SPARROW
SOUND & PICTURE
ARCHIVES FOR
RESEARCH
ON
WOMEN

Publication Number 86
Published by
Sound & Picture Archives for
Research on Women
The Nest, B-101/201/301, Patel Apartment,
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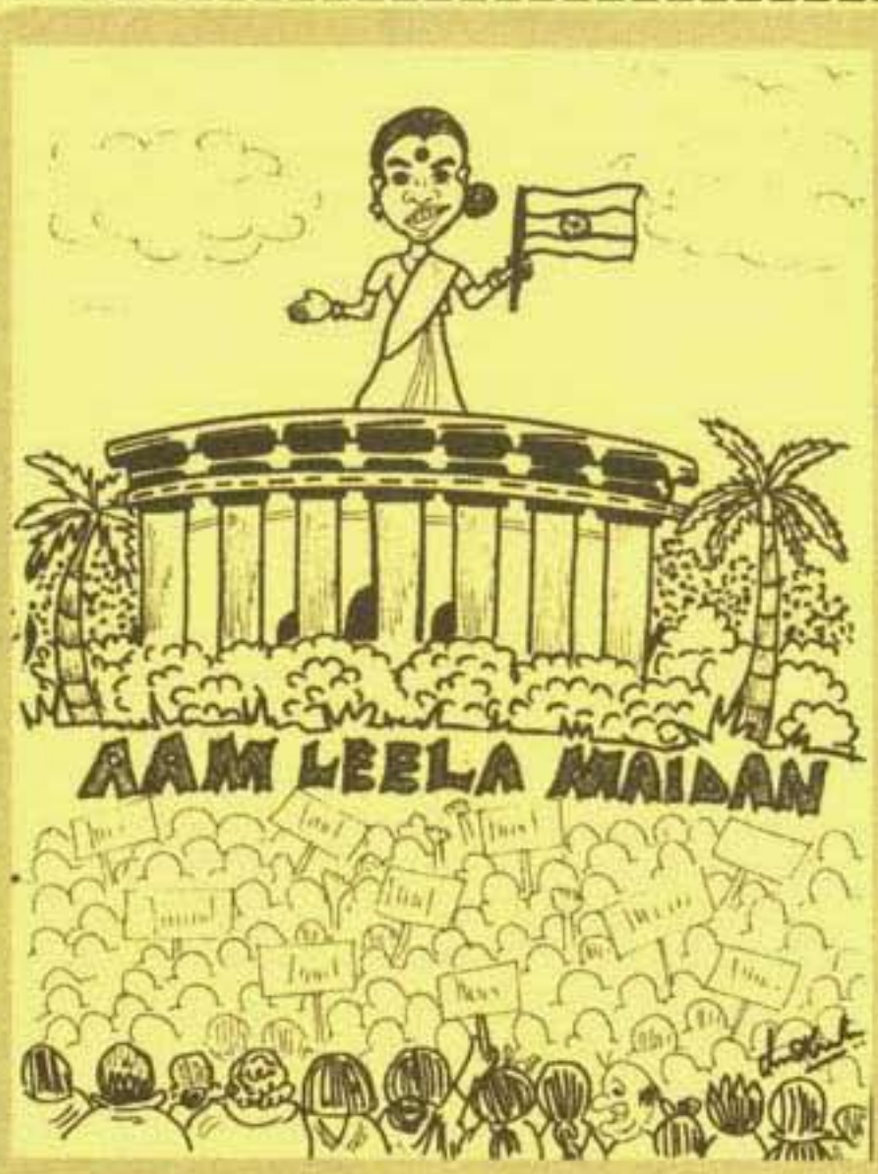
Mouj Prakashan Griha,
Khatau Wadi, Goregaonkar Lane, Girgaum,
Mumbai - 400 004
Phone: 022 2387 1050

SPARROW newsletter

SNL Number 34 April 2016



Leelaji, my maid comes in all excited, 'Bhaiyya! kaam dhaam karna sab bekaar hai! Is desh mein eik hi dhanda chalta hai - rajnaitik party ka! Yeh Kejriwal ne 'aadmi' ki party banai hai, main Auraton ki party banaungi. Meri hogi: Aam Aurat Palti. Kaun mujhe bote dalega?' Brother, working hard is no use. Only one business works in this country - the business of making political parties. How dare Arvind Kejriwal make a 'male' party? I will make a women's party - Aam Aurat Party! Who will vote for me?

CONTENTS

[Editor's Note]

This issue of SNL comes with the expert touch of Charanjeet Kaur. From this issue we will also have cartoons of Lakshmi Karunakaran on our cover page.

The Chennai floods in December was a nightmare which affected the life of almost everyone in Chennai. Dhamayanthi writes about her experience in the Chennai floods. Svetlana Alexievich won the Nobel prize in 2015 for her work. Her acceptance speech talks of human lives destroyed in wars and power-mongering and is a historical document of our times. This SNL carries her entire speech.

For book reviews we have chosen *Zorami* by Malsawmi Jacob, a biography of Lokasundari Raman by Uma Parameswaran and *Maajhi Kahani* by Paravatibai Athavle:

The homage pages of SNL, we realised, are pages that tell us so much about women's life and women's work. In this SNL also we have women who have lived amazing lives and we have also paid homage to some extraordinary men.

Do write to us and do visit our website *www.sparrowonline.org.* and also join us on our Facebook page.

The Last Scene of a Battlefield

It was a week after Diwali.... The date was 17th... When I set out on work in the afternoon I found the neighbours agitated about something. "Are you going out for a walk? They are opening the floodgates of the Chembarambakkam lake... the water level is going to rise," they told me. I did not take it very seriously.

Behind my house was the Adyar river flowing in a thin stream. For the last five years I have been staying in various rental places in Ekkaduthangal. But I did not have any special liking or love for the Adyar river. For a long time I thought it was just a gutter like the Koovam river. In a casual conversation, someone whose name I cannot recall now, had told me that this was actually the Adyar river. I had an umbilical relationship with the river Thamirabarani flowing in Tirunelveli; so I could not accept any other flowing waterbody as a river.

I did not even pay much attention to what they said and started walking briskly. I had to attend a story discussion meet that day. Around 5 p.m. friends rang up to inform that the floodgates had been opened. When I rang up home there seemed to be a commotion. "All the things have to be placed at a higher level. It seems the water may come into the house," they said.

I could not go home immediately. To reach Ekkaduthangal from Velacheri took some four hours that day. By then the water had reached our street corner. Those on the first floor stayed put there. We decided to stay in a nearby hotel. Exactly two days later the water level went down. The house looked like an abruptly ended game of dice. The gas cylinder had pushed itself through the door into the toilet. Everything made of wood crumbled when touched.

Thinking "this also shall pass" we threw out everything and washed the house clean. That was the first time I felt the water of river Adyar touching my feet. Loving and supportive friends helped us to buy the basic essentials once again. We were slowly returning to our earlier frame of mind.

December 1st afternoon. I had gone for a shooting, despite heavy rains. We could not go near Kathipara area. It was terribly flooded. When we went via T Nagar we found that G N Chetty Road had water one could only swim through. Some people stood there, pushing the cars stranded there. Looking at it from where we were, we could see that they were pouring water into the silencer, without the knowledge of the car owners. "Look how people make a living in this rain," said our driver.

Some friends around spoke about how people were making a business out of the rain and we continued our discussion in the heavy rains. Again, a phone call. "They are opening the Chembarambakkam lake's floodgates. This time they are going to release 30,000 cusecs of water."

I had a sinking feeling in my stomach. I began to rush, saying I must somehow reach home. The friend's car we were in was caught in the water and the brakes were not functioning. We made calls to auto and taxi service centres. Everyone frankly said that they were unwilling to come to any part of Chennai even if crores were offered. When I felt totally disheartened, another friend with us suggested that we could go to the Fort station and then go to Kodambakkam from there and then go to Vadapalani and then take the Metro to Ekkaduthangal.

That sounded like a good suggestion. We stopped a friend's car that came along and asked him to take us to the overhead train station. There were cars all around, grouped like matchboxes on the road. We ran inside the station in the torrential rain. At the Fort station we got into the train only to hear the passenger sitting opposite tell us after hearing us talk aloud of our anxiety, "They say trains to Kodambakkam from Fort are not running. Do check." I became more anxious about the house. There was not much money left in the mobile. When I rang up home there was a worried response: "Where are you? Come home safe. The water has started entering the house."

That did it. I was shattered. I got off at Kotturpuram and got the train from the opposite side and came to Indra Nagar. We thought we would go to Madhya Kailash from there and take a bus. As we got out of the station, it began to rain even more heavily. Despite the umbrella the whole body got drenched in the rain. The rain was so heavy that there was a haze before the eyes and nothing was visible. When I crossed the road an old lady pulled me away and said, "Be careful." I opened my eyes with difficulty and saw that there was a deep ten-foot hole in the middle of the road at Madhya Kailash. The iron fence around it had got dislodged in the rains. While I type this, I can still hear that woman's voice saying, "Be careful, Thayee."

It was only while taking shelter in the temple there that I

could sense the great anxiety of people around. People were wandering about in the heavy rains searching for people and anxious to reach home. Unable to stand for long in the rain, we got on to a bus going to T Nagar. It began to move at a snail's pace. At one point, near Raj Bhavan, we felt as if we were in a boat. A young boy said, "Akka, since they don't want the governor's bungalow inundated they have let out the water."

Since hostels were suddenly closed, the evacuated students were desperately looking for buses departing from the Koyambedu bus stand. We walked and caught the Koyambedu bus, standing ahead of us. We went half a kilometre in two hours. The person in the seat ahead of us distributed biscuit packets. Oblivious to all this were two young students in love caught up with themselves. The bus turned at the Kathipara Bridge towards T Nagar. At 11 in the night the bus took us to Vadapalani going through T Nagar and Kodambakkam. The mobile phones of all the girls kept ringing.

We caught the Metro at Vadapalani and reached Ekkaduthangal at midnight. As I was coming down the steps a fear gripped my heart. What would have happened to the house? I got down the steps only to find water up to the waist outside the metro station. There was just a room available in the adjacent hotel. And even that was on the ground floor. There was ankle deep water in the room. Over the phone came the news that water had forcefully entered the house. Many friends urged us to go over to their houses; and that love kept us alive.

In the morning we requested for a room upstairs at the hotel. The manager said that he may be able to offer a room at around 10 a.m. We thought we could go see the state of the house and have a cup of coffee somewhere. We could not even go past the Jaya TV channel office on the main road. "Don't go," people advised, "they are after all just the household things; let them go." Some said the water was running with ferocity over the Adyar Bridge. Ekkaduthangal had been cut off from the rest of Chennai. We wanted to leave immediately. Then we thought we could wait till the evening and went and had a cup of coffee and reached the hotel only to see that the waist-deep water outside the hotel was now spreading all over the road. Even during the Thamirabarani floods in 1992, I had not seen a river burst into so many directions with such aggression.

Even as we packed our stuff the hotel closed its doors. It was a glass door. The hotel administrators said that they could not change the decision to close the door since the water may rush into the hotel if they open the door to let us out. They refused to let us out. They gave us a room upstairs. I remember the moment when we started looking at the world through the balcony window. Floating on the water were refrigerators, scooters, deers...

There were others like us who were "refugees", with babes in arms, from Chennai, in the hotel. Suddenly, hunger pangs began to gnaw at the stomach. There was a loud blast below. The water with its magical hands had broken open the glass door of the hotel.

One person decided to take care of everybody's hunger to go in the neck-deep water despite the broken glass pieces and he got us all food. He brought us four puffs for Rs.250. All three of us ate a puff each and one was left over. When we picked up the phone to check if the water would go down by the night, we realised there was no tower connection.

The generator's diesel got mixed with water and there was no electricity. There was no TV and now no communication was possible either, cautioned my mind. I looked at the street below. The water was swirling with great speed making it impossible for anyone to get on to the road. On the opposite road some were taking selfies with the flood scenes. We thought we may escape if boats arrived. We shouted when boats came. They asked us to cross the road and come over to the other side. They were a bit worried about entering the deep area we were in.

"Let us wait. 'Amma' (Chief Minsiter Jayalaitha) will arrange for something by the morning," hoped a party man beside us.

Soon it began to get dark. The rains had not let off. We went off to sleep. A fitful sleep due to hunger. All around were sounds as if snakes and frogs were at war. I kept getting up to look through the window. The water was rising all the time. I thought of a story I had written about not wanting death to happen in water or on a rainy day.

The person in the opposite room was going from room to room saying, "My wife has fever. Do you have some tablets?" I looked into my bag. I had just another kurta to change into. Was this life all about? Is nature changing in minutes to convey that our identities are impermanent?

More than the rain, the river or the engulfing darkness, a disgusting emptiness of having lost everything in a second took hold of me. When I looked outside the window my cheeks became wet with tears. I was waiting for the sun, hoping that dawn would bring some light. In the morning the rain had stopped. The water level had reduced by about half a foot. Helicopters were flying above. We raised our arms and asked for help. No food packet was thrown towards us. Resolutely, we got down. People were walking about with bundles like they were some kings of a refugee land. I walked through the water in fear. I heard that the water had entered our street up to the second floor and that a young couple who got down into the water had died. They said an old man's body had been washed ashore in Ashok Nagar. My head began to swim. We had to wait for an hour in the queue to get a cup of coffee.

The overhead Metro seemed to be the only way out of that place. It took an hour to get the tickets. Outside the station they were selling burgers and sandwiches at slightly hiked up rates. To get on to the train the people fought as if they were some slaves escaping from being auctioned. We stood on one leg and reached Vadapalani. As soon as we got down we got the mobile signal. Calls followed... messages... That night we ate after two days. As I put the first morsel in my mouth, tears filled my eyes.

Next day the water level reduced and the somewhat subdued Adyar river was flowing under the Kasi theatre bridge. Still with aggression. They said that the army had come and that it was the army that had saved many by boats. They had put more than ten thousand sand bags against the wall of Jaya TV for the wall to hold on. In the very next street was a dead body unattended.

Our area was like the last scene of a battlefield. Cars lay smashed all around. Trees... dead cows... news of death... I ran towards my house. When I broke open the door my heart stood still. There was nothing in the house. There was only a stomach-churning stench of a graveyard.

An army man going past me saw my tears and told me in English: It was not 35,000 cusecs of water as they informed, *ma*. It was above 85,000. The engineers did not have the power to open the flood gates of Chembarambakkam lake. The power lay with the politicians. Flood is politics... Do you understand, daughter? If they had asked for the army in the first place there would not have been so much of loss of life...."

Minister Valarmathy who lives five streets away and who had shed tears when she took the oath for her office, had not even bothered to visit the area with the same tears, said the boy next door, throwing away his treadmill bought just a week before. People were moving about here and there, grumbling that everything, including setting right petrol queues, announcement of freebies for the present and even free bus travel had to be now done through court orders.

They moved about as mortals on whom the sight of grace of the government had not fallen, as those kept alive through the immense love of the social workers, and as simple folks who would eagerly accept, six months later, the compensation amount for this when it comes masked as a part of election gratises.

With nowhere to go, I have taken refuge in the houses of my friends. And the Adyar river has taken refuge within its shores.

—Dhamayanthi

(Translated by Dr C S Lakshmi from the Tamil original "Porkkalathin iruthik kaatchi" published in Anandavikatan, 16 December 2015)

On the Battle Lost

Svetlana Alexievich's Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech
7 December 2015

Svetlana Alexievich is a Belarusian investigative journalist and non-fiction prose writer who writes in Russian. She was awarded the 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature

I do not stand alone at this podium... There are voices around me, hundreds of voices. They have always been with me, since childhood. I grew up in the countryside. As children, we loved to play outdoors, but come evening, the voices of tired village women who gathered on benches near their cottages drew us like magnets. None of them had husbands, fathers or brothers. I don't remember men in our village after World War II: during the war, one out of four Belarusians perished, either fighting at the front or with the partisans. After the war, we children lived in a world of women. What I remember most, is that women talked about love, not death. They would tell stories about saying goodbye to the men they loved the day before they went to war, they would talk about waiting for them, and how they were still waiting. Years had passed, but they continued to wait: "I don't care if he lost his arms and legs, I'll carry him." No arms... no legs... I think I've known what love is since childhood...

Here are a few sad melodies from the choir that I hear...

First voice:

"Why do you want to know all this? It's so sad. I met my husband during the war. I was in a tank crew that made it all the way to Berlin. I remember, we were standing near the Reichstag—he wasn't my husband yet—and he says to me: "Let's get married. I love you." I was so upset—we'd been living in filth, dirt, and blood the whole war, heard nothing but obscenities. I answered: "First make a woman of me: give me flowers, whisper sweet nothings. When I'm demobilised, I'll make myself a dress." I was so upset I wanted to hit him. He felt all of it. One of his cheeks had been badly burned, it was scarred over, and I saw tears running down the scars. "Alright, I'll marry you," I said. Just like that... I couldn't believe I said it... All around us there was nothing but ashes and smashed bricks, in short—war."

Second voice:

"We lived near the Chernobyl nuclear plant. I was working at a bakery, making pasties. My husband was a fireman. We had just gotten married, and we held hands even when we went to the store. The day the reactor exploded, my

husband was on duty at the fire station. They responded to the call in their shirtsleeves, in regular clothes—there was an explosion at the nuclear power station, but they weren't given any special clothing. That's just the way we lived... You know... They worked all night putting out the fire, and received doses of radiation incompatible with life. The next morning they were flown straight to Moscow. Severe radiation sickness... you don't live for more than a few weeks ... My husband was strong, an athlete, and he was the last to die. When I got to Moscow, they told me that he was in a special isolation chamber and no one was allowed in. "But I love him," I begged. "Soldiers are taking care of them. Where do you think you're going?" "I love him." They argued with me: "This isn't the man you love anymore, he's an object requiring decontamination. You get it?" I kept telling myself the same thing over and over: I love, I love... At night, I would climb up the fire escape to see him... Or I'd ask the night janitors... I paid them money so they'd let me in... I didn't abandon him, I was with him until the end... A few months after his death, I gave birth to a little girl, but she lived only a few days. She... We were so excited about her, and I killed her... She saved me, she absorbed all the radiation herself. She was so little... teeny-tiny... But I loved them both. How can love be killed? Why are love and death so close? They always come together. Who can explain it? At the grave I go down on my knees..."

Third Voice:

"The first time I killed a German... I was ten years old, and the partisans were already taking me on missions. This German was lying on the ground, wounded... I was told to take his pistol. I ran over, and he clutched the pistol with two hands and was aiming it at my face. But he didn't manage to fire first, I did...

It didn't scare me to kill someone... And I never thought about him during the war. A lot of people were killed, we lived among the dead. I was surprised when I suddenly had a dream about that German many years later. It came out of the blue... I kept dreaming the same thing over and over... I would be flying, and he wouldn't let me go. Lifting off... flying, flying... He catches up, and I fall down with him. I fall into some sort of pit. Or, I want to get up... stand up... But he won't let me... Because of him, I can't fly away...

The same dream... It haunted me for decades...

I couldn't tell my son about that dream. He was young—I couldn't. I read fairy tales to him. My son is grown now—but I still can't..."

Flaubert called himself a human pen; I would say that I am a human ear. When I walk down the street and catch words, phrases, and exclamations, I always think—how many novels disappear without a trace! Disappear into darkness. We haven't been able to capture the conversational side of human life for literature. We don't appreciate it, we aren't surprised or delighted by it. But it fascinates me, and has made me its captive. I love how humans talk... I love the lone human voice. It is my greatest love and passion.

The road to this podium has been long—almost forty years, going from person to person, from voice to voice. I can't say that I have always been up to following this path. Many times I have been shocked and frightened by human beings. I have experienced delight and revulsion. I have sometimes wanted to forget what I heard, to return to a time when I lived in ignorance. More than once, however, I have seen the sublime in people, and wanted to cry.

I lived in a country where dying was taught to us from childhood. We were taught death. We were told that human beings exist in order to give everything they have, to burn out, to sacrifice themselves. We were taught to love people with weapons. Had I grown up in a different country, I couldn't have travelled this path. Evil is cruel, you have to be inoculated against it. We grew up among executioners and victims. Even if our parents lived in fear and didn't tell us everything—and more often than not they told us nothing—the very air of our life was poisoned. Evil kept a watchful eye on us.

I have written five books, but I feel that they are all one book. A book about the history of a utopia...

Varlam Shalamov once wrote: "I was a participant in the colossal battle, a battle that was lost, for the genuine renewal of humanity." I reconstruct the history of that battle, its victories and its defeats. The history of how people wanted to build the Heavenly Kingdom on earth. Paradise! The City of the Sun! In the end, all that remained was a sea of blood, millions of ruined human lives. There was a time, however, when no political idea of the 20th century was comparable to communism (or the October Revolution as its symbol), a time when nothing attracted Western intellectuals and people all around the world more powerfully or emotionally. Raymond Aron called the Russian Revolution the "opium of intellectuals." But the idea of communism is at least two thousand years old. We can find it in Plato's teachings about an ideal, correct state; in Aristophanes' dreams about a time when "everything will belong to everyone." ... In Thomas More and Tommaso Campanella... Later in Saint-Simon, Fourier and Robert Owen. There is something in the Russian spirit that compels it to try to turn these dreams

into reality.

Twenty years ago, we bid farewell to the "Red Empire" of the Soviets with curses and tears. We can now look at that past more calmly, as a historical experiment. This is important, because arguments about socialism have not died down. A new generation has grown up with a different picture of the world, but many young people are reading Marx and Lenin again. In Russian towns there are new museums dedicated to Stalin, and new monuments have been erected to him.

The "Red Empire" is gone, but the "Red Man," homo sovieticus, remains. He endures.

My father died recently. He believed in communism to the end. He kept his party membership card. I can't bring myself to use the word 'sovok,' that derogatory epithet for the Soviet mentality, because then I would have to apply it my father and others close to me, my friends. They all come from the same place—socialism. There are many idealists among them. Romantics. Today they are sometimes called slavery romantics. Slaves of utopia. I believe that all of them could have lived different lives, but they lived Soviet lives. Why? I searched for the answer to that question for a long time—I travelled all over the vast country once called the USSR, and recorded thousands of tapes. It was socialism, and it was simply our life. I have collected the history of "domestic," "indoor" socialism, bit by bit. The history of how it played out in the human soul. I am drawn to that small space called a human being... a single individual. In reality, that is where everything happens.

Right after the war, Theodor Adorno wrote, in shock: "Writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." My teacher, Ales Adamovich, whose name I mention today with gratitude, felt that writing prose about the nightmares of the 20th century was sacrilege. Nothing may be invented. You must give the truth as it is. A "super-literature" is required. The witness must speak. Nietzsche's words come to mind—no artist can live up to reality. He can't lift it.

It always troubled me that the truth doesn't fit into one heart, into one mind, that truth is somehow splintered. There's a lot of it, it is varied, and it is strewn about the world. Dostoevsky thought that humanity knows much, much more about itself than it has recorded in literature. So what is it that I do? I collect the everyday life of feelings, thoughts, and words. I collect the life of my time. I'm interested in the history of the soul. The everyday life of the soul, the things that the big picture of history usually omits, or disdains. I work with missing history. I am often told, even now, that what I write isn't literature, it's a document. What is literature today? Who can answer that question? We live faster than ever before. Content ruptures form. Breaks and changes it. Everything overflows its banks: music, painting—even words in documents escape the boundaries of the document. There are no borders between fact and fabrication, one flows into the other. Witnesses are not impartial. In telling a story, humans create, they wrestle time like a sculptor does marble. They are actors and creators.

I'm interested in little people. The little, great people, is how I would put it, because suffering expands people. In my books these people tell their own, little histories, and big history is told along the way. We haven't had time to comprehend what already has and is still happening to us, we just need to say it. To begin with, we must at least articulate what happened. We are afraid of doing that, we're not up to coping with our past. In Dostoevsky's *Demons*, Shatov says to Stavrogin at the beginning of their conversation: "We are two creatures who have met in boundless infinity... for the last time in the world. So drop that tone and speak like a human being. At least once, speak with a human voice."

That is more or less how my conversations with my protagonists begin. People speak from their own time, of course, they can't speak out of a void. But it is difficult to reach the human soul, the path is littered with television and newspapers, and the superstitions of the century, its biases, its deceptions.

I would like to read a few pages from my diaries to show how time moved... how the idea died... How I followed in its path...

1980–1985

I'm writing a book about the war... Why about the war? Because we are people of war—we have always been at war or been preparing for war. If one looks closely, we all think in terms of war. At home, on the street. That's why human life is so cheap in this country. Everything is wartime.

I began with doubts. Another book about World War II... What for?

On one trip I met a woman who had been a medic during the war. She told me a story: as they crossed Lake Ladoga during the winter, the enemy noticed some movement and began to shoot at them. Horses and people fell under the ice. It all happened at night. She grabbed someone she thought was injured and began to drag him toward the shore. "I

pulled him, he was wet and naked, I thought his clothes had been torn off," she told me. Once on shore, she discovered that she had been dragging an enormous wounded sturgeon. And she let loose a terrible string of obscenities: people are suffering, but animals, birds, fish —what did they do? On another trip I heard the story of a medic from a cavalry squadron. During a battle she pulled a wounded soldier into a shell crater, and only then noticed that he was a German. His leg was broken and he was bleeding. He was the enemy! What to do? Her own guys were dying up above! But she bandaged the German and crawled out again. She dragged in a Russian soldier who had lost consciousness. When he came to, he wanted to kill the German, and when the German came to, he grabbed a machine gun and wanted to kill the Russian. "I'd slap one of them, and then the other. Our legs were all covered in blood," she remembered. "The blood was all mixed together."

This was a war I had never heard about. A woman's war. It wasn't about heroes. It wasn't about one group of people heroically killing another group of people. I remember a frequent female lament: "After the battle, you'd walk through the field. They lay on their backs... All young, so handsome. They lay there, staring at the sky. You felt sorry for all of them, on both sides." It was this attitude, "all of them, on both sides," that gave me the idea of what my book would be about: war is nothing more than killing. That's how it registered in women's memories. This person had just been smiling, smoking—and now he's gone. Disappearance was what women talked about most, how quickly everything can turn into nothing during war. Both the human being, and human time. Yes, they had volunteered for the front at 17 or 18, but they didn't want to kill. And yet—they were ready to die. To die for the Motherland. And to die for Stalin—you can't erase those words from history.

The book wasn't published for two years, not before perestroika and Gorbachev. "After reading your book no one will fight," the censor lectured me. "Your war is terrifying. Why don't you have any heroes?" I wasn't looking for heroes. I was writing history through the stories of its unnoticed witnesses and participants. They had never been asked anything. What do people think? We don't really know what people think about great ideas. Right after a war, a person will tell the story of one war, a few decades later, it's a different war, of course. Something will change in him, because he has folded his whole life into his memories. His entire self. How he lived during those years, what he read, saw, whom he met. What he believes in. Finally, whether is he happy or not. Documents are living creatures—they change as we change.

I'm absolutely convinced that there will never again be young women like the war-time girls of 1941. This was the high point of the "Red" idea, higher even than the Revolution and Lenin. Their Victory still eclipses the GULAG. I dearly love these women. But you couldn't talk to them about Stalin, or about the fact that after the war, whole trainloads of the boldest and most outspoken victors were sent straight to Siberia. The rest returned home and kept quiet. Once I heard: "The only time we were free was during the war. At the front." Suffering is our capital, our natural resource. Not oil or gas—but suffering. It is the only thing we are able to produce consistently. I'm always looking for the answer: why doesn't our suffering convert into freedom? Is it truly all in vain? Chaadayev was right: Russia is a country without memory, it's a space of total amnesia, a virgin consciousness for criticism and reflection.

But great books are piled up beneath our feet.

1989

I'm in Kabul. I don't want to write about war anymore. But here I am in a real war. The newspaper *Pravda* says: "We are helping the fraternal Afghan people build socialism." People of war and objects of war are everywhere. Wartime.

They wouldn't take me into battle yesterday: "Stay in the hotel, young lady. We'll have to answer for you later." I'm sitting in the hotel, thinking: there is something immoral in scrutinising other people's courage and the risks they take. I've been here for two weeks and I can't shake the feeling that war is a product of masculine nature, which is unfathomable to me. But the everyday accessories of war are grand. I discovered for myself that weapons are beautiful: machine guns, mines, tanks. Man has put a lot of thought into how best to kill other men. The eternal dispute between truth and beauty. They showed me a new Italian mine, and my "feminine" reaction was: "It's beautiful. Why is it beautiful?" They explained to me precisely, in military terms: if someone drives over or steps on this mine just so... at a certain angle... there would be nothing left but half a bucket of flesh. People talk about abnormal things here as though they're normal, taken for granted. Well, you know, it's war... No one is driven insane by these pictures—for instance, there's a man lying on the ground who was killed not by the elements, not by fate, but by another man.

I watched the loading of a "black tulip" (the airplane that carries casualties back home in zinc coffins). The dead are often dressed in old military uniforms from the '40s, with jodhpurs; sometimes there aren't even enough of those to go around. The soldiers were chatting: "They just delivered

some new ones to the fridges. It smells like boar gone bad." I am going to write about this. I'm afraid that no one at home will believe me. Our newspapers just write about friendship alleys planted by Soviet soldiers.

I talk to the guys. Many have come voluntarily. They asked to come here. I note that most are from educated families, the intelligentsia—teachers, doctors, librarians—in a word, bookish people. They sincerely dreamed of helping the Afghan people build socialism. Now they laugh at themselves. I was shown a place at the airport where hundreds of zinc coffins sparkle mysteriously in the sun. The officer accompanying me couldn't help himself: "Who knows... my coffin might be over there... They'll stick me in it... What am I fighting for here?" His own words scared him and he immediately said: "Don't write that down."

At night I dream of the dead, they all have looks of surprise on their faces: what, you mean I was killed? Have I really been killed?"

I drove to a hospital for Afghan civilians with a group of nurses—we brought presents for the children. Toys, candy, cookies. I had about five teddy bears. We arrived at the hospital, a long barracks. No one has more than a blanket for bedding. A young Afghan woman approached me, holding a child in her arms. She wanted to say something—over the last ten years almost everyone here has learned to speak a little Russian—and I handed the child a toy, which he took with his teeth. "Why his teeth?" I asked in surprise. She pulled the blanket off his tiny body —the little boy was missing both arms. "It was when your Russians bombed." Someone held me up as I began to fall.

I saw our "Grad" rockets turn villages into plowed fields. I visited an Afghan cemetery, which was about the length of one of their villages. Somewhere in the middle of the cemetery an old Afghan woman was shouting. I remembered the howl of a mother in a village near Minsk when they carried a zinc coffin into the house. The cry wasn't human or animal... It resembled what I heard at the Kabul cemetery...

I have to admit that I didn't become free all at once. I was sincere with my subjects, and they trusted me. Each of us has his or her own path to freedom. Before Afghanistan, I believed in socialism with a human face. I came back from Afghanistan free of all illusions. "Forgive me father," I said when I saw him. "You raised me to believe in communist ideals, but seeing those young men, recent Soviet schoolboys like the ones you and Mama taught (my parents were village school teachers), kill people they don't know, on foreign territory, was enough to turn all your words to ash. We are murderers, Papa, do you understand?!" My father cried.

Many people returned free from Afghanistan. But there are other examples, too. There was a young fellow in Afghanistan who shouted to me: "You're a woman, what do you understand about war? You think that people die a pretty death in war, like they do in books and movies? Yesterday my friend was killed, he took a bullet in the head, and kept running another ten meters, trying to catch his own brains..." Seven years later, the same fellow is a successful businessman, who likes to tell stories about Afghanistan. He called me: "What are your books for? They're too scary." He was a different person, no longer the young man I'd met amid death, who didn't want to die at age twenty...

I ask myself what kind of book I want to write about war. I'd like to write a book about a person who doesn't shoot, who can't fire on another human being, who suffers at the very idea of war. Where is he? I haven't met him.

1990–1997

Russian literature is interesting in that it is the only literature to tell the story of an experiment carried out on a huge country. I am often asked: why do you always write about tragedy? Because that's how we live. We live in different countries now, but "Red" people are everywhere. They come out of that same life, and have the same memories.

I resisted writing about Chernobyl for a long time. I didn't know how to write about it, what instrument to use, how to approach the subject. The world had almost never heard anything about my little country, tucked away in a corner of Europe, but now its name was on everyone's tongue. We, Belarusians, had become the people of Chernobyl. The first to encounter the unknown. It was clear now: besides communist, ethnic, and new religious challenges, there are more global, savage challenges in store for us, though for the moment they are invisible. Something opened a little bit after Chernobyl...

I remember an old taxi driver swearing in despair when a pigeon hit the windshield: "Every day, two or three birds smash into the car. But the newspapers say the situation is under control."

The leaves in city parks were raked up, taken out of town, and buried. The ground was cut out of contaminated areas and buried, too—earth was buried in the earth. Firewood was buried, and grass. Everyone looked a little crazy. An old beekeeper told me: "I went out into the garden that

morning, and something was missing, a familiar sound. There weren't any bees. I couldn't hear a single bee. Not one! What? What's going on? They didn't fly out on the second day either, or on the third... Then we were told that there was an accident at the nuclear station—and it isn't far away. But we didn't know anything about it for a long time. The bees knew, but we didn't." All the information about Chernobyl in the newspapers was in military language: explosion, heroes, soldiers, evacuation ... The KGB worked right at the station. They were looking for spies and saboteurs. Rumours circulated that the accident was planned by western intelligence services in order to undermine the socialist camp. Military equipment was on its way to Chernobyl, soldiers were coming. As usual, the system worked like it was war time, but in this new world, a soldier with a shiny new machine gun was a tragic figure. The only thing he could do was absorb large doses of radiation and die when he returned home.

Before my eyes pre-Chernobyl people turned into the people of Chernobyl.

You couldn't see the radiation, or touch it, or smell it ... The world around was both familiar and unfamiliar. When I travelled to the zone, I was told right away: don't pick the flowers, don't sit on the grass, don't drink water from a well ... Death hid everywhere, but now it was a different sort of death. Wearing a new mask. In an unfamiliar guise. Old people who had lived through the war were being evacuated again. They looked at the sky: "The sun is shining ... There's no smoke, no gas. No one's shooting. How can this be war? But we have to become refugees."

In the mornings everyone would grab the papers, greedy for news, and then put them down in disappointment. No spies had been found. No one wrote about enemies of the people. A world without spies and enemies of the people was also unfamiliar. This was the beginning of something new. Following on the heels of Afghanistan, Chernobyl made us free people.

For me the world parted: inside the zone I didn't feel Belarusian, or Russian, or Ukrainian, but a representative of a biological species that could be destroyed. Two catastrophes coincided: in the social sphere, the socialist Atlantis was sinking; and on the cosmic—there was Chernobyl. The collapse of the empire upset everyone. People were worried about everyday life. How and with what to buy things? How to survive? What to believe in? What banners to follow this time? Or do we need to learn to live without any great idea? The latter was unfamiliar, too, since no one had ever lived that way. Hundreds of questions faced the "Red" man, but he was on his own. He had never been so alone as in those first days of freedom. I was surrounded by people in shock. I listened to them...

I close my diary...

What happened to us when the empire collapsed? Previously, the world had been divided: there were executioners and victims—that was the GULAG; brothers and sisters—that was the war; the electorate—was part of technology and the contemporary world. Our world had also been divided into those who were imprisoned and those who imprisoned them; today there's a division between Slavophiles and Westernisers, "fascist-traitors" and patriots. And between those who can buy things and those who can't. The latter, I would say, was the cruelest of the ordeals to follow socialism, because not so long ago everyone had been equal. The "Red" man wasn't able to enter the kingdom of freedom he had dreamed of around his kitchen table. Russia was divvied up without him, and he was left with nothing. Humiliated and robbed. Aggressive and dangerous.

Here are some of the comments I heard as I travelled around Russia...

"Modernisation will only happen here with *sharashkas*, those prison camps for scientists, and firing squads."

"Russians don't really want to be rich, they're even afraid of it. What does a Russian want? Just one thing: for no one else to get rich. No richer than he is."

"There aren't any honest people here, but there are saintly ones."

"We'll never see a generation that hasn't been flogged; Russians don't understand freedom, they need the Cossack and the lash."

"The two most important words in Russian are 'war' and 'prison.' You steal something, have some fun, they lock you up... you get out, and then end up back in jail..."

"Russian life needs to be vicious and despicable. Then the soul is uplifted, it realises that it doesn't belong to this world ... The filthier and bloodier things are, the more room there is for the soul..."

"No one has the energy for a new revolution, or the craziness. No spirit. Russians need the kind of idea that will send shivers down your spine..."

"So our life just dangles between bedlam and the barracks. Communism didn't die, the corpse is still alive."

I will take the liberty of saying that we missed the chance we had in the 1990s. The question was posed: what kind of country should we have? A strong country, or a worthy one where people can live decently? We chose the former—a strong country. Once again we are living in an era of power. Russians are fighting Ukrainians. Their brothers. My father is Belarusian, my mother, Ukrainian. That's the way it is for many people. Russian planes are bombing Syria...

A time full of hope has been replaced by a time of fear. The era has turned around and headed back in time. The time we live in now is second-hand...

Sometimes I am not sure that I've finished writing the history of the "Red" man...

I have three homes: my Belarusian land, the homeland of my father, where I have lived my whole life; Ukraine, the homeland of my mother, where I was born; and Russia's great culture, without which I cannot imagine myself. All are very dear to me. But in this day and age it is difficult to talk about love.

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SPARROW CONGRATULATES

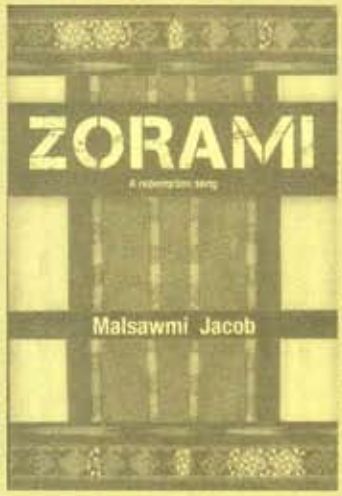
Writer/editor, social activist Vidya Bal for receiving Maharashtra Foundation Award (2015).

Writer Anuradha Roy for winning the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature (2016) for her novel ***Sleeping on Jupiter*** *at the Galle Literary Festival in Sri Lanka.*

Vidita Vaidya of TIFR Mumbai for receiving Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize for Science and Technology for Medical Sciences (2015).

Activist-Author Sunita Aralikar for receiving the 'Times Now' Amazing Indian Award (2016) in the category of Stree Shakti.

Zorami: A Redemption Song
by Malsawmi Jacob



Zorami:
A Redemption Song
by Malsawmi Jacob
Morph Books, 2014
No. of pages: 263
Price: 399/-
ISBN/EAN No
978-93-82759-10-2

Malsawmi Jacob's debut novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song* is a brave pioneer fictional account about Mizoram in the English language. It is, also, the first Mizo novel in English to delve into the two-decades long insurgency movement in the state, which entailed untold suffering for the people caught between the Indian Army and the Mizo National Front (MNF). It is a dark novel, with graphic descriptions of the brutalities, betrayals, power relations, loss, death, tortures and rapes; and, in most part, its intensity is over-powering. But, it is also 'A Redemption Song' in its use of lyricism in the many folk tales and folksongs have been used to recreate the ambience of the land, in the spirit of Christian forgiveness it revels in, the poetic, though sparse use of Mizo language and, on a more practical level, in the political and personal closure it offers to the trauma experienced by the land and its people. It is that rare insurgency novel which offers this kind of closure, with the Peace Accord signed in 1986 between the Government of India and the MNF, which claims that Mizoram is an 'island of peace' in the disturbed North-East region.

Right from its outset *Zorami* works on two levels: 'Zorami' is the Mizo term for Mizoram; so, the protagonist becomes a symbol for the inhabitants and for its land; the central motif—the rape of the protagonist Zorami by an Indian Army officer emerges as the symbol for the rape of Mizoram; the fact that her father works in the Indian Army is also symbolic—the Army which is supposed to be the protective father-figure, becomes the violator of the land. Her father reminds Zorami that she is 'a damaged woman', not only displaying insensitivity, but also serving as a reminder that though the healing may have taken place on a certain level, the hurt remains embedded deep within. Like the land, it is the women who are ruptured. Her relationship

with her husband Sanga also points to the same rupture: he is a broken man married to a damaged woman, and on her fiftieth birthday, she identifies with what W B Yeats refers to as 'a paltry thing/ a tattered coat upon a stick'. The redemption happens, in her case, when from the fear of the faithlessness of Sanga she moves to an understanding of his love for her. This personal story of Zorami's marital irritants can be seen as the frame story in which the larger narrative of insurgency unfolds.

Naturally, given its vast canvas, the novel is episodic. A host of fictional and real life characters (Pu Laldenga, for example) people it and many of the stories recounted are effective even as stand-alone stories, criss-crossing with inter-related episodes: for example, there is the story of Kimi, Zorami's childhood friend, whose father is killed, and whose mother is forced to become a bootlegger to support the family; and there is the story of the historical Nikhuma, the writer, who joins the MNF and is one of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence, and who faces brutalities at the hands of the Indian Army, including the arrest of his wife and children; his spirit is often crushed, but he survives and lives to become one of the important writers of the struggle. It is his novel that Kimi presents to Zorami on her fiftieth birthday.

Apart from the physical violence, *Zorami* also talks about the psychological toll these twenty years have taken on the people. The redemption does happen, but complete healing does not. In the novel itself, the desensitisation of the freedom fighters and the army personnel is starkly depicted. Ralkapa, the villain of the piece, begins as a young idealist; he loses his nerve when his four companions are subjected to an excrutiating death by torture in his presence; and when he is tempted with the opportunity to save his life by betraying his people, he takes it: he becomes an informer and leads so many of his people to their death. His transformation from an unwilling accomplice to a hardened, power-obsessed professional betrayer is delineated graphically: "At first, he was unhappy with his new appointment. He felt a pang every time he betrayed someone. But gradually, the task became routine, he got used to it and it stopped troubling him." And later, the sense of power itself becomes the central principle of his life: "'They are afraid of me,' he thought. The idea gave him a special thrill. *He now realised he possessed power over the people. Power to kill without using his hands, power to destroy lives.* He decided to use this power to his utmost advantage" (italics mine). The ultimate misuse comes when he uses this power to destroy the woman who had spurned him earlier; a woman whom he had been mildly interested in, but who becomes a victim because of a long-forgotten rejection. Most of the stand alone stories are, in this sense, representative and in a novel of this kind, the scope for individual characterisation is limited. So, we do remember characters, not so much because of their individual traits, but because of the episodes they are involved in. Right from the *mautam* (the dying of the bamboo trees) and the famine, the formation of the MNF, the Air Force strikes carried out by the Government of India, the re-grouping of villages, most of the MNF men going underground, the attacks by the Indian army, the inter killings by the Mizos themselves, —the dramatic happenings leave the reader overwhelmed and one is conscious that the fictional mode is a mere cover up for the historical happenings. It is not surprising that the central protagonists—Zorami, her husband, Ralkapa, Kimi, her family, are present most often on the periphery of the novel. Zoram, is, no doubt, the heart of the work, in the sense that it is Mizoram that is central; but Zorampari has to, by necessity, remain on the sidelines of a tale that is far deeper and intricate than the story of an individual or a family. She holds the narrative together, but more as a symbol than as a person.

Zorami is Malsawmi's paean to the soil and people of Mizoram. It is significant for us because it is imperative to pay heed to a voice from the North East; especially a voice which speaks with so much conviction and commitment that, given the political will to work towards a peaceful solution, insurgency movements need not be lost causes. A clear message for the troubled times in which terrorism is alive at local, national and global levels.

—Charanjeet Kaur

SPARROW CONGRATULATES

Jyoti Mhapsekar, a writer, poet, stage performer, director, social activist, environmentalist and one of the founding members of Stree Mukti Sanghatana, for being honoured with Nari Shakti Puraskar (2015) by the Government of India on the International Women's Day.

Volga, The Telugu writer, for winning the Sahitya Akademi award (2015) for her short story collection Vimukta Kathalu. Gowri Kirubanandan 's translation of it into Tamil, Meetchi, has also been awarded

Lady Lokasundari Raman: Reflections of Her Early Life and Times
by Uma Parmeswaran

Lady Lokasundari Raman: Reflections of Her Early Life and Times by Uma Parmeswaran
Manipal University Press, 2013
No of pages: 328;
Price: 380/-
ISBN No: 978-93-82460-10-7

Uma Parmeswaran, the well known English writer, academic and critic, is well aware of the complexity of the task she has taken up in her illuminating biography of Lady Lokasundari Raman. Taking off from her commissioned biography of Dr C V Raman, she makes the deliberate nature of her choices clear right at the outset: it is an account of growing up, of the first twenty-eight years of Lokasundari's life, till the much-desired and much-awaited birth of her first child only; the later part of her life, after the 1930s, the success story—the award of the Nobel prize in Physics to C V Raman, Lokasundari's own coming of age as a social being, her advocacy of various contemporary issues, especially those related to the welfare of women and animals, and her active role in establishing and presiding over charitable organisations—does not form part of this narrative.

The early life of Lokasunadari is steeped in struggles and restrictions. Two factors stand out as the roots of the travails she has to overcome before she can come into her own as the wife of the Nobel laureate and who can proudly claim it as 'our prize': her rigorous childhood training, imparted, almost exclusively, by her maverick brother-in-law, Sivan, (her sister, Lakshmi's husband), leading to her intersectal marriage with Raman; her marriage itself, which takes her from Madurai to Kolkatta to Rangoon and back South again,—a marriage that remains unconsummated for 14 years in spite of the fact that the couple lives together.

Her childhood experiences are crystallised in the unspoken injunction that she receives through the strict routine that Sivan sets for her: 'She ought not desire anything, ought not yearn for any material possessions; she ought to gratefully accept whatever was thrown her way.' So, she is sent to an English medium school for a few days and is removed from the school for reasons she understands only much later, leading to a sporadic education; the near-ascetic life that is imposed upon her by Sivan with his diktat that she wear no jewellry or flowers, as do the other girls: self-denial is to be her way of life, she learns very early in life.

By far, the most traumatic happening is her intersectal marriage, arranged by Sivan, on the insistence of Raman, without the initial knowledge and consent of her father, Krishnaswami. It is like a conflict of wills between the three adamant men, without even the slightest reference to the wishes of the girl herself. The dramatic postponement of the marriage and later on its accomplishment, are marked by the silence of the girl in question, making her silence her strongest voice. It is, indeed, telling, that Uma Parmeswaran does not record the emotional responses of Lady Raman herself to the goings-on which happen as a prelude to her marriage. The narration at this point is kept bare and straight-laced, leaving the reader to understand for herself what trauma it must have been to the 13-year-old girl. Her father's heart-breaking cry when he sees her off after the marriage, however, becomes a sign of the struggles that lie in store for her: 'Oh my child, what have I done? To what fate am I sending you? Heartless and ruthless have I been.'

That the marriage remains unconsummated for 14 long years is itself a cause for her unhappiness; but one which she takes in her stride; as she does the lack of companionship because of her husband's mad schedules with his 9-to-5 government job and his scientific experiments after working hours; also, her mother-in-law's taunts at the stigma attached to her lower sub-caste status. Coupled with this is the fact that Raman resents her attempts to formally educate herself (he prevents her from joining an English school) and to build a kind of independence for herself (he tears up her bank pass books when he learns that she has opened a bank account for herself). Most of the time, Raman comes across as a genius, an achiever, a man who is confident about and proud of his destiny, a strong willed, determined scientist, who, however, demands unending sacrifices from his wife in the fulfillment of his destiny. The biographer, who happens to be Raman's niece, has deftly touched upon his insensitivity and callousness towards his wife and her stoic acceptance of her fate.

But the narration is not bleak—Uma Parmeswaran writes with rich empathy that brings these episodes to life, filling in details of the society and ethos of the times. As Uma claims, the book is the story of not just one woman but about 'several women's lives connected by one woman...' The many women who people the book—the boisterous sister Lakshmi, Parvathi Ammal, the gossipy Mangalam, her dark and talented mother Kuppa, the Bengali Thakurma, Seetha, Aunt Gnanum—are seen through the eyes of Lokasundari and interwoven with her experiences. They present the life of women at the time: the early marriages, their conscious attempts to create their own space within a marriage, the

multiple child births—above all their companionship and camaraderie that has been essential to the very survival of the women.

But the book does not restrict itself to the woman's world. The late 19th century with its rapid changes in the social fabric due to reforms and the introduction of English education had a great impact on the South Indian Brahmin family; Lokasundari's father, Krishnaswami, is among the first Brahmins to get an English education and a stable government job. He is a kind of rebel in his youth, who, however, learns to adopt progressive ideas and decisions, without burning bridges with the conservative community. He crosses the seas when he takes up a job at Ceylon, thus becoming a caste offender, but later on subjects himself to the purification rites in order to be accepted back in his caste. The very detailing of his exposure to the poverty in his surroundings during the famine is a sensitive portrayal of the social conditions of the times. Similarly, Uma evokes the sense of place and the cultural mores of the different places across the subcontinent, where Raman's job takes them. It is this evocation of the holistic ambience of the age that justifies Uma's claim that 'It is not about oppression, but about celebration of life with all its restrictions'. It is about the process of overcoming —for Lokasundari, for the other women and for the quasi-rebellious men it portrays.

In the Preface to the book, Uma wonders whether the book presents 'memoirs of my time with Lokasundari Raman or, ... her memoirs as told through me, where I have been, I believe, a faithful scribe?' This introspection is significant, because the voice of Lokasundari is present throughout, thus, breaking the silence which one encounters; it is never intrusive or loud; distance in time and memory gives it an objectivity and balance that infuses the narration with poise. The woman who remembers is a mature woman who is looking back with the wisdom and humour of hindsight at the woman who has suffered way back in time; not, in any way, negating the suffering or the oppression she has been through, but pointing to the fact that all this was a paving of the way to a richer and more fulfilling life.

—Charanjeet Kaur

SPARROW CONGRATULATES

Renowned author Jerry Pinto for winning the Windham-Campbell Prize (2016) instituted by the Yale University, USA, for his novel Em and the Big Hoom..

Maajhi Kahani

by Parvatibai Athavle

Maajhi Kahani by Parvatibai Athavle
Rajhans Prakashan, 2013
No of pages: 100;
Price: 100/-
ISBN No: 978-81-74346-01-8

The sub-title of *Maajhi Kahani* by Parvatibai Athavle, *Mahrashi Karve Yanchya Sanstheteel Karyakarti che Atmakathan* indicates that it is not just the story of an ordinary activist. It is not limited only to her story or her activism, but it is grounded in the progressive background of 19th and 20th century history of Maharashtra. This small book (91 pages being the actual memoir itself) was first published in 1928; it has now been republished, with the original introduction of Dhondo Keshav Karve and the 'Rajhans' perspective written by Vinaya Khadpekar, in which she extols the virtues of Parvatibai, a common, illiterate widow who rose above her circumstances and made a valuable contribution to contemporary society.

This book spans 50 years of her life from her birth till her return from the US. But the book is very small because Parvatibai writes about her life 'as it happened'. There is no adornment of language, no amplification. She, briefly, mentions her marriage and married life within two to three pages, and eventually talks about her own ideas regarding social issues like the status of contemporary women in India, marriage rituals and subjects like cleanliness and sanitary conditions. She offers advice to organisations and activists working in the field of women's education. She offers these ideas and advice not merely as a social worker, but as a person deeply involved in her work, which she is sharing with her readers.

Parvatibai was born in 1870 in a village called Devrukh in a Brahmin family. At that time there was no question of girls' education. As she humorously says 'girls' matriculation [meant] to make *pithala-bhat* and be able to cook for two people'. In this way, at the age of 11, she became a 'matric'. In those days girls used to get married at the age of 5 or 7. So, when she got married at the age of 11 she was considered 'too old'. Later, her life was like that of any other ordinary woman spent in family and maternity. A son, born when she was 18, survived. She lost her husband when she was 20. As per the customs of the time, her head was tonsured, and she started wearing a maroon coloured sari, giving up all jewellery. She

returned to her maternal home. Her two sisters were also widows and lived in their maternal home. Up to this time, her life was that of any ordinary woman. But her life took a turn after her third sister Baya's remarriage with Dhondo Keshav Karve. Widow remarriage was finding acceptance in cities like Pune and Mumbai at that time, but in the village of Devrukh, their family was ostracised because of her sister's remarriage.

The doors of women's education and women's progress were opened to Parvatibai because of Karve. With Baya Karve's motivation, she started going to school. Karve's plan of Vidhavashram was taking shape and for that he needed a lady teacher. So Parvatibai trained as a teacher and she started working with Karve at Hingane. Later, she decided to become a life-time activist of the ashram.

Had she remained at Devrukh she would have spent her life like any other widow, but because she came to Pune and got educated, her mind and her life were transformed. She progressed rapidly, taking her own decisions of becoming a life-long activist and making her work the goal of her life. To begin with, she started by taking up any work the ashram required, but later, when she realised that Karve was burdened with many other responsibilities, she took up the work of getting donations for the ashram. And she fulfilled this responsibility with honesty, full dedication and in the face of difficult circumstances. This work made her realise the power and qualities within herself. She travelled all over Maharashtra, and later, India and America. Wherever there was a possibility of getting donations she would go to give lectures, explain the work of ashram in meetings, and ask for donations. She had to face many obstacles. But since she was firm in her aim, she tirelessly continued her work.

At a later period, she changed her appearance; she gave up her widow's garb and grew her hair. Appreciating her work for the ashram, Karve decided to send her to America when she was 45. She had to face many obstacles and much criticism from people for this decision. But she went to America and was there for three years, spreading information about the ashram and its work and generating funds. She was conscious that her travel and living expenses should not be a burden on the ashram, and she even took up the job of a maid, in some houses. She came into contact with Christian missionaries and Indian students. She had both good and bad experiences during her stay in the US. For example, she met a Bengali student who strongly opposed her work and said that she was denigrating the image of Indian women and Brahminism and it would be better for her to go back to India. He also made all arrangements to send her back. But due to the support of other students, she could continue her work in the US.

She was able to attend the International Workers' Conference at Washington as a 'representative Hindi [Indian] woman working in the US'. At the conference, she met Oriyeli, an unmarried Irish lady, who lived with her mother, near New York and was working for women workers and for her motherland, Ireland. She invited Parvatibai to stay with them. Parvatibai worked and lived with them for a year and a quarter. She was greatly inspired by Oriyeli. Also, Oriyeli's contacts helped her in spreading information about Karve's work for women's education in several conferences and meetings, and also in generating funds for the ashram. After three years in the US, she returned to India and resumed her work in Hingane.

When we visualise the canvas of this life, we are left wondering. A woman born in 1870, who lived on into the early decades of the 20th century, coming from an ordinary family, a villager, an uneducated widow with a son, who was influenced by education and the philosophy of Karve rose to the occasion and transformed her own world and for those around her. She took her own decisions even though she belonged to a time when women's lives were full of restrictions. Whether it was the decision of staying at Pune at her sister's house, and getting herself educated against her parents' will, or taking the responsibility of collecting donations for the ashram to share the burden of Karve, or whether it was the decision of her son's marriage or her decision of going to the US, or the decision of changing her appearance, she stood firm, and owned the responsibility, while facing much opposition for her actions.

Due to the pressures of contemporary society in which Parvatibai had to face much opposition, her autobiography remained neglected when it was first published in 1928 and for a long time after that. Vijaya Khadapekar says in her Introduction that this neglect is probably also due to the fact that Parvatibai, unlike other contemporary women autobiographers like Lakshmibai Tilak (*Smritichitre*) and Ramabai Ranade (*Amchya Ayusatil Kahi Athavani*), does not dwell upon her married life and is not supported by the reputation of an illustrious husband.The timely re-publication (by Rajhans Prakashan) of this simple autobiography seeks to overcome this long-standing neglect and is, therefore, a welcome addition to an understanding of the life and times of Parvatibai, the work of Dhono Keshav Karve and their unparalleled contribution to the cause of women's education.

—Sharmila Sontakke

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

Singing from the Heart: Veena Chitko (1935- 19 September 2015)

When Veena Chitko was born her father Master Krishnarao Phulambrikar, a student of Bhaskarbhuwa Bakhale and employed in Bal Gandharva's Gandharva Natak Mandali, had been invited by the legendary filmmaker V Shantaram to be the music director for his film *Dharmatma* where Bal Gandharva did the role of Sant Eknath. The year was 1935. Thus began her musical journey with her father as her guru. Trained by her father Veena herself became one of the best music directors of the Marathi film industry and also a lyricist. In 2011, when she was 75 she was invited by the Bhavna Trust for one of its *Sunehre Pal* programmes where old film songs are heard and discussed by a group of music lovers. Veena Chitko spoke about film musicians who used to visit their home and her memories of Muhammad Rafi visiting them. The years she grew up must have been heady days of music but there is no record of it. She published her father's autobiography *Bola Amrita Bola*, in 1985, a year after his death. One wishes she had written one too which would have given us the musical history of her times and her own musical life. In her song *Man majhe bhulale* there is a line *anthariche geet umagale*; it is a line that reflects her own way of singing from the heart. Her demise is recorded in just two lines in newspapers. This is how the history women make is forgotten and wiped out.

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Bridging Two Diverse Cultures: Suniti Deshpande (8 November 1954 – 23 September 2015)

The voice of Russian culture, language and literature in Mumbai and India for the past 30 years, Dr Suniti Deshpande, - academician, writer, voice-over artist, translator and journalist, has left a space that seems difficult to fill. She brought her knowledge of Marathi, Hindi, English and Sanskrit to bear upon her extensive translations across English and Russian. As head of the Cultural Centre of Russia, Mumbai, since the heyday of Indo-Russian collaboration, Dr Deshpande has translated various Russian classics into English, written seven books and more than 400 articles, essays and short stories which were published in *Loksatta, Maharashtra Times, Dharma Yug, Sakal, and Samna*, among others. She has been honoured as the Best Russian Teacher in the World by the Russian Cultural Centre (2103), the Pushkin Medal for Lifetime Contribution to Russian Literature (2007) which she received from President Vladimir Putin, and was the winner of the International MAPRYL Contest (Contest for Russian Language Masters, 2011). She is also the recipient of the Honorary Expert of Russian language scholarship for South Asia, by UNESCO in 1986, National Dakshina Fellowship for exemplary academic achievement, awarded by President of India (1975-1977), and National UGC Fellowship (1982-1985). A voice that spoke across so many languages has been lost.

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An Aachi to All: Manorama (1937 – 10 October 2015)

Manorama, the famous comedienne, who graduated to character roles, passed away last year, after a prolonged illness, was affectionately known as Aachi (Mother) in Tamil Nadu. Manorama appeared in more than 1500 films, 5000 stage performances, and several television series until 2015. She entered the *Guinness World Records* for acting in more than 1000 films in 1985. By 2015, she had acted in more than 1500 films.

Manorama was born as Gopi Shantha, and had to endure hard times as her father threw her mother out of the house for he did not want a girl child. Her mother then had to work as a maid to bring up her child and at one time, she has said in an interview, that her mother had only one sari and when she was bathing in the river, Manorama would run around drying the sari! At one point her mother became sick and Manorama, at the age of eleven, became a maid herself.

She began acting in plays from a very young age and she caught the attention of S S Rajendran, who was a famous actor in Tamil movies at that time. She later acted as a comedienne, in her first film, *Malayitta Mangai* (1958). It was Kavignar Kannadasan, a famous lyricist, who advised her to concentrate on comedy roles, as heroines had a brief screen life. In *Thillana Mohanambal*, she acted with Shivaji Ganesan and Padmini. She played the role of Jil Jil Ramamani which is remembered to this day. Later on, she began to appear as the mother of heroes and heroines and even there, she essayed her roles with great finesse. Journalist Cho Ramaswamy, in fact, called her a female Shivaji, saying she equalled his acting prowess. Whenever she did the role of a mother she did an excellent job for she never forgot her mother's role in her life and always mentioned her mother in her interviews.

She is the only actress, who has had the good fortune

to act with five Chief Ministers of South India, namely, C N Annadurai, M K Karunanidhi, M G Ramachandran, Jayalalitha and N T Rama Rao. She was also a singer who sang more than 300 songs.

Her personal life was not a happy one. She married the manager of her drama troupe but they were separated in 1966. She had been let down by the three men in her life. Her father, her husband, who deserted her and her son, Bhoopathi, who did not fulfill the ambitions his mother had nursed for him. But, in spite of all that, through sheer grit, tenacity and talent, she carved a niche for herself in Tamil films, which may not be filled for many years to come.

—Rajeswari Thiagarajan

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An Architect and An Activist: Himani Savarkar (31 March 1947 - 12 October 2015)

Himani Savarkar (Asilata Godse) passed away, after a six-month battle with cancer and brain tumour, at the age of 68 on 12 October 2015. Trained as an architect, the daughter of Gopal Godse, joined politics in 2000 as a member of the Hindu Mahasabha; she rose to become the President of Abhinav Bharat. Himani unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha and Maharashtra State Assembly Elections in 2004 and 2009, respectively. She worked for according greater recognition to Lokmanya Tilak, V D Savarkar and V B Phadke as Indian freedom fighters. She was the daughter-in-law of Narayan Savarkar, the brother of V D Savarkar. Her vision included the promotion of Sanskrit as a national duty.

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A Cross Cultural Bridge: Meena Vangikar (1950 – 22 October 2015)

When Meena Vangikar, the cross cultural bridge between Kannada and Marathi literatures visited her ancestral village, Hudli, shortly before her death, the entire village had gathered to see the daughter of V M Inamdar, the renowned writer who had made the village proud. Her own contribution is no less significant: translation of hundreds of short stories by eminent Kannada writers like Masti Venkatesh Iyengar, Vyasaraya Ballal, Yashwant Chittal, Anupama Niranjan, Raghvendra Khasnis, Niranjana, Prof L S Sheshagiri Rao, Shantaram Somyaji, Jayant Kaykini, Nemichandra, Jayashree Deshpande, Shantadevi Kanavi into Marathi and their publication in various Marathi journals and periodicals such as *Kirloskar, Swarajya, Kesari, Sakal,* and *Stree*. She also translated Shivaram Karanth's *Mookajjiya Kanasugalu* , *Bandaya* by Vyasarao Banal, *Moolamukhi* by Anupama Nilanjana, *Dhoomaluethu* by Raobahaddur, and her father's novels *Vijaya Yatre* and *Trishanku*, thus bringing Kannada culture closer home to the Marathi readership and enriching it.

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Together We Marched: Surekha Panindikar (1935 - 31 October 2015)

Surekha Panindikar dedicated herself to the education of children and bringing the world alive for them by inspiring reading habits in them with literature, storytelling and the library movements she initiated with more than 75 libraries. Her books for children in Marathi, English and Hindi and her extensive publications in newspapers and magazines were formally recognised with the award of Jeevangaurav Puruskar by All India Marathi Children's and Young Adult Literature Foundation. She has been active as convener of the AWIC Children's Library Project that won IBBY Asahi Reading Promotion Award in 1991, President of the Lekhika Sangh, and Member of Executive Committee of Associations of Writers and Illustrators for Children. Her popular books include *M for Mystery: Stories of Mystery and Adventure, Letters from Grandparents, A For Adventure, Chulbuli Chani, MAA MAA Hi Kai, Bridge at Borim, Chitku, Chitku in the Zoo* and *Together we Marched.*

Daughter of noted economist and former union minister Kakasaheb Gadgil and sister of barrister Vithalrao Gadgil (former union minister) she was a graduate from the Delhi School of Economics 'Together we marched' she could easily say to children with whom she undertook so many literary journeys.

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The Writer Who Brought Laughter into the Lives of Children: Kamala Laxman (1927 - 14 November 2015)

Kamala Laxman was the well-known author of the Thama stories and tales of Tenali Raman which India Book House commissioned her to write in the 1970s. Her stories have filled the childhood years of many children in India, for the Tenali Raman stories

were later serialised telecast and by Doordarshan. She was the second wife of the famous cartoonist R K Laxman and she also happened to be his niece. Kamala lived a long and fruitful life, not only being a recognised writer, but also being a warm companion to her more famous cartoonist husband. Her stories will continue to be part of the life of children for many generations to come.

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The Humane Healing Touch: Saroj Vashisht (1932 - 5 December 2015)

At 83, the death of Saroj Vashisht, Hindi writer, translator and activist, seems untimely. And not merely because of the tragic death by suffocation she faced; also because as Kiran Bedi says of her: 'Her zest for life was incredible. She proved to be extremely dynamic in all spheres of community work, especially in those aspects related to adolescents and juveniles.' Her literacy drive with the inmates of Tihar jail is exemplary, resulting in the publication of three books of poetry by them and the performance of several plays. The Kusumanjali Foundation at India International Centre, New Delhi, honoured her with a Fellowship for her unfinished novel *Airaaf*, relaxing the age criterion for her. *Airaaf* will, unfortunately, remain forever, incomplete now. Born in Jalandhar, Punjab, Saroj was a graduate from Delhi University and had diplomas in French and Japanese. She retired as Translator-Announcer, AIR (1964-1989). She was also a translator with UNICEF, Aga Khan Foundation and Indian News and Features Alliance. She was General Secretary of SLWA Kala Karam, and was associated actively with the Tihar and Kaithu Jail, Delhi and Shimla Project in the field of Art, Literature and Theatre. In 1991-92, she was a Theatre Evaluator at Sahitya Kala Parishad, Delhi. She has been honoured by the Vijaya Gujral Foundation Award in 1995. A woman of deep understanding, indeed, whose life work has been to humanise convicted criminals and to sensitise society towards them.

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'Only Memory Has Preservatives': Hema Upadhayay (1972 - 11 December 2015)

Hema Upadhayay's short, tragic life packs in memorable work in photography and sculptural installations which are remarkable for their innovation and acute social consciousness. Her internationally renowned work seeks to explore notions of personal identity, dislocation, nostalgia and gender and draws upon her own personal and family experiences of migration. From her first solo exhibition 'Sweet Sweat Memories' in 2001 and 'The Nymph and the Adult' in which she hand sculpted 2000 lifelike cockroaches and infested the art gallery with them, to later work like 'Where the Bee Sucks, there Suck I', the social and political messages were loud and clear: partition, mass migration, mindless urbanisation, consumerism, globalisation and the consequences of military actions. Her miniature self portraits reflect 'urban entropy through a feminist reconfiguration of the genre of self-portraiture' in the words of Nancy Adajania.

Hema's installations have been part of group shows at: Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China; National Portrait Gallery Canberra, Australia; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Museum on the Seam, Jerusalem, Israel; MACRO museum, Rome, Italy; IVAM, Valencia, Spain; Mart Museum, Italy; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan; Hanger Bicocca, Milan, Italy; Chicago Cultural Centre, Chicago, USA; Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux Arts, Paris, France; Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan; Japan Foundation, Tokyo and the Henie Onstad Kunssenter, Oslo, Norway. She was the only Indian artist to be part of the inaugural exhibition for the Reopening of the MACRO Museum, Rome.

Hema is the daughter of the sculptor Bina Ramani and was married briefly to Chintan Upadhayay. On 11 December 2015, she was found murdered along with her lawyer Harish Bhambhani. 'I think I see my works as a whole, because one idea leads to another', is how she defines the links between the physical and the mental aspects of her art. A life richly lived and so tragically cut short!

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Abhi toh dil bhara nahin: Sadhana (2 September 1941 - 25 December 2015)

If the black-and-white images of Sadhana are a picture of grace and ethereal beauty, the colour images project her as the fashion icon she emerged as, holding her own in an industry in which stalwarts like Meena Kumari, Nargis, Nutan and Madhubala held sway. From her debut in the Sindhi film *Abaana* as a 16-year-old and *Love in Shimla* in Hindi, she has acted in more than 30 films, essaying memorable, soft romantic roles as in *Parakh, Asli Naqli, Hum Dono, Ek Musafir Ek Hasina,* and *Gaban,* before turning to dramatic mysterious portrayals in *Who Kaun Thi, Mera Saaya* and *Anita.* As one of the few women directors of her time, the lady with the iconic fringe cut, she left her mark in the minds of the audiences not only because of her often underplayed performances, but also because of the soulful

music that is associated with her films; Sanjay Leela Bansali rightly remembers her as the actress who sang the best of Madan Mohan, Salil Chowdhury and Lata Mangheshkar songs on screen.

Married to R K Nayyar, the film director, and niece of the actor Hari Shivdasani, Sadhana was launched by S Mukherjee in 1960 along with Joy Mukherjee. Her struggles with a thyroid problem, intense loneliness in the wake of her husband's death in 1995, and the legal property disputes she was involved in made her a near-recluse in later life and she died a lonely death. Her last appearance on the ramp with Ranbir Kapoor at a function organised for the welfare of cancer patients showed the ravages that time had wrought; and yet, the final image of the aged Sadhana dressed in a pink sari, smiling, is endearing and reminds one that *jahan mein aisa kaun hai, ke jis ko gum mila nahin.*

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Balancing Development and Health: Dr Vijaya Venkat (1946- 6 January 2016)

Dr Vijaya Venkat's name is synonymous with health, nutrition, holistic living natural living and natural farming. Founder of the Anna Jagruti Kendra, The Health Awareness Centre (THAC), established in 1989 along with Kamala Vichare, her work, incorporating food, health, ecology and employment, reinforces the link between our daily habits and their effect on the environment. Armed with an honours degree in Chemistry, a PG Diploma in Dietetics and Nutrition and a PhD degree in Nutritional Science, conferred by the College of Life Sciences, Texas, Dr Venkat sought to introduce healthy lifestyles, especially in deprived, rural communities.

Vijaya's work in health sciences has earned her accolades from international bodies like the Medicina Alternativa International, Denmark, The World Wellness Open University and Divine Noni Biotech. Her personal interactions with the grand masters—M Fukouka, Bhaskar Save, Sunderlal Bahuguna, Baba Amte, Bill Mollison, and Winnin Pereira enabled her to share the connections and similarities between our Body and the Earth. She was the Vice President of 'Prakruti' a platform for bringing together activists and consumers. She introduced the concept of Streekheti at Vangani, Maharashtra, and trained and motivated Anganwadi workers to redesign and provide wholesome, nutritious food to 400 children for the midday meal programme. She was instrumental in establishing a trust - TRUTH (Trust for Re-education and Understanding of True Health) focussing on research, documentation, training and awareness in Health Care and Earth Care at Vangani. She, along with the THAC team, formulated a course for natural living for Indira Gandhi National Open University. Her efforts to enable people to take care of their health without external intervention, and her inspiration to people to embrace the simple fundamentals that govern health and well-being need to be taken up in a big way as a fitting tribute to her memory.

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'Voice of the Heart': Mrinalini Sarabhai (11 May 1918–21 January 2016)

When Mrinalani Sarabhai passed away at the age of 97, tributes came in for her stellar Manipuri and Bharatnatyam dance performances, the Darpana Academcy of Performing Arts which she established in 1948, her perceptive political and social consciousness which became an integral part of her choreographic practices, and for her hands-on philanthropic work. As the noted dancer Ranjana Dave recalls, she once said "I was looking for subjects that would shake people in dance". So, as in the 1960's 'Memory is a Ragged Fragment of Eternity' which was prompted by the high suicide rates of women in India, she combines a sense of celebration of womanhood in the midst of raging issues that lead to tragedy.

Belonging to an illustrious family—her father being a noted barrister, her mother a freedom fighter and a member of the first parliament of India, her sister Captain Lakshmi Sehgal, her prominent scientist husband, Vikram Sarabhai—Mrinalini herself emerged as a quiet revolutionary and a cultural icon for more than three generations. The Gandhian influence on her came from her sister Mrudula who had joined Gandhiji at Naokhali in 1946 and through her father-in-law, Ambalal Sarabhai. Her Gurus, Rabindranath Tagore, Muthukumara Pillai and Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai and her western education ensured that she was steeped in cultural values which were deeply spiritual and progressive. She was always in tune with the 'Voice of the Heart' as she named her autobiography. Her mystic poem 'Kaan' is about her deep love for Krishna; she was a devout Hindu who believed that tolerance was the highest virtue.

As she passed into immortality, the abiding image that remains in the mind is that of the dance performance of her daughter Mallika, before her last rites—reinforcing the picture of dignity, grace and celebration, with which Mrinalini will be remembered.

A Twilight Death: Kalpana Ranjani (13 October 1965 – 25 January 2016)

Kalpana Ranjani, passed away in January this year, when she had gone to Hyderabad, to shoot for a bi-lingual. She was the elder sister of Urvashi, a famous Tamil and Malayalam actress.

Kalpana began her career as a child artiste in the film *Vidarunna Mottukal* (1977) directed by P Subramaniam, but her debut film as an actor was G Aravindan's *Pokkuveyil* (1980). In Tamil her debut film was *Chinna Veedu* (1985) where she starred opposite K Bhagyaraj, which won her a lot of critical acclaim. Another memorable film she did was *Sathi Leelavathi* (1995). Kalpana did not possess the usual assets that a film heroine is expected to have. She herself would say that she had the cylindrical lunch box figure and never regretted playing character roles as they left a deeper impression on the viewers. She continued to act in Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu films. She got married to Malayalam Film Director, Anil Kumar, in 1998 but the marriage ended in 2012. She leaves behind a daughter, 16 year-old Sreemayi. The Govt of Kerala honoured her by giving her a State Funeral. Her life ended even while in twilight (pokkuveyil) and a brilliant night with stars and a beautiful dawn did not happen.

—Rajeswari Thiagarajan

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'As much Muslim as Hindu': Intezar Husain (7 December 1923 - 2 February 2016)

Intezar Husain's novels and short stories, 'spun on an oriental loom' in the words of Keki Daruwala, straddle the ground between a deep seated nostalgia for undivided India, a gentle and humanist look at the two partitions of 1947 and 1971, and the growing disenchantment of Pakistan with its identity and its radicalisation under successive regimes. Drawing from sources as diverse as Babylonian, Greek and Hindu mythologies, Biblical, Quranic and Buddhist texts, magical tales of West Asian and Indian origin, and the traditions of the moralistic fable, the Qissa and the Dastan, Husain moves away from the realistic tradition of the Progressive Writers' Movement to blend realistic narratives with surrealism, fable and parable. Vigorously political, his writing expands into larger metaphysical and archetypal concerns that are infused in the stories of the Indian subcontinent.

With his death at the age of 92, Intezar Husain leaves behind a body of work—especially his trilogy—*Naya Ghar* (The New House), *Aage Samunder Hai* (The Sea Lies Ahead) and *Basti* (Town)—which can be read as an alternative history of the subcontinent and the blurring of political lines that divide India, Pakistan and Bangla Desh. Shortlisted for the Man Booker Award in 2013, the 'Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters' was conferred upon him by the French Ambassador to Pakistan, Philppe Thiebaud, in 2014. He was also the recipient of the third highest civilian award of Pakistan, the Sitara-e-Imtiaz.

His colossal contribution to literature goes far beyond awards, though. Rakshanda Jalil, the translator of *The Sea Lies Ahead* says, his panoramic vision is that of 'a brave man [who dared] to speak of the soiling of dreams, to look inwards and outwards.' To limit him as a Pakistani writer would be a disservice to both Intezar Husain and to his Indian roots in Bulandshahr district, where he was born.

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'Muqammil Jahan': Nida Fazli (12 October 1938 – 8 February 2016)

Poet and film lyricist, Nida Fazli, who passed away at the age of 78, gave soul to Hindi film music long after its golden era was over and the demands of the marketplace had replaced poetry with inane verses and jagged rhythms. The only one from his family to have opted to stay in India during partition, his poetry 'travels in many directions' and blends the urban with the rural ambience, while reflecting upon human relationships and Nature, in seemingly simple stanzas. Partition, for him, remained an unresolved tragedy. '*kya dukh hai samandar ko bata bhi nahi sakta/ aansu ki tarah ankh mein aa bhi nahi sakta*'.

Nida Fazli, it appears, felt the force of poetry for the first time in his childhood, when he heard a Surdas bhajan sung in a temple. Later on, Mir, Mirza Ghalib, Meerabai, Kabir and T S Eliot opened up news vistas of the poetic in him as he went on to become a major film lyricist and Urdu poet. The awards that have brought recognition to his work (his six poetry books and his film lyrics) include the Khusro Award, Best Poetry Award from Maharashtra Urdu Academy, Hindi Urdu Sangam Award and Sahitya Akademi Award and Padma Shri. His essays in his book *Mulaqatein* was critical of the poetic modes of the 1960s and earned him the ire of stalwant poets like Sahir Ludhianvi, Kaifi Azmi and Ali Sardar Jafri. So, here was a poet who could compose the philosophic '*kabhi kisi ko muqammil jahan nahi milta*' and also the hauntingly sensuous '*ai dile nadaan*'.

'His Poetry Smells of the Raw Earth': ONV Kurup (27 May 1931 – 13 February 2016)

"When one day I vacate this rented abode called Earth, I will leave a vital element of my living presence here—that is my poetry," said Ottaplakkal Neelakandan Velu Kurup, in his acceptance speech at Bharatiya Jnanpith Awards function in 2010. True, his poetry, which reflects his Marxist leanings and his concern for the rights of the oppressed and working classes and his active championing of the rights of the aggrieved, is a cultural treasure of the Indian literary tradition and earned him the title of 'Peoples' Poet'. He moves into larger concerns in his poems as in *Bhommikkoru Charamageetham* (A Requiem for Mother Earth) which reflects his environmental concerns and the need to protect and preserve the rain forests of Kerala. His literary output is eclectic—including 20 volumes of poetry, 900 film songs in 232 films and several songs written for plays and private albums.

A multi-dimensional personality—poet, popular film lyricist, academician and professor—ONV has also been honoured by the Padma Vibhushan and Padma Shri, and numerous other awards. The Jnanpith recognised him as a "progressive writer [who] matured into a humanist though he never gave up his commitment to socialist ideology." His popularity with the masses is evident from the fact that ONV won the Best Lyricist Award from various bodies as many as 17 times. He has served as an Executive Member, Executive Board of the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi from 1982–86, as Chairman, Kerala Kalamandalam—the State Akademi of Classical performing Arts in 1996 and was a Fellow of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi in 1999. In recognition of his services, a State funeral was accorded to him by the Kerala Government.

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A Man of Many Awards: Akbar Kakkattil (7 July 1954 – 17 February 2016)

A Malayalam teacher and a prolific writer, Akbar Kakkattil wrote four novels, seven collections of novelettes, twenty-seven anthologies of short stories, six collections of essays, memoirs, a play and a volume of critical essays and interviews with the leading writers of Malayalam. His work, laced with humour, explores the world of the teaching community and the world of writers. Twice winner of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for *School Diary* and the novel *Vadakkuninnoru Kudumba Vrithantham,* he has also won the Joseph Mundassery Award for the best Novel, the Fellowship of Literature from the Government of India and the Rajiv Gandhi Peace Foundation Award. His book on Adoor Gopalakrishnan *Varoo Adoorileykku Pokam* has been translated to Tamil and his novel *Mrithyuyogam*is into Kannada. All his works are noted for a unique narrative style that was ushered in by the new generation of Malayalam writers.

Akbar Kakkattil has held prestigious positions in cultural and academic departments in various capacities: member of the governing body of South Zone Cultural Centre of Central Government of India and Kerala State Institute of Children's literature, Kerala Lalitha Kala Akademi, permanent Jury member of the First Educational Reality Show in Kerala 'Haritha Vidyalaya' and Programme Advisory Board of Akashavani, Kozhikkode. He was also the Convener of Publications Committee, Kerala Sahitya Akademi and the Vice-President of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi. He will be remembered for his multiple roles—as writer, teacher, policy maker and academician.

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The Man Who Loved Madurai: Bernard Bate (7 October 1960- 11 March 2016)

Bernard Bate, Barney to all, was a linguistic anthropologist whose specialisation was Tamil language. His research was on Tamil oratory with reference to Dravidian aesthetics. He got his PhD from the University of Chicago and later was at Yale and National University of Singapore. Whoever came in contact with Barney always left with the feeling that Barney was a close personal friend. That is the way Barney was. His love for Tamil language and his research brought him to Madurai and he made Madurai his home in many ways. He knew where the best coffee was available and knew all the roadside food shops. He knew the little lanes of Madurai and often would lead others into its secrets. He spoke Tamil and constantly surprised people with the way he used certain nuances of the language. His book on Tamil oratory and Dravidian aesthetic is an erudite book with great insight. Barney brought joy and love apart from scholarship into the lives of many friends here and in the US. He was one of the patrons of SPARROW and always enquired warmly about SPARROW projects. His sudden death in his sleep is a cruel joke life has played on all his friends and his family who adored him. There was so much more to talk, so much more to share and there will not be another Barney who could make you laugh about life.