But Anjali Roy's life work may inspire some students to look in that direction.

—C S Lakshmi



**'Making the familiar exotic and the exotic familiar':
Bharati Mukherjee (July 27, 1940 – January 28, 2017)**



The first name that comes to mind when one thinks of immigrant writing, is that of the Indian born American writer Bharati Mukherjee, who, when she passed at the age of 76, was Professor Emerita in the Department of English at the University of California, Berkeley. She gave voice to the immigrant experience of Indian women, particularly in her novels and short stories, talking about the identity crises of immigrant women caught between two cultures in America and the nostalgia, liberation, alienation that they undergo in crossing over to a society and culture so radically different from their own. The overall immigrant experience in her work is subsumed under the themes of the oppression of women who try to break free from constraining patriarchal structures.

Coming from a well-to-do Bengali family of Calcutta, she was the daughter of Sudhir Lal Mukherjee and Bina Banerjee, who extended their hospitality and support to an extended joint family. Educated in the best of institutions in India, England and Switzerland, Bharati Mukherjee was quick to discover where her calling lay. Combining erudition in academics with a creative urge, she moved on to take up challenging teaching assignments in comparative literature, feminism, multiculturalism and postcolonialism and taking up a course in Creative Writing

in the University of Iowa. This cultural transition from India to the US, she says, 'was an enormous transformation in my life..., I blossomed because people did not have preconceived notions of who I was and what I could do'.

She wrote her first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* in 1971, and went on to write *Wife, Jasmine, The Holder of the World, Leave It To Me, Desirable Daughters, The Tree Bride*, and *Miss New India*, in a writing career spanning more than 40 years. In these years she also wrote her collections of Short Stories, *Darkness, The Middleman and Other Stories, A Father and The Management of Grief*; with her husband, Clark Blasie she wrote her Memoir, *Days and Nights in Calcutta* and the moving *The Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of the Air India Tragedy* (about Air India Flight 182, which was destroyed by a bomb in 1985). Her other non-fiction books include *Political Culture and Leadership in India* and *Regionalism in the Indian Perspective*. So, even though she identified herself as an American, her writing comes back to Indian social and political realities regularly. *The Middleman and Other Stories* won the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction soon after it was published and, along with *Jasmine*, is the work which established her a writer.

About her writing, she says, 'From those years I evolved a credo: Make the familiar exotic (Americans won't recognize their country when I get finished with it) and make the exotic—the India of elephants and arranged marriages—familiar'. Today, with globalisation and the American-born generation of Indian writers taking centre stage, it must not be forgotten that they are traversing the path set out by the likes of Bharati Mukherjee.

—Charanjeet Kaur



**A Mentor of Adivasis: Srilatha Swaminathan
(April 29, 1944 – February 5, 2017)**



Srilata Swaminathan was the granddaughter of Ammu Swaminathan, who was a member of the Constituent Assembly and was elected five times as Member of Parliament from Chennai and niece of Captain Laxmi Sehgal of INA. Srilata studied at the National School of Drama and later went to London to do advanced studies in drama. On her return she got into politics organising farm workers and hotel workers. She was in jail during Emergency. In Chennai she organised the port and dock workers. She shifted base to southern Rajasthan in 1978 to work among tribals, women, small peasants, workers, rural bonded labourers and trade unions in the mining sector and other industries in the region. She played a major role in founding

the Rajasthan chapter of People's Union for Civil Liberties. She was a revolutionary, a crusader and a fighter who fought fearlessly for the downtrodden. To the adivasis in Dhantali she was a mentor who taught them to fight for justice and the right to live a life with self-respect. Srilata was a veteran leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) and she became president of the All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) in the mid-nineties. She was chosen as a member of CPI(ML) Central Committee in 1997. She also held the post of vice-president of the All India Central Council of Trade Unions. She was very active till 2013 and had to slow down after that on health grounds. But the end came much faster than what the people she worked for and worked with imagined. She suffered a stroke followed by a cardiac arrest and breathed her last. The revolutionary Left movement has lost a firebrand leader in her death.

—C S Lakshmi



A Life Left Untold: Salma Siddiqui (June 18, 1930- February 13, 2017)



It is sad to realise that Salma Siddiqui's three novels, *Mangalsutra*, *Bharosa* and *Gilhari Ki Bahen* are not to be easily found today and that no translations are available. It is even more unfortunate that she gave up writing when some of her unpublished manuscripts were destroyed in the Mumbai rains and that she never got to complete her Autobiography, leaving a rich life untold. Perhaps this is the price she had to pay for living in the shadows, as the wife of one of the foremost writers of the Progressive Writers' Association, Krishan Chander, whom she married in 1957, after an unsuccessful earlier marriage.

Fondly remembered as Salma Apa, she was born in Aligarh in 1930 and grew up in the intellectual environment fostered by her father, Professor Rasheed Ahmed Siddiqui, who taught at the Aligarh Muslim University, and was a well-known scholar of his times. From AMU (where she completed her postgraduation), she imbibed a love for Urdu *zubaan*, *tehzeeb* and *shayari*; her life in Bombay after her marriage, saw the Chander home emerge as a centre for Urdu *adab* and culture, and Salma Apa played perfect hostess to stalwarts of the Movement like, K A Abbas, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Ismat Chhugtai and Jan Nisar Akhtar. When she passed away at the age of 89, it seems that the remnants of a vibrant era had breathed their last.

Salma Apa's wit, humour and insight made her the perfect hostess in both Aligarh and Mumbai. It also gave us one of her most endearing works, *Sikandarnama*; a

picaresque account of the life of their faithful family retainer, Sikander, who had a wealth of stories to tell. So popular were the adventures of Sikander, that the book was presented as a series on Doordarshan. She could have written much more, one feels, but did she willingly accept to surrender her talent in the light of the formidable reputation of Krishan Chander? One never knows; but as Rakshanda Jalil, in her tribute says, 'Those who have savoured the delights of *Sikandarnama* would surely have relished a ringside view of the great literary grouping, known as the Progressive Writers' Association', had Salma Apa been more forthcoming with her pen.

—Charanjeet Kaur



Apa of Aurat Foundation in Pakistan: Nigar Ahmad (1945 – February 24, 2017)



Nigar Ahmad lovingly known as Apa in activist circles, was a Women Rights activist and leftist who was well-known among many women in other countries, especially India. In 1981 she set up the Women Action Forum's (WAF) Islamabad Chapter, and since then her life has been a total involvement with the women's movement. She spearheaded and co-founded the Aurat Foundation with Shehla Zia in Lahore in 1985 in protest against the dictatorial regime of General Zia ul Haq. Aurat foundation did the pioneering work of mobilising women to fight in the national and local government elections. She also was instrumental in generating debates through Aurat Foundation on women's political and economical empowerment. The Aurat Foundation under her leadership also worked on issues relating to peace and democracy. She studied at the Government College, Lahore, and later went to New Hall on a Commonwealth Scholarship. She came back to Pakistan and taught Economics for nearly sixteen years at the Quaid-e-Azam University. Nigar Ahmad was married to Dr Tariq Siddiqui, a nonconformist civil servant. She was afflicted with Parkinson's but that did not deter her from continuing to think of ways to strengthen the women's movement. Neelam Hussain, in a touching tribute in *The Friday Times*, 10 March 2017, says: Despite her body's betrayal, Nigar kept faith with the ideals that had shaped her life and never lost touch with the larger politics of the world around her. Months before her death... she expressed her unhappiness with the depoliticisation of NGOs, the growing consumerist ethic, and the loss of old values. "We must do something about it," she had said. "We need to get together, plan and find ways of fighting for what we

believe in.” Neelam Hussain says that she remembers looking at her and thinking: this is not a rhetorical statement; she means what she is saying. When women like Nigar Ahmad die, the women’s movement in South Asia becomes that much poorer.

—C S Lakshmi



Bhinna Shadja, Note Extraordinaire: Kishori Amonkar (April 10, 1932–April 3, 2017)



For a long time my mornings began with Kishori Amonkar’s *Maro Pranam* in Yaman Kalyan. That was a gentle number to ease the day in. But her more complicated renditions were as complicated as her personality was rumoured to be. Her one concert was never like the other. She could rise to great heights and take you along with her but she could also leave you behind and wander on her own. For many like me she was not just Kishori Amonkar, but Kishori Amonkar, the daughter of Moghubai Kurdikar, the legendary singer of the Jaipur gharana, who later made a musical path of her own. Kishori accompanied her mother on the tanpura as a young girl. She later learnt from Anjanibai Malpekar of the Bhendi Bazaar gharana and later trained under several gurus of different gharanas. She did not believe in music being restrained by gharanas and believed in freely breaking gharana borders. Her music, as she has spoken many times, stressed the rasa aspect of music. She has also sung for Hindi films like *Geet Gaya Patharon Ne* (1964) and *Drishti* (1990). Her views on music, musical theory and rendition are elaborated in the book *Swaraartha Ramani* in Marathi, which she published in 2010. She was honoured with a Padma Bhushan in 1987 and Padma Vibhushan in 2002. She was awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for 1985 and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship for 2009. She was awarded the prestigious Dr T M A Pai Outstanding Konkani Award in 1991. In 2016, she was one of the seven recipients of the M S Subbulakshmi Award for classical music. Her thoughts on music have been captured in the documentary film *Bhinna Shadja* by Amol Palekar. Her music will continue to haunt, perplex and elevate those for whom it has become an addiction.

—C S Lakshmi



We thank all our trustess, advisors, funders, donors, supporters, well-wishers and friends who reposed immense faith in our efforts which has made it possible for us to spread our wings.

‘Why Should I Not Have Suffered?’: Shobha Magdolna Friedmann Nehru (December 5, 1908–April 25, 2017)



In her long life of 108 years, Fori, as Shobha Nehru was fondly known, has been witness to the major upheavals of the 20th century in India, America, Hungary and Europe. The Hungarian-born wife of a scion of the Nehru family, the Diplomat B K Nehru, she moved in the highest echelons of power and rubbed shoulders with Presidents and other Heads of State.

She was born in Budapest to Regina and Armin Friedmann; the family changed their name to Forbath, but had to revert to the earlier name under Hungarian pressure. She hardly ever spoke about her Hungarian background, but remained acutely conscious of the trauma which her people—the Hungarian Jews—had faced. After her marriage to B K Nehru, she adopted everything Indian as her own; so much so that she was hardly ever seen dressed in anything but a sari, and was often mistaken for a Kashmiri Pandit, the community to which the Nehrus belong.

Fori lived through the Holocaust (which, however, she did not face directly, though her family did), the Independence and Partition of India, the World War, the assassinations of Mahatma Gandhi and her beloved Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. She was close to Indira Gandhi, but did not hesitate to talk straight to her during the Emergency, when civil rights had been suspended. She is said to have presented her the names and contacts of young men and boys who had been forcibly sterilised at the time. That was the kind of courage she had, and her husband has said that none of them other than her could dare take on the then Prime Minister; Fori was the one who could speak up. ‘She felt she had to get the truth across to her’, says her son, Ashok Nehru.

Shobha Nehru, who had seen ethnic and religious violence, was active in rehabilitation work during the Partition of India. She initiated an employment project also for women who needed to have some source of income, by opening a shop in which they could sell the handicrafts they had made. This small initiative would grow into a vast network—the Central Cottage Industries Emporium. She was active in assisting people on both sides of the border in crossing over and in getting rehabilitated.

Fori returned to Hungary in 1949, and learnt of the multiple tragedies her friends had faced. She knew earlier that her father had been saved by his German housekeeper, her brother, an officer in the Hungarian Army, had to swim across the Danube to Czechoslovakia and a friend of hers had to smuggle her son across the border, hidden in the truck of the car. But in this visit, she heard more

stories which left her deeply disturbed. When she was 90, she asked the British historian, Martin Gilbert, who had been her son's classmate at Oxford, to help her with some reading material on the Jews. This was 67 years after she had left Hungary. Martin wrote *Letters to Auntie Fori: The 5000-Year History of the Jewish People and their Faith*, which was published in 2002.

She talks of the trauma in 1919, when as a young girl, she saw the anti-Semitic tide rise in Hungary: "Once a week my father would travel to the villages to get food," she told Mr. Gilbert. "He had a house on Lake Balaton. One summer we went there— by train—and I saw people hanging from trees. It was terrible for us children to look at." She also told Gilbert that in diplomatic circles she could not bring herself to shake hands with the German Ambassador. This, coupled with the Partition experience, perhaps, is what she had in mind when she said: 'I have a feeling of guilt.... The guilt feeling is still with me. Why should I not have suffered?' [All quotes and references taken from Ellen Barry's tribute to Fori, in *the New York Times*, dated 28 April 2017 can be accessed at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/28/world/asia/shobha-nehru-death.html>].

—Charanjeet Kaur



A Quiet Life: Bhavani Panch (May 18, 1924-May 13, 2017)



Bhavani Panch (Panch is the short form of Pancharatnam) used to be our neighbour during my childhood and growing up years in Bangalore. Bhavani Panch meant leather bound books for all of us. She had a cupboard full of all classics in English, bound in black leather with gold letters on the shoulders of the books. All the reading of classics we did was with books borrowed from her. I didn't know at that time, that she also painted. Bhavani Panch took to painting in the forties and followed the Bengal style of painting, using the wash method. She participated in competitions and won prizes but did not hold any shows for she had taken to painting to soothe her mind. Her husband, who was in the army, died in the Second World War, when she was just nineteen. And her own daughter died in childbirth at the age of nineteen. Bhavani Panch stopped painting then. Then she again picked it up doing designs and patterns. Bhavani Panch belongs to a generation of women who had taken to painting as a hobby. Many of them painted at home, not entering the professional world which was considered male. And at this time the Bengal School of Painting was the most influential. Bhavani Panch later

became the much adored mother-in-law of Neela Panch, the traditional Mysore style painter, who considers Bhavani her godmother. When I did my project on women musicians, dancers and painters, I had interviewed Bhavani Panch and also Neela Panch. Later SPARROW made a film, *Colours of Tradition* on Neela Panch, as a part of a series of films SPARROW made on ten women and we made Bhavani Panch also a part of it. Born on 18th May 1924 Bhavani Panch passed away on Saturday, the 13th of May 2017, five days before her 93rd birthday. Towards the end of her life she suffered a lot of physical pain but she bore it with fortitude with the help of her loving son Rudra Panch and daughter-in-law Neela Panch, whom she encouraged to be a professional painter against all odds. She took care of her children so that she could be the professional she is now. It is the path that women like her have laid on which we walk today freely, fighting obstacles and prejudices.

—C S Lakshmi



Manzilein Aur Bhi Honi Thi: Reema Lagoo (June 21, 1958-May 18, 2017)



The sudden death of Reema Lagoo (born as Nayan Bhadbhade) at the age of 58 has left one with the feeling that here was an actor who deserved much more in terms of the kind of roles she could play in Hindi and Marathi films, TV serials and Theatre. Stuck with the 'New Age Mother' roles as they are called, the full range of her talent could hardly have been explored in an industry which believes in stereotyping, especially women, and fitting them in predetermined slots. Reema Lagoo, with the warm smile and the gentle look, is a woman who died too soon; and even in the time that was given to her, hardly anyone in the industry ventured to explore all that she was capable of. This is a tragedy that is deeper than the tragedy of one individual. Women get restricted roles in our films; elderly women, literally, seem to have no choice.

It is not that Reema Lagoo did not do well. She had a prolific, successful career. With her talent being recognised in school itself, she did not find it difficult to make the transition to professional theatre in Pune, where her mother, Mandakini Bhadbhade, of the *Lekure Udand Jaahalee* fame, was well known. Even when she worked for the Union Bank of India, which she joined in 1979, she continued to be active in theatre. Married to Vivek Lagoo (they were divorced later) she is survived by a daughter, Mrunmayee, who lit her mother's pyre on the 18th.

Reema Lagoo debuted in the Marathi film *Simhasan* in 1979. Small roles in parallel cinema in films like *Aakrosh*, *Kalyug*, *Nasoor* and *Rihaee*, paved the way to a transition to mainstream films; *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*, *Maine Pyar Kiya*, *Aashiqui*, *Henna*, *Saajan*, *PattharKePhool*, *Hum Apke Hain Koun...*, *Rangeela*, *Judwa*, *Yes Boss*, *Kal Ho Na Ho*—a plethora of films that came her way, had her carve a comfortable place in the film industry for herself, while she continued to work in Marathi films like *Reshamgaath* (for which she won the Maharashtra State Film Award as Best Actress), *Aai Shapath*, *Shubh Mangala Savadhan*, *Mee Shivajiraje Bhosle Boltoy*, *Dhoosar*, *Katray Kaljat Ghusali*. She tasted success as a TV Actress, too, particularly in Comedies like *Shriman Shrimati* and *Tu Tu Main Main*, among others.

The day before her death, she had been shooting for the TV serial *Naamkaran*. She felt uneasy shortly after midnight, was taken to Kokilaben Hospital at Andheri and she passed away in the early hours of the morning. Like her daughter, her fans are finding it difficult to come to terms with the fact that she has been snatched away so soon.

—Charanjeet Kaur



The Woman Who Found Contentment: Mehrunnisa Dalwai (May 25, 1930 – June 8, 1917)



It seems like yesterday that Mehrunnisa Dalwai came to SPARROW office to be recorded for our oral history archives. She was a very simple woman considering all the work she had done and spoke honesty and with conviction. She passed away at the age of 87. Mehrunnisa Dalwai was the president of the Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal, which was established on March 22, 1970 by her husband, Hamid Dalwai, a progressive Muslim social reformist and writer. Born into a Marathi-speaking Muslim family on the Konkan coast of Maharashtra, Hamid Dalwai joined the youth wing of the Socialist party, the Rashtriya Seva Dal while he was still in school. He grew up believing that Muslims in India had to embrace modernity and liberalization to claim their rightful place in a pluralistic, secular India. Even though Islamic religious authorities branded him an infidel, he braved criticisms and even threats to his life to campaign for reforms in Muslim personal law in India. His book *Muslim Politics in Secular India* is now regarded as a classic. He focussed on the secondary status of women in Indian Islam, especially abandoned victims of talaq. He believed that a Uniform Civil Code was the only way to guarantee

fundamental human rights to all Indian women, regardless of religion or caste. Unfortunately, Dalwai died when he was only 44, due to kidney failure. Mehrunnisa Dalwai decided to continue the work of the Mandal. She had worked along with Hamid constantly even while keeping her job at the Khadi Commission for 35 years. She had held the house together at an emotional and economic level despite all their difficulties. When Hamid had decided that his vocation was social work, she had been told not to hassle him with household affairs. Mehrunnisa said that she would manage the house on her own and would not be dependent on him financially. However, she maintained that Hamid should earn for himself. She always took a strong stand in these issues.

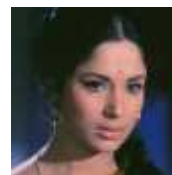
In her autobiography, *Mi Bharoon Paavle Aahe* (I Feel Content) which has been published in both Hindi and Marathi, Mehrunnisa writes that she and her husband shared a beautiful and honest relationship. She worked as his ally both at home and outside as she helped organise Muslim women and educate them about their rights. She was one of the few women in the historical Morcha of 1966, which demanded a Uniform Civil Code.

During the Shahbano case in the late eighties, the Mandal was very active in educating Muslim women about their right to maintenance. The organisation took out a procession in various parts of Maharashtra to spread awareness about legal rights in personal laws. Mehrunnisa Dalwai worked as president of the Mandal and also founded Islamic Research Institute and Maharashtra Talaq Mukti Morcha. It is the work done by women like Mehrunnisa Dalwai that others have to take forward.

—C S Lakshmi



'Muthimein band hai woh sookhe phool abhi': Sumita Sanyal (October 9, 1945- July 9, 2017)



Veteran Actor of Bengali and Hindi cinema, with more than 50 films behind her, Sumita Sanyal, daughter of Girija Golkunda Sanyal, was born as Manjula Sanyal in Darjeeling. She was the wife of Subodh Roy, the noted film editor.

In her first film, *Kokhababur Paryabartan*, the Director Bibhuti Laha gave her the screen name Suchorita, which was shortened to Sumita by Kanak Mukhopadhyay. She passed away after an eventful career at the age of 71 at her Kolkata home, Deshapriyo Park.

A theatre personality, she acted in Satyajit Ray's *Nayak*, and other significant films like *Kanchan Kanya*, *Kalsrot*, *Trishna* and *Sagina Mahto* in Bengali. A few Hindi films—*Anand*, *Aashirwad*, *Guddi*, *Mere Apne* and *The Peacock Spring* endeared her to Bollywood audiences too. Her quiet

presence in her films reveal a consummate actor, a far cry from the usual over-the-board attention seeking performances that are a hallmark of Bollywood. That she chose to work with Directors like Gulzar and Satyajit Ray speaks a great deal about the kind of cinema she wanted to make a mark in—artistic, subtle and the cinema of understatement. Like most women in public professions, she, too, seems to have maintained a low public profile and drawn the lines between her private life and her public persona. That explains, perhaps, why so little is known about her except that she was married and is survived by a son.

Sumita Sanyal belongs to the era of soft-spoken, traditional romantic heroines of the 1960s; that is how she will be remembered.

—Charanjeet Kaur



May the leopards develop/ A taste for poetry: Eunice de Souza (1940-July 29, 2017)



*May the leopards develop
A taste for poetry
The crows and kites learn
To modulate their voices.
May there be mist and waterfalls
Grass and flowers
In the wrong season.*

Eunice de Souza's commitment to poetry, and her impatience (and that's a mild term) with self-indulgent people who took poetry lightly, was total. Her famed acerbic wit and her scathing criticism embraced all kinds of charlatans and dilettantes, especially in the academic and the literary world. Her sharp sense of the aesthetic and her balanced, rational intellectualism did not permit her to suffer fools. She could be harsh and make people quail if she sensed a note of falsehood in them. When the news of her death on 28 July 2017 broke on social media and the Mumbai press the next day, it was but natural that her poetic genius was hailed along with the active role she played in opening up the minds of generations of students who had been touched by her classes and her work, ever since she started teaching at St Xavier's College, Mumbai, in the 1970s.

An endearing, widely circulated picture of Eunice with a parrot perched on her head bears testimony to a much softer side of her. Her parrots and the stray dogs she tended to have been mentioned in almost all the obits that have been written by her students, colleagues and fellow poets. Also, the fact that she was active as a unionist—fighting for the rights of teachers, and taking on the College administration whenever she found that injustice was being done to either students or teachers.

The feminist strain in her poetry makes Eunice stand out as one of the pioneering voices to talk about the constrictions that the family imposes upon the girl. Right from the fact that her parents, like most parents in India, hankered after a male child, to the commodification of girls in the marriage market ('Marriages are Made') to the glaring ignorance of girls in matters sexual, she has said it all; sometimes in all its brutality and sometimes with ironical indulgence and cheeky humour, as in

*At sixteen, Phoebe asked me:
Can it happen when you're in a dance hall
I mean, you know what,
Getting preggers and all that, when
You're dancing?
I, sixteen, assured her
You could.*

Personal references to her father, her mother, her grandmother and her childhood abound in her poetry; but Eunice is one poet who can write about herself without any sentimentality and without any sham. In her four poetry collections, *Fix* (a brilliant first book, according to K D Katrak), *Women in Dutch Painting* (in which the title poem is one of her enduring gems), *Ways of Belonging* and *New and Selected Poems*, she continued to hone her bare, minimalist poetry almost to the bone. *Dangerlok*, her first novella, captures the 'swirl, the sprawl, the scum and the slime in the seductively malevolent city we know as Mumbai' (Anjana Sharma) and it was followed quickly by *Dev and Simran* (a brave little book, according to Aradhika Sekhon in her review of the book in *The Tribune*). As an anthologist, she has six books to her credit—*Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology*, *101 Folktales from India*, *Purdah: An Anthology*, *Women's Voices: Selections from Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Indian Writing in English*, *Early Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology 1829-1947*, and *The Sathianadhan Family Album*—and along with her *Conversations with Indian Poets*, shown her keen grasp of the essentially poetic and her astute ability to separate and discard the chaff. Most of the poets she included in her Anthologies today have justified their inclusion in her 'canon'.

Eunice de Souza was known to be a very reclusive person. When she died, though, it was obvious that the people she actually belongs to—her fellow poets, her students, her colleagues, the admirers of her poetry and her occasional writing—who became and remained her home. Like the Western Ghats that seemed to beckon to her:

*Fling my ashes in the Western Ghats
They've always seemed like home.*

—Charanjeet Kaur



A Woman Who Knew Too Much: Shanta Serbjeet Singh (January 11, 1936 – August 2, 2017)



In the seventies, while I was studying in Delhi, young dancers and even some established dancers, dreaded two art critics: one was Subbudu and the other was Shanta Serbjeet Singh. Shanta was not known to mince her words when it came to her dance reviews. And to think that she had nothing to do with dance when she began writing about it. Shanta had a Master's degree in International Relations from the University of Berkeley. When she returned to India she tried her best to work in one of the English dailies to write on foreign relations, finance or law. But no jobs came her way. *Hindustan Times* offered her a weekly column for commenting on dance events! Leela Venkatraman in her moving tribute in her column 'Taalam' in *Narthaki* says Shanta put it wryly to her thus: "It seemed that every sphere needed a specialist but for dance writing any general writer would do! Anyway I decided to give it a try—though barring Hindustani music, my knowledge was minimal. Rest is history and here I am." Shanta was married to the well-known painter and filmmaker Serbjeet Singh and also wrote on films. She may not have known anything about dance when she began but she certainly became the most formidable art writer whose knowledge about what she wrote was never incomplete or lacking in depth. She served as a member on several important committees in organizations like ICCR and Sangeet Natak Akademi and Sahitya Kala Parishad. She was Vice-chairman of Sangeet Natak Akademi and was also the Chairperson of APPAN (Asia Pacific Performing Arts Network). APPAN was really her brainchild and she organised some important events in India and abroad under its aegis. Shanta's books *The Fiftieth Milestone: A Feminine Critique*, *Nanak the Guru* and *Indian Dance: The Ultimate Metaphor*, which she edited, one can say, covered both her work and her views on art and life. They say Shanta died in a sitting position. It is difficult to imagine an indefatigable person like her lying down to die.

—C S Lakshmi



'To Light a candle' : Dr Ruth Katherina Martha Pfau (September 9, 1929- August 10, 2017)



Actually, the first patient who really made me decide was a young Pathan. He crawled on hands and feet into this dispensary, acting as if this was quite normal, as if someone has to crawl there through that

slime and dirt on hands and feet, like a dog.

The deep humanism of Ruth Pfau, Magsaysay Award winner, evident in this account of how she decided to dedicate her life to the service of those afflicted with leprosy, is what marks her life in Pakistan. Born as a German to Lutheran parents, Pfau saw the ravages caused by the Second World War, when her house was destroyed in a bombing. She studied medicine at the University of Mainz, and a few meetings with a Dutch Christian woman, who was a concentration camp survivor, had a great impact on her. She converted to Roman Catholicism in 1953, and was influenced by the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and the thinker Josef Pieper. In 1957, she joined the Daughters of the Heart of Mary, a Catholic Order. She worked for some time in South India, but found her true calling when she got stuck in Karachi due to a visa problem. Pakistan was to become her home for the remaining part of her life.

She started her medical practice for leprosy patients in a small hut in a Lepers' Colony near McLeod Road, and established the Marie Adelaide Leprosy Centre in Karachi, which catered to people from all parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan. In recognition of her untiring efforts, she was given a Pakistani citizenship in 1988; her work as the Federal Advisor on Leprosy to the Ministry of Health and Social welfare of the Government of Pakistan and in the 157 leprosy clinics she established all over Pakistan was highlighted when the World Health Organisation declared Pakistan a leprosy-free nation in 1996.

Pakistan honoured her with its highest civilian Award the Hilal-i-Pakistan and the Nishan-i-Quaid-i-Azam for public service. She is also the recipient of the Staufer Medal, the highest award of the German state of Baden-Württemberg. After the 2010 floods in Karachi, Pfau was hailed as the 'Mother Teresa' of Pakistan, and a few days after her death the Civil Hospital of Karachi has been renamed as the Dr Ruth Pfau Hospital. Other honours include the Sitara-i-Hilal, and the Jinnah Award in Pakistan. She was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Science Degree by the Aga Khan University of Karachi. Dr Ruth Pfau has written several books in German two of which—*To Light a Candle: Reminiscences and Reflections of Dr Ruth Pfau* and *The Last Word is Love: Adventure, Medicine, War and God* are available in English.

Her words, those of a woman who has seen much suffering in the people she served, resonate in an era when conflict and a near-war situation seem always to be just round the corner:

Not all of us can prevent a war; but most of us can help ease sufferings—of the body and the soul.

—Charanjeet Kaur

Not an *adhuri kahani*: Shobha Sen (1924?- August 13, 2017)



In her illustrious career as a stage and film actor, in which she acted in iconic films like Praful Chakraborty's *Bhagwan Shri Ramakrishna*, Ritwik Ghatak's *Bedeni*, Mrinal Sen's *Ek Adhuri Kahani* and *Ek Din Pratidin*, Utpal Dutt's *Baisakhi Megh*, Gautam Ghosh's *Dekha* and Florian Gallenberger's *Shadows of Time* (German), the one performance for which Shobha Sen has been remembered is the lead role in the 1944 play about the Bengal famine, produced by IPTA, and written by Bijon Bhattacharya. That the connect with the more than 70-year-old play had remained so strong is proof of its enduring legacy and the continuing relevance of the issues of death by famine, poverty and starvation; Sova Sen or Shobha Sen, as she is known, began her career with this path-breaking performance.

She carved a space for herself, and established herself as a committed artist in a scenario brimming over with talent. IPTA and Ganantya Sangstha provided her the impetus to grow and deliver some lifetime performances in theatre and cinema. The other plays for which she is remembered are: *Barricade*, *Tiner Taloyar*, *Titumirand Kallol* (which is set in the backdrop of the 1946 Naval Mutiny), all of them produced by the Little Theatre Group, which later on became the Little Peoples' Group. Throughout her life her leftist leaning defined her work; in death, too, she rose above ritualism and donated her body to a public hospital in Kolkatta. Wife of the towering Utpal Dutt, she is survived by her only daughter, Bishupriya Dutt, a Professor in Theatre History in the School of Art and Aesthetics at JNU.

—Charanjeet Kaur



A Quiet Butterfly on the Windscreen of a Speeding Car: Shirish Pai (November 15, 1929-September 2, 2017)



Shirish Pai was a poet and a social worker. Pai was the one who introduced Haiku to Marathi and has since then published many books of haiku poems. She was born into an illustrious family. Her father was the legendary Acharya Pralhad Keshav Atre who produced *Shyamchi Aayi*. Shirish Pai did her L L B from Government Law College and joined her father's newspaper, *Maratha*, initially as a journalist and later became its editor. It is said that the Soviet ideology and way of life influenced her a great deal and that she visited the Soviet Union and travelled to Eastern Block countries. Along with her father, Shirish played a role in the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement through her newspaper *Maratha*.

She was married to the lawyer and journalist Venkatesh Pai. Her collection of poems *Ek Tari*, *Eka Pavalyat*, *Gaiwat*, *Kasturi* and *Rutuchakra* were highly appreciated works. Her novels *Lalan Bairagin* and *He Divas Hi Jatil* were popular and also critically acclaimed. She also translated Japanese Haikus into Marathi. In a conversation with A Thyagarajan she has said that in 1975 when she began to write Haiku it was not a form of poetry that was well known. People were making fun of Haiku ridiculing it as *kaaiku* (meaning why). Sharing her thoughts on Haiku with A Thyagarajan who has written an erudite article on her in Boloji blog, she said that Haiku was "not a piece of thought; not even an expression of any feeling or emotion" but that it was "a poetic wondering or a poetic exclamation." A Thyagarajan has translated some of her Haikus into English. Even in translation they read well and many of them reveal a person who could see beauty in small things in this busy city. One Haiku in which I could imagine the city of Mumbai is:

On the windscreen of a speeding car
a tiny butterfly
slowly came and sat quietly.

A long life filled with short beautiful Haiku poems is how one must see her life.

—C S Lakshmi



A Woman of Courage: Gauri Lankesh (1962- September 5, 2017)



Gauri Lankesh was a courageous journalist. She worked as an editor in *Lankesh Patrike*, a Kannada weekly started by her father P Lankesh. After his death she and her brother Indrajit took over the weekly. Before that she had worked for *Times of India*, Bangalore, and had had some 16 years of experience as a journalist. Later in 2005 she started her own weekly *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*. She stood all her life for freedom of speech. She was considered pro-Naxal although she has said that though she was part of Citizens' Initiative for Peace she was not promoting Naxalism and that she did not support their extremism and was keen to bring them into mainstream politics. She actively worked for communal harmony and was a spirited opponent of right wing politics. She had received many threat calls for her courageous stand on issues concerning freedom of speech. On 5th September she was gunned down by unknown assailants outside her home. Losing journalists like her is a great loss for the cause of freedom of speech.

—C S Lakshmi

The Lone Warrior: Ritha Devi

(December 6, 1924-September 12, 2017)



It was in 2000 that SPARROW made a 62-minute documentary on Ritha. When I had contacted her to ask her if she would agree to do the film for SPARROW she jocularly remarked that she would come only if I called her Ritha. I understood what she was referring to. In my book on dancers I had referred to her in a conversation as Rita, her original name. But she had added an 'h' to her name a long time ago and hated being Rita; she was Ritha. I promised her never to make the mistake again and she graciously agreed to come to a friend's place to speak and also do a dance demonstration. She was shorter than my five feet nothing but she was a bundle of energy and determination at the age of 73. She had not yet decided to settle down in Pune and was on a visit to Mumbai. During the making of the documentary we learnt a lot about her.

She was born in Assam and was related to Rabindranath Tagore and Lakshminath Bezbaroa, father of modern Assamese literature. Her mother, Aruna, was a musician and taught music and was involved in organising stage performances in their town in Assam. Her family later moved to Baroda and Ritha studied in Bombay University and later began to learn classical dancing much against her father's objections. Her marriage to Indra Chatterji in 1950 was a failure as her husband did not think girls from decent families should take up dance as a profession. By 1953 she was alone with a son and began to write on dance and make a living. But she continued to learn dance. She learnt many styles and from the best masters of her time. Howbom Athomba Singh taught her Manipuri in Kolkata, Asan Karunakaran Panikkar taught her Kathakali in Mumbai and Mohiniattam she learnt from Kalamandalam Lakshmi. She also learnt Odissi from Pankaj Charan Das in Puri and Kuchipudi from Vembatti Chinna Satyam. Pandanallur Chokkalingam Pillai taught her Bharatanatyam in Chennai. She also learnt the sacred Sattriya Nritya of Assam and learnt Kathak. Ritha Devi was one of the dancers who took Odissi to the world along with Indrani Rehman. She toured Europe and Soviet Union and later taught at the New York University for ten years. She lived in New York for 35 years and had several fellowships for choreography and her works have been archived in the National Endowment for the Arts in New York.

When she returned to India the dance scene had changed and she felt she did not belong although she made all the efforts to be part of the dance world in India. When she fell ill everyone said the usual things about artistes being abandoned in their old age. Same words had been spoken when Damayanti Joshi had passed away but we

still have made no efforts to set up a retirement home for artistes and writers where they can live and die with dignity. We forget them once they get their lifetime achievement awards. It has happened to all of them—dancers, musicians, actors, writers and others. I read somewhere that Ritha means someone gifted with a sixth-sense, in addition to discerning and inspiring qualities with high energy levels and highly sensitive. Ritha was all that and she kept her spirit alive even when her body succumbed to age. She would have been 93 this December.

—C S Lakshmi

**Kal ka bhi gum kis liye?: Shakila**

(January 1, 1935- September 20, 2017)



Beginning with a small role in *Duniya* (1949), Shakila, who passed away at the age, got her first major break in A K Rashid's *Dastaan* in 1950, launching her 14-year-old career. Born as Badshah Begum and orphaned early, she and her sisters Noor and Nasreen were brought up by her *bua*; and like most women actors of the times, all three of them came to films due to financial compulsions.

A short career in films, in which Shakila worked with eminent Directors like Guru Dutt (*Aar Paar*, *Baazi*, *CID*), Raj Kapoor (*Satyavan Satyawadi*) and Shakti Samanta (*China Town*), fantasy films like *Sindbad the Sailor*, *Alibaba and 40 Chor*, and *Hatim Tai*, she bid goodbye to films after her marriage with Johny Barber in 1963 and settled down in London. A warm friendly person, she counted among her closest friends actors like Waheeda Rehman, Nanda, Dilip Kumar, Asha Parekh, Saira Banu and Shyma; her niece (daughter of Noor and Johnny Walker) describes her as 'loving, stylish and elegant' in spite of the ups and downs of her life, particularly the tragic loss of her daughter, Meenaz, in 1991. Well remembered, especially for the mesmerizing songs pictured on her – *ankhon hi ankhon mein ishaara ho gaya*, and *babuji dheere chanlna*, Shakila, of the soft, sensuous, beautiful looks, in spite of having worked with some of the finest directors of her time, could not make it into the big time league of actresses of her time, even though she acted in more than 50 films. She was content to give priority to her domestic commitments; cameo appearances in *Hum Intezar Karenge* (1989) and *Rajdrohi* (1993), reminded those who are familiar with her earlier work of the charm she exuded in an age when film heroines retained the aura of innocence even when they broke the mould, as she did in *Baazi*. *Hoon abhi main jawan ai dil*, the song of eternal youth, appears to have been the signature tune of her life.

—Charanjeet Kaur