APPENDIX I

INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS

The major focus was on identifying those experts who were well versed with Translation Studies. Lakshmi Holmstrom, Alladi Uma, M. Sridhar, Mandira Sen, Ram Ramanarayan, Jasbir Jain, Dr. GJV Prasad and Dr. Premananthan were contacted and interviewed. Apart from the queries related to translation studies, their expertise was also sought to validate the selection of writers. Initially, the aim was to select women writers from the whole of South India. Hence, I contacted the translators who were engaged in the translation of Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Tamil literature.

The list of experts also includes Tamil writers, such as Ambai and Vaasanthi Sundaram, whose works I have included for my research. A conscious attempt was made to include them not only to get their perspective about translations/translated work, but also to get an in-depth information about their genre of writings. The interview schedule presented here does not follow a structured pattern. Each of these experts, were asked different sets of questions depending on the area of their expertise. While some of the interviews have been transcribed, majority of them were received through the electronic mail. Their details and responses are as follows:

PROFESSOR ALLADI UMA, alladiu@yahoo.co.in: She was a Professor at the University of Hyderabad and has retired recently. She was once the Head of the English Department and recently the Chief Proctor of the University, before retirement. She dons several hats- that of an academician as well as a translator. She has taught the English literature courses in the University of Hyderabad and has even contributed immensely in the area of African American Literature, Indian Writing in English, Women’s Studies, Translation and Dalit Studies. One of the academicians from the IIT asked me to interview Alladi Uma. I sent my questionnaire through email. The following are the excerpts from the interview.

1. Are there some anomalies that exist between a translated text and an original one? Does the essence get lost if one works on the translated text?

   There are bound to be differences between an original and a translation. Who is translating and when are very crucial for a reading/understanding of a translated text. How else can we explain multiple translations of a text?
2. *Does the essence get lost when we are reading the translated texts?*

Is there just a single essence even when you read a text in the "original"?

3. *How ethical is it to work on the translations at the Ph.D level?*

Do you consider this question when you working on a so-called "original" text? Where do most of your western critical theories come from?

4. *Are there some differences in perspective and focus if a text written by a woman writer gets translated by a male writer?*

If you agree that women read texts differently from men, then obviously a translation by a woman will be different as a translation too is a reading. Also, it would depend on the background of the woman too, i.e., it would depend on the race, caste, class, background etc.

5. *Are there some women authors in Tamil/ Telugu who have written according to caste and class, or have focused on such a divide? If so, who are they? Are their translations available?*

There are quite a number--difficult to list them. Yes, translations are available. Just as a couple of examples: Challapalli Swarupa Rani, Shajahana in Telugu, Bama and Sivakami in Tamil.

6. *If one takes translated texts, how does one account for the time lag between the original text and the date on which it gets translated?*

If you agree that translations are also readings of the texts, then obviously you will look at not just the context of the original text, but also take into account when it was translated, by whom, for what purpose etc. Can we read Shakespeare's "Tempest" the same way as early twentieth century readers did?

7. *How does one address issues of contemporaneity if one takes translations? What is ‘contemporary’ in Literature?*

The above answer will help you deal with this too.

8. *What becomes the basis of translation of the original text- readership expectancy or contemporaneity?*

The question is not too clear to me. What role of the translator, then?
9. Who are the women authors in Tamil and Telugu who have written on issues related to gender and identity?

There are far too many writers for me to spell out--this has been an issue with the Telugu women writers and they have dealt with it in their own ways depending on their location.

10. What according to you are the core issues of gender identity?

Again too complex a question for a simple response. Factors such as the writer's age, the period she lives in, her caste/race, religion, class, location, etc. would contribute to her identity.

11. What according to you should the focus of my study be on- short stories, novellas or novels? Or can I take all the three?

All three would be too huge a task. Perhaps short stories but then it would depend on your own inclination.

12. Is it possible to study one state rather than the whole of South India?

Of course, it is better to narrow down to a state but cross references always help.

13. Could you please give me references of those people who have done such representations in Literature?

In Telugu you could contact Volga (Asmita Resource Centre for Women), Chaya Devi, Challapalli Swarupa Rani (Telugu University), Shajahana--you should be able to get information through them through the web or through Sahitya Akademi. Gogu Symala and Subhadra (Anveshi)

14. Who else to contact?

Swathi Margaret (Univ. of Hyderabad), K. Suneetha Rani (Univ. of Hyderabad) and the journal Samyukta, which also has a special issue on Indian women's short fiction

15. Is it possible to study identity through the medium of certain symbols from the purview of literature?

Why not?
16. *Are there some women writers in Tamil/ Telugu who have written about middle aged or old women? Could you please name them and tell us if their translations are available?*

Yes. Volga, Chaya Devi come to my mind immediately. Yes, their translations are available.

17. *Is translation, interpretation? If yes, then how does the translator do justice to the author’s original text?*

Yes, I have answered this earlier--when I have called it a reading. It depends on what you call justice. I believe we can be as close to the "original" even when we read a text.

18. *Are you happy with the way texts get translated? How do they differ from the original?*

Too large a question. I can only say, my colleague and I who do joint translations are happy with the way we approach translation. We are targeting a different audience, and in a different language, and so, there are bound to be differences!

**AMBAI, C.S. LAKSHMI, kuruvi1944@vsnl.com:** She is one of the noted feminist militant writers in Tamil literature. Ambai has translated several stories and novels. Detailed information about her background is given in Chapter 2. While scouting for the writers for my research work, I got familiarized with her writings. One of the experts, Dr. GJV Prasad, from JNU who teaches Comparative Literature and has translated several Tamil literary texts proposed that I should contact her and gave me her email id. Since Ambai had done her doctorate in Political Science from JNU, he was acquainted with her. Along with Dr. GJV Prasad, another expert, Dr. Premananthan, who teaches Tamil Literature in Delhi University, categorised Ambai as one of the writers who wrote on issues related to gender and identity. I made a conscious effort to consult her not only because of her position as a translator, but also as a writer, for I thought she would be able to give a better perspective about the other Tamil writers who wrote on similar themes. I mailed Ambai a set of questions related to translation studies as well as the selection of writers. Presented below, are some excerpts from her interview.

1. *Are there some anomalies that exist between a translated text and an original one? Does the essence get lost if one works on the translated text?*

I would not call them anomalies but discrepancies. This is especially so when the original text gets translated into English or other foreign languages. When it gets
translated from one Indian language to another directly from the original, the discrepancies would be less. But now-a-days people who are good at two languages are rare and they start translating from English to other Indian languages. I am not for this at all and I always tell the translator to work with me. The essence does not get lost as much as the rhythm, colour and images that go with the language and cultural context of the original language. Sometimes subtleties in the original can be lost. For example, I had once written that 'the city lay like a demon', and it got translated as 'the city looked like a demon'. The entire meaning had changed, for a demon who is lying down looks big, but is harmless, but a city that looks like a demon is dangerous. In another instance, I had used the word “moorkkan” in Tamil to mean violent, tough and adamant. The translator, who was more familiar with Sanskrit and Hindi maybe, translated it as idiotic. So, vehicles that moved violently in my story became idiotically moving vehicles in the translation. Since my stories are really not narrations of a tale with a beginning, middle and end, these distortions can take away everything from the story.

2. **How ethical is it to work with translations at the Ph.D level?**

Ph.D is about getting a degree. If you are using translations to arrive at some general conclusions, it is fine. Even if you attempt at some translations to support the dissertation, it is fine so long as you know how limited the purpose is. So long as a Ph.D student does not imagine herself as some kind of authority on that author or the literature of that language and is humble enough to realise that she still has a lot more to learn after the degree is obtained, it is okay. The trouble is Ph.D students feel that at the end of it, they know more than the original authors!

3. **Are there some differences in perspective and focus if a text written by a woman writer gets translated by a male writer?**

Not if the translator works with the writer. Even women translate men. I have translated male writers and they have had no complaints. I think it is a question of being open to new ideas and even a contrary view. If a woman translates another woman without understanding the core of the writer's worldview, the translation would be as bad any other bad translation attempted by any other translator, female or male. And these questions arise only when the writers are contemporary and alive. Poor dead writers cannot complain whether they are female or male!

4. **Are there some authors who have written according to caste and class, or have focused on such a divide? If so, who are they?**

In Tamil, there are many writers who have focused on caste from Pudumaippiththan onwards. Bama, Sivakami, Imayam, Poomani, Thamizselvi are
some I can think of, but there are many more. There are Marxist writers like Melanmai Ponnusami, and others like Ki. Rajanarayanan, who have dealt with village level realities. There are those who write in Thamarai, who are stressing the class divide. There are other writers like Vannadasan, Vannanilavan and Nanjilnadan, who have written about small towns and villages and communities without labelling themselves as specific kind of writers. There is Yuma Vasuki and there is also Azhakiya Periyavan, who write about small towns and village level life and its struggles, without wanting to be labelled as those who write about caste or class. I can also mention Perumal Murugan and S.Ramakrishnan in this context. But both form an important component of their writing. There are others who have written about Dalit Christians.

5. **If one takes translated texts, how does one account for the time lag between the writing of the original text and the date on which it gets translated?**

I don't think stories are written to reflect a particular time period alone, although particular events of a period may get reflected in them. But basically, stories are timeless in a certain sense, for sometimes a particular story gets written twenty years after it has been experienced. And the translation may happen twenty years later. Many things being told in the story may have changed in those twenty years including the language. But when stories are reprinted, the original language and style have to be retained and when they are translated, the original events or opinions cannot be changed. The text can be interpreted differently at each point of reading, but it cannot be altered to suit the reader's or translator's needs. I know it is now the trend to think that the author is dead. But some living authors don't want to be termed theoretically dead! I have personally told some snooty translators that they will translate me over my dead body!

6. **How does one address issues of contemporaneity if one takes translations? What is 'contemporary' in Literature?**

What is contemporary in literature is that a particular idea or theme is approached at a particular given time. Like I may write an entire novel about the Devadasi system, but my perspective of looking at it will be from the times in which I live, and the ways in which I have informed myself about a given historical reality, and how my cultural context continues to be affected by that reality. So, I will be seeing it not only from what it was at a given time, but how I see it and experience it sitting in my present times. The translator or a later reader may have to see it at different levels of experience, interpretation and expression and as a multi-layered text and not see it as a one-dimensional flat text.
7. **What becomes the basis of translation of the original text- readership expectancy or contemporariness?**

I think readership should be the last thing that should matter. To be frank, I don't even know who reads me! In my latest collection, I have written in the foreword that I am one of those shameless story tellers who continue to tell stories hoping that somebody would listen. I have said that even if the long-tailed parrots who visit the banyan tree in my building morning and evening listen to my stories, it would do. As regards contemporaneity, the translator must decide how she understands it. To me, as I have explained, whatever is part of my current contemporary life and thoughts would be contemporary and relevant. I would still read “War and Peace”, although the life it describes is not contemporary anymore. There is a certain universality about literature, which should rise above the concern about contemporaneity.

8. **Who are the authors who have written on issues related to gender and identity?**

I don't think stories are written with such specific purposes in mind. But I would say many have dealt with this issue. Ku.Pa.Ra, T.Janakiraman, Jayakanthan, Sundara Ramasamy, Asokamitran, Kumudini, Gugapiyai, Gowri Ammal, Hepzibah Jesudasan, Vaasanthi, Jyotirlata Girija, Lakshmi Kannan, Rajam Krishnan, R.Chudamani and more recently, Bama, Sivakami, Thamizhselvi and Salma.

9. **What according to you are the core issues of gender identity?**

The core issue of gender identity has to do with undefining oneself constantly and rediscovering new meanings of identity and not just alter one kind of definition for another. In a certain sense, the main thing is to know how not to foreclose things and to let oneself be open for change, evolution and knowledge above all. Another core issue has to do with relationships and defining the basis of relationships without predefined notions, with a broader perspective. Only such an approach will allow us to understand not only our rights but that of others. The basic thing in all these efforts is to maintain one's self-respect and not to allow the society or the system to degrade one as a human being. And once one's position is clear, this will extend to all and not remain just a goal of one's individual life but become an ideology. Although it sounds very simple when put in such words, one is constantly struggling to understand one's identity and needs in different social, political and familial circumstances.
10. **What according to you should be the focus of my study- short stories, novellas or novels? Or can I take all the three?**

I think you should take fiction in general, and not get caught in specificities.

11. **Is it possible to study one state rather than the whole of South India? Is there enough translated material available in Tamil literature?**

There is enough translated material available of contemporary Tamil literature. But taking the whole of South India depends on what your study is about. There is enough available in all the South Indian languages.

12. **Could you please give me references of those people who have done such representations in Literature?**

The university dissertations are full of such studies. You have to check at some of the Universities like Chennai and so on. It won’t be a bad idea to check the latest catalogues of some publishers and also check on the web whether similar studies have been done. There are many abroad who are doing it. In fact, a girl from Spain has done work on my stories.

13. **Who else to contact?**

You must contact Professor Indra from Chennai University. She can give you good advice. You must also contact Jayashri who brings out the journal Samyukta. Susie Tharu, who is a Literature person in Hyderabad, may also be a good person to contact.

14. **Is it possible to study identity through the medium of certain symbols from the purview of literature?**

Symbols can form only one component of identity. That can’t become the basis of understanding all identities. If you make symbols so very important, they may get blown up out of shape and you may end up with a distorted view of identities.

15. **Are there some writers who have written about the middle aged or old women? Could you please name them and tell us if their translations are available?**

I would never look for stories with such specific expectations, for stories are not written with such specific purposes. Of course, there are stories with middle-aged and old women. You must read authors in general and find these stories.
16. **Is Translation interpretation? If yes, then how does the translator do justice to the author's original text?**

A translation is an interpretation in a way, for the expression of one language is fitted into the reality of another. When certain words, phrases or idioms are not translatable, you interpret it so that it makes sense in the translated language. Other than that, if a translator tries to interpret the intentions of the author and draws her own conclusions and bases her translations on that, it won’t do justice to the original. A translator’s attempt must be to respect the original text for what it is and not make it a vehicle for her own expression. For that she should write her own story and not tamper with that of another.

17. **Are you happy with the way your texts get translated? How do they differ from the original?**

The translations differ in terms of style, rhythm and sound of the original language and often what one intended does not come through in the translated text. One can never be completely happy with a translation. Even though my translator and I work a lot together, but when I first read the stories, they sound like someone else’s. It takes a while to get used to it.

**DR.GJV PRASAD, gjvprasad@mail.jnu.ac.in:** He is a Professor at the Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University. He has translated several works from Tamil literature into English. Dr. Prasad specialises in Translation Studies, Postcolonial Literature, Indian Writing in English, Contemporary Theatre, Indian Literatures and Australian Drama. While I was searching for information and articles related to Translation Studies on the internet, I came across Dr. GJV Prasad’s name from the JNU website. The website also had his contact details. I got in touch with him over the telephone and fixed up an appointment for the interview. Since Dr. Prasad specialized in multiple areas which were relevant for my research work, I interviewed him personally. The interview gave me lot of insights and resolved all my queries related to translation writings as well as about the women writers. In fact, Dr. Prasad gave me the email ids of authors such as Ambai, Lakshmi Kannan and Vanamala Viswanatha.

1. **How ethical is it to work on translations at the Ph.D level?**

If I am looking at teaching, I am looking at a response to Aurobindo’s spiritualism. I am looking at a social fact, not literature. You are not looking at the literary quality of the text, but looking at gender identity, so it is ok. While looking at symbols one
has to be careful enough to know if the translator has interpreted it in the same way as the author.

2. **Should my focus be only on one State or the whole of South India?**

It should be only one state as even the caste issues of all the states would be different. Bama and Sivakami write about caste issues very differently. Even their caste portrayals are very different.

3. **Who are the women writers who write on issues related to gender and identity in Tamil?**

Ambai, Lakshmi Kannan, Bama and Sivakami.

4. **Are there any differences in perspective in case a text written by a female writer gets translated by a male writer?**

It can happen even in case of caste. They miss the language, the ways of representing things. A woman can place herself in a male writer's place and vice-versa. Ambai refuses to call herself a woman or a feminist writer. As a writer, pitfalls arise. The ideology may not allow the translation to be complete. Bama, a Dalit writer, may have Brahmin friends, but when she writes as a Dalit writer, her identity becomes quite distinct. It happens even in case of women writers who belong to a different caste, class and backgrounds. For example, a Brahmin writer would not be able to capture the experiences of the Dalit woman completely. One has to be empathetic, have compassion to be able to understand the issues. Therefore, a male writer's ideology would be completely different from that of a woman writer. Even a male writer may miss many things - caste, class, social location, forms of place. Certain words are impossible to translate in English. For instance the usage of the word “nama vidu” and “enga vidu” (our home) is difficult to be translated into English. “Nama vidu” is all encompassing, including everyone. The words “ival” and “aval” (she) may mean the same in English, but the latter connotes social distancing.

5. **How would one represent issues in contemporaneity, especially when there exists a huge time lag between the year of publication of the original text and the year in which it gets translated?**

Twenty to twenty five years is not a huge time lag. Identity issues have become popular since mid nineties. Therefore, the books that deal with them are noteworthy. If it were not of contemporary importance, it wouldn't have been translated. Literary texts are pre-texts to talk about time. Contemporariness has to
do with time. The definition of contemporary is very complex. The time we live in after a certain defined literary movement defines contemporaneity. Even the ways in which epics are being narrated are in tune with the contemporary times. We always cite examples from the present/everyday lives and then take recourse to epics.

6. **What according to you are the core issues of gender identity?**

Gender and caste in India. All girls are not raised likewise. It is nuanced. It will be different in each point of time, each situation as well. It’s not a false celebration-how a woman would rule the household and how hierarchies are set upon that.

**J.DEVIKA, devika@cds.ac.in**: She is currently an Associate Professor at the Centre for Development Studies. She has a doctoral degree in History and is interested in bringing to bear her training as a historian on understanding contemporary shifts in gender, development, politics and culture in Kerala. She has also translated extensively from Malayalam into English. Ms. Mandira Sen, Editor, Stree Publications, gave me her email id. I got in touch with her over the telephone and fixed up an appointment with her. I met her personally on her visit to JNU for some programme. Interaction with her proved to be extremely beneficial since she gave insights about the problems that a translator has to face usually while translating the texts. I also read through her book “Engendering Individuals”, which enlightened me about issues related to individuation, which has direct linkages with empowerment of women. J. Devika also provided me information about the Malayalam feminist writers who wrote on issues related to gender and identity.

1. **Is translation, interpretation?**

You have to transcend the rhetoric of the text. Unless you surrender yourself to the logic, you cannot do it. One has to look up in two layers-of the translator. Translation is a different sense of creative activity. It is through the translators that you get to know the text. Therefore, understanding the role of the translator becomes important.

Devika talked about her own experience of translating a particular text. She translated the autobiography of Nalini, the sex worker. She said that the author had a cinematographic manner of writing and a distinct style of discussing the past and the present events. However, the translation was given to some other writer, Gita Krishnankutty, who Devika felt, didn't do justice to the book as she completely obliterated the author’s style and wrote entirely in the past tense, which robbed the author’s style. Ironically, the translation, she says was greatly appreciated because people didn’t know what was missing from the original. For Gita Krishnankutty, who is a professional translator, it was just another book to be translated.
2. **What genre of writing should be included for delineating identity related issues—short stories, novellas or novels?**

   If I am looking at themes such as individuation then I must also include memoirs and autobiographies as I cannot talk about the evolution of independent self, without including the genres. Autobiographies, now-a-days has been classified as fiction, as it is the construction of one’s story for others. It is not a truthful account of someone’s life but a literary recollection of someone’s life.

3. **What are the core issues of gender identity?**

   Gender is one which influences and guides us towards individuation, the ability to reason, critique and having a mind of one’s own, the distinct demarcation between the public and domestic spaces, while in the public one can talk about rights, but not in the domestic spaces. There are also issues about matriliney. Senior women engaged in a lot of power. Age and kinship becomes the important criterion. The demise of matriliney is not mourned by younger women. Devika cited the example of the mythical figure like Sita, who was reinterpreted in a new light. She critiqued Rama. She said that in the panchayats women were being given access, it was an extension of the domestic space, where they had to be polite, not aggressive. Even in the household, women had control only in the child care arrangement. Only in the few households were they treated as individuals.

4. **What is contemporary in Literature? What becomes the basis of translation of texts?**

   Contemporary is what is current and those texts are read and valued. For instance, the writings of Saraswatiammal were revived only because of interest in the feminist movement. Even one of the authors’ works got revived because of sudden interest in Dalit literature. In Malayalam there are no Dalit writings. Thus, translations take place also because the issues have a contemporary value and also because of the readership expectancy. Dynamics of the Indian publishing industry also gives rise to the need for translations. It is important to make a classification of the time period, depending on the objective and focus of research.

5. **Who are the writers who wrote on issues related to gender and identity?**

   Lalithambika Antherjanam, Kamala Das, Sarah Joseph, Ratammai Devi.
6. *Does the essence get lost while taking up translated works?*

Sometimes the translator gets so intimate with the author…I have translated some of the works exactly as what the author wants to represent.

**JASBIR JAIN, jains_ip@sancharnet.in:** She is the Professor Emeritus at the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur. Professor Jasbir Jain has written on issues related to women and literature. She is the Head of the Department of English at Jaipur University. I got familiarized with her work at the World Book Fair 2007. She was interviewed to get an insight into the anomalies of translated literature.

1. *Does the essence get lost in case we take up translated literature?*

Translation does lose, but we have no choice in a multilingual society, it also upsets the canon as all the works of a writer are not necessarily translated. We also miss out on the same language reviews and discussions.

2. *If one takes the translated texts, how does one account for the time lag between the original text and the date on which it gets translated?*

Contemporaneity is both social and political.

**DR. KRISHNASWAMY NACHIMUTTHU, tamizhkina@gmail.com:** He specializes in Grammar Linguistics Culture and Epigraphy Translation Studies. Dr. Nachimutthu teaches Tamil at Jawaharlal Nehru University. I got the reference of Dr. Nachimutthu from Dr.GJV Prasad. I contacted him over telephone and fixed up an appointment with him. I interviewed him personally in order to gain insights about translated literature and also to gauge information about the Tamil women writers. The following are the excerpts from the interview.

1. *Are there some differences in perspective in case a text written by a woman writer gets translated by a male writer?*

It depends on the translator’s capacity to capture the original. There is a possibility of lack of ability to capture the original.

2. *Are there some Tamil women writers who have written on issues related to caste/class, dalit/marginalized/gender and identity related issues?*

Marginalised writings- Bama, Sivakami. Rajam Krishnan, through her work portrays that she is a Brahmin.
3. **How does one raise issues in contemporaneity if one takes translated literature as there exists a huge time lag between the original writing and the translated one?**

   Sometimes issues will lose relevance and topicality. Possibility of interpretation is there in literature.

4. **What genre should one take for representing identity-short stories, novellas, novels or can one take all three of them?**

   Autobiographies can also be taken.

5. **Should one study one state or can one study the whole of South India? Is there adequate material available if one studies only one state?**

   Over all view on four languages would give a clear perspective. There are more liberated women writing in Tamil. Look at historiography in all the writings representing all the four states.

6. **How much representation is adequate from each state?**

   In fiction-feminist writers, their geographical/chronological/sociological spread, age group, community, region can make out a sampling.

7. **Is translation, interpretation?**

   A kind of interpretation. Every writing is an interpretation. So, to a certain extent it is interpretation.

8. **What according to you are the core issues of gender identity?**

   Socialisation, marriage, relationships-husband, wife, choice of children, scanning, dowry, job related problems, women as victims, exploitation of women in fields, workplace.

*LAKSHMI HOLMSTROM*, holmstrom99@yahoo.co.uk, holmstrom2@gmail.com. She is a noted translator who translates Tamil literary works. She is a UK based translator who has translated most of the works of Tamil women writers such as Ambai and Salma. Since I had already read the selected writings beforehand, I also made a specific note of the translators who had translated these texts. Lakshmi Holmstrom appeared to be a noted and famous name. I searched for her id through a search engine and got in touch
with her. I then introduced myself through the mail and explained the purpose of my research in detail. Then, I mailed her the set of questions related to translated studies and the selection of writers. I would like to give the excerpts of her interview.

“This is a very long list of questions, and some of them require quite detailed answers. I really cannot undertake to answer them all. I also find it very difficult to generalize about ‘women writers’, ‘translated texts’ etc. I prefer to think of individual texts. Also translation varies so much according to the sensitivity of the translator in terms of style, but also in terms of the political perspective of the translator. However, I'll make some comments, based on your questions.”

1. **Are there some anomalies that exist between a translated text and an original one? Does the essence get lost if one works on the translated text?**

   Of course there will be anomalies between a translated text and its original. It really depends on the quality and thrust of the translation, though. I think if you do a Ph. D based on translated texts alone, you have to acknowledge the translation as a translation (too many people confuse the translation with the original)

2. **Are there any differences in perspective in case a text written by a woman writer gets translated by a male writer?**

   I don't think very many women writers have been translated by men (Ismat Chughtai has, though) so I don't know how the focus might shift. What about women translating men's work? Isn't that a similar issue?

3. **Who are the women writers who have written on issues related to caste and gender in Tamil literature?**

   Many women have focused on issues of caste and class, particularly Dalit women in recent times (Bama etc, in Tamil, for instance.)

4. **If one takes the translated texts, how does one account for the time period as there exists a time lag between the original text and the date in which it gets translated?**

   I think you have not formulated your questions about 'contemporaneity' clearly enough. Translations in the Southern Indian languages are mostly of recent writing- sometimes there is a very short time-lag between the publication of the source text and its translation. This is the case particularly of women writers.
6. **Who are the writers who have written on issues related to gender and identity?**

Most women writers in Tamil, in recent times have grappled with issues of gender and identity. With Chudamani Raghavan, Rajam Krishnan, Sivakami, Ambai, Bama, and most recently, Salma, these are fundamental themes. Gender identity is deeply involved with caste and class issues in India- reading the works of Ambai and Bama makes that apparent immediately. It shows up in the language, images, symbols and literary forms they use, as well as their perspective and the actual content of their work. There is certainly some interesting writing by women both in Malayalam and Kannada; I don't know about Telugu. You could contact Ms Mini Krishnan of OUP to put you in touch with both. You should be clear about the thrust of your thesis, and not make it too vague or broad. Certainly you could work through translations from just one - or perhaps two - languages, and use both short and long fiction.

7. **Is translation, interpretation?**

Translation depends on the closest possible reading. But if all reading is in some sense 'interpreting', then yes, translation is also an interpretation in some ways. But the translator has a responsibility to the text, to put across its argument as well as its literary qualities as closely as possible, to re-create its 'world'. Some translations achieve this, many do not. I have written about many of these issues in the introductions to my translations.

Lakshmi Holmstrom’s interview excerpts from the newspaper article have also been included in order to get some insights about the translation studies.

**ARTICLE FROM HINDU ON TRANSLATIONS**([www.hindu.com](http://www.hindu.com)) October 7, 2006.

**INTERVIEW WITH LAKSHMI HOLMSTROM, AN ARTICLE IN HINDU.**

*Translation is about sensitivity*

**GOUTAM GHOSH**

*Is a translator like a transparent window, tinted window or a mirror? Lakshmi Holmstrom, acclaimed U.K.-based translator, has the answer*

*INTERPRETING WORDS* Lakshmi Holmstrom, translator of several Tamil literary works

Despite the exalted status of translators today, their names are invariably in smaller print than the original authors. It is the translator who transforms a vernacular text for readers to bask in its literary light. In India, we are aware that, but for translations, most of our literature would be out of reach.
But there are translation theories, hypotheses and counter hypotheses. Amit Chaudhury ("The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature") shows how English is not an Indian language in the sense that Tamil or Bengali are. Hemani Banerji ("The Sound Barrier: Translating Ourselves in Languages and Experience") and Ngugi wa Thiongo, an African writer in English, opine that mapping a non-western meaning system on to English is "inherently violent" and that language carries culture, and culture carries the body of values by which we perceive our place in the world. Can English then serve as a matrix to transform and capture the cultural nuances endemic to a vernacular tongue?

There is hardly a choice in India. One of the legacies of colonial rule has been English that has served us since long before Independence. The shortcomings of English have been overcome by Indian writers and translators through ingenious manipulation. Lakshmi Holmstrom, an acclaimed U.K.-based translator, has translated Tamil literary works. While in Chennai, she spoke to this correspondent at the Oxford University Press office. Excerpts:

*There isn’t much about you on the Internet. Could you please tell me about yourself?*

I had my education at Women's Christian College, Madras Christian College and Oxford. I began as a student of mainstream literature, looking for a different path and chose women writers. About 17 years ago, I was invited by Virago Press to do a collection of short stories by women. I came across Ambai's *Manjal Meen* ("*Yellow Fish*") and translated it. That opened the door to translations. I have as much love for English literature as Tamil literature. I have not rejected one for the other. It was learning and moving, learning and including.

*Do you feel satisfied after doing a translation?*

One is never satisfied. What I say to myself is, "For the moment this is the best I can do." In some years I could return to it and say, "Perhaps I could have done better." The text is not a dead thing. As you grow, you react to it in different ways. You interact closely with the source text and when you translate, it's never word for word. It's an interpretation. So you dare not say it is a finished thing and the best of all time.

*Is there any translation of yours which you feel has been as effective as the original?*

I could never tell you that. A translation is different; the original is different. It is a different text in a different language in a different culture.
Have you published anything other than translations?

Yes, a critical work and a re-telling of "Silapadhikaram" and "Manimegalai". It is an imaginative re-creation and more contemporary. In "Manimegalai", I stayed close to the text, but it was not a word-to-word translation.

Is a translator like a transparent window, tinted window or a mirror?

You are trying to interpret the source text, staying faithfully close to it. But a word-to-word can never hold because words are taken out of context. Words have different resonances, and they never equate between one language and another. So it is not a mirror. It is an interpretation; a close reading that the translator tries to carry over to a different language.

Do you consider source text a prison of language and the target text the key that sets the source text free?

I do not like to think of the source text as a prison and I wouldn't be presumptuous to claim that a translation holds the key. A translator cannot work without being committed to the source text, without loving it. A translation is a discovery and celebration of the source text.

What about the modern theories which talk about the translator's creativity and that the translator need not be faithful to the source text?

In my view, you have to be faithful to the source text but that does not cut out creativity. A creative translation is more than content. It is the voice, the style and the imaginative world of the text. The challenge is to get that across. Otherwise it becomes flat, word-to-word translation. It may make sense, but has no feeling, no heart.

Is an equally good command of the source and target languages a must?

You need sensitivity to love the music of languages. And you must know the grammar and structure of the languages. Words do not equate one-to-one. What works in one language does not work the same way in the other language. That's the challenge.

How far do you believe that Indian Writing in English is an act of translation?

There is a lot of truth in that. You have to translate if you are writing about ordinary people in this country to approximate the language they use. You are translating not the actual words, but the resonance and thought process. And that is what Indian writers in
English are doing. They find clever ways to capture the nuances of the language and transform into English. R. K. Narayan does, Mulk Raj Anand does.

PROFESSOR M. SRIDHAR, msridha@gmail.com: He is an academician who has done his doctorate from the University of Hyderabad and specializes in the area of Literary Criticism, Comparative Studies and Translation, and Eighteenth and Twentieth Century English Literature. I contacted Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar jointly through electronic mail. Like the other experts, a questionnaire related to the identification of writers and translation studies was mailed to them. The following are the excerpts from his interview.

1. *Are there some anomalies that exist between a translated text and an original one? Does the essence get lost if one works on the translated text?*

   All "good" translations would try to get the essence of their originals. We have no escape from depending on translated texts. How do we know if the Greek/French/German texts we read in English are translations where the essence has indeed been retained?

2. *How ethical is it to work on the translations at the Ph.D level?*

   I don't understand the question. How ethical is to work on the originals?

3. *Are there some differences in perspective and focus if a text written by a woman writer gets translated by a male writer?*

   Yes, though a male writer conscious of his own position and the task before him may try to transcend the limitation.

4. *Are there some women authors in Tamil/ Telugu who have written according to caste and class, or have focused on such a divide? If so, who are they and if the translations of their works are available?*

   The question is not clear.

5. *If one takes the translated texts, how does one account for the time lag between the original text and the date on which it gets translated?*

   One accounts for the time lag by making the context of the translation clear in a translator's foreword or introduction? A study of two translations of a text done over a wide gap might illustrate the difference.
6. **How does one raise issues in its contemporaneity if one takes translations? What is 'contemporary' in Literature?**

It is the contemporary debates in a certain literature that gives rise to certain kind of translations. Susie Tharu and Lalita's "Women Writing in India" some years ago and translations of various Dalit writers more recently are indeed products, historical moments when women's and Dalit issues have come to the fore.

7. **What becomes the basis of translation of the original text- readership expectancy or contemporaneity?**

It not an either or question. Contemporaneity is of course a crucial issue as stated above. Reader's expectations may give rise to some translations, but they cannot govern the nature of translation.

8. **Who are the women authors in Tamil/ Telugu who have written on the issues related to gender and identity?**

Kanuparti Varalakshmamma, Sridevi, Ranganayakamma, Abburi Chaya Devi, Volga, Kuppili Padma, Shajahana, Swarupa Rani, among short story writers and novelists come immediately to mind.

9. **What according to you are the core issues of gender identity?**

Discrimination on the basis of gender, issues of the self, violence etc.

10. **What according to you should be the focus of my study- short stories, novellas or novels? Can I take all the three genres for representing identity?**

Choose one of the genres. Dealing with all will be difficult. Maybe more primary material will be available on short stories perhaps.

11. **Is it possible to study one state rather than the whole of South India?**

You may wish to concentrate on one state, but you could bring in cross references from the other southern states.

12. **Could you please give me references of those people who have done such representations in Literature?**

It is difficult to suggest names of those who could respond to you in English. You could perhaps get in touch with Dr. C. Mrunalini, Reader, P. S.Telugu University,
13. **Who else to contact?**

You may get in touch with the editors of Samyukta, a journal on women's studies that comes from Kerala and look at several issues of the journal.

14. **Is it possible to study identity through the medium of certain symbols from the purview of literature?**

Question is not clear. I am not sure of symbols. But the use of metaphors and myths and reversal of myths is particularly significant in women's writing.

15. **Are there some Tamil/ Telugu women writers who have written about middle aged or old women? Could you please name them and tell us if their translations are available?**

Most of the writers I have mentioned above deal with middle aged women too. Translations are available. You need to find them from scattered journal issues, anthologies or from the writers themselves. I must warn you that it is a painstaking exercise.

16. **Is translation, interpretation? If yes, then how does the translator do justice to the author’s original text?**

It of course is. Different translations of the same text will make this very clear. The translator's own understanding of the source text, her/his location, her/his position vis-à-vis the source give rise to different interpretations of the text. Doing justice to the source text will have to be evaluated on the basis of the translator's empathy with the source.

17. **Are you happy with the way texts get translated? How do they differ from the original?**

The quality of translation, as I have said before, needs to be judged on the basis of whether the translator has been able to empathise with the source material. The ideology of the translator will also transform the source in certain ways. The reader's own ideological position will determine the way s/he receives the translated text.
MANDIRA SEN, stree@cal2.vsnl.net.in: My supervisor, Dr. Namita Ranganathan, was acquainted with Ms Mandira Sen, Editor, Stree Publications. She proposed to me that in order to select the writers and address the queries related to translation studies, I must interview the editor of a feminist press, which publishes women’s writings. Therefore, I sent Ms Sen my questionnaire finding out from her, about views that she held related to translation studies and the identified women writers. In fact, the interview with Ms Sen opened up new avenues, for she gave me the email ids of translators such as V. Geetha and Devika, who were actively engaged in translation and issues related to gender and identity. The following are the excerpts from the interview.

“I am not sure if we can answer your queries, or how competent I am to do so. When we publish a book we are looking at it from the point of view of human enquiry, of knowledge. Books physically package ideas in an accessible form. That is, the level of publishing that we deal with, which is high quality reference. Our aim is to contribute to the world's knowledge system, not merely reprint what is published abroad, nor be derivative. Because we think it is so important to disseminate knowledge and also to publish new contributions, we also publish women's studies in Bengali originals--also looking for readership away from the small English language and also for new authors, as otherwise you get the same pool of scholarly authors circulating amongst publishers.

We can handle Bengali at a high level. Sometimes we translate a Bengali book into English, and immediately many problems surface, the need for more annotation, more 'explanations', more 'facilitation'. We are facing this with the translation of Bengali Muslim women's writings 1904-1938 into English. It is not an equivalent thing in a different language. It seems to be a different book altogether. The two editors are re-drafting their introductions, not just translating the old ones. Then they are anxious that the book be presented as authentic for the English-reading public, here and in the West. So one has roped in an Indian scholar who works on Muslim writers from Bengal in a US university; the other one is getting a well-known scholar of literature in Bangladesh to write this foreword. She wants to ensure that the 'identity' and culture and history of the Bengali Muslim woman is put in the right perspective and she thinks she needs a Bengali Muslim woman to do this. I do not agree with her as many great scholars of Islam or History of Islamic societies have not been Muslims and do not need to be.

Our translations are done to indicate what women have written in the regional languages, but in-depth work would probably require reading the original texts. That is why historians always learn the language of the sources, e.g. Sumit Guha, the historian learnt Marathi before he could study Maratha History and presumably, could read Persian too and of course so many people before him have learnt languages too. This is my viewpoint. I think to get at the wealth of our literary heritage, you do have to delve in directly into the languages, which immediately connect you to history. Translations can only do so much. Side by side is the politics of translation, as exemplified by the
translation of our writings by Bengali Muslim women into English. So languages have power and hierarchy and will shed different light on identity.

Would someone studying the question of identity in French literature depend on translations of French? So you would have to present your arguments on why is it you think your work can be done via translations or what can be done and what cannot be done.

Language identity is terrifically strong in most societies, including ours. It is only the English-medium educated lot of this generation who live in big cities who underestimate it (and lightly forsake a culture that is ‘naturally’ multi-tongued). This is particularly true of Delhi. A visit to Bangladesh or Tamil Nadu or Kerala will give you an idea; to West Bengal too. I notice my kids speak to their friends mostly in Bengali with dollops of English. All my editorial work outside the manuscript with Bengali authors is in Bengali, even if the formal letter is typed in English. If I spoke in English to Ashok Mitra or Saoli Mitra, the actor-director (we translated her Nathabathi Anathbat and Kathaamrita Saman, two one-act plays on the royal women of the Mahabharata in English), they would certainly find it odd. In other words, in Tamil Nadu and in Bengal, 'being educated' means that you can interact in the local language too at a highly formal level. For example, seminars, any kind of public interaction: example, the protest over Nandigram and Singur is in Bengali. This also links you across classes. That has something to do with gender identity too. It is not of one model in India.

I do not know if a man brings a different perspective into translating a work by a woman. There are publishers who have only women authors and women translators. Not us. Our book Nabankur by the late Suklekha Sanyal was translated by a man, Gouranga Chattopadyay. We did not find it noticeably different."

1. **Are there some anomalies that exist between the translated and the original texts? If so, how does one deal with them if one isn't well versed in the original languages in which they are written?**

I don't think you can deal with them if you do not read the originals. When we translate from Bengali, we benefit because we can read both Bengali and English: we delved into the original Bengali work of Ashok Mitra's political memoir, Apila Chapila (i.e.; a line from a nonsense rhyme) when we were working on the English translation, A Prattler's Tale: Bengal, Marxism, Governance just to double check all the time. At the moment we have three translations: two from Marathi and one from Gujarati, and we have had to rely on the translators for the nuances and so forth, and the final books going into press are in their 4th drafts. We can publish in these languages just because the translators really know Marathi and Gujarati at a very high level. The book by Vibhavari Shirurkar (born around 1905, died about 3 years
back), a tremendous pioneering writer whose effigy was burnt in Pune in the 1940s because she wrote novels depicting the actual situation of Marathi upper caste women, she had used a pseudonym or would have been killed. Well, the translation was checked by our chairman, Ramdas Bhatkal, who is the doyen of Marathi literature and writes ably in both Marathi and in English. But the translator was a woman. Maybe you can consult someone who can read the original texts and answer your questions.

2. How does one deal with the question of time period as there is a huge time lag between the date of publication of the original text and its translation?

I don't know how to answer this. In Europe translations take place rapidly among the European language fiction and nonfiction. So you could talk to a multinational publisher in Delhi if you wish.

3. Does translation take place only because the work is believed to have huge readership or because the issues and themes raised in the book will have contemporary relevance?

Both. Fiction translations in India do not have a huge readership. In fact, the reading public is very small in India. The Malayalee sex worker, Nalini, has had her book translated from Malayalam to English and published by Westland, Chennai. Devika did the translation, so you could ask her. In Europe, translations sometimes have huge readership, e.g. Harry Potter or the famous writers, e.g. Grass, Marquez, Umberto Eco, etc. You can find out the Harry Potter translation in India. You could check with Penguin.

4. What according to you are the core issues of gender identity?

Can't answer this either as don't think there would be agreement. You need to elaborate on what you mean by core issues too.

DR. PREMANANTHAN: He teaches in the Modern Indian Languages Department, Delhi University. I got acquainted with Dr. Premananthan through one of my students who had done her Masters in Tamil literature from Delhi University. Dr. Premananthan had been her teacher. I fixed up an appointment with him over the telephone and interviewed him personally in order to get insights about literature in translation and to gauge about the availability of translated works of women in South Indian literature.
1. **Who are the South Indian women writers who write on issues related to gender and identity?**

Lalithambika Antherjanam in Malayalam, Thangamma Bharathi who wrote the biography of Subramania Bharathi, V. M. Kodainayakiamma, Ambai. Malathi Maitri who wrote a documentary film on four women poets and described how they are struggling with their writing. Then there are writers like Lakshmi Kannan, Sivasankari, Indumathi and among the Dalit writers, Bama and Sivakami and Muslim women writers like Salma. There are very few representations of Muslim women in Tamil writing.

2. **What is the difference between women’s writings and men’s writings?**

Women writers are not writing thrillers, detective novels, they only write about family, romance and deal with themes which only centre around family issues. Only women like Sivasankari have taken non-stereotypes. Other issues that get depicted through their works are the problems of employed women, extra marital romances, even friendship is treated as extra marital, writings of agony, being feminine, lack of love in married life, women who didn’t marry their lovers and how their lovers turn as blackmailers. There are novels of fidelity and chastity. The texts are modern versions of ancient tales of agony like Damayanti and Shakuntala. Each and every novel celebrates pre-pubertal times or the phase of childhood and portray movement, space and colourful worlds. It is only after puberty, menstruation that their space and freedom get curtailed.

3. **Are there any differences in perspective when a text written by a woman writer gets translated by a male writer?**

Translation is a critical affirm. Could be. May be mild or strong. In the lexicon translation, translators’ idea also matters. The nuances or beauty of a native language might get lost. The sound and intonation...in English gets lost. It depends on the reader also. If you know the cultural background of one particular community, you can sense the meaning. We do not find many women translators ready to translate. Translation demands lot of time. Now-a-days we are giving adequate time to women’s writing.

4. **Is it ethical to work on translations at the Ph.D level?**

You are getting traces of a particular community. There is no other way. One cannot say anything about the tone, language, authority, one cannot comment on the linguistic aspects because it is narration of a narration.
5. **How can one interpret identity through the texts?**

   Position of reader changes direction of the reading. The reader is decoding with one’s own understanding of cultural codes, religion codes.

6. **Is translation, interpretation?**

   Translation is interpretation. The translator can get the rhythm, musicality and put it into other language patterns. One has to be faithful to the words. So far as the novel is concerned, one cannot read the novel as a whole. It will have multiple value. If we pick it up, everything will arrive at a different interpretation.

7. **Are there adequate translated works of women writers available in Tamil?**

   Representation of Tamil translation is very limited owing to the constraints on the part of the translator and cultural specificity.

8. **How does one raise issues in contemporaneity in literature? What is contemporary in Literature?**

   If I take up contemporary work, I have to do a social research. All details about the writer, the background of the novel. If I take a contemporary novel, I should be aware of the specific setting. The presence of ideological tool might change the perspective. Time matters when you are reading the material. If one reads at the time when women’s liberation movement is active, the issues will take a different light altogether.

9. **What according to you are the core issues of gender identity?**

   Many women wrote about issues related to women’s education, but not outside homes. Space was confined according to traditional writers, women’s access to certain places are limited. Question on reversal of roles-why a man shouldn’t be a house husband. These issues aren’t raised. Fear of freedom, equality and human rights are being questioned. What it is to live in freedom, how can a woman go and have freedom. Traditional women writers saw women’s education in the light of the conventions of the welfare of the family, society and nation, restrictions of space, lack of freedom- of movement, body language, is reiterated through their works. The body of women represents self-denial; women and shudras are treated alike, for both do not have access to certain spaces. Religion, Indian traditions are always opposing women’s freedom. Education should demolish the gender issues. They should clearly mention in History how women were treated and how they form a part of social setting.
RAM RAMNARAYAN: He is the editor of New Horizon Media Limited, Indian Literature in Translation, a publication house which translated Tamil literary works into English. I became acquainted with Mr. Ram Ramnarayan during my visit to the book fair, wherein I came across the stall of New Horizon Media Limited. I enquired of the people in the stall about the range of writings brought about by the publication house. The editor, Mr. Ram Ramanarayan, was also present there and I got an opportunity to interact with him. He has translated several Tamil literary texts into English. I interviewed him personally, for I felt that owing to his expertise in translating texts, he would be able to lend insights into the anomalies of translation and would be able to provide information about the Tamil women writers and the spectrum of themes covered by them. He also gave me the telephone number of Sivasankari, the noted Tamil writer, with whom I interacted over telephone in order to get information on Tamil women writers and their writings.

1. Are there some anomalies that exist between the translated and the original text? Does the essence get lost in translations?

It depends on the translator who is translating the text. Of course anomalies are there, but we always refer back to the author in case he or she is alive and she supplies the appropriate word.

2. Is translation, interpretation?

No, it is not interpretation. The translator tries to adhere to the text as closely as possible.

3. Are there any differences in perspective in case a text written by a woman writer gets translated by a male writer?

I don’t know but you can do a survey that almost fifty to seventy percent of the translations get done by women. However, we have published a novel “Paalangal” in Tamil written by Sivasankari and translated by a man. It has been very well translated. If the women readers can accept it, then there is no problem. If you come to contemporary women writers, they are facing lot of opposition from male writers, especially when they are writing about explicit issues related to sexuality, about women’s rights. Even in translation, this kind of a problem will still be there. When a man comes and agrees to translate there will be lot of problems because we are still a male dominated society. You have to go to women publishers or those publishing works by women, they constitute a specific constituency. I am only guessing.
4. **Who are the writers who write on caste related issues?**

Bama, Sivakami write about Dalit women and the triple problem they pose. They write about caste, gender and their status in society. I am not sure about others.

5. **Is it better to focus on one state or take the whole of South India?**

It is better to focus on one state. The subject becomes vaster, but you’ll find a completely different perspective. But if you know Tamil and English, it helps, but if you don’t know Malayalam…you can compare, then it is very well. If you know both the texts and the original translation, it would be good. You can take all the states if you like. “Knit India through Literature” by Sivasankari covers all the writers like Kamla Das, Lalithambika Antherjanam. Sivasankari has covered all the four zones including the central zone. You’ll get an idea whom to look at.

6. **How do we reflect issues in contemporaneity when there exists a huge time lag between the year of publication of the original text and the translated one?**

It is a problem. Most issues don’t get resolved and continue to remain issues throughout the ages. Today, most of the problem remains contemporary for a long time. For instance, in case of “Deception”, the issues are very contemporary. A man who marries, has two children, goes abroad and happily lives with another woman. The setting is 1970s. Today also we have such things happening with little difference. But women are also stronger; they also go abroad, work and study. Lots of other problems are there. But there are cases when the problems are not contemporary, but they are a part of social history. For example, today women are emancipated, but their problems remain much bigger.

7. **How would you define contemporary in Literature?**

The greatest works of literature are always contemporary. You read them today it is difficult for you to guess that they were written one hundred years ago. There is something about the author, his style, their writings and the way they tell their stories. So they are always contemporary. Language changes, music changes, but people and issues don’t change much. For instance, some short stories are contemporary because they cater to the western audience and do not give a true picture of life. They are written in a way to please, mostly poking fun at India/Indians, but it should be done with empathy and without contempt. Great writing will deal with permanent values and feelings, for example, love, honesty, taking responsibility for people/ action. So, anything that is written with compassion for downtrodden, suffering amongst us, gets appreciation in the true sense, and is
always contemporary. It will always appeal to young people. They will always read something that can address them. Great works are like that.

8. **What are the core issues of gender identity?**

There is a deep anger against society which has treated women as second class citizens. There is a deep admiration for those women who get over these problems. There are also caste related problems. An oppressed woman will have a lot of pity or fellow feeling for other women.

9. **How would you categorise women’s writings from the purview of original writing and translation?**

There is a tendency to disrespect women’s writings. The gender of the writer doesn’t matter to me. I read it as a book. A novel, “Kalaman dapam”, has been written by a woman writer, Sumathi. She doesn’t depict women’s issues. She has written about the people who perform funeral rites at the ghats-lowest of low, underfed. It is written with such great compassion, anger, four lettered word, one can’t guess that a woman has written it. She is a lawyer, an activist. I am not happy with the way it has been translated, even she is not happy. For any writing to survive, it has to come out of a particular theme. It becomes a niche if one only writes about women’s issues. The moment you write from a particular point of view, you are sidelined.

10. **Who are the good translators who do justice to the book?**

Penguin, OUP, Orient Longman, they are the only people who do translations. They are not the best judge of what they are translating. They are the people who are good in Tamil and English. However, in the course of retaining the flavour of the language, they are doing it wrong. One can’t know if the original has been exactly reproduced. The translation is only to make it acceptable to the English reading person. Most of them are replete with Indianisms. It has to be in contemporary English…in readable English. There'll be some loss somewhere. If the author is alive, we go back to the author; otherwise, we contact somebody who is close to the author to supply the word, especially in dialect. In translations, there are some jarring Indianisms. For example, in Tamil, one says we would sit and mother would put the food, we would sit around mother who would serve food in our palms. Ninety nine percent of the translators would say that we would sit around our mother and she would put food. It would be terrible to read it. How can one go on and write pages and pages to describe one incident as this. Another example, there was loud noise behind him and hearing that he turned around, there was a loud noise behind him and he turned around to look at it. There is no
need for a word to word or literal translation. The translator doesn’t know such rules. For instance, hearing the joke, he laughed. Why hearing? One has to have a very sharp eye, keen sense, then, one can do the task. The translator simply does the task. Unless the translator has a good editor at home, they don’t do it. They back and forth correspond with the author and it takes a lot of time, in desperation, they give up.

11. **What are the differences between regional language writing and Indian writing in English?**

Increasingly, regional language writers are imitating those who are writing in English. They are concerned with isms- post modernism, post Indianism. Some people are writing genuine stuff, they are from villages. “Blood Ties” is written by people who are not urbanized, they are rooted in soil. They become urbanized later. Most of the Indian writing in English, which has won a high acclaim are written by Indians who are not even living here. Often they poke fun at Indians, though there is nothing wrong in poking fun, but there is no compassion and understanding. That is the difference between genuine Indian writing and Indian writing in English. Even though people like Amitav Ghosh write well, yet there is a distancing. If people like me write, it would be as bad. I don’t depend on the monsoon for my livelihood, I don’t travel in buses, I am urbanized, westernized and I can speak English. My perception of life is so different. It is not from their experience, it is second hand. It is sometimes contemptuous of the real India.

**V. GEETHA, v.geetha@gmail.com, geethav@gmail.com:** She is a translator, writer, a social historian and an activist. She is a freelance journalist with a number of small research journals. A leading intellectual from Tamil Nadu, she has been active in the Indian women’s movement since 1988, organizing workshops and conferences. She has written widely both in Tamil and in English on gender, popular culture, caste and politics of Tamil Nadu. I came to know about V. Geetha through Ms Mandira Sen, Editor, Stree Publications, who gave me her email id. I therefore mailed my questionnaire to her in order to know about the anomalies of taking up translated literature and also to get information about women writers of South India. I would like to give excerpts from her interview.

1. **Are there some anomalies that exist between a translated text and an original one? Does the essence get lost if one works on the translated text?**

Umberto Eco, the Italian writer and novelist once remarked that a translation is essentially an act of betrayal! That is one cannot assume at all that a translation can or intends to ‘capture’ the sense of an original. The original text inspires, captivates, but in translation, it is displaced into another life-world, for that is what
languages are - they are all equally life-worlds. And in this new habitation, the original text necessarily endures a different existence.

2. **How ethical is it to work on the translations at the Ph.D level?**

   I am not sure I understand this question - ethical in what sense? That you research something that others have spent a life time working on? If that is indeed so, won’t that be true of any research project?

3. **Are there some differences in perspective and focus if a text written by a female writer gets translated by a male writer?**

   Yes and no. If the translator is exceptionally skilled, the text, without him having to do much, will come to life. I recently read a Tamil translation of Mahashweta Devi - the translator is male, and I think the aching beauty of her prose came through. But I think if a woman, equally skilled were to do this, the result would have been different - for this simple reason, that she will make the text live through her own sensibility in a manner a man simply cannot...

4. **Are there some authors who have written according to caste and class, or have focused on such a divide? If so, who are they?**

   In which language? Again, I am not clear. Authors occupy a definite social space - they are rich or poor, male or female, Hindu or Christian, from the village or the sea... in this sense, no one can really be said to write outside of a defined social location. What they make of this location, whether they attempt to universalise their own parochialism, or problematise it, whether they achieve a transcendence through the power of their imagination - all these and more have a bearing on how class and caste define a text.

5. **If one takes the translated texts, how does one account for the time period as there exists a time lag between the original text and the date in which it gets translated?**

   The same text gets translated differently at different times. Much of this has to do with how a text is kept alive in public memory, whether it is part of an enduring cultural history, or an outsider text, who has written it, and how important that person in literary history... Based on these and related reasons, texts get translated across generations, centuries...The time of a translation then is inevitably the present - from where it attempts to enter into a conversation with past.
6. **How does one address issues in contemporaneity if one takes translations? What is ‘contemporary’ in Literature?**

You translate something because a) it is required in the syllabus b) it brings prestige c) it is an important part of a global literary canon ... there are many reasons why a certain text is translated. Apart from very particular and contingent reasons, translations reflect the present in that they indicate in what manner and through what means the text wishes to engage the past. In this sense, a translated text answers anxieties of the present, of the historical present.

7. **What becomes the basis of translation of the original text-readership expectancy or contemporaneity?**

The nature of the times, I would say, I feel I have to do this now and not later. Many translators except when they are commissioned for a particular task, do not go by what readers want, or by what the moment demands. Through translation, they attempt to engage the past, another place and time, and it is in this relationship that the basis of translation emerges.

8. **Who are the authors who have written on the issues related to gender and identity?**

There are many, and this is too general a question for me to answer.

9. **What according to you are the core issues of gender identity?**

Labour and sexuality.

10. **What according to you should the focus of my study be on- short stories, novellas or novels?**

Novels - I dislike short fiction. I see it as a lazy form.

11. **Is it possible to study one state rather than the whole of South India?**

While South India enjoys a sort of unity, each state is also firmly anchored in its own history. South India, I'd say that against this context of unity, it would make sense to study not the putatively unified whole, but the parts, that is individual states.
12. **Is it possible to study identity through the medium of certain symbols from the purview of literature?**

Identity emerges in and through relationships. So, I would say that while symbols tell part of the story, they are not the story. Identity has to be understood historically, in the context of social and literary relationships and so on.

13. **Is translation interpretation? If yes, then how does the translator do justice to the author's original text?**

Yes, translation is an interpretation, and as I have noted earlier, a translation is actually a text in its own right. Staying true to the original is the condition of translation, but not the reason for its existence.

14. **Are you happy with the way texts get translated? How do they differ from the original?**

Depends from which language to which language. Also my reading is too selective for me to give a fair answer.

**VAASANTHI SUNDARAM, vaasanthi.sundaram@gmail.com:** She is the Tamil writer, whose novel I have included as a part of my research work. The detailed biographical information about the author has been given in Chapter 2. The editor, Mr. Ram Ramnarayan and Dr. GJV Prasad proposed that I should contact her in order to get information about Tamil women writers and issues related to translation studies.

1. **Is it ethical to work on translations at the Ph.D level?**

Half of your doubts are irrelevant I feel. The world knows Garcia Marques only through the translations. So why worry? You have the advantage of knowing to speak Tamil, which means you can reasonably well relate to the ethos of the South Indian languages and their cultural nuances even in translation. Of course the power of an Indian language in the original cannot be fully transmitted in English which is alien to the culture here. But still English being a language of general communication translation in English is the only way you can reach across a wider circle of readers. Your thesis is on writings of women in vernacular tongues of the South-which means you cannot possibly have first-hand knowledge of all the languages and that you have to go by translations only. So don't worry about ethics. Go for recommended good translations. You can ask Zubaan to suggest a few titles. Women Unlimited and Penguin have also brought out some books.
2. **Are there any differences in perspective in case a text written by a woman writer gets translated by a male writer?**

I have not found much difference in translation between a male translator and a female translator in understanding the text. I have seen that some male writers don't understand the meanings between the lines in female writing depending upon their background or ideologies.

3. **How would one address issues in contemporaneity if there exists a huge time gap between the date of original writing and the translated one?**

All good short stories speak of Universal truths as revealed to the story teller which hold good to the reader whenever the original may have been written. Being contemporary is reflected in style and handling of the subject. Writers have been writing about the same subject—love, betrayal, joy, sorrow. The difference lies in the presentation and perception.

4. **What becomes the basis of translation of the original text—readership? Expectancy or contemporaneity?**

Truthfulness to the original. Nothing else.

5. **Who are the authors who have written on the issues related to gender and identity?**

There are several. Go to Sahitya Akademi Library and see in that section.

6. **What according to you are the core issues of gender identity?**

Discrimination which is a human rights violation.

7. **What according to you should the focus of my study be on—short stories, novellas or novels or can one take all the three while delineating the identity related issues?**

Concentrate on one genre. Short stories are the best to find the perception of the author regarding the subject that is handled.

8. **Is it possible to study one state rather than the whole of South India?**

Whole of South India is not a bad idea, though it involves a lot of work and also depends on the availability of translations. As far as Tamil is concerned, many of
the important women writers have at least some of their stories translated in English. You have a whole new crop of very bold women poets who speak about their bodies without inhibition. Their poems have been translated. You can add Rajam Krishnan and Salma to your list. If I were you I would stick to one state.

9. **Is it possible to study identity through the medium of certain symbols from the purview of literature?**

Of course. You have to come to a conclusion yourself from the text.

10. **Is translation interpretation? If yes, then how does the translator do justice to the author’s text?**

It is transcreation.

11. **Are you happy with the way your texts get translated? In what way does your text differ from the original?**

It is team work. My translators consult me and they allow me to do some corrections. I am fairly happy with the outcome. That is all you can hope for. Translation is a difficult art.

**VANAMALA VISWANATHA, kathaten@gmail.com:** She is an award winning translator who works both in Kannada and English. She has published seminal articles on various issues in English Studies and Translation Studies. She has translated several novels, poems and short stories from Kannada to English. She has worked as Honorary Director, Centre for Translation, Sahitya Akademi, Bangalore, and as a Director of Katha Translation for Equity Network. Professor Viswanatha is a Member of the Advisory Council, National Translation Mission and National Knowledge Commission, Government of India. Her name was proposed by Dr. GJV Prasad, who gave me her email id. I interviewed her on queries related to translations through electronic mail.

1. **Does the essence get lost if we take up translated works?**

There's nothing like 'essence' in any text. Essence is created in every process of reading. Hence, the translator as reader creates her meaning out of the text that she reads.

2. **How ethical is it to work on translations at the Ph.D level?**

Highly ethical.
3. **Are there any differences in perspective in case a text written by a woman writer gets translated by a male writer?**

Translation is an active process of mediation. So there are bound to be changes necessitated by the target language, culture and readership. So, change is inevitable. However, when a male translator translates a woman's text, one could watch out for the typical mainstream attitudes of disdain towards women's writing which can happen by heavy editing, omitting and changing of the text, especially endings.

4. **Who are the women writers who write on caste and class issues?**

Issues of caste and class are bound to be present in every text. I'm not familiar with the Tamil scene since I work with Kannada.

5. **Why does a text get translated- because of the readership expectancy or contemporariness?**

What gets translated and how the translation will be received by the target readership is dependent on the context and times of the readers. This plays an important role in deciding between choices for the translator.

6. **How does one address issues of contemporaneity if one takes translations? What is contemporary in literature?**

To the extent literature is a document of the time when it gets written, it is an important record of human experience. Since the mind which is reading and making sense of the translation is contemporary, the questions raised in the process of reading are willy-nilly contemporary.

7. **What according to you should the focus of my study be on- novellas, novels or short stories? Or can I take all the three?**

Whichever is a significant genre in terms of bulk and interest, you could select that.

8. **What according to you are the core issues of gender identity?**

Depends on what issues you are investigating.
9. *Is translation interpretation? If yes, then how does the translator do justice to the author’s original text?*

Yes. The translated text is the only text for the reader.

10. *Are you happy with the way your texts get translated? How do they differ from the original?*

Yes. That calls for a thesis from me !!!!!!
APPENDIX II

The detailed summaries of the novellas, novels and short stories form a part of the Appendix II and have been discussed as under.

AMBAI “UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT”

“Unpublished Manuscript” is a revelation of the central character’s life story. It is being unravelled by her daughter, Chentamarai. Thirumagal, the central character of the story, is an English Professor in the University of Benares. She is the daughter of Ramasami, who owns a printing press. He is a great advocate of women’s rights and freedom. Ramasami marries a widow and recognizes the yearning in his wife’s eyes to study further. Immediately after marriage, he sends her for further studies. His wife later on joins him only after the completion of her studies. Ramasami does not adhere to the gendered norms and expectations. He brings up his daughter, Thirumagal, in a progressive manner and fully appreciates her creativity, research and academic abilities.

Thirumagal falls in love with Muthukumaran, a Tamil poet. Quite a contrary figure to her father, Muthukumaran is a true patriarch, who expects his wife to perform her domestic duties without fail. Through his male chauvinistic attitude and egoism, he tries to curtail Thirumagal’s creative spaces. She on the other hand, stands out boldly against all criticism and violent behaviour and pursues her path with determination and a steadfast attitude.

The turning point appears after Ramasami’s death when Muthukumaran insists that his poems should be accepted by their publication house. Thirumagal considers these poems as gory, exhibiting sexual violence against women and raises objections. She tells him that the decision of publication rests with the advisory board. This once again results in criticisms and arguments. Muthukumaran insults Ramasami and slanders the father daughter relationship. Thirumagal is unable to take all this and gives a violent blow in his groin. This fierce retaliation lands her in a mental asylum. However, the situation turns out to be better for her as she comes out of the institution after six months with the help of one of the workers of the publication house. Finally with her daughter, Chentamarai, she starts her life afresh in Benares.

Chentamarai has great admiration for her mother. She is more of a friend than a daughter and helps her mother by doing small things for her. Whenever Thirumagal is busy writing her research paper and does not even have the time to bathe and cook, Chentamarai makes tea for her mother. Thirumagal also shares a deep bonding with her daughter. She introduces her to the works of great poets and writers and encourages her to see beyond the world of romanticism. Her inculcation of regenerative thinking process begins with inducing Chentamarai to think about the reversal of roles in a man
woman relationship. Thirumagal tries to dispel her idealistic notions about the man woman relationship. She is quite open with her daughter and candidly tells her whenever Chentamarai asks her about the male poets coming to their house at odd hours. When she asks her mother if a certain poet is in love with her, Thirumagal tells her that he came here only to hold discussions and improvise on the quality of his poems.

One day Chentamarai overhears a conversation between Mohan Gupta, a poet and writer, who frequently visited their home and her mother. Mohan is in love with Thiru and is aware about her traumatic past. When he proposes marriage to her, Thiru refuses to enter into any relationship and tells him that it had been very difficult for her to come out of the trauma of violent marriage and her ordeal in a mental asylum. Chentamarai discovers the manuscript of her mother's life story. Her heart goes out to her mother and she feels as if the bond between them has got strengthened further. Thiru at once makes out through her daughter's attitude that she had read the manuscript. In order to compensate for the absence of father figure in her life, she places Muthukumaran's photograph on her daughter's table. Thirumagal does not let the bitterness of marital relationship enter into her daughter's life. The novella also projects a single woman's ability and courage to rebuild her life singlehandedly.

**AMBAI “A DEER IN THE FOREST”**

“A Deer in the Forest” has been translated by CT Indra. It was originally written by Ambai in 1992 when she was a Rockfeller Scholar-in-Residence at the University of Chicago. This story appears as a part of the collection of “Ambai Two Novellas and A Story”, published by Katha in 2003.

This is a beautiful metaphorical story that raises relevant issues related to a woman's body, reproduction, barrenness and various social stigmas allied with it. These issues are projected through the central character Thangam, who is considered abnormal because she never menstruates. In order to attain normalcy, her body is subjected to various kinds of torture- physical, mental and psychological. Thangam finally gives up and requests to let her be. She no longer considers her body as an enigma and accepts it as it is.

The unknown and strange forest in the story, wherein the young deer gets lost, perhaps stands for Thangam athai's body, which appeared as an enigma to her when she didn't menstruate. Although initially she was scared of it and didn't know how to deal with it, yet she gradually started accepting her body as it is. It posed no riddles to her now. The presence of other animals in the forest perhaps is an indication of people like her. This gives her an assurance that she is not alone.
The triumph of the central character lies in building a positive image about her sense of self through her transcendence over fears instead of giving herself to negativities. She is able to brush aside the gendered evaluation of her body on the basis of reproductive capacities with her transformative capacity, perceptiveness and a new outlook. Thangam is able to cope positively by extending her love and warmth to everyone around. It is this positivity that lends “a lucky touch” to her.

**AMBAI “WRESTLING”**

“Wrestling” is one of the novellas written by Ambai, which explores the professional rivalry between a husband and wife. The story is about a couple- Shanmugam and Shenbagam, who hold concerts in temples, popularly known as ‘kacheris’ in Tamil Nadu. Shanmugam is jealous of his wife, Shenbagam’s artistic abilities and curtails her from participating in concerts. Her main function in the house is to do the household chores and make proper arrangements for her husband to conduct classes. Shanmugam finds fault with everything that Shenbagam does. He does not spare her even before his students and disciples, who come to take music lessons from him. They both appear like wrestlers in a mortal combat. However, Shanmugam camouflages his insecurity and jealousy before his children and appears his cheerful self. Like a dutiful wife Shenbagam bears everything calmly.

As a little girl Shenbhagam is left under Ayya’s care by her mother, Nagammal, who wished to nurture her daughter’s musical abilities. She trains her daughter well so that she is taken in by Ayya as his pupil. Despite his initial refusal, Ayya feels compelled to give in on seeing Nagammal’s determination as well as Shenbagam’s talents. He trains her well and considers her as his best pupil. Shenbagam does well than Ayya’s son, Shanmugam, who considers music as his legacy. He exhibits his jealousy against Shenbagam’s talents when Ayya gives her a chance to perform a solo on the stage and is critical of her compositions. Ayya on the other hand is proud of her talents and abilities. Shenbagam and Shanmugam gradually fall in love with each other. Ayya and his wife decide to get them married. Although Ayya is initially critical of Shenbagam assuming domestic roles and blames her for negating her musical talents, yet he continues to teach her till his death. Shanmugam on the other hand, relegates her to the life of domesticity and child care and does not let her perform. One day when one of his pupils in a public concert deliberately negates Shanmugam’s instruction to sing, Shenbagam takes the mike in her hand and starts singing. Her husband feels trapped, and it appears to him as if he has been wrestled to the ground.

Ambai champions the cause of equal rights for women through the portrayal of progressive characters such as Ayya, who believe that women’s creative spaces must never be smothered by domestication and child rearing. He brings up his protégée, Shenbagam without any discrimination. Even when she is menstruating, he does not
keep her away from music and books. Ayya prevents Shenbagam from doing household chores, lest her fingers get spoilt. He also shares the housework with his son, Shanmugam, when his wife is unwell. Ambai also portrays certain courageous women characters, such as Kanakambal (Ayya’s mother) and Nagammal, who possess the ability to achieve anything through their grit and determination. Kanakambal was a devdasi who actively participated in the Self-Respect Movement meetings and followed the Gandhian principles through the adornment of khaddar. She had the courage to defy the authorities. When the temple authorities asked her as to why she had not adorned herself in a silk sari, she asserted her individual choice to wear a khaddar sari, thereby lending her support to the freedom struggle. Similarly, Nagammal who worked as a domestic servant in other people’s houses succeeded in getting the best music teacher for her daughter, Shenbhagam.

The title “Wrestling” in its true sense describes the gender war and clash of ego between Shanmugam and Shenbagam. It also throws a lot of light on their relationship which is harboured by male dominance, insecurity and a sense of ownership of a man over his wife which gives him complete authority to belittle her achievements.

**AMBAI “A PURPLE SEA”**

“A Purple Sea” is a collection of short stories by Ambai. It was first published in 1992 by East West Books (Madras) Pvt Ltd. All these stories were originally written in Tamil and constituted a part of different books and magazines. Manas, an imprint of East West Books has reprinted these stories, which have been translated into English by the noted writer and translator, Lakshmi Holmstrom. Out of the collection of seventeen stories, eleven of them deal with issues related to gender identity.

I would like to focus on the summaries of each of these stories that form a part of this collection.

**GIFTS**

In this story, the narrator is a young woman, who travels to several places as she is working on a project related to women. She tries to capture their life experiences, their thought processes, dreams and aspirations, if any. For this purpose, she has to interview several women. During the course of undertaking this project she meets two women, with whom she shares a bonding of a different kind.

The narrator first meets the hostess, who greets her hospitably with coffee and dosais. In a conversation with her, the narrator comes to know about her repressive existence. Her life is merely confined within the four walls of the house, dedicated to the service of her family. Her dreams are being stifled by her husband who shows no scruples in
bringing his wife to violent submission in case his wishes are thwarted. What surprises the narrator is her unflinching devotion to her household duties and the warmth that she showers upon everyone, despite such devaluation and disrespect. The narrator feels drawn towards her and tries to trace a similarity between herself and the hostess in their love for sea. While her desires, dreams and ambitions have been encouraged, the latter’s have been stifled. The narrator meets Chandra, a young girl of twenty during the course of her project work. She is the sister of Ganapati, who escorts her in one of the trips. Chandra is awed by the narrator’s ability to travel alone and walk fast, both of which have been highlighted by her brother as traits remarkable to a woman. She is also confined within the four walls of the house and is not allowed to move out anywhere except for temples and that too once in a while. Chandra too leads a restrictive existence and spends her entire day performing household chores. She has fanciful notions about marriage, for she feels she would gain the freedom to go out only after marriage. Somehow, this myopic vision is being constructed by her brother and mother. Chandra shares her dreams and fantasies of an ideal husband with the narrator. She not only serves food to the narrator, but also attends to her needs even in the middle of the night. In case the latter sneezes, Chandra makes a drink of pepper and jeera in hot water. When the narrator leaves for her place, Chandra asks her brother to buy her the special town halva. She even receives dosais from the hostess as a parting gift.

One evinces female bonding through the hospitality, affection and warmth shown by both the women through the act of sharing and sending food as gifts from their side. Apart from the gender bias and negation of women’s abilities, a caring and nurturant image is reflected through the garb of domesticity adorned by these women.

**MY MOTHER, HER CRIME**

This story reflects societal views on girls attaining maturity. Although an extremely sensitive issue, it reflects how negative attitude and lack of warmth and acceptance on the part of the mother results in a negative impact and a feeling of fear instilled into the mind of the young adolescent girl. This story also mirrors sexual taboos and silence on such issues, lack of openness, which in turn rakes the fearful imagination of the young minds, turning the growing up phase into an unpleasant one.

The story begins with a very happy note reflecting the bonding between the mother and the daughter. The narrator of this story is a young girl, who is pampered and cosseted by her mother. Her mother is the sole refuge for her and she idolizes her as a goddess whose presence removes all impurities. It is her mother who strengthens the young girl’s belief in her inner worth. She tells her daughter that despite her dark complexion, she is beautiful. Her mother’s presence lends a sense of security to the daughter. The young girl turns thirteen and asks her mother questions on puberty. The mother doesn’t give her a straightforward reply, but asks her to stay as it is- dancing, twirling and playing.
around. Diwali comes and the girl is quite happy and eager to wear a purple coloured satin ‘paavadai’ (a long skirt), stitched by her mother. However, this much looked forward to festival has to be spent without the mother, who is away for a week to attend to her niece’s bride viewing ceremony. She is thus being left under the care of her elder sister, Kalyani. After having had her oil bath, the young girl goes to pick out some flowers from the champakam tree. Suddenly, she hears the noise of bursting crackers and rushes home. However, while collecting the flowers in the basket, she notices stains on her long skirt, which she feels might have occurred due to her tree climbing activity.

When she discusses about the stained skirt with her elder sister, Kalyani raises a hue and cry about it. She invites the neighbourhood women and an old widow too comes to view the young girl. She is unable to understand the physiological changes that has come upon her and craves for her mother’s loving presence. It appears to her as if something horrific has happened to her. She looks forward to her mother’s homecoming and feels that she alone would be able to unveil this mystery for her. She becomes detached, stubborn and aggressive in her temperament. Neither her father nor Kalyani make an attempt to make her comfortable by conversing with her about her fears. When the mother comes home, she is ready to pour out her sufferings and pangs before her. However, her mother is utterly disappointed due to her niece’s rejection by the boy owing to her dark complexion. Thus, when she sees her daughter, instead of comforting her, she blames her for this condition. The Goddess like image of her mother gets shattered. She is reduced to a mere human being before her daughter with all her failings. Her mother’s barbed words create a negative feeling into her psyche, paving way to endless fears, dark pictures, thereby slaughtering the innocence and childhood joys. The story delineates a negative image of motherhood as well as the sexual taboos of purity, pollution and restrictions imposed on the female body owing to menstruation, which is treated as a physiological and psychological experience.

**WINGS: I**

This is a long story which describes the protagonist’s captivity in a hapless marriage, her assertion of financial independence and creative spaces through sewing. Her dilemmas and frustrations are evinced through her relationship with her husband, who deprives her of the smallest pleasures, stifles her dreams, so much so that she loses all zest and enthusiasm for life.

Chaya, the main protagonist of the story, weaves certain sexual dreams and fantasies, bordering on laws and principles, about men in general. However, all her dreams and principles are shattered as a result of her marriage with Bhaskaran. He flouts all her rules not only in terms of his body image, but also by denying her the smallest comforts and happiness.
Bhaskaran is stout and heavily built, but Chaya overlooks all his physical flaws and gets married to him. He turns out to be miserly and always continues to find faults with Chaya’s home management skills. All that she does for him is devalued. Bhaskaran feels that Chaya ends up wasting a lot of things while cooking. He denies her space and independence by stifling her desires. Chaya loves sewing and pursues it as a favourite pastime activity. She decides to stitch a few frocks for Bhaskaran’s sister’s children. However, he objects to doing it for free and gives her less money for the monthly expenses. Bhaskaran is of the view that out of the money given for household expenses, Chaya is wasting it on needles and threads. From then on she starts charging money for stitching clothes. Chaya feels fettered and loses all zest and enthusiasm to go on in life. She experiences a deeper bonding with her mother now, whose hardships she was unable to understand as a young girl. Chaya feels sorry about the tantrums and nagging demands that she had once made upon her mother.

Chaya herself is a loving and caring mother. She is deeply attached to her son, Sekhar. However, she feels sorry to find him adult like as he never pesters her for anything— not even a bicycle, which she is willing to buy him. Chaya grieves about the fact that Sekhar is turning out like his father as like him he too feels proud to have saved money. She strives for a breathing space and retaliates by holding arguments with Bhaskaran. When Bhaskaran refuses to buy Sekhar a bicycle, she asserts her financial independence and says that she would do it on her own. Their relationship lacks warmth. Even when Bhaskaran desired her sexually, she found his grip suffocating and paralyzing. Chaya felt that he wanted to have her only because that was the only thing that he could get without paying money. Being a dutiful wife, she found it difficult to resist him. With this frame of mind, she formulated another rule that men who caused their wives such affliction should be given houses in the red light district in perpetuity.

**WINGS: II**

This is a sequel to the part one entitled, “Wings: I”. It beautifully captivates the dilemmas, anxieties and frustrations of the protagonist, Chaya, who is caught in a hapless marriage from which she envisions no escape. She makes a regression from a desire to assert her independence and individuality by breaking herself free, to succumbing to this caged existence. It also highlights the bonding that a daughter shares with her mother on account of the similarity of their experiences. Other significant issues such as lack of space, freedom, independent decision making, stifling of the creative spaces, desires and ambitions and envisioning of motherhood as a trap, are also highlighted.

Chaya makes a resolve to break free from this marriage, which has robbed her of independence and space. She detests Bhaskaran for prying into her mother’s letters. She feels that after the separation, she would be able to work as a teacher or continue
with her tailoring. Chaya envisions a happy and peaceful life with Sekhar, unmarked by stinginess. However, the next moment she feels guilty and wonders at her audacity for entertaining such thoughts. Ever since her marriage, she has been unable to change Bhaskaran’s temperament. Owing to several hardships faced by him, the thought of saving money becomes an obsession, at the cost of his family’s happiness. Chaya is emotionally alienated from her husband and is drained of all feelings excepting that of compassion which one human being feels for another. Her mother invites her for the bride viewing ceremony of her sister, Bhuma. While Chaya wants to go, Bhaskaran doesn’t give her permission to spend money on the bus fare. He feels that it would be impossible for her to go for each and every ceremony like this. Despite his refusal, Chaya decides to go.

She shares a special bonding with Bhuma. On reaching there when Chaya asks Bhuma about the bridegroom, she reveals to her that Chaya already knew him. She is aware of Bhuma’s liking for Ishwaran and feels quite happy for her sister. However, Chaya senses an emotional alienation on Bhuma’s part. She feels that her sister has somehow changed. Chaya even overhears a conversation between her sister and mother, whereby Bhuma criticises Chaya for her miserly and stingy attitude. This comes as a jolt to her and all her excitement and enthusiasm vanishes. Chaya experiences severe headache and feels quite unwell. However, she meets Ishwaran out of courtesy and rushes to the backyard. Her mother senses that something is amiss and comes and comforts her daughter. Even before Chaya tells her about her pregnancy, her mother knows about it. Chaya on the other hand, considers this pregnancy as an additional burden and pain.

Chaya shares a special bonding with her mother, Kamu. It is characterized by a typical love hate relationship. She is aware about her mother’s dislike for Bhaskaran as a bridegroom. Her mother had not been in favour of this match. Chaya even notices a forlorn expression on her mother’s face when she comes home after marriage. She even quarrels with her mother for not accepting Bhaskaran as her son-in-law. Despite her apology, Chaya is aware of the gnawing sorrow and discontentment inside her mother. Her mother even acts as an emotional anchor for Chaya. She shares a bonding with Kamu on account of their similarity of experiences. Kamu too had suffered because of her husband’s dominating nature. He did not let her pursue her creative interests because of his jealous temperament. Consequently, Kamu who had a love for music and enjoyed playing vina, deliberately broke its strings, thereby stifling her dreams at the altar of her husband’s ego.

Chaya is weighed down by the thoughts of her pregnancy. She does not feel any enthusiasm or happiness, but only considers it as an obstacle. When she tells Bhaskaran about it, he too is worried about the financial burden and additional expenditure that this second child would make them incur. Chaya is emotionally and
physically drained. She feels as if her wings had been clipped. All her initial resolve of independence and breaking free from this oppressive marriage are reduced to a mere dream, and she succumbs to this dreary and hapless existence.

**TRISANKU**

It is a moving story which captures the protagonist’s strife to overcome the feelings of negativity, inferiority and timidity and her constant failure to do so.

Anjana is a doctoral student in the Department of International Relations. We find her introspecting over her life experiences. She loathes herself for her mediocrity, lack of confidence and her inability to question her professors or speak in seminars. It appears to Anjana as if her father’s clerk like quality had seeped into her. She seems to have inherited his docility, timidity and submissiveness, allowing others to treat her like a dog or a slave. She wonders if her weakness is due to the fact of being a woman. Anjana observes the other women scholars in the department who speak with perfect ease and confidence. They not only question their professors, but before they even get a reply, they light a cigarette or chew their gums before them. They even mock and jeer at their professors and have a high opinion about themselves. On seeing their confident and saucy behavior, she feels that she would never be able to behave like them.

Anjana is self-critical and loathes herself for her timidity. She is unable to assert her dignity even when her father’s boss forcibly kisses her in his car and her guide, Professor Basavayya, tries to take advantage of her. Instead of confronting them boldly, she is filled with remorse and tears. Anjana rather avoids her guide instead of filing a complaint against him. She manages to get herself registered for a doctoral degree in international relations in another University in the North. Anjana becomes conscious of her academic inferiority and considers her a misfit as unlike others she is unable to get her research papers published with haste. Even her Professor makes fun of her and is glad to get rid of her.

Anjana’s constant self-criticism robs her of her peace of mind. She therefore strives to transcend her mediocrity and timidity by speaking out her views in one of the seminars. Although she speaks with confidence and clarity and leaves the speaker from overseas spell bound, but the audience and her professors jeer at her. Anjana realizes that it is impossible to reveal anything without fear and shame. Not even one’s tears. This story delineates the protagonist’s failure to confront the challenges of life as all her efforts are met with a failure.
ONCE AGAIN

This is a story about two adolescents, Lokidas and Sabari, who are brought up with the set of do’s and don’ts. The restrictive socialization robs them of their freedom, goals, aspirations and desires. They try to break free of the good boy and girl image by indulging in sexual experimentation, the consequences of which they have to endure. Sabari’s sexual intercourse with her boyfriend, Loki, results in her pregnancy and a painful abortion. Despite all the negative experiences, the story ends on a positive note with both the lovers being united. Their love blossoms with the birth of their baby. It also exhibits the adolescents’ ability to deal with the crisis and assume responsibility for their actions.

FIFTEEN

This is a humorous and interesting story, which gives us a peep into the adolescent world of Chellam and Champakam characterized by their love affairs, infatuation, fantastical world of make belief and delusions informed by cinematic influence, and exploration of sexual knowledge.

Chellam is a thirteen year old adolescent girl, who is in love with her tutor’s son, Kalivardan, an eighteen year old college going boy. She confesses about her feelings to her aunt’s daughter, Champakam, who is two years elder to her. Champakam lives in her own world of fantasy and make believe, weaving imaginary tales and incidents one after another. She has an intense desire to renounce the world. She wants to create an aura of tragedy around her and very often exclaims, “What a life!” Champakam devises various ways of renunciation. She desires to become a nun, whereby from a pedestal she would be able to serve humanity. It is Champakam’s belief that women who have had unhappy love affairs turned into nuns. Her imagination takes a turn in dreaming about having a lover suffering from TB, cancer and other dreadful illnesses about which he himself would be unaware of. Champakam dreams of such a man coming in quest for her and dying at her doorstep, uttering “Champa”. She feels that she would then be elevated to a tragic figure, devoid of tears. Champakam even dreams of falling in love with a George or a Salim, their families in strong opposition to their love. She fantasizes bidding a farewell to her lover with a sad heart, who lacks the courage and resolution to go against his family. Her fanciful imagination knows no bounds.

When Chellam shows Champakam the love poem written by Kalivaradan, she drafts an imaginary reply on the former’s behalf informing him about her resolution of becoming a nun owing to her attachment with a man who has lost his manhood. Kalivaradan devoutly replies to her letters and tries to discourage her from such attempts. However, Champakam’s imagination knows no bounds and she keeps on weaving a tragic aura around the love story. When Chellam asks her as to what she meant by losing one’s
manhood, Champakam exhibits complete ignorance. She tells Chellam that she had been inspired to write about it due to a movie that she had watched where the hero loses his manhood owing to an accident and his wife has frequent baths during night time. Both Chellam and Champakam decide to consult her friend, Katyayani, who too is an avid movie watcher and an expert in gesticulating and imitating the hero and heroine’s actions. She too is unable to give any explanation, but brings a book from his uncle’s room, which gives them some idea about the connection between the loss of manhood and birth of babies. All the three visit a circulating library in Bangalore to quench their curiosity about sexual matters and consult a book on love games and positions. Katyayani derives some half-baked information by watching her newly married uncle stealthily kissing his wife, which she shares with her friends. All of them however, come to the conclusion that all the married couples frequently indulge in these kinds of activities, though Chellam finds it hard to believe this about her parents.

The love letters continue to get exchanged. The family gets a new cook, Vasudevan with whom the girls develop a bonding. They show him Kalivaradan’s poems. He tells them that this has been copied from some movie lyric. The girls are extremely disappointed at his plagiarism. When Kalivaradan comes to meet Chellam and hands her a book of self-composed poems, at Champakam’s insistence she throws it on the ground. He feels heart-broken and informs them of his resolution to die. The girls eagerly await the news of his death and even speculate the manner of his death—by hanging or by poisoning. However, their imagination falls flat when they see Kalivaradan alive and happy. Champakam continues to whet her imagination by thinking that she and Kalivaradan had been in love and that he had hanged himself for the sake of love. She imagines his corpse in various poses which adds on to another tragic burden giving her a reason to renounce the world. This story mirrors the adolescent world of fantasies and imagination and their sexual exploration through books.

**WHEELCHAIR**

This story mirrors the angst of the female protagonist, Hitha, her conflict of ideologies with that of her boyfriend, Gautaman, with whom she shares a live-in relationship. It also depicts her expectations, conflicts and frustrations resulting there from. Hitha evolves as a self-realized being by openly challenging the hypocritical principles of Gautaman’s party and unfettering the shackles of this one-sided relationship. She exhibits staunch courage to walk alone and follow her path without Gautaman’s support.

Hitha is a research scholar. She belongs to a lower middle class family. Hitha is ill treated by her brother and sister-in-law, who deprive her of food and extort from her a lot of housework. Her crippled father stands as a silent spectator to her sufferings. He never raises any voice even when Hitha’s brother throws her out of the house.
Having closely experienced and suffered injustice, hunger, shame, reproach and contempt, she feels she would be able to fight for the cause of the oppressed and poor with rage and passion. She herself tries fighting against the termination of the peon in her office, who is sacked on account of being underweight. Hitha is unable to understand the irony as the area in which he lived lacked in hygiene and smelled of faeces. She felt that if the organization couldn't improve his standard of living, it had no right whatsoever to terminate him from the job. In the process of the struggle, she comes into contact with Gautaman who invites her to join his party. Hitha rejects his offer as she wishes to pursue this struggle alone. However, she loses her job and later on joins Gautaman’s political party as it emphasized on the revolutionary ideals and principles.

Hitha shares a live in relationship with Gautaman and actively works for the party. However, she notices several discrepancies with respect to differences in ideologies and commitment. Hitha observes that all the party members belong to the elite section of society and lack the perspective to understand the sufferings of the poor. She points out to Gautaman about it but he refuses to listen to her. Hitha feels that by sitting in air conditioned rooms and drinking expensive whiskey one cannot bring about revolution. She even criticizes members such as Nambiar, who feel that by merely putting on a kurta pajama and drinking bidis, he can covert the working class people of Kerala to his way of thinking.

Gautaman is unable to understand Hitha’s point of view. She objects to the inclusion of certain members like Mahesh who are hypocrites. While they can have sex with a lower caste women like Anandi and even make them pregnant, but cannot marry or claim responsibility for her child in the womb. They would rather obey their fathers in this respect. It falls upon women like Hitha to escort them for abortion. There arises bitter arguments and difference of opinions between the two. For Gautaman, Hitha represents the ideologies that he holds and seems to cherish apparently. He takes her for meeting his father, who is a high ranking official in the United Nations, but is rather ashamed of Hitha’s gluttonous appetite and asks her to be mindful and show restraint. The huge wall of class difference between the two leads to incompatibility, of which Hitha is acutely conscious. While Gautaman wanted her to be obedient and acceptable to all the principles, it was not possible for her to be so.

Hitha finally makes a resolution to walk out of Gautaman’s life and party. She voices out her difficulty to pursue a path of hypocrisy with complete lack of commitment towards justice. Although she loves Gautaman, yet she decides to tread this path alone by clearing away all the obstacles. Commitment and passion for justice gain preponderance over her love for Gautaman. This story delineates the empowerment of the protagonist through the choice that she makes.
**YELLOW FISH**

This is a moving story in which the protagonist, Anu, a young mother, tries to compensate for her inability to save her infant daughter, Jalaja's life by saving the life of a yellow fish, which in its struggle for its life resembles like her daughter. Anu seeks the help of a young fisher boy who at her request places the fish safely into the sea water. She herself ensures that the yellow fish safely glides into water and watches its movements till it gets submerged into the blue grey waters. The sea water has a special significance as Jalaja's ashes are also submerged into it. This story appears to reflect positive coping to overcome the negative feelings of helplessness.

**A KITCHEN IN THE CORNER OF THE HOUSE**

This story delineates the identity of the Indian woman in the true sense. It gives us a peep into the Rajasthani household, their customs and mores. Although this story is replete with Rajasthani women characters, but the protagonist, Minakshi, is a South Indian woman married to Kishen, one of the sons of the family. It is through her eyes that the plot is unravelled. Her marriage is based on companionship and equality, unlike the rest of the women whose husbands make compelling gendered demands on them. While the rest of the women characters accept their domestication silently, Minakshi questions it by asking her father-in-law for a wider cooking space overlooking the mountains, which according to her would seem to provide breathing space to its inmates. It is Minakshi who triggers the thought processes of Jiji, her mother-in-law, by asking her to imagine her existence beyond the gender trappings.

The kitchen becomes a concept, a set of beliefs for the family. The lives of all the women revolve around the dark and dimly lit kitchen, where they slog throughout to make palatable and delicious eatables for the male members. Even for Jiji, her biggest achievement in life has been to establish her domination and rights over the kitchen. Her fierce competitor is Bari Jiji, her stepmother-in-law, who is elder to her only by two years. Jiji tries to compensate for the back breaking work that had been extorted from her by her stepmother-in-law during her father-in-law's time by denying food and other privileges to the now widowed Bari Jiji. The kitchen becomes a site of power and domination in which Jiji exercises complete control. There is hostility between them in terms of food wars and possession of kitchen keys. Bari Jiji, on the other hand tries to compensate for the lack by stocking and stealing food in the secret pockets of her heavily pleated skirt. Once in a while she pretends to be possessed by the spirit of the Goddess Ambe and demands meat, food and drinks from Jiji.

The identity of the rest of the women and their roles as daughters-in-law are merely defined by the extent of household chores done by them. Radha Bhabhiji, the eldest daughter-in-law, worked in a highest position in the bank. Despite all her education, she
has to do all the household chores in her house. Her husband, Gopal, refuses to lend a
helping hand and finds it difficult to stand in the kitchen in the sweltering heat to make
even a cup of tea, when she is away on some official work. He feels that women are
used to standing in the kitchen. Same is the case with Kusuma, the second daughter-in-
law, who besides her Masters in Political Science had studied French to brighten her
matrimonial aspects. She fits into the category of a perfect daughter-in-law, who knows
embroidery, had attended classes in flower arrangement, bakery and sewing. The
culinary and home management skills make them ideal daughters-in-laws. Even when
the picnic is planned, it is the women of the household who get up early and make
preparations for food items. They pack other essential things such as milk powder,
bottles, sweet and salty biscuits for children. The men on the other hand rest
complacently.

While the other women unquestioningly accept their roles, Minakshi raises issue
regarding the modification of the kitchen so that there is more ventilation and hygiene.
She is fully supported by Kishen who always lends her a helping hand either in chopping
vegetables or in serving tea, unmindful of his father’s taunts. Minakshi is able to raise
herself beyond the gendered roles. One day Jiji gets unwell. She is looked after by her
daughters-in-law. At that point of time Minakshi is around her and Jiji boasts to her about
her achievements of being in the possession of large amount of jewellery and the
kitchen keys. Minakshi encourages Jiji to transcend herself above the gender trappings.
She tries to kindle her dormant and circumscribed thought processes by asking her to
explore her strengths, abilities and search into her inner self. Minakshi asks her to
imagine what she would have become if she were not trapped by these roles and duties
of a mother and mother-in-law. Thus, this story not only highlights the double burden
shouldered by women and exalts their culinary skills and capabilities, but it also conveys
the message that there is more to a woman’s existence than her domestication and
commitment to relational roles and responsibilities.

**BLACK HORSE SQUARE**

Most poignant and touching of all the stories, it mirrors rape and exploitation of Rosa, the
protagonist, at the hands of several policemen and her efforts to fight against injustice
with the help of women’s groups. It also delineates women power, strength, female
solidarity and their transformative capacities in using their anger as a potent weapon.

Abhilasha comes to visit Rosa, the rape victim. She also happens to be Rosa’s sister-in-
law. Abhilasha wishes to take up Rosa’s case by writing a report in the women’s
magazine, “Naari”. She envisions lot of bitterness in Rosa who has lost all faith in justice.
Despite Abhilasha’s insistence, she refuses to fight and blames all the women’s groups
and organizations who had earlier come to visit her and tried muddling issues of price
rise and other things along with her cause. Abhilasha tries to convince Rosa that she
can use her anger as a potent and constructive weapon to fight against the injustice and violence that has been committed upon her body. Finally, at her mother’s insistence she decides to fight.

Rosa agrees to give interview to Abhilasha. Rosa and her brother Lenin had grown up listening to stories of independence, French Revolution, Industrial Revolution from their father, Kandasami, who was a Marxist. They both had firm belief in Marxian ideals and were willing to fight for the cause of the oppressed. They had imbibed these ideals from their father who was a trade union activist. Thus, Rosa like her brother was an active participant in trade union activities till she met Prabhakar Shinde, who used to fight for the rights of the adivasis and tribals. Prabhakar followed his brother, Sudhakar’s footsteps. Sudhakar too fought for the tribals, but was driven many times from the forest. Later on it was said that he had hanged himself in the prison. The blue marks on his brother’s neck got deeply embedded in Prabhakar’s psyche.

Rosa decided to join Prabhakar and there arose a conflict between Lenin and her as he wanted her to pursue higher studies. Much against Lenin’s wishes, she worked with Prabhakar visiting the tribals’ huts and even had food with them. There arose an intimacy between Rosa and Prabhakar. She even became quite close to Prabhakar’s family. His mother organized a feast celebrating Rosa’s pregnancy when Prabhakar’s arrest took place. He was falsely accused of setting fire to the factory warehouse and was brutally beaten by the policemen. When Rosa went to meet him in the prison, she saw his mangled body and subjection to police violence. There were bruises all over his body, his testicles were purple red in colour and were swollen. He could only see with one eye, which too had no life in it and was completely red in colour. Prabhakar died in the prison and Rosa was arrested as his accomplice. She was brutally gang raped. Every time she fainted water was poured over her and the policemen inserted twigs and wire into her. Finally, when they could do nothing with her body and found the man who had set fire to the factory warehouse, they let her go. Rosa lost her right to motherhood. When she came home, she complained of a pain in her lower belly and was covered in a pool of blood.

Rosa was filled with anguish, bitterness and anger. She rejected all help from Prabhakar Shinde’s associates and asked them where they were when his body was brutally mutilated. She felt that she had no shoulder to lean over in the most critical time. Rosa abhorred the efforts of media who felt that she was just hot news. She put forth a haunting question before Sheila Kulkarni, who reported about Rosa’s interview in “Eve’s Weekly”. Rosa asked her if she wanted her to plead for justice before those people who had destroyed her. Rosa boldly claimed that though she had not even killed a fly but a day would come when she would pull out and throw away the intestines of each of those policemen and smear herself with their blood.
It seemed to Abhilasha that all the meetings and processions for Rosa had failed because of her non-participation. After a lot of persuasion, Rosa participates in the processions and voices out the story of her suffering, brutality and police violence. She receives the support of women’s organization who succeed in printing the posters, arranging for funds and organizing the TV channel for a live coverage of Rosa’s address. Rosa’s procession turns out to be huge success as women from all walks of life participate- right from educated ones to domestic servants and sweepers. She receives their support in the form of tears and applause. Her case attracts the attention of one of the retired judges who claimed that she had ninety percent chances of winning.

Abhilasha also voices out the stories of several bold women, who when summoned to the police station, always carried their babies on their hips so that they were allowed to go when the child cried. Also, there were some who wore nylon saris and carried matchboxes in case they suspected any violation to their honour.

Abhilasha admires Rosa’s courage and fiery spirit. She is the one who tries to justify her conduct before Lenin, thereby building the breach. Lenin though talks about Marxist principles and ideologies, fails to come forward to help and support his sister’s cause. He is more worried about societal causes than that of an individual. While his mother is too proud of him, Lenin somehow feels ashamed of owning them, as Abhilasha points out to him.

What appears to be the most interesting part of the story is the conflict of ideologies amongst the women’s groups. The women’s groups supporting Rosa receive criticism on grounds of their dress. It is believed by some of them that if they are fighting for women’s cause, they should be dressed up in saris rather than trousers. The strength and solidarity of the women’s groups is emphasized through the formulation of an Association Against Rape and their efforts in bringing about a change in the rape laws. This story exalts the activism of women in bringing about a larger social, legal and attitudinal transformation.

**AMBAI “IN A FOREST, A DEER”**

“In A Forest, A Deer” is a collection of short stories collated from Ambai’s two Tamil anthologies, “Siragugal Muriyum” (‘Shattered Wings’ (1976)) and “Veetin Muulaiyil Oru Samayalarai” (‘A Kitchen in the Corner of the House’) (1988). They have been translated into English by the noted translator and writer, Lakshmi Holmstrom and published by the Oxford University Press in 2006. Out of the collection of eighteen stories that constitute a part of this collection, ten stories deal with issues related to gender identity.

The selected stories have been summarized as under.
JOURNEY 1

This is a short story which describes the narrator's lone journey by bus and the difficulties that she encounters as a single woman. On her forward journey which she undertakes for business purpose, she finds her sari spoiled by a child’s urine, a sleepy woman’s oozing saliva that drenches her shoulders and choli/ blouse and finally, the tobacco juice consecrated on her by somebody spitting. When she objects to it, people make gendered remarks and object to her single status. However, on her way back, she meets with a ten year old boy with whom she shares a bonding. The assertion of independence as a single woman and the indomitable spirit not to be cowed down, are the hallmarks of her character.

JOURNEY 2

This is a simple story which describes the protagonist's mobility, independence, career commitment. It tells us about the narrator's journey with Dinakaran, a friend, who usually accompanies her on field trips and bus journeys and the relationship she shares with him.

Dinakaran is in the habit of accompanying the protagonist on field trips. Both share a cordial and friendly relation with each other. He had visited her once in Delhi and was stunned at the treatment meted out to him by the protagonist. She left for her early morning classes and asked him to have bread and fruits for breakfast. In addition to this, she also instructed him to help himself with rice, curd and pickles for the afternoon lunch. Dinakaran had a hearty appetite and an extreme love for South Indian food, which got satiated only after he had his fill of it after taking lodgings elsewhere.

Despite these frequent travels, the protagonist is uncertain if she knew Dinakaran as an individual. One day when her work got over, Dinakaran decided to take her to Lizzy's house for refreshing herself. He claimed that Lizzy was a distant relative. However, when the protagonist reached her house, she sensed a strange bonding between Dinakaran and Lizzy. Lizzy too told her about her long association with his family. She cordially welcomed them and served dosais and masala tea. When the narrator asked her about her husband, Lizzy told her that her husband was a medical sales representative and was out twenty days in a month. The narrator noticed a child’s photograph in her home, whose face appeared vaguely familiar to her. Before they left, her four year old son came and hugged Dinakaran. He too showered immense love on him. Lizzy finally gave them a freshly baked cake, which she also packed separately for Dinakaran in a tiffin box.
This story throws light on the contrast between Lizzy and the narrator. While Lizzy made food that appealed to Dinakaran’s palate and fell into the category of an ‘angel’ who would do things for others. The narrator didn’t consider such things as important. For her, survival cooking was adequate to fill one’s belly. Lizzy, the homemaker, is quite a contrast to the narrator, who is a career woman.

**PARASAKTI AND OTHERS IN A PLASTIC BOX**

This is a very interesting story, which describes an aged woman’s preoccupation, compassion, affection and bonding with the external world. The protagonist has long term plans to learn a lot of things and does not lose her zeal and zest, despite her husband’s death. Wherever she goes, she establishes a bonding with others through her preoccupation with domestic chores. Ambai has depicted old age not as a period of inactivity, but as one brimming with never ending tasks. Domesticity and culinary skills have been highlighted by Ambai as constructive chores.

Kumuda, the protagonist, is an aged mother who establishes and restores her elder daughter’s sense of peace and harmony. Her elder daughter, Bharathi, becomes upset by her divorce and loses her sense of confidence. Kumuda goes to the States to help her daughter. Interestingly, she constructs a creative outlet for herself by placing food for squirrels, making pickles, milk sweets for pregnant ladies in the neighbourhood, holding conversation about Tamil Nadu politics with the South Indian grocery store owner and above all, by cooking a variety of food items. In addition to this, she even procures her daughter’s jewellery and silver vessels, given to her in marriage from her husband, Kumarasamy. She is a woman of grit and determination, who moves about with her four idols- Sivalingam, Amman, Murugan, Ganesha and baby Krishna, wherever she goes. After her husband’s death, she looks out for a refuge for herself. Although she moves with her second daughter, Dhanam and continues with her usual set of activities, which keep her busy, yet she longs for a place of her own. The story also highlights the daughter’s understanding of her mother’s need. Dhanam writes a letter to Bharathi, suggesting that they can sell their jewellery and silver vessels in order to buy a house for their mother, where she can reign indisputably. The story highlights the empowerment of an old woman through the creative and constructive outlets of domesticity.

**VAAGANAM**

This story depicts the protagonist’s desire for possession of a vehicle of her own. Bhakyam, the protagonist, reminisces how as a child, her desire was thwarted with the denial of even a tricycle. She is acutely conscious of the gender bias and discrimination in their family, which forbade girls from possessing vehicles. Mobility and possession have always been the men’s prerogative. Even in the family photographs, while boys were seen sitting on a tricycle or a toy motor car, girls and women of all ages
were seen holding the back of the chair. Her constant striving to drive the vehicle is always met with a failure, resulting in bruises and reprimands. Finally, she gains joy from the possession of an electronic vehicle—a mouse through which she is able to bridge the path of communication and travel several places. The story not only reveals deep seated gender biases and prejudices against girls and women, but also exhibits the protagonist’s desire for mobility and independence through the possession of a vehicle.

**JOURNEY 3**

This story gives us a peep into childhood fun and transgressions. The protagonist, Mythili, is a young girl who revels while going on a trip to the Mariamman (Goddess Kali/Durga) temple along with her maid servant, Marudayi and her daughter, Minakshi. It is a much looked forward to trip for Mythili. Her mother sends Marudayi with some offerings to the Goddess to ward off diseases such as small pox. She even issues strict instructions to her maid servant not to take Mythili to the ‘other side’. However, Mythili enjoys going and witnessing the forbidden place in the temple where the sacrifice of animals take place and even loves eating chicken pulao from there. All the three of them revel in transgressing her mother’s commands of not eating any rubbish and going to the temple by horse carriage. Instead, they save the carriage money and spend it on eating rubbish. In addition to all this, they even camouflage it with lies by giving the acceptable responses to Mythili’s mother. Their discreet outings come to light one day with the accompaniment of Mythili’s younger brother, who lets out their secret of watching a movie. From then on their outing is stopped. This story also throws light on the caste dimension with Marudayi acting as the interceptor on behalf of the upper caste woman.

**FOREST**

This story captivates the dilemma of a middle aged woman, Chenthiru, who strives to search for a refuge in a forest. She believes that the solutions to all her problems lie in the forest, where she creates her own space. She is frustrated by the non-recognition of her capabilities and her negation of contribution in the expansion of her husband, Thirumalai’s business. She is denied a share in his business. Chenthiru therefore, decides to move into the forest and renounce all attachments. In the forest, she develops a bonding with three women—Savitabai, Minabai and Rukminibai. The gay abandon and the merry making in which all the four women indulge provides a kind of emotional release for Chenthiru. Interestingly, the story also deconstructs the epic Ramayana. Sita’s voice is mingled with Chenthiru’s story, and her predicament is viewed in an entirely feminist perspective. She does not appear as the meek, obedient and submissive heroine, but as an empowered one who decides to take charge of her own life and looks at Rama’s actions and decisions critically. Sita’s resolve to write her life story “Sita’s ayanam” not only questions the norms of wifehood, motherhood and
daughterhood, making apparent the gender bias and discrimination, but also emphasizes on the creative outlet that she devises for herself.

This story somehow subverts the stereotypical notions by building on the theme of self reconstruction. The forest doesn't seem to pose dangers for Chenthiru and Sita. On the other hand, it paves a path towards self-discovery (by dispelling and breaking Rama's image and leading to the discovery of one's true individual self). It is however, interesting to note that only by unshackling themselves from the bondage of family, both Chenthiru and Sita achieve self realization.

**A MOVEMENT, A FOLDER, SOME TEARS**

This is a story about three women friends- Charu, Selvi and Sakina, who work for a woman’s organization, headed by an eighty year old woman, Nargis Khala. Despite being crippled, Nargis Khala actively engages with the work of the organization. She does not let her wheelchair become an obstruction and shows adaptability and zestfulness. This long story describes their fight for a non-regional and non-communal identity. Each one of them defies communal wars and violence, which discriminate human beings on the basis of their religion. Sakina is a victim of communal violence. The inability to arouse feelings of acceptance amongst her own acquaintances becomes too much for her to bear. She becomes depressed and in a whirlwind of emotional turmoil falls down from the terrace of her maternal uncle’s home. Sakina leaves a letter, which is later on discovered by her friend Selvi, which is addressed to her maidservant’s daughter, Roshni. The letter is a dawn song, through which she exalts the social and educational achievements of the women of past and entrusts the responsibility of social transformation on the younger generation of women like Roshni. Although she dies with her dreams unrealized, yet Selvi hopes that one day Sakina’s dreams would be fulfilled, but till then she would continue to do her work in her own way. Charu is unable to forget the tortuous death of her boy friend, Tamal, in a bomb blast in an electric train. She too is present in the women’s compartment and rushes him to the hospital but Tamal succumbs to his injuries. Charu even finds the seeds of communal hatred growing into the hearts of her family against her own dear friend, Sakina. She is unable to endure their fanaticism and leaves for the States on the pretext of research and further studies. Selvi is coerced to vacate the office premises and is unable to work for the women’s organization singlehandedly. She breaks all relations with her daughter, Nandini, when she comes to know about her daughter’s rude remarks, directing feelings of communal hatred against Sakina. Thus, each one of them wages a battle in their own way. This story depicts valorous women, who have the courage and determination to stick to their ideals against all odds.

We evince the portrayal of strong women characters breaking the gender stereotypy through their activism. They emerge as intelligent, thinking and evolved beings who aim
at higher goals of transforming society. This story raises the larger social issue of stigmatized communal identity and need for acceptance on humanitarian grounds.

**BAMA “SANGATI EVENTS”**

This novel, which has been translated into English in 2005, doesn't have any one central character. In fact, it revolves around myriad characters, whose life stories and experiences we are acquainted with through the critical eyes of the narrator, Pathima and her grandmother, Vellaiyamma Kizhavi. It is Pathima who raises questions pertaining to gender inequality and discrimination against women prevalent in her community. She glorifies the Dalit women and takes pride in their courage, fortitude and persistence.

She takes pride in her grandmother, Vellaiyamma, who acts as a midwife in her village. It is Vellaiyamma who delivers the babies from their mother’s womb with utmost care, safety and diligence. She doesn't move out of the house till the mother and child are safe. Although she is an untrained midwife, yet the expertise with which she handles all the deliveries prompts the people of her community to call for her. Vellaiyamma does this without expecting anything in return. Sometimes for her services, she is given beetle leaves and nuts.

Vellaiyamma is an extremely courageous woman, who brings up her two daughters singlehandedly. She is deserted by her husband, Goyindan after four years of marriage. He goes on to work in the plantations of Sri Lanka, never to return. Although, she waits for his return, yet when he fails to come back, she sells her ‘tali’ (mangalsutra) for her survival. She works as a ‘kotachi’ in the landlord's fields. Her main duty is to ask the landlords about the kind of work they required in their fields, and then to assign work to the labourers and pay them the wages. For this, she has to travel extensively. Though, her job requires her to travel once in the morning and once in the evening to the landlord's home to collect wages, out of sheer insolence they make her do several rounds of their homes. In addition, she also works in their fields. Vellaiyamma has traditional views related to matrimony. She believes that girls should be married off early once they come of age, lest they might fall into trouble. She even advises her daughter to marry off Pathima as soon as she comes of age and asks her to stop her education. She gives preferential treatment to her grandsons, whom she pampers with cucumbers and mangoes, whereas in contrast, her granddaughters get only stones (that is, the remaining portion of the mango), as the best portion of the fruit is consumed by the boys. Vellaiyamma also keeps abreast of the village news and gossip. It is she who tells Pathima stories about women being possessed by spirits. She even tells Pathima that she must never go out alone in the forest, lest she be raped by some upper caste men, or caught by a spirit. It was a common belief amongst them that the smell of the
menstrual blood attracted spirits. Therefore, women must be extremely cautious during their periods and never venture out alone in the dark.

We also get an insight into the nature of marital discord and domestic violence through the lives of certain characters. The men were always in the position of authority and the women always had to succumb to their domination. The women were also subject to physical and sexual violence by their husbands. Pathima’s maternal aunt was married off to a drunkard, Samudrakani, who tortured her with his excessive sexual demands. For him, she was merely an object to satiate his lust and vent his frustration. He always rained blows on her, sometimes with a rice pounding rod. When she got married, she got so scared during her first night that she refused to sleep with him. Although he waited patiently for four days, on the fifth day he dragged her into his room and forcibly slept with her.

Her ‘Periamma’ (aunt) was treated more like a child bearing machine. She had to work the entire day in the fields and at home and at night had to surrender her body to placate her husband. One day she was so tired that she refused to succumb to his sexual demands. Samudrakani got so angry that he killed her. Vellaiyamma who was a witness to her daughter’s torture was unable to do anything except mourn her death. She inwardly believed that a husband had full right to do anything with his wife. Samudrakani, on the other hand had no regret about his wife’s death and found solace through a keep. His children were neglected.

Their eldest girl, Mariamma, acted as a mother for her siblings. She worked in the construction site and earned money by carrying bricks. One day, she met with an accident and was hospitalized. She recovered after eight months, but continued to work in the fields subsequently. One day while bringing firewood from the fields, she decided to stop by to drink water from the irrigation pump of her landlord, Kumarasami Ayya. He was already in the pump shed at that time and tried to take advantage of her sexually. She ran away in fright, leaving aside her bundle of firewood. When she discussed the matter with her friends, they asked her to keep quiet, lest her reputation got slandered and she was branded as a whore. Kumarasami became perturbed and slandered Mariamma’s reputation by linking her with a certain boy, Manikkam, before the village headman of their community. He told them that he saw both of them misbehaving in his fields and when he caught them red handed, they both ran away like frightened donkeys. The village headman believed Kumarasami and called for a panchayat meeting. Mariamma was questioned and asked to apologise for her misconduct. When she confessed the truth, they accused her of lying. Even the women who tried to speak on her behalf were silenced by their men folk. Nobody asked for an apology from Manikkam, instead it was Mariamma, who was humiliated before everyone. There was a grave injustice even in meting out the punishment to both. She was forced to apologise for fear of being thrashed by her father and had to pay a heavier fine of two hundred
rupees than Manikkam, who was fined only a hundred rupees. Mariamma had to live with this humiliation and was castigated wherever she went out to work. She suffered punishment for a crime, which she had never committed. Finally, Samudrakani married her off to Manikkam, who turned out to be a drunkard, gambler and a wife beater.

We also get an insight into the lives of some other women, who passively succumbed to their husbands’ beatings and violent treatment. Thaayi was a light skinned woman, who was extremely good looking like an upper caste woman. She was married off to a man whom she disliked. He was extremely suspicious of her and beat her all the time. Since the lower caste women did not wear blouses, one could see red weals on her back. When one of the men rebuked him for treating his wife brutally, his suspicions got strengthened and he beat Thaayi further and referred to her as a whore and a prostitute. He even humiliated her by cutting a thick tuft of hair from her neck, which he hung from his doorpost. He believed that by acting thus, he had reduced his wife’s pride.

There was another woman, Rose, who in her full term of pregnancy was beaten by her husband. He had no qualms in dragging out his pregnant wife onto the streets. When the people approached her parents for help, they washed their hands off her saying that since she married him of her own accord, defying their wishes, she must bear the consequences on her own.

Apart from the women who passively succumbed to such violent beatings, Bama also delineates certain women who actively and courageously retaliate against their husband’s violence. Kaaliamma actively fought with her husband, Chinnappan, for not bearing equal responsibilities. She asserted for equality by questioning him as to why she should be taking the responsibility for housework, when she too goes out to work in the fields. She criticized her husband for having a bath after having returned from work, while she has to stoke the fire and cook food. She also grumbled about standing in a long queue to obtain kerosene. When Chinnappan found her struggling with fire and smoke and asked her to pour a little kerosene to stoke the fire, she put him to shame saying that he had not stocked adequate kerosene for her in order that she be spared of such domestic troubles. She demanded him to return the hundred rupees that he had taken away from her and threatened Chinnappan with dire consequences on his failure to do so. Chinnappan rebuked her saying that she should be ashamed to call herself a woman since she didn’t even know how to light a stove. He then moved out of the house. Their relationship was a war of words.

Another woman is Raakkamamma, who resorted to using abusive language in order to escape from her husband, Pakkiraj’s blows. She called his action unmanly and said that he was fit enough to drink a woman’s farts. She asked him to fight with a man, rather than show his strength over a woman. She also put him to shame by asking him to drink his son’s urine and her monthly blood. Thereafter, she lifted her sari before everyone. A
little later when she heard the other women abusing her, she clarified that if she hadn't put him to shame, he would have broken her skull.

We also find depiction of courageous women like Sammuga Kizhavi, who retaliated against the upper caste people. When during the elections, she was picked up from her house by some upper caste men to go to the voting booth, she insisted on being dropped back. When they refused to do so, she refused to get down from the car, telling them that she would defame their party’s name before others. They had no option but to drop her back. Her boldness during her youth was evident when she had the courage to bathe in the well belonging to the upper caste landlord. After being caught, she insolently replied saying that the water in his well was not good. On seeing him beating two children for touching his drinking water, she got back at him by urinating inside it.

The courage exhibited by Dalit women is remarkable. One of them delivered her child without anybody’s help while working in the fields, by cutting the umbilical cord with her sickle. Bama also provides an insight into the hard lives of the lower caste women. These women had to bear the double burden of working in the fields as well as in their homes. Even the wages that they received were lesser than men. Their lives were circumscribed by the unceasing chores that they had to undertake, such as rearing their children, cooking food, washing utensils and clothes. It was their prime duty to serve their husbands. In fact, there are instances in the novel where a woman gets badly beaten by her husband only because she commits the sin of eating first. Many women were treated more like sexual objects, being needed by their husbands irrespective of the fact whether their bodies wracked with pain. They were subject to torture inside their homes and also in the fields. They were treated like child bearing machines. While their husbands refused to use birth control methods, for fear of losing their masculinity, the women themselves were scared of sterilization at the hands of untrained people, lest they become unfit to work in the fields. There was a huge difference in the lifestyle of both men and women. While the men had the freedom to drink, loiter around and roam freely after their day’s work, the women did not enjoy any rest. What becomes noteworthy amongst them is their use of abusive language, explicit with sexual references.

The lower caste women were also subject to sexual exploitation and abuse from the upper caste landlords. They had to bear this humiliation silently and were unable to complain about it for fear of being slandered as whores or prostitutes. Besides, it was to the upper caste men that they had to go begging for work and wages. This led to their voices being silenced.

As readers, we also get insight into gender dynamics as they existed. Although in the lower class community, no difference is made between the birth of a boy or girl, yet the preferential treatment accorded to the boys and the mode of upbringing makes the
discrimination conspicuous. While the girls had to bear the responsibility of household chores, sibling care, washing clothes and utensils, and collecting firewood, the boys roamed around freely. There were restrictions on the movements of girls—they were not allowed to go to the cinema, nor play boys' games. They enacted gender roles through the games they played. While the boys acted as domineering husbands, who beat their wives if the food lacked flavour, the girls adhered to the gender roles by serving them mud rice first.

Due to the excessive burden at home, they often didn’t go to schools. Somewhere these girls were robbed of the joys of childhood because they became adults the moment they started walking. Girls like Maikkanni had to lead very hard lives. She had to get up early in the morning, before sunrise, go to the matchbox factory and returned quite late. In addition to this, she helped her mother in the household chores and sibling care, since her mother was always pregnant. She had to also work in the fields. Even in the factory where she worked, she was subject to exploitation and beatings. One day the maistri beat her hard on her head for using extra labels for the matchbox. Then on another occasion, she was beaten for defecating outside. Since she left quite early for work, she didn’t get time to defecate, so, she usually restrained and controlled her bowel movement until she returned home. However, one day she couldn’t control herself and went out to defecate. Somebody saw her and complained to the maistri, who beat her. In addition to all this, she was also lured by someone who tempted her with the offer of giving her firewood, provided she came alone with him in the interior of the forest. However, she ran away. This shows the vulnerability of young girls to sexual exploitation and their early maturity to understand such things. Maikkanni lacked the support of her father, who deserted her mother for another woman. However, he kept shuttling between his wife’s home and that of another woman. Whenever he visited her mother, she was left with a child in the womb. He also kept a tab on his children’s incomes. Maikkanni got beaten by her father for spending some money on ice cream.

The discrimination also becomes evident in the selection of the marriage partner. While boys had complete freedom to marry anyone from outside their caste and community, girls were not allowed to exercise their choice in the selection of their marriage partner. A certain girl who was in love with a boy from another community, got beaten violently by her brother and father. She had to face this humiliation despite being educated and employed. Unable to bear this treatment and the incessant beating, she eloped with her lover, whom she married and lived happily. For this, she faced expulsion from her village and community. Another story, in the form of a mythological belief reflected gender discrimination, and was narrated by Vellaiyamma to Pathima. This was the story of Esaaki, a spirit who possessed only women and expectant mothers. The story has it that Esaaki was the only girl child amongst seven brothers. All her brothers doted on her and brought her up with a lot of affection. Then, she fell in love with a man from the vannan community and eloped with him. Although both of them were happily married and Esaaki
was expecting her first child, their happiness was disturbed by her brothers. They lured her with the promise of taking her home for the delivery of her child. Her husband sent her half heartedly, smelling something foul. When they took Esaaki on a different path, she suspected their intentions, but it was too late for her to do anything. Her brothers gagged and bound her and severed her head from her body. In addition, they sliced her womb, took out the infant and strangled it. While her husband became mad, Esaaki kept roaming around as a spirit. Whosoever she possessed, she demanded a cradle from for letting them free from her grip.

Bama also gives a class based caste perspective in her representation of gender identity. The Dalit women undertook the task of sweeping and cleaning the church floors and were acutely conscious of the discriminated treatment which persisted for women of other castes, who first occupied the seats after the cleaning task was over. However, despite such favouritism and partiality, the women of the Dalit community considered themselves better off as compared to the upper caste women. They took pride in their dark complexion and their identity as Dalits. They felt that their children had better features as compared to the upper caste children. They also revelled in the freedom that they enjoyed. They also felt that while the upper caste women were confined within the four walls of their homes and were economically dependent on their husbands, the Dalit women had the freedom to go out, remarry, work in the fields and take a dip in the ponds. They also had greater bodily strength and stamina in leading a life of hard toil as opposed to the upper caste women, whose body was unused to hard labour. They attributed features of upper caste homes such as separate spaces for defecating and taking a bath to their lack of mobility, freedom and their ignorance of swimming. Further, the very fact that in their community dowry or ‘parisam’ was paid by the groom’s family filled them with pride.

However, Bama has indicated certain differences that exist amongst and within the lower caste communities. The women belonging to the pallar or the parayar community have the freedom to remarry and leave their husbands if they find it difficult to live with them. There are instances in the novel where Pathima’s friend, Pecchiamma leaves her husband because she is unable to put up with his drunken behaviour and remarries. She has two children from her first marriage- a son and a daughter. It is decided by the panchayat that the son would stay with the father and the daughter with the mother. She even has a child from her second marriage. In contrast, Christian women were denied this right. They had to bear their husband even if he was like a stone or a blade of grass. Even the church denied them the right of separation. They neither had the freedom to dissolve their marriage, nor go to their parents’ house. There were instances where women defied the panchayat’s rules and decided to stay on their own. They were however, forcefully dragged by their husbands, and violently beaten and imprisoned in their houses.
Bama also gives us an insight into the superstitious beliefs and folktales prevalent in the community. When Mariamma did not come of age in spite of her grandmother taking her to hospital, it was decided to subject her to indigenous religious healing. There are many evidences of the villagers believing in the existence of spirits and ghosts. We come across interesting stories of spirits from the Annacchi troupe, who had the power to disguise themselves and then operate. These interesting anecdotes add spice and flavour to the book. Also the book is replete with songs and dances, which are sung by women on every occasion—right from the celebration of pubertal ceremonies to songs related to teasing, or to funeral flavours like a dirge. These constituted a significant aspect of women’s identity and provided them with an outlet for creativity in composing them at the spur of the moment.

A striking feature of this book is the portrayal of Pathima who acts as a spokesperson for gender equality and empowerment. She feels that women should realise their self-respect and honour and must dare to rise and improve their status. She had a critical eye for everything. She questions the discriminated status of girls and women. When Vellaiyamma narrated to her the incidents of spirits possessing women, she did not accept them at face value. In contrast, she rationalized the reason for women’s vulnerability to such forces. She felt that the causative factor for women’s susceptibility to mental illness was due to the boredom and exhaustion of their daily chores and mundane existence. Women who lacked mental strength and courage were more prone to such frenzied states of mind. Pathima asserted her own individuality through her decision to stay unmarried. She exalted her status through the modes of education, employment and independent living. However, life for her did not turn out to be a bed of roses as owing to her marginalized and single status, she faced great difficulty in finding a house and also in gaining acceptance from other women in her community. She not only faced gender biases and prejudices, but also had to endure casteist remarks. People found it difficult to accept that a woman could stay alone and independently without matrimony. She envisioned that the only way of removing these gender inequalities was through non-discriminated upbringing and socialisation of boys and girls. She believed that girls should be given more freedom to move out like boys and thus, be made to realise their worth. As readers, we are compelled to admire the courage, fortitude and never say die spirit of these women who brave life against all odds.

**BAMA “HARUM-SCARUM SAAR AND OTHER STORIES”**

Bama’s *Harum-scarum saar and other stories* is a collection of short stories which was translated from the original, *Kisumbukkaran* in the year 2006 by Women UNLIMITED, an associate of Kali for Women.
I would like to briefly summarise each of these stories in the light of the characters. We encounter vulnerable characters such as Arulayi and Chellakkilli, who are unable to stand against the injustice meted out to them. In the story, “Half-sari”, Chellakkilli, an eleven year old girl, loses her life due to the severe beating administered to her by the mistress of the house. Her father, Irulappan is lured by the empty promise of school education for his daughter in return for her small services at the landlord’s daughter’s house. Chellakkilli is the apple of her parents’ eye and is treated with love and affection. Her mother, Arulayi ensures that her daughter devotes her entire time studying rather than doing the household chores. However, at her husband’s insistence she gets ready to send her dear daughter away. When after eight months there is no news from Chellakkilli’s end, the parents get worried and Irulappan decides to personally visit his daughter along with his brother-in-law, Kaliappan. Just then they hear about the sudden news of Chellakkilli’s death. Although the landlord and his daughter camouflage the cause of her death and put up a false pretence, yet they come to know the true cause of her death through a conversation which they overhear. Chellakkilli had to endure ill treatment at the mistress’ place. She was never sent to school and had to work hard all day long. She died because of a heavy blow administered to her on her neck with a log. When Irulappan and Kaliappan confront the landlord, he tries to hush up the matter with a meager sum of two thousand rupees and a red half-sari, which he says had been bought for Chellakkilli by his daughter. Kaliappan throws away the money. Irulappan is unable to endure the shock and holds himself responsible for his daughter’s death. He hangs himself with the red half-sari. The story mirrors social issues such as child labour and vulnerability to exploitation.

In “Rich girl”, Kaliyamma and her daughter, Ramayi, have to endure the injustice meted out to them by the landlord. Kaliyamma’s husband loses his life in his effort to bring back the landlord’s strayed bull from the middle of the water. The flow of the water is so heavy that he gets drowned. He risks his life because of the landlord’s threats. In return, they are paid a meagre sum of hundred rupees. The struggle for survival and the caste class dimension is vividly reflected through this story. Ramayi in her innocence considers herself rich and is unable to understand the gravity of the situation. The story explores significant issues such as injustice and exploitation of lower caste at the hands of upper caste men, double burden imposed upon girls and loss of emotional and social privileges such as joy and education.

In “Chilli powder”, we encounter powerful characters such as Pachayamma and the landlady, Gangamma. Pachayamma exhibits staunch courage in retaliating against the foul-mouthed Gangamma, of whom everyone is scared. She steals grass from her fields and even gangs up with other women to beat her. Gangamma, on the other hand, throws chilli powder into the latter’s eyes when she finds them stealing. She uses her influence to teach Pachayamma a lesson by complaining against her to the police. The police officer arrests Pachayamma and a group of women for stealing cotton from
Gangamma’s fields. However, they are not in the least cowed down by their threats and are able to free themselves using their intelligence. Pachayamma puts up a brave front and urinates in front of the police station. She even tells the officer who asks her to pay a fine of ten rupees to release them for a day so that they are able to go and work and pay the sum. She considers this arrest as a sign of prestige as they are led to the police station in a tractor. This story mirrors empowerment of Pachayamma who through her boldness and fortitude emerges out of a critical situation and escapes imprisonment.

In “Ponnuthayi”, Bama portrays a lower caste woman who exhibits great courage, grit and determination to lead life on her own terms. She poses a challenge to the patriarchal and male dominated society through her independence and resolution. Ponnuthayi exhibits strong business acumen and people are jealous of her independence and mobility. She severs all her relationship with her husband, Mookkandi, who is a drunkard and lives off her earnings. She presents a new image of womanhood by entrusting him with the responsibility of all the four children. She claims that it is not the sole prerogative of a mother to be taking care of her children. On one occasion, when Mookkandi tries to drag her back forcibly and uses physical violence, she rushes to the police station and lodges a complaint against him. Ponnuthayi defies all the societal norms by selling the ‘tali’, the sacred thread of marriage and setting up a shop from the sale proceeds.

In “Freedom”, Bama portrays the retaliation of a servant woman, Arayi, against her masters through flight. Her faithfulness and hard work are always met with ingratitude by her masters. Thus, being fed up of this treatment, she leaves their house without informing them. The story reflects the dehumanised treatment of Arayi and her retaliation, assertion of dignity and covert rebellion through flight.

**LAKSHMI KANNAN “GOING HOME”**

Lakshmi Kannan’s book, “Going Home” was originally written in Tamil in the year 1986 and later translated into English in 1999, by Disha Books. It depicts the loneliness, ennui, existential dilemmas and the feeling of angst amongst the urban Indian women. It revolves around the lives of two central women characters- Gayatri and Rama. Kannan in her book seems to have raised a very significant social issue related to the denial of property rights to girl children and has even narrated some very poignant and troublesome instances in the Preface to this book.

Gayatri, the central character of the novel, is continuously nostalgic about “Retreat”, her grandfather’s home, where she had spent some blissful moments of her childhood. She is unable to forgive her mother, Meenakshi, for having given over her rightful claim to the house to her brother. Gayatri craves for a house like “Retreat” and devalues her husband, Shankar’s idea of purchasing a DDA flat, which she considers as another mouse trap. Though she is fatigued by her drab existence, but is unable to entertain the
idea of leaving her job due to economic compulsions. Her job in a private firm hardly leaves her with the time and space to follow creative pursuits like dancing. In order to compensate for that she regularly does yoga to keep her body fit to bear the double brunt and combat the daily stressors.

We are also introduced to another character, Rama Doraiswamy, a University Lecturer and a creative writer. She too is bogged down by the strain of her dull domestic existence, household chores, childcare and her research work. Both Gayatri and Rama are friends. While Gayatri has an understanding husband who offers her the warmth of a comfortable home, Rama’s husband, Dorai, makes life miserable for her with his continuous fault finding. He suffers from an inferiority complex and is jealous of his wife’s abilities and competence. Rama is bereft of emotional support, except for the bonding that she shares with Gayatri. Even her in-laws constantly find faults with her and devalue her completely. Rama’s parents on the other hand completely negate her existence. Her mother, Maduram and father, Sadasivam, turn a blind eye to the atrocities meted out to her at her marital home and consider it as a part of her fate. To Rama, her writing and her friendship with Gayatri offer a catharsis. Both Rama and Gayatri suffer from the existential dilemmas, ennui and suffocation of modern life.

This novel is divided into two parts. The first part deals with Gayatri’s yearning and longing for ‘Retreat’, while the second part reflects a change in her attitude marked by the acceptance of a DDA flat as her home to her renunciation of worldly desires. It is interesting to note that while Gayatri is on a road to renunciation, Rama lets her impulses and desires govern her. She decides to live her life anew through the cultivation of a friendship with Damodaran. While Rama feels rejuvenated, Gayatri is ready to renounce her life and embrace death. The novel explores myriad threads of relationships and looks at gender related issues very closely.

**LAKSHMI KANNAN “GLASS WALLS”**

Lakshmi Kannan’s novella, “Glass Walls”, constitute a part of “Rhythms and Other Stories” published by Vikas, New-Delhi in the year 1986. It has been translated from the Tamil original entitled “Kannadi Suvargal”.

“Glass Walls” is a novella which explores the anxiety of parents who are battling hard to cure their son, who starts exhibiting strange symptoms. Mythili and Gunaseelan are worried about their son, Aditya. He has been a bright boy, who has been excelling well in sports and academics. However, all of a sudden he starts manifesting symptoms of mental illness, which become a source of concern for his parents. While Mythili and Gunaseelan try and do everything to treat their son- right from taking him to the best of psychiatrists to making him visit various temples, his illness doesn’t get cured. His condition becomes so worst that they have to admit him into a hospital. Both parents
continue to visit him. While Mythili feels that her womb has become empty, Gunaseelan feels that his son has reached an orbit from where no communication is possible. He considers Adi to be in a blissful state, free of all the problems, while he himself is subject to all sorts of crisis—right from business to personal.

In addition to Adi's illness, the family is subject to a lot of stressors. Their daughter, Priya's marriage proposals are unable to get finalised due to her brother's mental illness. Gunaseelan is beset by a lot of business problems. He is fearful about his business associate, Natarajan, who he feels would sexually devour his wife and business in due course of time. Mythili, on the other hand has to endure the bitter and sarcastic remarks of Gunaseelan, who has been suffering from a gnawing sense of insecurity and suspicion. Her beauty and slim figure becomes a source of torment for her. Mythili had to give constant reassurance to Gunaseelan that she belonged to him and allay his suspicions that she had not been conversing with Natarajan. She suffers from an unspeakable embarrassment and humiliation due to the sexual advances made by Natarajan and endures this harassment only because of her husband's business commitments. She proves herself as a dutiful wife who is adjusting and accommodating to Gunaseelan's erratic time schedules. Mythili patiently waits for him to come home so that they can discuss about Adi's health condition. He, on the other hand is so occupied with business and official dinner even on Sunday that he finds it hard to give time to her. Mythili hides her son's mental condition before her husband's business associates and close friends in order that Gunaseelan's reputation is not spoiled in his business circle.

Lakshmi Kannan has explored the crisis of a middle-age woman who had to deal with marital insecurities in addition to the stress of her grown up son's mental illness.

**LAKSHMI KANNAN “SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR AND THE MANES”**

This is one of the long stories written by Lakshmi Kannan, published in “A Storehouse of Tales”, edited by Jehanara Wasi, Shrishti Publications, New-Delhi, 2001.

Uma is an intelligent and creative writer. She is constantly being compared to the great French writer, Simone de Beauvoir, by her male colleagues. Kannan has depicted gendered attitudes through the beliefs and ideologies of certain male writers like Shekar and Mehta, who are of the opinion that Uma’s writings would attain embellishment under the guidance of an able companion like Sartre. This story delineates her struggle to break free from such shackles and emerge independent.

Uma is a research scholar, pursuing her Ph.D. She also writes poems and gets extremely disappointed when they are rejected for publication. She comes into contact with Sekhar, one of the writers, who has written several books to his credit. He compares her to Simone de Beauvoir and makes her believe that her creativity would attain its bloom if she too gets a companion like Sartre. Sekhar advises her that their
creativity and individuality could only be preserved if they together brush aside the family obligations and commitments. He tells Uma that while he would have to obliterate his wife, she would have to treat her parents mainly as background scores. She momentarily feels happy that her worth is recognized and appreciated by a writer like Sekhar.

Uma seriously decides to concentrate on her work, but is unable to do so as Sekhar constantly keeps pestering her for attention and time. He wants her to neglect her work and come and stay with him in Kashmir as his companion. When she asserts her work space, he belittles her task commitment. Uma realises the futility of this relationship. She starts ignoring his phone calls and spends her time researching about Simone’s and Sartre’s relationship. She finally realises and understands Simone’s agony and torment caused by this so called companionate relationship with Sartre. While Sartre has relationships with several women, Simone feels bound to him and acts as his devoted wife.

Uma brushes aside not only the comparisons made with Simone, but also the proposals that she receives from other male writers like Mohan Mehta. Although Uma unfetters herself from these traps, yet she is consciously aware of the skewed gender equations which exist in society as well as of men’s persistent attraction and desire for possessing intelligent women. Thus, in her opinion Simone appeared and reappeared in many forms and continued to seduce potential men. Kannan has delineated the character’s preservation of individuality and her empowerment through her assertion of space and flouting of gender norms and expectations.

LAKSHMI KANNAN “INDIA GATE AND OTHER STORIES”

“India Gate and Other Stories” has been translated from the original Tamil into English by the author herself and published by Disha Books in the year 1993. Out of sixteen stories which form a part of this collection of short stories, ten stories deal with issues related to gender identity and mirror the feminist struggles.

I would like to give an individual summary of each of these ten stories.

URVASHI 2000

It is an interesting story that celebrates selfhood and the image of new womanhood. Through this story the writer sees a woman, who refuses to adhere to the traditional gender norms and expectations. The expression of freedom is evinced through her choice of loose garments, her refusal to name herself and cling to moorings and social relationships. She exhibits a strong will to be herself and claims to be an individual in her own right. This story is replete with meanings and reflects a whole lot of feminist issues
such as celebration of independence, individuality, sexual freedom and emancipated womanhood.

**THE COMING OF DEVI**

This is a very interesting story, which evokes the image of Devi to convey a powerful and strong image of womanhood. The story begins with the delay in the installation of the deity in the temple premises, the discussion of which goes on in the house of Kausalya, the main protagonist. Her talents and abilities are not being acknowledged in her marital home due to which she is restricted only within the walls of domesticity. Kausalya’s husband is appalled by her intelligence and stifles her career space and freedom. Thus, the research searching mathematician obliterates and sacrifices herself to the performance of relational roles and responsibilities. She resorts to a mediocre existence to placate her husband’s ego. The yearning to break free from the shackles of domesticity lies dormant within her mind and finds expression through her imagination of the goddess assuming a fierce and irate expression to destroy everything. Kausalya's pent up emotions consequent upon the curbing of freedom results in the imaginary construction of the image of an irate goddess transgressing the bounds with ferocity followed by the assertion of her rights. The fear of independent status is exhibited through the protagonist waking from this dream and praying to goddess to lull this destructive self within her. Kausalya stifles her all her strivings for the preservation of her domestic harmony.

**ISLANDERS**

This story explores the protagonist, Pankajam’s sensitivity and compassion for the flood afflicted victims and her ability to think beyond the usual mundane things.

Pankajam acts as an efficient household manager by stocking provisions during flood. She is praised by her mother-in-law and husband for her managerial skills in the crisis situation. While there is no scarcity of food in her house, she is moved by the plight of innumerable people, who are dying of starvation. Pankajam feels guilty of hoarding things. There arises an inner desire within her to act as a universal mother for the afflicted victims by serving them food. Though Pankajam yearns to rise above her usual domestic existence, but she is equally aware of her weakness to succumb to the domestic pressures. Kannan delineates as to how a woman’s ambitions and striving for social good are stifled by the domestic/familial demands towards which she feels pulled. She even highlights women’s ability to nurture liberated thoughts within the private dark and musty domestic spaces such as the pantry.
**SHELL**

This story centres round the theme of sexual exploitation faced by Nandini, the main protagonist, at her work place and her manner of dealing with such occupational hazards.

Nandini is a practicing medico, working under a renowned cardiac surgeon, Dr. Sambamurthy. Despite being senior to her in age, he desires sexual favours from her and dispels all her claims of fidelity to her husband, Kumar. Dr. Sambamurthy tells Nandini that an intelligent woman like her cannot belong to one man alone. Although she resists all his advances, yet he continues to pester her.

Nandini shares a cordial relationship with her husband, Kumar. Their relationship is characterised by feelings of warmth, affection, companionship and trust. Kumar is in the know of his wife’s previous suitors. He is also aware about Dr. Sambamurthy's advances. However, he advises Nandini to accept all this as a part of occupational hazard. Nandini has a feeling of belongingness to her husband, yet she questions her identity, thereby arriving at the notion of empowered self. Apart from her identity as Kumar’s wife, Nandini discovers that she is a woman in her own right, imbued with power and strength. Although her persona attracts a lot of male suitors to her, yet she feels that she would never lose her essence. Nandini feels that she would always appear as a mystique before men and elude them till they are silenced and discover the futility of this quest. Kannan delineates the discovery and realisation of female power by the protagonist to confront all the odds of life.

**MOORINGS**

This story has strong feminist contours and explores issues related to a woman's sense of self-worth and fulfillment through her career rather than through circumscribing to the traditional roles of matrimony. Sushila, the central character of the story, is a successful young cardiologist. She unfetters herself from what seems to her to be an impending stifling relationship with another doctor, Vikram, a radiologist. Although he is deeply in love with Sushila, yet when she voices out her anxieties about the pursuit of her research and professional commitments after marriage and a child, he dispels it in his male complacency. Vikram negotiates and plans things in such way which though offers him ample opportunities to flourish in his career, but relegates Sushila to complete domesticity. When Sushila realizes this, she dispels Vikram as a calculating chauvinist and breaks off all relationship with him. She resolves to marry a man who has the courage to accept her as she is and is not afraid of her competence. Feminist in its theme and essence, Kannan has delineated the theme of women’s empowerment through the central character’s assertion of individual and professional space.
A PEA IN THE MATTRESS

It highlights the plight of the protagonist, Shobha, who is trapped in a marriage and is unable to help her widowed mother and siblings financially. She is tired of acting as her husband, Shekhar’s trophy. He negates her feelings completely and does not permit her to take up a job. Shobha, on the other hand feels that taking up a job would help her to kill the monotony and boredom and also grant her financial independence. Shekhar expects her to fulfill all the social obligations and commitments even during his absence. She is not allowed to spend the time the way she feels like. Shobha decides to flout Shekhar's authority and exercise autonomy by spending time with her friends rather than going and attending a dinner party. She goes to a tavern along with her friends and gets drunk. In an inebriated state, she picks up a painting that is hung on the wall and puts it inside her bag. The manager of the tavern notices it and has arguments with her friends. She is made to return the painting. Lack of autonomy, independence and personal space propels her to transgress the moral code of conduct, which consequently results in guilt syndrome.

A FEVER

This is a story about stifling of a woman’s dreams and ambitions and the resultant frustrations, which create a negative impact on her psyche.

Girija’s dancing ambitions are stifled by her orthodox family. She is unable to come to terms with her situation. She is conditioned to suppress her desires and beauty, which later on affects her married life. Girija continues to feel depressed and frustrated even after her marriage. Although she reveals and confides about her frustrations of not being able to pursue dancing to her husband, Ramesh and his friend, Chandran, yet there appears a shrouded mystery about her. Girija’s sexuality overpowers both Chandran and Ramesh. While Chandran feels guilty of entertaining such thoughts about his friend’s wife, Ramesh empathises with him. Girija’s reaction quizzes her husband equally and causes him agony. She appears to be mystical to him and he is unable to understand her. Through this story Kannan depicts the theme of negative socialisation resulting in sexual suppression, desires and frigidity in the protagonist.

PAIN

This is a moving story of a woman, who is suffering from cancer and is on her deathbed. It vividly captivates the suffering of Padma, the central character, who has accepted the pain and oncoming death with stoicism. She feels sorry for her husband, Seshadri, whose eyes have run dry of tears. He feels quite helpless as he is unable to do anything about Padma’s suffering. What becomes an interesting aspect of the story is that all the relatives who have assembled at their house reduce Padma’s identity and body in terms
of her relationship as a wife and mother. They consider her lucky as she is departing from this world as a ‘sumangali’. Also, they feel that she has experienced the fulfillment of the joys of motherhood. Usha, her elder daughter, retaliates against this kind of fragmentation. She feels that her mother, Padma is a whole being than just a sum total of relations or an amalgamation of body parts that only characterise her as a female. This story raises questions about female body through the assertion that a woman’s entity is more than a sum total of her body parts or her reproductive functions. It also highlights the stoicism and acceptance of pain and death.

**MUNIYAKKA**

This is a story of an old woman, Muniyakka, who exhibits staunch courage, independence, indomitable will and determination to lead her life alone. Being deserted by her sons, she relies on herself and sustains by working. She takes immense pride in her financial independence.

Muniyakka tried to cope with the feelings of loneliness by indulging in an imaginary dialogue with her relatives and also by soliloquizing. She always cursed her dead husband, Bairappa, and her worthless sons. She felt that their sons lusted after their wives and neglected their old mother. Muniyakka therefore, is extremely cynical about those women who in the hope of being blessed with sons worshipped the Lord of the Snakes’ idol with their offerings. She lamented as to how like them she too had committed this mistake earlier. Muniyakka’s sons neglected their filial duties and failed to perform the ceremonies due to their dead father every year. Therefore, she considered it her duty to appease his soul by devoutly performing the sraddha ceremony. She invited the temple gardener to her house and served him a sumptuous feast, comprising of delicacies of dead Bairappa’s liking- fish curry, tenderly cooked cabbage curry, his favourite brand of bidis, sweet buns made of jaggery, spiced rice and a bottle of toddy. Muniyakka even had a youthful glow on her face that day as she decorated her forehead with a big round kumkum and wore flowers on her hair. She even wore a neat cotton sari on her wrinkled body.

Kannan has depicted old age through the grit, independence, courage and determination of Muniyakka to lead her life alone.

**INDIA GATE**

This story depicts a woman’s struggle to attain a new sense of selfhood, identity, space and freedom by unfettering herself from the stifling marital and gendered relationship. She makes considerable progression from a non-entity to a dignified being.
Padmini, the central character of the story worked in State Bank of India, Madras branch. Her father fixed up her alliance with Balaraman, a boy, who was equal to her in terms of status and abilities. While he was about to be transferred to Delhi on a promotion, Padmini was quite apprehensive about leaving her job after marriage. Even her mother supported her on this ground. Her father promised to talk to the groom’s family about this matter. To her surprise, Balaraman’s brothers took an offence when Padmini’s father asked him to give up the idea of going to Delhi. His sister-in-law even devalued Padmini’s capabilities and appearance and told her father that it wasn’t right for a woman to professionally compete with men. Balaraman’s family offered two choices to Padmini’s family- resignation from the job or letting go of this match. They had a patronising attitude towards the girls’ family and exhibited a strong gender bias.

On her father’s insistence, Padmini decided to ask her bank for transfer. In return, she was awarded with a promotion as a reward for her hard work. After her marriage, she along with Balaraman moved towards their in-laws house in Tiruchirapalli. There she sensed complete devaluation in terms of the way they treated her. What surprised Padmini the most was her husband’s indifference in the entire matter. He acted as a patriarch, who negated his wife’s existence. Balaraman neither made any effort to make his wife comfortable in a new place, nor he exhibited happiness at her promotion. For Padmini the day began at four thirty in the morning in her in-laws house with endless chores to be completed. She sensed a complete lack of respect and dignity with which the daughters-in-laws of the house were treated. For all the hard work and labour that they put in, they were served the stale leftovers, which her sisters-in-law devoured with a hearty appetite. The best portion of the food and even the freshly made coffee were served to the male members of the house. Padmini felt stifled and yearned to escape from the oppressive atmosphere.

Even in Delhi, Padmini had to bear the double burden of housework and office work. After returning from work, Balaraman spent his time by leisurely reading the newspapers or substandard Tamil magazines. He neither helped her out in the housework nor exhibited warmth, but only issued orders to her. Padmini found solace through her work in the bank. Even during vacations, the major portion of the time was spent in her in-laws house. Padmini sensed her humiliation and criticised herself for enduring all this despite her solid academic background and a good job. One envisages a covert rebellion germinating in her mind. She felt that with all her education and work competence, she deserved to be treated with dignity and respect.

Padmini applies for a loan in her bank to buy a house for herself. When Balaraman creates a hue and cry about it and emphasizes on the need to consult his brothers and mother, she asserts her independence. She tells him that she is buying the house in her name with her own money and there was no need of consulting anybody as she was going to live there alone. Padmini breaks free from this oppressive marriage and exhibits
a staunch resolution, courage and determination to lead her life alone with dignity, irrespective of all the hardships that she might have to go through. Kannan has highlighted empowerment through Padmini’s breaking of the oppressive shackles of gender stereotypy and assertion of dignity.

**P. SIVAKAMI “THE GRIP OF CHANGE”**

P. Sivakami’s novel, *The Grip of Change* is the English translation of her full length novel in Tamil (*Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum*). Through her novel, she projects a gradual change and transformation in the lives of Dalits through the formation of trade unions in which she sees marginalized and exploited people actively fighting for their rights and justice against discrimination. She also highlights some erosion of upper caste power through the portrayal of certain educated characters who are oblivious of caste hegemony and power relations. Although this novel does not directly deal with the identity related issues of women, yet it depicts the lower caste women’s vulnerability to different forms of exploitation.

Although Sivakami portrays Dalits as the oppressed community, subject to exploitation of all sorts, yet she also asserts their power through her portrayal of a certain character- Kathamuthu. He is shrewd, able to negotiate with upper caste men and capable to resolve the disputes of his community quite efficaciously. Not only does Kathamuthu enjoy respect from his own people, but also wields the awe of the upper caste men. He has two wives. Kanagavalli is his first wife. She has two children- Gowri and Sekaran. Nagamani is his second wife. She belongs to an upper caste. After being widowed, Kathamuthu decides to give her protection by marrying her. Initially, he enjoys the attention bestowed upon him by both his wives. He is also happy to see them competing with each other to gain his attention. They quarrelled over matters such as who would serve him food, or do small tasks for him. However, later on he is a little perturbed to see the unity between them and also jokingly thinks that he would have to get a third woman to set them alright.

Kathamuthu is considered a sagacious member of his community. One day a woman named Thangam comes to his house seeking his help. She is beaten violently by her landlord, Paranjothi Udayar’s wife’s brothers and brother-in-law for having an illicit relationship with him (her landlord). The manner in which Kathamuthu talks to her is demeaning as he asks her why she did not choose any one from her own community for satiating her lust. Thangam confesses to being raped by her landlord in the sugarcane fields. She further explains that thereafter she succumbed to his lust owing to her economic compulsions. He being her paymaster, she didn’t have any other choice. Thangam is a widow who is exploited by her relatives, who deny her a share in her dead husband’s property. Her brothers-in-law try to take advantage of her widowed status by demanding sexual favours from her. She, however, resists their demands and works on
Udayar’s land to earn a living. It is her own husband’s relatives who taint her reputation before Udayar’s relatives, which in turn provoke them into beating her. Hearing her story, Kathamuthu takes up her case. He decides to use the facts of the case to turn things to Thangam’s advantage and give it a casteist dimension. Kathamuthu instructs her about the manner in which she should report the facts of the case before the police officers. He tells her that she must tell them that when she was passing through the upper caste street to attend to nature’s call, Udayar’s wife started hurling casteist abuses upon her and when she (Thangam) protested to the usage of such words, they started beating her. Kathamuthu sends Thangam to receive medical aid and she starts staying in his house. He even pleads with the officer-in-charge, who is an upper caste person that if he failed to take any action, then people would assume that he was defending his own caste man despite the wrong doing. The officer gets so infuriated that he immediately decides to take action against Udayar.

The author also gives us a peep into the struggle between the upper castes and the lower castes through the strategies and machinations to plot against lower caste people. When Udayar comes to know about Thangam’s intent through some of his loyal policemen, he decides to act on their advice by filing a counter complaint against her so that her complaint is nullified. They decide to place some valuables in Thangam’s hut, in order to prove her as a thief. Kathamuthu manages to get an inkling about Udayar’s evil machinations, through one of the policemen, who blabbers before him out of fear. He therefore, decides to post a few men outside Thangam’s hut in order to thwart the landlord’s plans. This move of his turns into a caste struggle, for when some of the upper caste men try to enter into Thangam’s hut, they are beaten by the lower caste men stationed outside. This aggravates the upper caste community- the Reddiars, Padayachis and Udayars. They decide to wage a war against the lower caste people by appointing the Chakkiliyar women to work on their fields, instead of the Parayar women. This caste and class strife takes a bitter turn. Their huts are burnt by the upper caste men.

Kathamuthu once again acts as the saviour of the lower caste. He fights their case and manages to get compensation for those people whose huts are being destroyed completely, or have suffered damage. He even negotiates with Udayar, who agrees to compensate Thangam. The amount payable is reduced from twenty thousand to a petty sum of ten thousand. However, Udayar is happy and contented that no direct charges of sexual abuse or rape are hurled against him. Kathamuthu utilizes and consumes Thangam’s money, who under the debt of gratitude gives him the entire sum to buy clothes for his family. He buys a sari for Thangam as well. He leads a comfortable life with her money. Delicacies such as meat get cooked in his house daily. Thangam requests Kathamuthu to get her an independent share of land from the panchayat. Till then, she decides to toil on his land. Even his wives begin to accept her as a part of the family. Thangam is given a share of the food cooked by them. With the improvement in
her diet, her looks also improve and she starts looking attractive. One day Kathamuthu serves foreign liquor to both his wives, and also ensures that Thangam gets a share. While Kanagavalli and Nagamani relish it, Thangam takes ill and pukes it out. She continues to lie in a semi-conscious state in the kitchen. Kathamuthu takes advantage of her sexually, despite her pleading that he is like a brother to her.

Gradually, Thangam gains a new control in the house. She starts paying wages to those people who worked in Kathamuthu’s land and is happy with the new found status. She is shown as Kathamuthu’s third wife. The gender dynamics are clearly evident in the unquestioning power that men like Kathamuthu enjoyed. The rules of conduct are different for both men and women, irrespective of the fact whether a woman belongs to an upper caste or lower caste. While it is alright for lower caste men like Kathamuthu to marry an upper caste woman, but it is considered a sin if a lower caste woman tries to establish physical intimacy with an upper caste man. Interestingly, the author depicts the reversal of rules for an upper caste woman, for the Reddiar’s wife, Shanthi, has illicit relationship with a lower caste man, Kaliyan, who works in her house. Although this relationship is covert and Shanthi outwardly pretends to be very strict and abusive towards Kaliyan, yet she derives sexual gratification from him.

Gowri, Kathamuthu’s daughter, is very intelligent and expresses disdain for her father’s use of authority at home and outside. He always criticizes Gowri for applying kohl and for putting flowers while going to school. She however, does whatever she wants to and is quite conscious about her appearance. Gowri hates her father for taking Thangam’s money and even pities her condition as a lower caste woman. She wonders what her position and stance would be once she grew up and if she too would be beaten as badly as Thangam. Being bright, she helps her father draft the letter of complaint on Thangam’s behalf. She is proud to bring about some improvisations in the language, dictated to her by her father. She is very critical of Kathamuthu when he sexually exploits Thangam and refers to him as a beast. She dreams of leaving her father’s place, which she considers as oppressive and stifling. Gowri studies quite hard and gets admission into a college. She moves to the hostel where she is quite happy. She is portrayed as a non-conformist, who abhors the gendered expectations. She doesn’t wish to get married, pursues her doctorate, gets a job and is happy with her single status. Gowri has heated arguments with Kathamuthu on issues related to matrimony. She even disapproves of her mother’s and her stepmother’s blind compliance to her father’s authority. While Gowri is quite bold and achieves whatever she wants to in life, yet she is class caste conscious. During her student days in college, she feels humiliated about collecting the scholarship money due to her as a Scheduled Caste. She even suffers humiliation at the hands of a few of her classmates on the grounds of caste.

The change in the status of the Dalit community is being projected through the marriages outside one’s caste and formation of trade unions. One of the characters
Lalitha, an upper caste woman, decides to get married to a Paraya boy, Elangovan, despite strong opposition from her mother. There are progressive characters such as Chandran and Rasendran, who do not believe in caste differences in and amongst themselves. They believe in free mingling and have some upper caste men as their friends. With the new generation of young men, Sivakami depicts the slow erosion of Kathamuthu’s power.

This novel is divided into two parts. Part I deals with Kathamuthu’s sovereignty in settling disputes amongst the members of his community, his settling of Thangam’s case, Gowri’s difference of ideology from that of her father, new developments in the lives of the younger generation and the slow decline of his power. The change in the status of Dalits is envisioned in terms of education, mobility, awareness of their rights and its assertion. Part II, which is entitled as “Author’s Notes”, is an attempt by the author to deconstruct her novel through the depiction of Gowri as a critic. Through the dialogic process Gowri unravels the disjunction between what happens in reality in the author’s family and community and her fictional representations of these happenings.

The discrepancies are reflected through the discord prevalent at the author’s home and the constant tussle between the two wives and their children. The stepmother dominates the household and succeeds in poisoning her father against the author’s mother, resulting in her mother earning the beatings. The author also highlights the hostility endured by her mother at the hands of her mother-in-law, who always tried feeding her with the leftovers on her father-in-law’s plate. She also suffered discrimination at the hands of her father, who always sided with her step brother. Part II of the novel also highlights the casteist remarks and abuses hurled upon the author as a child and even in her college, her vulnerability at the hands of her friend’s brother who tries to rape her in an inebriated state, but is unable to do so, her bitter relationship with her father, who constantly criticizes her and devalues all that she does for him, her mother’s bonding with the author in terms of her understanding of her daughter and the emotional support that she lends. Finally, her revenge on her father through the portrayal of Kathamuthu’s character, which she feels is based on her father and his slow erosion of powers. The author is unable to discount her father on account of his second marriage, which she believes is the root cause of his change of attitude towards her. She therefore deprives him of good and charitable qualities and taints him with a tinge of corruption through Kathamuthu’s character.

The second part doesn’t seem to have any linkages with the first part and merely appears as a critique and a disjointed piece. What appears to be an interesting aspect of this part is that it seems to throw much light on the gender and identity related issues as opposed to the first part in terms of the representation of the family dynamics and the presentation of women characters such as the author, her mother and aunt who suffer because of patriarchy, gender injustice and caste based oppression.
However, we as readers are not expecting or drawing any parallels between the author's life and the characters drawn by her. On the contrary, we are only treating the novel as a work of fiction.

**RAJAM KRISHNAN “LAMPS IN THE WHIRLPOOL”**

“Lamps in the Whirlpool” is a feminist novel and was awarded the Tamil Valarchi Kazhagam award in 1989. This novel is a translation of the Tamil novel, “Suzhalil Mithakkum Deepangal”. Uma Narayanan and Prema Seetharam have translated this novel into English in 1995 and it has been published by Macmillan India Limited. It depicts the journey of the protagonist Girija from repression to self-awakening. Girija is caught in the mire of ritual piety and austerity which is imposed upon her by her mother-in-law. The observance of ritual piety characterized as ‘madi’ in Tamil alienates her from her children. She is unable to touch and cuddle them whenever she feels like. Her mundane existence reduces her into a mere machine. Her education, skills, competence are devalued and sacrificed at the altar of household chores and madi. Even her husband, Swaminathan (referred to as Samu), doesn’t support her and demands complete obedience from her. Her superficial neighbour, Roja Mami, gains credit with her mother-in-law and interferes in Girija’s life, aggravating her hardships further. It is only her friend’s sister, Ratna, who understands her and tries to awaken her dormant sense of self. Girija’s discontentment is stirred when Samu fails to answer a simple question asked by her. Her entire devotion and commitment to her family is devalued by her husband. She decides to take reprieve by travelling to Haridwar. Girija’s short escapade for four days causes a crisis in her family. Samu accuses her of being a loose woman and asks her to get out of the house. Although she gets separated from her children, yet she decides to maintain contact with them and start her life anew.

**SALMA “THE HOUR PAST MIDNIGHT”**

This novel has been translated into English in the year 2009 by Zubaan Books. It gives us an insight into the lives of Tamil Muslim women, their customs and practices. Rabia, a young girl studying in a madrasa, is the daughter of Zohra and Karim. She enjoys going to school as it provides her with an outlet to meet her friends and enjoy her share of freedom. It being a rainy day, her mother sends her a car so that she returns home quickly. Rabia on the other hand asks her driver Mutthu to go away. She tells him that she has got work to complete and therefore, her teacher wouldn’t allow her to go home. All the children are extremely awe struck to see Rabia’s affluence. It fills her with pride to see the admiring glances of her classmates. Her gesture of sending the car back also adds to her pride. Rabia is friendly with Madina and loves to play with her. She tells Madina that she didn’t wish to miss the fun of walking back home with her. Madina feels
overjoyed to hear this. Both Rabia and Madina share a special bonding with each other and are willing to do anything to please each other.

As Rabia reaches home, she is scolded by her mother, Zohra, for having sent the car back. At this moment her ‘Periamma’, that is Rabia’s uncle’s wife, Rahima comes to her rescue. She tells Zohra not to be too strict with the child. Zohra and Rahima too share a deep bonding with each other. Theirs is a joint family. One evinces a unity in the family. Zohra asks Rabia to get ready fast as they had to go for mourning. She instructs Rabia to behave properly and to cover her head and breasts with a ‘davani’ (a dupatta). When they reach at the funeral, Rabia gets frightened and suffocated by the huge cry of lamentation and cries. She at once looks at Rahima who gestures her to go out. Rabia always feels comforted by her Periamma’s understanding. When they come out of the mourning, Zohra is shocked to find her daughter sitting and roaming amidst the men folk and once again scolds her. Rahima tells her not to get angry with Rabia and instead blames Zohra for having brought the child to such a place.

We are introduced to Zohra’s mother Amina, and her sister Firdaus. Amina is extremely sad owing to her daughter, Firdaus’ obstinate refusal to go and stay with her husband. Firdaus on looking at the ugly face of her husband refuses to live with him. This decision of hers causes displeasure and resentment amongst her family members. The marriage was being arranged by Zohra’s husband, Karim. Just before her marriage, Firdaus overhears the conversation between her sister and brother-in-law. Zohra sounds extremely upset about this match. However, Karim tells her that they have agreed to marry Firdaus without any dowry. He raises himself in their estimation by pointing out that it is only because of him that they have agreed for a match into a family where there is no male member to pay for the dowry. Karim asks her not to maintain a sorrowful face before her sister. Firdaus is unhappy with her brother-in-law, who she feels has deliberately arranged for a match in order to save the dowry money. She is unable to forgive him. After Firdaus’ divorce and break up, Zohra too severs all connections with her sister and mother. It becomes difficult for them to make out whether she does it because of her anger for belittling her husband or due to compulsion and obedience. Amina is heart-broken to see her daughter’s condition and wonders that an evil eye has been cast upon her good looking daughter. Firdaus too remembers as to how her mother used to keep her away from the gaze of other women, lest she might catch the evil eye of others. Amina used to be extremely proud of her daughter’s beauty. It now becomes a sole concern for her now. She wonders how she would be able to protect her from the leering gaze of men.

Amina is reminded of her youth. Her father, Kani Rowther fixed up her marriage with Ismail while playing a game of cards. At that time she was only ten years old and Ismail was thirty five. When Ismail told Kani that he wouldn’t play for money, but for his daughter’s hand, he readily agrees. When he informs his wife, Kadija about the
proposed match, she expresses discontent over his widower’s status and the age disparity between them. The match gets arranged on account of Ismail’s affluence. Kani believes that his daughter would be well off. However, when he arranges for his second daughter, Maimoon’s marriage through business contacts, it proves as a failure. Maimoon returns home within two months of their marriage and refuses to live with her husband despite Amina’s and Kadija’s insistence. To add on to their miseries, she even becomes pregnant by another man. Amina secretly arranges for a woman from the next village through her farm hand, Murungi’s, help. She feels that her sister must be rid of this problem. Amina discreetly moves out of her house in the night after putting her children to sleep. She only informs her mother-in-law. As soon as she reaches there, the woman is ready. All the four women—Kadija, Amina, Murungi and the woman move towards Maimoon’s room. She is fast asleep and they wake her up. Amina is filled with pity on seeing her sister’s childlike frame and wonders how Allah could have put a child into her womb. She consoles her sister and asks her to be brave. The woman appears to be forty-five years old and quite an expert in handling such cases. She gestures through her facial expression that they needn’t worry at all. She carried a twig, a ball of thread and an ointment. As soon as she applied the ointment, Maimoon got severe pains. All the women present in the room made sure that Maimoon didn’t scream and wake up others. She bore an unbearable pain till dawn and then died after her unborn child came out in the form of fragments, shreds and clot of blood.

Amina was worried for Firdaus. It seemed to her that Firdaus possessed her mother’s beauty and Maimoon’s stubbornness. She was scared that her daughter’s life might turn out like her sister’s. This fear propelled her to subject her to restrictions. Amina forbade Firdaus to go out. Firdaus felt depressed owing to the restrictions and wondered that while she used to accompany the other young women a few days back for a bath in the river, but was now forbidden to go out and longed for freedom. She wondered if she had committed a sin. Firdaus is unable to endure this social exclusion. Despite the confinement, she exhibits a strong desire to live. She tells herself that come what may, she would never commit suicide.

Rabia and Madina share a deep bond with each other. They love to spend time with each other and have lot of fun. Rabia has a great liking for Ahmad and loves to play with him too. He on the other hand boasts about and frequently quarrels with Madina. While Rabia admires his smartness in making kites, riding a bicycle, Madina doesn’t like him one bit. She even feels jealous of Rabia’s closeness with Ahmad. One day Rabia makes a truce with Ahmad without telling Madina. He offers to teach her bicycle only on one condition that Madina gets excluded from such activities. When Madina comes to know about her renewed friendship with Ahmad, she feels bad.

We also get an insight into their quarrels and petty mischief. Rabia’s cousin, Wahida is home after completing her class tenth from her grandfather’s house. Wahida is the
daughter of Rahima and Kader. Rabia is excessively proud of her cousin’s beauty and intelligence and likes to boast about her before her friends. One day Wahida asks her to get some books for her from the library. She goes to the library along with Madina. On the way she picks up Uma, who is their driver, Mutthu’s sister. While all the three of them are on their way, Ahmad teases Uma as dark skinned and makes fun of Rabia and Madina for applying too much powder onto their faces. He deliberately follows them to the library along with his friends and asks them if they would like to go for a movie. The girls know that he had intentionally spoken this so that they might overhear and know about his plan of going for a movie. Rabia, Madina and Uma also decide to go after playing in the water tank. While Uma goes and informs her mother, getting some money for snacks, Rabia and Madina decide to go stealthily. When they reach the hall, they watch Ahmad standing near the gate with a mischievous smile. They find out that there is nobody in the ladies ticket counter and understand the reason for his smile. However, Rabia requests Ahmad to buy them tickets and asks him not to report about this escapade to her mother. He assures her of secrecy. When they go inside, they are surprised to see not even a single girl sitting. All three of them sit huddled in a corner and feel embarrassed by the bathing scenes shown in the movie. They also become conscious of the male gaze. Once the movie gets over, they decide to leave in the last after everyone has left so that they don’t have to face embarrassing remarks.

Uma leaves for home immediately. Rabia and Madina are aware of the guilt pangs and decide to go home after the library closes so that nobody suspects them. When Rabia reaches home, she realises that Ahmad has already played as the mischief maker. Zohra is excessively angry and slaps Rabia for her transgression. Rahima comes to her rescue once again. She asks Zohra not to make much of the matter, lest the men come to know about it. Rabia realises the gravity of her offence as it was for the first time that her mother had slapped her. It was believed by them that to watch movies during the fasting days was sinful.

Kader decides to fix his daughter’s marriage with his sister, Sabia’s son, Sikander, and tells Rahima about it. Rahima doesn’t hold a high opinion about Sabia. She finds her an ill-tempered woman who always found faults with her brother’s wives. She tells him that there is no hurry for arranging for her match as she has just completed her tenth. Kader is anxious about not losing the family ties and is desperate to arrange this match. He finds it hard to convince his wife and seeks Karim’s help. The latter on the other hand is unable to understand the fuss that his brother was creating about making his wife displeased. Unable to confront his wife directly, Kader makes an announcement before Karim and Zohra that he has decided to arrange for Wahida’s nikah with Sikander. Rahima is excessively upset but is unable to voice out her displeasure before others. Kader is reminded of the promise made to his mother, Jamila Begum on her death bed that he would marry his daughter to Sabia’s son in order to keep the family ties intact.
Rahima, on the other hand is excessively upset. Somehow, she is unable to defy her husband’s wishes. She remembers how her sterilization after the birth of two children had upset Kader. When Rahima consulted the doctor after the birth of her son, the latter advised her that her uterus was very weak. Immediately, she went in for sterilization at Gandhigram without consulting Kader. Rahima was well aware of the fact that he would never allow her to go against the rules of Islam. However, after the death of her son, Sahul, she started feeling guilty. When she confronted Kader about his decision, he told her that she must not oppose and question Allah’s will. Whatever has to happen must happen. When she shared her concern about Sikander’s immoral good character, Kader dispelled her fears saying that she could not find a perfect match for her daughter. Men are bound to be like that. When Zohra raises a similar objection before her husband, he too is of the opinion that being a man he cannot control himself, like the girls. Thus, there is a perfect laxity of sexual morality so far as men are concerned. Karim asks Zohra not to make too much of a small matter. While the preparation for the Ramzan fasts and feasts are going on the additional burden of Wahida’s marriage falls on their heads.

We are introduced to Madina’s mother, Sainu who is battling hard with her mentally challenged twin girls, Rabikka and Siddhikka. She has to go through the burden of giving them a bath, changing their clothes and even changing their sanitary napkins during their periods. Sainu’s family faces a stigma of being categorized as an insane family. Due to these twins, nobody is willing to marry her daughter, Farida. Her worry is to get her daughter married. Her son, Suleiman works in Singapore and every time she talked to him about the problem of getting his sister married, he told her that they have to look for a groom elsewhere. Sainu is upset that while Wahida’s match is fixed, her daughter Farida despite being eighteen years old is still unmarried. She remembers as to how her own sister-in-law, Saura, (that is, her husband’s brother’s wife), had refused to marry her daughter, Sherifa to Suleiman. Instead, she was married to her (Saura’s) sister’s son, Salaam. Saura was scared that her daughter might also give birth to mentally retarded children. She wished the twins to die soon as she was scared that nobody would take care of them after her death. Even Madina feels ashamed to bring her friends home because of her retarded sisters. She is scared that they might make fun of her. Only Rabia comes to her house. Madina herself is unable to tolerate the stench of the twins’ saliva oozing all over. Sainu is waiting for Suleiman to fix up Farida’s marriage. She also hopes at the same time that with his arrival her daughter-in-law, Mumtaz, also conceives this time.

Mumtaz is a gossip monger. She loves to know the whereabouts of other people’s inside stories. She is friendly with Nafiza, Ahmad’s mother. They both love to exchange sexual banter with each other and share a love hate relationship. Mumtaz is aware about Nafiza’s scandalous and extra marital affair with Aziz. While her husband, Bashir, is a nice man, she loves Aziz and even spends intimate moments with him. Both Mumtaz and Nafiza share with each other the town’s gossip picking out slices of information from
others. However, there are times when Mumtaz makes oblique remarks at Nafiza’s affairs and hurts her. On one occasion when Nafiza warns her that Suleiman might develop a liking and intimacy for other woman, she obliquely hints that there are certain married women who develop bonds of intimacy with men other than their husbands. Mumtaz is eagerly waiting for her husband. The other women tease her that she should have energy boosters in her diet as when her husband comes back he would hardly leave her alone. She enjoys such conversations and participates actively in them. Mumtaz even asks Wahida to clarify any doubts related to sexual matters. Thus, Nafiza and Mumtaz are known for their outspokenness and forthrightness in sexual matters. Once when they attend a funeral with Rahima and Zohra, they never stop short making such remarks. It surprises Rahima that they could talk about sexual intercourse, clothes and blouse patterns on such a solemn occasion. At the funeral one of the ladies who is in the advanced stage of pregnancy comes, Rahima advises her to go for sterilization as this happened to be her sixth or seventh time. Rahima asks her for how long would she be able to bear such things. She replies that she cannot stop having sex with her husband and cannot take such a bold step of sterilization. She further tells her that she would go on bearing children till she is alive. On hearing all this Nafiza humorously remarked that she must tie a balloon over her husband. When the woman accused Nafiza of talking sinfully, the latter replied that such talks were much better than walking with a bloated stomach every time.

We also evince the sexual desires and frustrations through the characters of Sherifa and Firdaus. Sherifa is a young widow. Her husband dies in an accident. She has a daughter, Yasmin. While her mother, Saura asks her to remarry, she tells them clearly that while she would get a husband, her daughter would never be able to get a father. She is reminded of the happy moments that she has had with her husband, Salaam and is filled with grief that Allah had taken away all the bliss and happiness after her husband’s death. Sherifa experiences a physical longing for her husband and finds it hard to battle the cravings of her body. Her love for Salaam is immense. She has preserved all his letters and keeps reading them again and again. She is unable to obliterate him from her memory. Sherifa is unable to come to terms with the restrictions of widowhood. Her desire to dress well in a sari is stifled through her widowed existence. She lamented the fact that while older people were alive, why her husband Salaam had to die at such a young age.

Even Firdaus is smitten by the desires of her body. She is attracted towards Siva, the tenant who lived opposite Amina’s house. In fact, it was Amina who had rent that part of the house to a Hindu family. He worked as a teacher. Siva was married and had a child. Firdaus secretly watched him from her window and sometimes deliberately stood within his gaze. An attraction persisted between the two. His wife, Jaya, sometimes left the child under her care. She was away most of the time to her parents’ house as her child was frequently unwell. One day he came and handed her the house keys to be given to
his wife. When Firdaus held the keys, his fingers touched hers and a sudden thrill ran through her entire body. Firdaus got an opportunity to be alone with Siva when Jaya was away. It was the festival time and one could hear the loud beating of drums. Siva was entering inside his house when Firdaus saw him. He could sense the passion in her eyes and he opened his arms wide. She at once fell into his embrace. Firdaus was happy and gratified. She sensed that their union was based on love rather than on bodily lust. At times, she was assailed by doubts and fears of separation, and questioned why it was not possible for him to love two women. Firdaus felt that while she had no objection to such a proposition, Jaya might not agree to it. Even Siva tells her that it would have been nice if he had been a Muslim because then he would have been able to marry Firdaus also. She is overjoyed to hear this.

The preparations for Wahida’s wedding are on a full swing. All the neighbourhood women visit Rahima and Zohra to see what they had purchased for the festival and marriage. They show them the saris and both Nafiza and Mumtaz are disappointed that they hadn’t got the opportunity to see the bridal jewellery. They discuss it amongst themselves that they had deliberately hidden it lest anyone cast an evil spell on them. They are visited by Nuramma, their old maid, who expresses her enthusiasm and interest to see everything. She had served their family since their mother-in-law, Jamila’s time. Her daughter, Fatima, helps them with the tasks now. Fatima’s husband disappears a few months after her marriage and she is left with her son, Iliaz. Nuramma delights them with the stories of her youth and her first night encounter with her husband. All the ladies listen to her account with interest and enthusiasm missing their prayers.

One gets a glimpse into the painful life of Nuramma. Her mother Kairunissa was a loud mouthed and dominating woman. She didn’t listen to her husband. She felt that he was unable to meet their needs and resorted to prostitution. Her husband started keeping himself away from the house owing to her behavior. When Nuramma grew up, her mother initiated her into prostitution. She started inviting clients for her and Nuramma too was delighted by the gifts that her clients gave her. Even her sister also joined the flesh trade. However, soon Nuramma became tired of all this and told her mother of her resolve to quit prostitution. When Kairunissa asked her if she wanted to get married, she asked her who would marry her with a child in her womb. Nuramma couldn’t abort the child and had to lead a hard life. She raises Fatima singlehandedly and was pained to see her daughter’s ill fated marital life as her husband eloped a few months after her marriage. Fatima on the other hand, comes to terms with her condition and tells her that she doesn’t want to stay with her husband even if he comes back. Fatima is in love with Murugan, who works in Bashir’s shop. She elopes with him leaving her son behind. Her actions are castigated by the people of the community. Even Sherifa who has been a good friend of hers and is in the knowledge of her affair criticises her inwardly. She finds it difficult to imagine as to how Fatima could leave her son in order to attain happiness
for herself. She considers Fatima as a selfish woman. Sherifa, however, also experiences jealousy that she had been able to create a happy life for herself. In fact, Fatima tells Sherifa openly that it is difficult for her to control her sexual desires. She even makes the latter acknowledge her desires. Her elopement causes a stir in the community.

It is being decided by the elders that Nuramma be banished from the community. The social exclusion infuriates her so much that she challenges the elders of the community. She asks them that though her daughter was punished for eloping with a Hindu, but if there was any Muslim man here who did not have relationship with the Hindu women labourers. This infuriates Suleiman, who rushes in a frenzy to kill her. He is stopped by Kader. After Fatima’s elopement, the rules and regulations become stricter for Muslim women. They are prevented from going out and watching cinemas. While one evinces the laxity of sexual morals amongst the male, the female sexuality and mobility is curbed. Karim has sexual relations with a Hindu labourer, Mariyayi, and nobody seems to have objections to it. Even his wife, Zohra accepts her as a part of the family and doesn’t hesitate to buy her a new sari on festive occasions.

Life for Fatima doesn’t seem to be easy. She meets with Karim one day in the market. She apologises to him and requests him to make arrangements for sending her son. Fatima also shows him their vegetable stall. She tells Karim that her mother would never have agreed to come with her. Karim promises to make arrangements for Iliaz to be sent. He keeps this meeting as a secret and doesn’t betray her.

Due to Fatima’s absence the entire responsibility of the household chores and wedding preparations fall upon Rahima and Zohra. Rahima is bogged down with heavy work and Kader feels sorry for his wife. On one occasion when she enters into the room limping, he presses her feet after she lies down. He understands her state of mind and wonders if he has been right in his decision regarding Sikander. Although he had taken this decision to show his authority and domination over his wife, he wonders if his decision would harm his daughter. As a father, Kader had practiced restraint and distancing from Wahida, as he had been conditioned likewise. He had always seen his father behaving with Sabia in a restrained fashion. He is short of words when he sees Wahida in her bridal dress and is unable to express his affection towards his daughter openly. Similarly, Karim too exercises restraint with Rabia. He doesn’t allow her to come near her. On one occasion, when Rabia comes to know that her father has pain on his feet, she comes to rub oil. Karim feels overwhelmed by this gesture and asks her what she wanted. Rabia asks for gold loops from Madurai and he promises to get her one. Her initial resistance to approach her father is brushed aside by his warmth. Karim proudly tells everyone that only because his daughter had rubbed oil that all his pain had vanished. Rabia feels shy by such praise and runs away from the room. He considers Rabia as a smart girl.
The physical distancing from fathers constitutes a part of socialisation practices. Later on, when Zohra is away for nursing her mother, Rabia is instructed not to sleep with her father. Her mother tells Rabia that while sleeping her ‘davani’ or long skirt might slip off and she wouldn’t want that to happen before her father. Even Wahida never sleeps in her parents’ room.

Even the questioning spirit amongst the girls is never encouraged. Once Rabia goes to Uma’s house to borrow some notes, she tells her that she had lent it to someone else. When Rabia asks Uma to borrow the notes for her from Ramesh, the latter refuses to go to his house and tells her that her mother had forbidden her to go there. Rabia, herself decides to go to her classmate, Ramesh’s house. She notices two men over there and wonders about their relationship with Ramesh’s mother. Later on, she comes to know that she has two husbands. She then asks Rahima if it is right on the part of women to have two husbands, when the latter replies in negative. She asks her then if it was right on the part of men to have two wives. Though Rahima answers her patiently, but is strict with Wahida. She rebukes Wahida for asking questions- if the entire universe was made by Allah, then who made Him. Her angry look silences Wahida.

There appears a rift in the relationship between Zohra and Rahima on account of Firdaus, which later on assumes a magnifying proportion. On one occasion when Zohra is warned about Sikander’s character by Mumtaz, Rahima comes to know about it through Fatima who overhears the conversation. When she asks Zohra about it, she tries to hide. At once Rahima asks her not to trust these women who might claim that they were worried about her welfare and speak ill of her behind her back and cites Firdaus’ example. At once Zohra takes an offence and she tells Rahima that let people speak whatever they want. She tells her that Firdaus is to be blamed. On seeing tears in Zohra’s eyes, Rahima apologises. On another occasion when they go to distribute the wedding cards to Amina, Zohra notices Firdaus being dressed in deplorable clothes. She tries to defend her family honour before Rahima by criticising her mother for having kept Firdaus in a beggarly condition. Amina tells Rahima that she had the best of clothes but she was scared that her daughter’s beauty might attract the male gaze. She tells them that she found it difficult to preserve her daughter’s honour without the male support. When Rahima’s father gets a necklace for Wahida as a wedding present, she notices a tinge of sadness on Zohra’s face. Zohra feels sorry that Rabia didn’t have a grandfather who would do such things for her.

Sabia is a domineering woman who expects thirty thousand rupees in cash as a dowry besides the gold jewellery, silver utensils, wardrobe, bed and mattresses. She on the other hand gives them ten thousand rupees in cash for the purchase of bridal make up and saris. While Zohra and Rahima create a fuss about it, Kader asks them to keep quiet. She is a miserly lady who doesn’t even get the colour painting done in her house.
thinking that the wedding is going to take place in the bride’s house and Sikander will be going back few days after the wedding. Sabia feels that since she and Wahida are going to stay alone, it would be an unnecessary expenditure. Sikander loathes the miserly nature of his mother. He is not in favour of getting married to Wahida and has an eye on Firdaus. He feels that she is perfectly matched to him in age and craves to catch a glimpse of her. While Sabia is aware of his liking for Firdaus, she feels that Amina’s family neither had the dignity nor the status to match with theirs. He has no option but to agree to his mother’s wishes. Sabia is devoid of helping nature. Once when Firdaus falls ill with high fever, Amina approaches her and asks her to send Sikander to fetch the doctor. Despite being aware that Sikander would do anything to please Firdaus, Sabia tells her that he is fast asleep and wouldn’t get up and advises her to make herbal decoction. However, on thinking that Zohra might blame her, she wakes up Sikander and asks him to fetch the doctor. However, as soon as he is about to go, she finds out that Siva had gone. Sikander gives her an angry look and goes back to bed. When Sabia’a sister-in-law (that is, her husband’s sister), Nurnissha comes and asks her for a sari for Sikander’s wedding, she rebukes her if she had brought him up. Sabia hates her sister-in-law. Her husband used to sell clothes in Bombay on the streets. It is being said that he had contracted a sexual disease and died. After his death, her condition became deplorable. While Sayyed, Sabia’s husband, tried to help his sister, Sabia puts a stop to everything. Nurnissha had three children- one son and two daughters. In order to fend for them, she resorted to prostitution. The elders couldn’t take any action against her as the reputed people like the heads were her clients. When her husband’s brother came to know about her immoral conduct, he forcibly took her son with him. Nurnissha cried a lot. However, after a few days, she even gave her daughters for adoption. While Sikander felt that she perhaps wanted to protect them from the hazards of her profession, Sabia felt that the children would have proved to be the obstacles in the way of what she wanted to do. He used to help her by sending money through his friend secretively. Sikander felt bad for his aunt and thought of getting her a sari.

Wahida is an extremely shy and quiet girl. She never shared her feelings with anyone. When there are talks about getting her married, she feels upset, but never expresses her feelings openly. She feels uncomfortable and shy to express her opinions about sex. When Mumtaz and Nafiza pester her, she looks to Rahima as a refuge and runs away from there. Before marriage when Sikander and Sabia come to pay them a visit, she wonders how her would-be groom looked like. Although Rabia gives her a brief account of his toe nails being clean, she feels reluctant to ask her more. Wahida never gets an opportunity to take a close look at Sikander or even to meet him. She experiences anxiety as to what kind of a man she was getting married to and wonders how he would behave with her. Wahida thinks if he would behave like a film hero and be caring or gentle, or he would be otherwise.
Rabia and Madina are delegated responsibilities of receiving their guests and serving them. It is decided that after the wedding, Rabia would accompany her sister to her in-laws house. She is excited by the possibility of seeing her aunt Firdaus. Madina is upset that her friend would be away and there would be nobody to play with her. Sainu and Farida caution her that she would not be allowed to roam freely once Suleiman was back. The impending restrictions make her feel sad.

During the wedding ceremony, the women look at Ramesh’s mother and Mariyayi with curiosity and interest. Rahima feels ashamed of subjecting her guests to shame and humiliation. However, when the bridegroom’s party arrives, their attention gets diverted. Sabia presides over the ceremony and instructs Wahida to say her prayers. After the wedding, Wahida is taken to her new home. As soon as she reaches there, she experiences anxiety. Rabia goes to meet with her aunt Firdaus. She looks at the four walls of the room and wonders that from then on this was going to be her space. Wahida wonders about Sikander again. She feels that not even once did he try to comfort her when she was crying. She realises that she must accept the fact that this is her home and that crying would not help her. Wahida was sweating in her silk sari and wanted to change. Just at that moment Rabia entered into the room and she felt relieved. The two of them started chatting when her father-in-law, Sayyed, came into the room. He lifted Wahida’s neck and asked her not to be shy. He told her that her neck would start aching if she sat in that position and asks her to take a look at the room. Sayyed even assured her that it was her house from now on. He asked Rabia if she had been taking care of her sister and giving her company. He further asked Rabia if she was all ready, when the latter assented, he jokingly remarked that she was fully dressed. Both Rabia and Wahida felt uncomfortable by this remark. After he left the room, Wahida asked Rabia to call her mother-in-law. She desperately wanted to go to the bathroom. Wahida suddenly gets her periods and wants to freshen up. Sabia asks her to take rest and assures Wahida that she would tell Sikander about her condition. Rabia asks her where she should sleep. Wahida wonders that Sabia wouldn’t allow her to sleep in that room and therefore, instructs her to sleep in her aunt Firdaus’ house. Just as she is running to tell Sabia about it, Sikander enters into the room and holds her tightly. Sabia shouts and asks him not to be too playful with his sister-in-law. He lets Rabia go. Wahida doesn’t like the way he behaves with her sister.

When Sikander comes near her, she feels anxious and nervous. Without the slightest inhibition he starts changing his clothes before her. Wahida feels too shy and hides her face in her knees. Sikander lifts her face and tells her that his mother had told him that she was in the wrong time of the month. Therefore, she has escaped from him. He asks her to lie down. She respects Sikander for letting her alone that night. Despite the new home and surroundings, Wahida is able to sleep soundly due to intense fatigue. The next day Rabia comes into Wahida’s house. Sabia asks her where she had been and
asks her if she would like to eat anything. She refuses and tells them that she has already had breakfast in her aunt’s house. When Wahida asks Rabia if she liked Sikander, she gives an uncertain reply which upsets Wahida. Sabia asks Rabia to take tea for her brother-in-law. Although she hates to go near Sikander, yet she has no choice and goes to the terrace cursing Sabia. Rabia notices him smoking on the terrace and wonders if he is a nice man. She tells Sikander that tea has been kept. Just as she is about to rush downstairs, he holds her tightly by the waist and asks her if she is scared of him. Rabia feels uncomfortable in his tight grip. He loosens his hand over her waist and grips her hand. Rabia tries hard to free her hands and ends up breaking the glass bangles. Sikander asks her why she had tried to pull her hand away so hard. He keeps his handkerchief on her hand from which blood starts oozing. She deliberately makes a fuss and starts shouting. Immediately, Sabia calls out and Sikander releases his hands. Rabia at once runs away from there.

Rabia wonders how rough his hands were. She decides to keep herself away from him. Rabia feels sorry for Wahida and wonders that though she would go away from here after a few days, her sister would have to spend the rest of her life here. Wahida is unable to bear the sexual torture caused by Sikander, which causes pain in her lower abdomen and belly. She is shocked by the violent treatment meted out to her. Wahida feels that she had been treated like an object, with no feelings. All the feelings of respect that she had felt for him during the course of her first night get obliterated. Just as she comes out of her room to have a bath and clean herself of all the pollution, she finds Sayyed waiting outside her room. His gaze roves all over her body and he asks her if it had hurt her a lot. Wahida is shell shocked and is unable to answer him. He tells her that since it is the first time, it would hurt her a bit. Wahida runs into the bathroom. She finds something sticky in between her legs and is scared to see if it is blood. She simply washes it with water and cries out loudly.

Wahida has been instructed by Rahima and Zohra that she must wash the pillow case, covers and the bed sheets after she has had sex with her husband. Also, she is advised to have bath before dawn. One day, Wahida falls asleep and fails to have an early morning bath. Just as she wakes up, she rushes inside the bathroom. Immediately, Sabia knocks at the door and taunts her for having her bath so late. Wahida constantly yearns for her mother and home. She considers her new home as a trap from which there is no escape. Wahida is unable to eat her fill as she is tormented by the gaze of Sabia who keeps a constant eye on the food she is eating. Sayyed, however asks and encourages her to eat well. The unhygienic manner in which Sabia cooks food repels her. Wahida’s stomach churns when she sees Sabia using the handkerchief to wipe her nose which is continuously watery due to the smoke. She doesn’t wash her hands afterwards. Moreover, Sabia puts the stirring spoon for tasting the food cooked and dips the same without cleaning it. The thought of Sabia’s saliva and phlegm dribbling over the food repels Wahida and makes her nauseous. Wahida remembers as to how in her
house she would never ever touch the used spoon or eat unhygienic food. There appears a huge discrepancy between her natal and marital home.

The incessant torture that she is subject to every night only increases her pain. She experiences a burning sensation in her urinary tract. Sabia rubs sesame oil on her lower belly and tells her that it is natural for her to feel such a pain after the sexual act. Wahida is unable to endure the taunts and sarcasm of Sabia and the leering gaze of Sayyed. Initially, she considers her father-in-law as her source of support, but soon her opinion changes about him. Wahida finds him continuously staring at her and appreciating her in a new sari. She feels that even her husband doesn't notice which sari she is wearing. Her father-in-law never fails to complement Sabia too. Very often Sayyed comes to Wahida and boasts about his sexual encounters with several women. He tells her that he used to look quite handsome in his youth and several women used to yearn to sleep with him. Sayyed tells her how several Sri Lankan women were available when he was young. However, at that point of time he didn't have the money then. He laments the fact that though he has the money now, but all his youth has gone. He satiates himself by telling all the imaginary stories to Wahida. He even tells her how he has had sex with Amina. Sayyed talks about an impotent friend of his who goes to these Sri Lankan women, and feels sorry for him as they could only touch and pat him and send him away. Wahida at once realises that this friend was none other than him. She feels sorry for him. One day Sayyed tells Wahida that she must give herself to Sikander without complaining as he is a young man. He tells her that she being young, it would hurt her when he has sex with her, but she must not complain and put him off. He boasts as to how he never used to leave Sabia alone, and they used to be locked in the room day and night. Even though Sabia was only ten years old then, she always pleased him. Sayyed talks about his encounters with several kinswomen too and tells Wahida that even Sabia is aware about all the women with whom he has had sex. All these stories repel Wahida.

Wahida feels unhappy about Sikander's flirtatious manner. She finds him flirting with all the women relatives who come to meet him. When Nafiza and Mumtaz come to meet him, she is able to perceive his admiring glances towards Mumtaz. She is angry to see Mumtaz dressed in a see through sari and flirting and laughing with her husband like a young girl. Even his habit of snoring robs her of the sleep. Wahida remembers how she never used to sleep in her parents' room because of her father's habit of snoring. She who has been used to the peace and quiet of her house had to endure all the restrictions. When Wahida goes home on the seventh day for the feast in her parents' house, she is quite happy to meet with her mother. All the women come to meet with her and ask her about her in-laws. Rahima instructs her not to open her mouth and utter anything lest it might reach Sabia's ears. Nafiza and some other women criticize Sabia. Mumtaz and Nafiza ask her if everything has got over. When they find Wahida too shy to speak, they decide to show her a cassette. Rahima asks them not to do anything of
sort. They go upstairs to meet Sikander and ask him the same question. Nafiza and Sikander are of the same age. He is appalled by her boldness and admits proudly that all that is over. However, he complains that Wahida is too shy and calls her a baby lamb. Nafiza promises to remove all her shyness and asks him what he would give her in return. Sikander jokingly remarks that he can give her whatever he has and she is welcome to it. Both the women move out laughingly.

Wahida falls ill after seeing the pornographic cassette. The sight of naked bodies repels her. However, she is shocked to see Nafiza and Mumtaz enjoying such things. She is angry towards Rahima for allowing them to show her such things. She feels that all this while all her family members had behaved before her in a restrained manner. They had never exhibited even the slightest trace of intimacy before her. Wahida has been socialised to have her bath with her underskirt/ petticoat tied on her breast. After all the years of restraint, she finds it difficult when her mother asks her to go and sleep with a strange man. Sikander at once leaves from the place when he comes to know about Wahida’s illness. She is hurt by his insensitivity. Wahida feels that he was so unlike the film hero who would have nursed the heroine back to health. When Wahida complains to Rahima about Sikander, she advises that she must stop behaving like a small child and accept him as her husband. She would be degrading her family by talking ill about them before others.

After Rabia comes back home along with Wahida, she meets with her friend Madina. They both go and sit on the terrace. She gives Madina the roots of the herbal plant which would make her hair soft and silky. When Madina asks her if she liked her brother-in-law, Rabia tells her that she didn’t like him at all. Rabia tells her as to how he used to pinch his cheeks and hold her hands. When Madina asks her as to why he used to behave like this to her when he had Wahida, she was unable to answer her. She asked Rabia if her sister had an early morning bath daily. Rabia is unable to understand it. Madina tells her that her sister-in-law, Mumtaz always used to have an early morning bath after she had spent time with her brother. She asked if Wahida and Sikander were happy. Rabia couldn’t understand what she meant by happy and asked Madina about it. She started running her fingers through Rabia’s body and kissed her on the cheek. Rabia gradually began to understand it.

We also get an insight into the sexual experimentation by the adolescents. Once Rabia goes to Ahmad’s house and they decide to play the game of father-mother. They start playing with their pots and pans. Ahmad at once commands Rabia to make the food ready. She like an obedient wife places it before him. He pretends that he has gone for work. When he comes back, he takes out his wooden doll from his shelf and tells her that it was their son. They lie down and pretend to sleep. At once, he asks Rabia to comfort and nurse their crying baby. She places the baby on her lap. He asks her to give him milk from her breasts. Rabia feeling shy asks Ahmad to turn his back. She lifts her
blouse and starts feeding the baby. Ahmad turns towards Rabia and has a look at her breast. He touches her soft nipples and starts sucking it like a child. Rabia experiences a sudden thrill and embraces him tightly. From then on, Rabia preserves the wooden doll. For her, it stands for Ahmad. Her infatuation with Ahmad keeps increasing. Whenever she went to meet him, Rabia made sure that she was well dressed. Rabia feels extremely delighted when Nafiza addresses her as her daughter-in-law. She keeps on telling before Zohra and others that Rabia is her daughter-in-law and a smart one. Rabia feels delighted and proud to hear this. Once when she goes to Ahmad’s house, he tells her that he is going to stay with his uncle as per his mother’s wish and would be studying there from now on. She feels sad and asks him if he cannot express his wish. At once Ahmad asks her when she wanted him to come back. Although Rabia knows that he was saying this to placate her, she feels happy by his remark. Rabia misses him immensely. On one occasion, Madina brings some titillating magazines for Wahida, sent to her by Mumtaz. She hides one of the magazines and both she and Rabia explore the mystery about sexuality. On seeing certain pictures, Rabia discovers the joys of sexuality. Both Rabia and Wahida had been brought up in a rigid manner. They had been instructed that it was a sin to look at one’s genitals, breasts and other body parts. If they ever transgressed this code of morality, their faces would be blackened. However, Rabia experiences a silent joy in looking at her budding breasts in the mirror. It is due to the rigid sexual orientation that Wahida’s sexual encounter with her husband turns out to be traumatic for her.

In the meanwhile, Suleiman decides to arrange for Farida’s marriage with Aziz. He tells Mumtaz about it. The latter experiences a sadistic pleasure thinking that it would hurt Nafiza to hear this. What upsets her is Suleiman’s decision to give Aziz a share in his business. Sainu is suspicious of Farida’s liking towards the driver Mutthu. One day when she comes back from Rahima’s house, she finds Mutthu. She asks him the reason. He tells her that he had come looking out for Rabia. Sainu suspects that he had come to meet Farida. She scolds him and sends him away. She is scared that Mumtaz might create an issue out of it and blow it out of proportion. When she enters inside, she finds Farida reading a book. Her davani has slipped off her breasts and she scolds her for reading and being oblivious of her appearance. Even Rabia points out to Wahida later that she had seen Farida and Mutthu giggling and laughing. They decide to arrange for her marriage in haste. Suleiman is a fanatic Muslim who takes a firm stance against Fatima’s elopement with Murugan. He is unable to tolerate this transgression. He even approaches Kader and Karim and keeps telling them that they being the elders of the community must take steps that such incidents doesn’t happen in future. He approaches Kader and complains to him about Mutthu. He is chucked out of the job.

Mumtaz approaches Nafiza and tells her about Farida’s marriage with Aziz. She expects to see anxiety in the latter’s face, but is disappointed when Nafiza appears unperturbed. Nafiza meets with Aziz and cries her heart out. He explains to her that through this
marriage he would be able to exalt his status. There is non-commitment in his relationship with Nafiza. When Nafiza violently scratches him with her nails, he rebukes her and asks her what kind of a woman is she who was unable to understand his position. Nafiza at once asks him to get out. She ignores the pleading look and emotions of love in his eyes. She becomes sorrow stricken and lies down without having had her mid-day meal. When Bashir returns home, he finds the unwashed clothes soaked in soap water. He even checks into the kitchen and notices that not even a morsel of food has been eaten. He at once gets angry with Nafiza for starving herself and Rafiq. However, when he enters into the room, he is moved by the sight of his wife. He wonders if there is any connection between Aziz’s marriage and Nafiza’s condition. Despite Bashir’s knowledge of his wife’s attachment with Aziz, he doesn’t ever utter angry words to his wife. His compassion and tolerance for her makes her feel guilty.

Wahida comes to her husband’s home. At night through her window, she watches Firdaus going to Siva’s house. She is filled with anger and decides to confront them. Wahida at once moves towards his house and finds them making love. She rebukes Firdaus and asks her what kind of a woman she was. Wahida waits for her outside Amina’s house. When Firdaus comes out, Wahida is shocked to find that she doesn’t have the slightest trace of guilt on her face. Firdaus confronts her and asks her what she wants. Wahida accuses her of adultery and threatens to make her affair public. Firdaus tells her that she would have to bear the consequences and asks her to go, lest her mother wakes up. Wahida refuses to go and feels satisfied to see the latter’s fearful face. As she is about to leave, Firdaus tells her that while she is accusing her of shameful behavior, what would she do if she comes to know as to how her mother had behaved with her uncle. Wahida is shocked to hear about it. With all this noise outside, Amina wakes up. She shivers with anger and in order to save the family’s honour asks Firdaus to drink rat poison. When she refuses to do so, Amina threatens to drink it herself. Firdaus has an excessive love for life and pleads with her mother to let her go. However, Amina remains unmoved. She at once drinks it in a gulp and lies down on the bed. Firdaus is unable to understand as to why she was being punished by her mother and sister like this. Her mother who used to give her milk in the wide mouthed tumbler, had poured poison into it today. She is unable to understand this social exclusion of hers. At the same time Firdaus feels sorry for Rahima for letting out her secret to Wahida. She feels that Zohra had been too innocent. However, she is unable to forget the sisterly love that Rahima had shown towards her. She feels sad at being parted from Siva. Firdaus had asked him to leave the place immediately expecting some trouble. Although her throat and stomach starts burning, she dies without making noise.

Zohra is shocked to hear the news about Firdaus’ death. She along with Rahima comes to Amina’s place. Rabia is shocked to find her aunt dead. Amina fabricates it as death due to electrocution. She feels guilty of betraying her granddaughter Rabia. Amina finds the picture of Ismail looking at her in an accusing manner. She feels guilty of poisoning
Firdaus. However, she convinces herself that this was the best way to save her family honour. Amina gets severe chest pains and she gets admitted into the hospital. Zohra stays back with her. She comes to know from Amina about Rahima’s escapade with Karim and a rift develops between the two. Later on, even Rahima comes to know through Amina about Firdaus’ confession to Wahida. She wonders how a thing done unknowingly and long forgotten could assume such monstrous proportions. Rahima had regretted about this deed, repented and even forgiven herself. She finds it difficult to face Wahida and experiences a feeling of guilt.

Wahida is unable to endure the domineering temperament of Sabia who keeps finding faults with her. Even when she goes to attend Firdaus’ funeral, her mother-in-law drags her back home. Even the women present there complain of Sabia sticking too much to her daughter-in-law. When Rabia comes to meet with Wahida, Sabia gets angry with her for having come directly from the funeral. She complains and gossips before other women about Firdaus’ affair with Siva and how Amina’s confrontation might have propelled her to commit suicide. Sabia even draws parallels between Maimoon and Firdaus. Sayyed who has been listening to this conversation feels embarrassed to hear his wife openly criticising Amina’s family before Wahida and asks her to make a cup of tea for him. Wahida wonders that she who hadn’t even served her parents with a cup of water had to do a lot of work for her in-laws. She notices that Sabia’s face had been darkened by her dark thoughts. Although Sayyed relishes the tea made by Wahida, Sabia finds fault with it. She blames her for having put too much sugar into it. Sayyed complains about the tense situation in Sri Lanka and his inability to go there due to riots. He asks them what he should do about it. Just then Sikander enters. When Sabia asks him why he was late, Sayyed tells that he being a young man had to do lot of work. Sikander gets irritable with his father and tells him that he couldn’t be blamed for the riots in Lanka. At once, Sabia scolds Wahida for standing like a statue and orders her to attend to her husband’s needs. She at once rushes towards him with a fresh towel. When he comes out, he realises from Wahida’s face that his mother had been shouting at her. Sikander comes to his wife’s rescue and tells his mother that he has been noticing that she has been getting at Wahida unnecessarily and she should remember that she was his wife. This open support surprises Wahida. At once he calls her into his room. Sabia accuses her of casting a spell on her son. When Wahida goes into his room, he tells her that if she doesn’t have any work she must rest rather than sitting with the old folk who would make her tired with their incessant chatter. He even assures her that he is there for her and asks her not to worry. She feels moved by this gesture.

The time for Wahida’s departure is drawing near and she is thrilled to meet her family. She wonders as to how her father had forgotten about her entirely after her marriage. Wahida keeps count of Sabia’s complaints against her family and feels that she would recount and tell them everything once she reaches her natal home. However, she is assailed by the thought of being pestered by the women and their frequent questioning if
she has conceived. Sabia tells Sikander to collect all the gifts and other things from his in-laws house when he goes to leave her on the fortieth day. Sikander at once points out that after all they are her brothers and would do the best possible thing for her. Sabia at once laments that her son had never spoken to her like this before and blames Wahida for it again. One day Sabia asks Wahida to cook her fast meal. That day Wahida gets the freedom to eat to her heart’s fill without being scrutinised by her mother-in-law. As she is preparing the meal, she finds somebody touching her bottom. She is shocked to see Sayyed behind and darts an angry glance towards him. Sabia instructs her to keep the windows of the kitchen closed for fear of being haunted by Firdaus’ spirit. Wahida feels amused by her fear. It is believed by them that those who have a love and desire for life haunt other people.

Wahida comes to her natal home with the resolution of staying there forever. She is relieved when Sikander leaves from there. He has been instructed by Sabia to come the very next day after dropping Wahida. Moreover, she tells him not to touch her now lest the embryo in the formation gets destroyed. Wahida gets irritated when her mother dresses her up for the night. She is being visited by lot of women who enquire her about the due date of the periods. She feels embarrassed to hear how her private affair could be discussed publicly. Saura and Sainu ask her if Sikander had slept with her and make oblique remarks against Sabia. Sherifa feels embarrassed to hear this, but is unable to stop the course of conversation. Rahima as usual instructs Wahida to keep quiet and not to let these women know about her in-laws. Wahida notices the rift between Zohra and Rahima and hears talks of the wall going to be erected in the middle of the house. She gets upset to know about this. She even finds Rabia quite listless. It is from her that Wahida gets to know all this information. Sainu invites Wahida to her house to meet with Madina who has come of age and also to visit Farida. After sometime, Suleiman comes with the news that Fatima who had been running a vegetable stall with Murugan had been run down by a bus or truck. He happily announces the news and feels that she had been punished by Allah for her transgression. Even Sainu agrees with her son. Sherifa and Wahida feel shocked by his callousness and pity Mumtaz for having married an insensitive man.

Rabia finds Wahida having lost all her earlier interest of listening to the film songs in Zohra’s radio. After her marriage, she appears to be quieter than ever. Rabia has nobody to play with as Madina is forbidden from going out and Ahmad hasn’t returned from his uncle’s house. She develops friendship with Nuramma’s grandson, Iliaz. She feels sorry for him as he has been staying without Fatima. Rabia is surprised to see the change in herself regarding Iliaz as earlier she used to exclude him from play and never allowed him to sit with her. She goes to Nuramma’s house along with Iliaz and finds it intolerable to endure the stench of urine. Every time there is a passerby Nuramma asked who it was. She always used to entertain herself with the thought that one day the jinn would leave a huge cauldron of treasure with her. Nuramma imagined hearing the sound
of the cauldron everytime and wished that the jinn gave it during her lifetime so that it turns out to be helpful for her Fatima and Iliaz. It was Rahima and Zohra who sent food to them. Rahima asks Iliaz to sleep at night in their house as she is scared that if anything happened to Nuramma, Iliaz would get frightened.

When Rabia meets with Madina, the latter tells her about Mumtaz being possessed by Firdaus’ spirit. Rabia is upset and asks her how she came to know. She recounts an incident when Mumtaz in a state of frenzy drove her brother out of the room. Madina tells her that her mother had sent Mumtaz to her mother’s place. We later on come to know from Sainu that Mumtaz was unable to conceive and had some problem. She was possessed by Firdaus’ spirit. In fact, when she screamed at Suleiman not to touch her and Sainu entered into her room, she found her in a frantic state. On being asked who she was, she replied that she was Firdaus. Sainu said that while Mumtaz’s mother feared that she might give birth to mentally deformed children, she was unable to produce any. Thus, she is sent back to her mother’s house.

Saura puts pressure on Sherifa to get married to Suleiman. When Sherifa refuses, her mother threatens to kill herself. She tells Sherifa that it would be difficult for her to protect her without the support of a male member. Saura feared that her husband suffered from ill health. If anything happened to him, it would be difficult for her to take care of her younger brother and Sherifa. She hates Suleiman for his heartlessness and insensitivity towards Fatima’s death. Sherifa also feels that it was unjust on his part to renounce Mumtaz because of her inability to produce a child and remarry. She is unable to obliterare Salaam’s memories from her heart. However, due to familial pressures, she is coerced to agree.

Rahima feels guilty to face Wahida. She wonders if her silence is because of her anger and resentment against her. Wahida had always been a quiet child, reluctant to share her feelings openly. When she finds her lying down quietly, she asks her the reason for it. Wahida who had been desperately trying to speak out her feelings before her mother is troubled by her care worn look and feels sorry for her. She tells Rahima that she doesn’t wish to go back to Sabia’s house and even expresses her dislike for Sikander. Even during her course of her stay here when he visits her, she remains silent. Sikander shares the village’s gossip with Wahida and asks her not to feel scared as he was not going to eat her up. He points out that even during the best of times, she had been very frigid. He then asks Wahida if she didn’t feel like speaking affectionate words to her husband who had come to meet with her after a long time. She senses a similarity of emotions in this regard. He tells Wahida that Sayyed was missing her. She detested her father-in-law who was merely on the lookout for an opportunity to get hold of her. When Sikander lay close to her, she was repelled by the smell of his perfume mingled with sweat. Wahida at once covered herself with a bed sheet from top to toe. He understood her disinterest and became angry.
Wahida tells Rahima that she cannot accept Sikander as her husband and addresses him disrespectfully. Rahima tells her that if she doesn’t feel like going then she can stay here. However, she must address her husband respectfully and permit him to visit her. When Rahima hints at the probability of her pregnancy, she negates the idea. She feels that she doesn’t have to worry about them as she wouldn’t have to go there. When Wahida goes inside the bathroom, she feels nauseous and vomits her breakfast of idlis. Her petticoat gets drenched by her urine and her stomach starts churning. Wahida at once perceives a life taking form inside her womb and starts crying helplessly. There seems to be no escape for her from her marital home. While Rahima continues to knock at the door, she weeps loudly.

Rabia comes to know about Ahmad’s arrival from Iliaz, and rushes to meet him. She at once goes to Wahida and asks her to make her plaits. When she asks her the reason for her hurry, she tells her that Zohra had forbidden her to come to her. Wahida feels upset to hear this. Rabia at once realises her mistake. Zohra even forbids Rabia from studying further. When Rahima tells her that she is just in her seventh grade, Zohra remains firm in her stance. Even before she comes of age, Rabia’s movements are fettered. Zohra doesn’t allow her to study hard during her exams. She tells Rabia that all her education is going to go waste as she wouldn’t be allowed to go to school once she menstruates. Both Rahima and Wahida realise the futility of Zohra’s restrictions and consider it as an over protective attitude. Zohra is scared that Rabia might turn out to be like Firdaus. She objects her daughter’s going to Rahima’s place. It is Zohra who decides that a wall gets erected in the centre of the house. On being asked the reason, she tells Karim that she wishes to bring her mother here. Only Rahima, Wahida and Zohra know the real reason behind it. They are sagacious to keep it hidden from others, especially the meddling women. They tell the others that the men have decided that their kitchens be separate.

Rabia goes to Ahmad’s house and finds him urban looking. She feels reluctant to speak to him with ease. However, his familiarity puts her at ease. Ahmad asks her as to why she had stopped going to school. When Nafiza addresses her as her daughter-in-law before Ahmad, she feels shy. He tells her that he is going to the school to get his Transfer Certificate and asks her to accompany him. Rabia at once rushes home and tells Zohra that she was going to Madina’s house. She asks her mother not to look for her elsewhere. Rabia feels a change in her mother’s attitude. Now-a-days, she preferred that Rabia rather spends time with Madina than with Wahida and Rahima. She also takes the wooden doll tucked below her half sari. Ahmad asks her about Madina. Rabia feels shy and tells him that she has come of age. When they reach school, he tells her that there is time yet for his father to come and they decide to sit for a while. He gives
her the imported chocolates and asks her to eat. Rabia shows him their names engraved on the leaves of the cactus plant. Ahmad observes that she has been hiding something and asks her what it is. Rabia feels shy and shows him the wooden doll. She tells him that she had got it to return it to him. Ahmad remembers certain things on seeing the doll and asks her to keep it. She enjoys being alone with him. He goes leaving her alone for a while to collect his certificate. After he comes back, they walk back silently. When they reach near his house, Ahmad tells Rabia that he was going by the evening’s train that day. He tells her that he was going to study in the convent there and would be returning after exams during the school holidays. Rabia feels sad. When she reaches home, she is shocked to see the erected wall in the middle of the house. All her cheerfulness disappears and she cries lying down on her bed.

We as readers evince as to how young girls were being treated as a commodity and married to older and richer men. There is a certain man called Abdulla, who marries beautiful girls from poor families. Despite the fact that all his wives were alive, he didn’t shirk from getting married again and again. He validated his conduct by citing the example of the Prophet who too married several times. One also evinces women’s body as a site of male domination and control. Mariyayi, the Hindu labourer, with whom Karim had established illicit relationship, was made to go through sterilization so that she couldn’t get pregnant by him. Later on, she regretted this decision and longed to have a child of her own. She was happy if anybody addressed her by the kinship term “Mammani”. When Karim refuses to tell her about Wahida’s marriage, she gets angry saying that after all what right she had. However, when Karim asked her what she was going to give her daughter for the wedding, she gets pacified. She gifts Wahida a gold ring. She adapts herself completely to the customs of the Muslim household by wearing black beads around her neck and removing the bindi.

We as readers get an insight into the female rivalry through the gossip mongering amongst women as well as through the relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Ismail’s mother, Biviamma, was jealous of Amina and complained that there was no reason for him to build such a big house. She felt that he was building a big mansion for his wife. However, when he assured her that he was building it for his daughter, who looked completely like Biviamma, she was pacified. Ismail told his mother that whenever he would see Zohra walking in the house with her tiny feet, he would feel that his mother was walking there. She at once addresses him as her son and father. The hardships in the lives of the women are evinced through their marital lives. For instance, Biviamma was married to a man who suffered from tuberculosis and who was much older than her. As soon as Ismail was born, his father died. The responsibility of bringing up her son fell upon her.
Thus, one catches the manifestations of gender identity through the myriad representation of women characters, their struggles and their ways of dealing with their lives.

SIVASANKARI “DECEPTION”

Sivasankari’s novel, “Deception” entitled “Poi” (meaning ‘lie’ in Tamil) was initially published in Tamil in 1985, but was translated into English in the year 2007 by Indian Writing, the English imprint of New Horizon Media Limited, a publishing house established in 2004. This novel in the first half, describes the marital bliss enjoyed by Giridhar and Durga, who are prototypes of a typical upper middle class family. The subsequent half focuses on the change in their relationship with Giridhar’s infidelity, leading to the shattering of faith, emotional turmoil and reconstruction of Durga’s identity into an independent self. Although this novel is set during the time when there were no internet or email services and people had to rely only on postal services such as letters and telegrams, yet one can empathise with the plight of the central character, Durga.

Giridhar and Durga have been happily married for seven years and are blessed with two sons- Visu and Jaggu. Their marital bliss is evident through the care and concern that they both exhibit towards each other. A turning point comes into their lives with the announcement of Giridhar’s trip to England for six months. While Giri is reluctant to be separated from his wife and children and decides to turn down this offer, Durga coaxes him into accepting it. She feels that it would not only entitle him to a promotion as Works Manager, but also improve their standard of living. Finally, Giridhar leaves for England and Durga spends most of the time at her parents’ place after coming back from office, going back to her house only to rest at night.

Durga is quite happy to receive letters from Giridhar once a week. Both she and her children anxiously wait for the training period to end soon. However, with the passage of time, Giridhar’s letters become infrequent and diffident in spirit. This worries her a lot. She tries to find out from her friend who works in a post office if this had been happening due to a postal strike in Britain. When she comes to know that there has been no strike, a gnawing sense of fear and worry fills her mind and heart. Durga sends her husband a telegram and receives a reply. Giridhar blames her for creating a scene and getting everyone worried. She is deeply upset to see Giridhar’s indifference to her promotion in the office, reflected in his congratulatory message, which appears as an afterthought and lacking in warmth. However, she tries her level best to hide her disappointment before her sons and tries to justify their father’s conduct before them. She even tries to brighten up Visu’s birthday party by inviting her mother-in-law, Chellamma and making arrangements for a magic show. Giridhar exhibits complete lack of responsibility by neither wishing his son, nor sending a gift for him.
One day Durga receives a call from the Managing Director of her husband’s firm. He informs her of Giridhar’s absence from his training for two months and also about his resignation letter to the company. Durga is shocked and is quite worried about her husband’s safety and health. She discusses the situation with Chellamma and informs her about Giridhar’s sudden departure to America. Her mother-in-law wonders if he had gone to meet his elder brother, Sudhakar. Durga makes arrangement so that Chellamma is able to speak to her elder son and find out about Giridhar’s whereabouts. To her dismay, even he pretends ignorance on this matter. On reaching home, she discovers a letter from Giridhar. He informs Durga about his new found attachment with Linda, an American widow and also an heiress. He confesses before Durga that he intends to marry her and settle down in America. Giridhar is even entrusted with the ownership of Linda’s industry. The luxurious lifestyle and affluence blinds him so much that he considers his life with Durga as meaningless and automated. He asks for a divorce and expects her not to create a scene and be hysterical. Durga is shell shocked. She finds it hard to bear that her affection and devotion has been so devalued. Her father, Subramaniam and mother, Akhila, emerge as strong pillars of support during this time of emotional crisis. Finally, after copious weeping, Durga decides to take charge of her life. She decides to go to Boston along with her sons to confront Giridhar. Durga is resolute in her decision to travel all alone and does not wish anybody to accompany her.

On reaching Boston after a thirty six hour long journey, she hires a cab and reaches Giridhar’s and Linda’s palatial mansion. On seeing Durga along with the children, Giridhar at once starts blaming her for having come without any intimation. He is also ashamed of their ‘beggarly’ appearance. Giridhar is relieved that Linda has gone to visit her ailing mother. Durga is unable to endure all this and she starts sobbing. He at once accuses her of acting in a cheap manner and of using such histrionics to take him back. She asserts her selfhood by refusing Linda’s offer of twelve lakh rupees as a compensation amount and tells Giridhar that she does not have any intentions of calling him back. She tells him that she came here only to show her children the true colour of their father. She did not want them to feel that she was lying that their father would never come back. While Durga had wanted him to tell them openly by looking into the children’s eyes that he did not want to live with them, but Giridhar had already said more than what was required. Thus, Durga emerges as a new and fearless woman, who pays back her husband by reminding him that she would not allow any man to trample upon her dignity.

**SIVASANKARI “BRIDGES”**

This book has been originally written in Tamil in 1983. It was then translated into English in the year 2007 by New Horizon Media Limited, a publishing house established in the year 2004.
“Bridges” is a story of three generations of Tamil Brahmin women. It runs like a chronology whereby the writer has depicted the events in accordance with the year. Although there are three stories running simultaneously- from 1907-1931, 1940-1964 and 1965-1985, there appear to be no correlation between them. Each of these stories has an independent plot and characters. The common thread that links all the stories together is that they reflect the differences in the lifestyles in terms of acceptance or rejection of the customs and traditions and the thinking processes of the women characters. In each of these stories, we evince a conflict between the older and the younger generation women, with the mothers acting as bridges in resolving the conflicts that emanate between their daughters and mothers-in-law or aunts.

The story of the first generation of women dating from 1907-1931 depicts their lives centering around customs, traditions, ceremonies and family responsibilities. As the novel opens, we find Pattamma rising before dawn and doing all the household chores-right from cleaning the utensils, taking water from the well, pouring water into the backyard and front yard, cleaning the oven, drawing rangoli on it and making coffee for everyone. We find her managing the household tasks single handedly. Both her sisters-in-law are not available for help as the younger one was having her periods and the youngest had gone to her parents’ place for delivery.

Pattamma wakes up her daughter, Sivakamu, and instructs her to do the mopping and cleaning. She is a woman of the older generation, who was socialised into believing that while the boys required more rest, girls should act properly. Sivakamu being the eldest wakes up her younger brothers and sisters and her cousins and helps her mother in the household tasks. She even goes to serve food to her aunt, who is made to sit outside the house due to menstrual pollution. We find Pattamma serving her family members dutifully. Hers is a patriarchal set up, where the decisions are taken by her father-in-law, Kalahasthi. He brings about a good marriage proposal for his grand-daughter to which both Pattamma and her husband Ganapati readily agree. Thus, Sivakamu’s marriage preparations take place with great pomp and show with the organization of Bharatnatyam recital by the famous dancer, Balamani.

We also get an insight into the practice of early marriage. Sivakamu is only seven years old and her husband Suppuni is eleven, when they get married. All the neighbourhood women come to assist Patamma’s family for preparing the delicacies. A rich dowry is given to her along with silver and brass utensils, a wardrobe and bed along with velvet mattress. After marriage, Sivakamu stays in her parental home and is sent back to her in-laws place only after she attains puberty.

Sivakamu’s pubertal ceremonies are celebrated ostentatiously with songs. It is projected as a public affair than a private one. All the members of the village are invited to take part in the ceremony. Sivakamu’s in-laws are formally invited and arrangements are
made for the couple’s first night after her ritual bath. The first night takes place in her parental home. Pattamma instructs Sivakamu to behave well and to give in to her husband. She follows her mother’s instructions quite obediently and despite all fears, she surrenders herself completely. After a few days, Sivakamu misses her periods, which is considered normal till the news of her pregnancy gets confirmed. As usual elaborate preparations are made to celebrate Sivakamu’s pregnancy. Pattamma with her mother-in-law, Thaila’s permission takes her daughter to her house and feeds her with all the spicy delicacies. During the fifth month of her pregnancy, a date is fixed for the bangle ceremony. Till then Sivakamu stays in her mother’s house. She is given castor oil so that her body is rid of all impurities and fed a light meal on the day of the ‘valaikappu’ (bangle) ceremony. An elderly sumangali lady puts bangles made of neem twigs in her hands, followed by adorning of glass bangles and finally gold bangles. The bangle seller puts twenty one coloured bangles in one of her hands. Her grandfather orders gold bracelets for Sivakamu. During the tenure of her staying in her parents’ house, Sivakamu doesn’t even look for her husband, though she catches occasional glimpse of him occasionally as they stay close by. Private and personal conversation between the couples was not permitted within the family. During the bangle ceremony, a lady who hasn’t conceived even after eight years of marriage was made to sit in Sivakamu’s place in the hope that she too might become pregnant. After the ceremony Sivakamu is taken to her in-laws place. The seemantham ceremony is organized by her in-laws in her eighth month of pregnancy. Elaborate ceremonies and preparations follow. A bridal chamber is decorated, where Sivakamu and Suppuni spend the night together. Early next morning, she leaves for her parents’ house and spends her time leisurely playing games with her younger aunts. Finally, the delivery day arrives and Sivakamu gives birth to a bonny baby boy. Relatives are informed formally. Sivakamu is put on a strict diet, devoid of spices or pulses. There is a whole lot of pollution associated with childbirth. She is confined to one room and her aunts alternately spend time looking after her. On the fifth day, the baby is put on the cradle and a silver bangle is put on his wrist. Finally, on the eleventh day the purification ceremony of the child takes place with elaborate rituals and her child is named Vaidyanathan. After the thirteenth day, Sivakamu is taken to the river to have bath and is rid of pollution. Pattamma asks her to touch the pickles and salt and advises her to resume the household chores gradually.

Like Pattamma, Sivakamu shoulders the responsibilities of her marital home. She along with her sister-in-law, Annam performs all the household chores right from taking oil from the castor plant, pouring and storing them in containers and churning buttermilk from curd to preparing puffed rice. Sivakamu is also entrusted with the responsibility of packing the food items for the aunt, an orthodox lady who comes to stay with them for some time and has to undertake a train journey. She decides to pack such items that would last longer. However, during her periods, Annam shoulders the responsibility.
Theirs is a huge family. Sivakamu has three children—Vaidyanathan, Subbulakshmi and Chinna Papa. Annam, on the other hand has undergone ten pregnancies and several abortions. These women do not have access to the birth control measures. Annam talks about aborting her child in the womb through some coarse home remedies and traditional methods, such as by powdering glass bangles with turmeric and vermillion paste, or by having camphor and coconut. The consequences of practicing such remedies are also dwelt on. While one woman vomitted blood after having consumed powdered glass bangles, Sivakamu’s mother who became pregnant around the same time with her and tried to abort her pregnancy with the latter method in order that she is of help to her daughter, gave birth to a dumb child. Thus, women had to endure several unwanted pregnancies, which were hazardous to their health.

Vaidyanathan’s thread ceremony is celebrated with ostentation. From his maternal grandmother’s side, lots of gifts are given. After his thread ceremony, Vaidyanathan starts doing prayers and recites mantras every morning, noon and evening. Besides continuing his studies, he starts going to fields along with his father.

Women’s identity is defined by the household chores. Their lives revolve around ceremonies and rituals. Before Diwali, Sivakamu is busy preparing all kinds of delicacies and the herbal paste, which facilitate digestion. She places new clothes on the plate. Thaila applies oil on their heads for the ceremonial oil bath, after which they burst crackers. After sunrise, the relatives start visiting each other to celebrate and spread the festive spirit. Sivakamu’s life is quite content, but her happiness and peace is disrupted by the sudden death of her husband. Elaborate ceremonies follow after Suppuni’s death. Relatives are informed and Thaila sings dirges mourning the death of her son. The last rites are performed by Vaidyanathan. Sivakamu is robbed of her jewels and is officially declared a widow with the presentation of white sari from her brother’s side and shaved off her locks.

Years pass and we find the blossoming of the younger generation. Sivakamu’s brother-in-law’s daughter, Peria Pappa complains about her grandmother Thaila, who constantly keeps finding fault with the children. Thaila is critical of her grand-daughter’s friends and is quite particular that the children enter into the house after removing their school clothes and after pouring water on themselves, in order to avoid pollution from outside. Sivakamu, on the other hand is quite apprehensive that Peria Pappa might spoil the other children and she tries to rationalize her grandmother’s behaviour. She tries to explain to Peria Pappa that they should consider themselves fortunate for having been given enough freedom to go out and study. During their times girls were married off at young age and had to behave like adults. Sivakamu tells her that she must not crib about such small things when they were enjoying all the comforts and were free of the responsibilities of household chores. However, Peria Pappa is not convinced. Sivakamu wonders if she too would become like Thaila once she grows old. While there is love and
concern for one's near ones, she reflects, from where does all the bitterness emanate. The story of this period ends here.

Instances of female hostility and devaluation of women by other women is evinced through the ill treatment of daughters-in-laws by their mothers-in-laws. The women are not given enough to eat, though they are the ones who manage the kitchen and do the entire household chores. We hear as to how a daughter-in-law was severely punished and beaten by her mother-in-law and husband for having some dosais while making for others. The sister-in-law complains to her mother when she finds her brother's wife stealthily eating the dosais. A certain Sunda Mami places her daughter-in-law's palms on the scalding pan as she didn't know how to cook adai, a certain dish. Similarly, another woman, Nagam whose mother-in-law left for someone's place and returned before the scheduled time as her neighbour's place was locked, was hostile towards her daughter-in-law for not opening the door. Nagam being fast asleep is unable to hear the knock. She took it as a pretext for complaining to her son and waited outside till his return. She told him that Nagam had deliberately pushed her out of the house. On hearing this, her husband without hearing Nagam's side of the story took her to her mother's house. We also get an insight into progressive women characters who have their independent lifestyle as they do not stay with their mother-in-laws. They are being ridiculed by the older women for their manner of dressing and their trimmed hair.

Rigidity, conservatism and tradition characterised the lives of these women. Household chores bound them and they found immense pleasure in helping each other during ceremonies and functions. They entertained themselves by narrating gossips and by singing songs.

The next story dates from 1940-1964 and explores the relationship between the older and the younger generation. It delineates as to how the values, beliefs and ideals of each generation varies from another. Besides the physiological transition, it also highlights on the emotional one. For instance, the younger generation's hatred of their grandmother's criticism gradually results in empathy and understanding of their attitude when they reach a certain age.

Rajam and Sundaram are happily married. She tries her level best to establish the family peace and harmony by adhering to her mother-in-law, Anandam's whims and fancies. However, the old lady doesn't seem to be pacified and continues to find fault with Rajam and her granddaughter, Mythili. Rajam on the other hand is at a loss and doesn't know how to establish peace between her daughter and her mother-in-law. Anandam considers herself as the lady of the house and any independent initiative taken by her daughter-in-law is offensive for her. She is always in the habit of making a mountain out of a molehill. She gets extremely annoyed with Rajam for entertaining her newly married niece, who visits her for the first time with her husband, with a blouse piece and five
rupees. Anandam feels that Rajam is squandering away the money. She immediately takes it as an insult and goes to her daughter’s place in Pudukottai. Sundaram finds it quite difficult to put up with his mother’s strange behaviour.

Mythili is excessively fed up of her grandmother, who criticises her for everything. Anandam finds fault with everything that Mythili does - right from plaiting her hair, to going out or letting her skirt touch the ground. Mythili is fond of dancing and wants to learn it. However, when her grandmother forbids her, she becomes quite upset. Even though Sundaram is quite supportive, all his arguments fail before Anandam, who feels that it is highly indecorous of girls from good families to learn dancing. Rajam has no say in this matter and ultimately the old woman’s will prevails. Her dreams are crushed. One day Mythili complains of stomach ache and is not sent to school. Suddenly, Rajam notices stains on her skirt and ultimately starts missing her mother-in-law who is away to her daughter’s house. She decides to inform the neighbours and celebrate it formally. Mythili furiously opposes this and tells her mother that the boys in her school would make fun of her. She disagrees to the celebration and is supported by Sundaram, who feels that it is their private matter and the neighbours have nothing to do with it. They only invite a few close relatives for a formal meal. Anandam and her daughter create a scene for neglecting the customs. When Mythili gets ready for school the next day, Anandam reprimands her for stepping out of the house during her periods. She even tells Mythili that there is no need for her to study further. However, Sundaram comes to her rescue and explains to her that times are changing and it makes no sense to confine a girl within the four walls of the house. Anandam once again goes to her daughter’s house, but returns immediately as she is unable to put up with her bickerings. Rajam on the other hand, welcomes her mother-in-law as if nothing had happened.

Mythili finishes her high school education. She has no plans of studying further and is in fact grateful to her father and grandmother for allowing her to finish her studies. Being eighteen years of age, her marriage becomes a source of concern for everyone. Anandam forces her to take music lessons and pesters her to practice continuously so that she is able to sing a song during the bride viewing ceremony. Sundaram starts looking for prospective grooms, but all the families are rejected on some ground or the other - either because of the extramarital affair in the family or because of the loose character of the father. He is proud of Mythili’s beauty and her skillfulness in embroidery and feels that his daughter deserves the best groom. Anandam and Rajam consider him fussy and are unable to understand him. Finally, he selects Venkittu, a practicing lawyer, who is from an affluent family.

His parents, Ramasubbu and Mangalam along with Venkittu are formally invited for the bride viewing ceremony. Both Mythili and Venkittu take a liking for each other. She falls for his handsome appearance. A heavy dowry is demanded, which includes a diamond ring and a thousand rupees suit piece for the boy, three thousand rupees cash, forty
sovereigns of gold jewellery for the bride, silk sarees with golden border for the boy's mother and sister, silver and brass vessels, sofa set with satin mattresses, a wardrobe with a mirror and a grand wedding and reception with fireworks dance recital and good cuisine. Although the dowry demands are a little heavy on Sundaram’s pocket, yet he doesn't want to lose a good match for Mythili on monetary grounds. He ignores Anandam’s protests of preserving some money for his other two daughters.

Mythili is quite nervous during her first night. Venkittu turns out to be a loving husband, who is extremely gentle with her. He spends sometime conversing with her and makes her feel at ease. Venkittu asks her to call him by his name when they are alone. However, Mythili shares her fear that if a woman calls her husband by name, his life span is shortened. During her first night, Mythili sheds all her fears and inhibitions and feels comfortable with Venkittu. He is an extremely caring husband who takes Mythili out for movies, bharatnatyam recitals and beaches. He even gets her new sarees, nail polish and imported creams to enhance the beauty of his wife. He is an open-minded person who doesn't believe in customs. However, at the insistence of his father, he agrees for the grahapravesham ceremony to be done at Sirkali, his parents' hometown. Mangalam makes formal arrangements for their first night, but he opposes to the idea of women sitting outside and singing ribald songs.

Within six months Mythili becomes pregnant. However, he doesn't allow her parents to give her castor oil, nor does he agree for the bangle ceremony to be conducted at Sirkali. He asks his parents to come to Madras if they wished to perform these ceremonies. They live quite happily with their usual outings going on. One day while coming back from a movie in a tram, Mythili gets labour pains and has an abortion. She gets extremely upset. Anandam is extremely upset and shows her sadness by criticising Venkittu for not following the elders’ advice. She blames them for going out when Mythili should have stayed at home. Anandam laments that she is not fated to see her great grandchild. Mythili who is unable to hear these taunts asks her husband to take her home. Venkittu too confesses to her of the bitter criticism that he has had to hear from his father, but he promises her to take home after a few weeks rest. He even assures her that they would be careful for six months, as per the doctor’s advice, then after a year, they would show them all by placing a grandchild on their lap. Their dreams come true. They are blessed with two children- Padmini and Kumar.

Venkittu becomes an established lawyer. He owns a car and a comfortable bungalow with servants and a cook. Mythili is spared of the kitchen duties. In spite of being busy, he makes it a point to spend time with his family during weekends. Mythili fulfills her ambitions of learning dance through her daughter. She makes Padmini learn dance. Their life is quite comfortable and happy. Two or three times in a year they visit Sirkali. While Mythili doesn’t follow any exclusion or isolation during her periods when she is at
home, but at her in-law’s place Mangalam makes her sit outside on such days. Her exclusion is lamented by her daughter, who is too young to understand things.

We once again evince a conflict between the older and the younger generation. Padmini finds it hard to stand her grandmother, who criticises her for being stubborn. On the occasion of Diwali, both Ramasubbu and Mangalam visit Venkittu’s house. Mangalam makes favourite snacks for her son. When Padmini returns from school, her grandmother reprimands her for entering into the kitchen without having changed her school clothes and shoes. She doesn’t like it at all and when Mythili tries to make a peace between them by asking Padmini to taste the ladoos that her grandmother has made, the latter criticizes it as a village dish and expresses her taste for gulab jamun. After their departure to Sirkali, Ramasubbu falls ill and dies.

Venkittu decides along with his younger brother, Sankaran that they should bring their mother back to Madras so that she is saved from the painful ceremonies of widowhood. They decide that they should let their uncle manage the property till Mangalam is able to decide on something. They bring Mangalam to Madras as they find it unbearable to see their mother being robbed of her jewels, ‘tali’ and her hair being shorn off. Venkittu and Sankaran believe that such ceremonies only aggravated a woman’s grief and didn’t let her forget her husband’s death.

Life becomes difficult for Mythili after Mangalam arrives as there are incessant quarrels between her children and her mother-in-law. She has to continuously act as a peacemaker. One day Mangalam finds Sankaran smoking in the garden and shouts at him. He in turn shouts back at his mother. When she starts weeping, Mythili tries to speak on her brother-in-law’s behalf to smoothen out the rough edges. She tells Mangalam that he would give it up. Her interference angers Mangalam and she starts blaming Mythili for acting as the lady of the house. Padmini, on the other hand gets infuriated and quarrels with Mangalam for unnecessarily blaming her mother for her uncle’s faults. When Venkittu returns from the court, he finds a sullen expression on all their faces. He talks to Mythili about Mani, his younger brother, who had earned his parents’ disapproval for having got married to a foreigner. While Mani explains to his parents that his would be wife is willing to learn Tamil and adapt herself to their customs and traditions, Ramasubbu refuses to accept her and severs all ties with his son. Venkittu talks about his brother’s arrival in Madras to meet his mother. Mythili is more than willing to welcome their family and brushes aside his fears about Mangalam’s reaction. When he talks to his mother, Mangalam maintains a stubborn stance and refuses to meet him. She is a dutiful wife, who considered her husband’s commands like that of a God and didn’t wish to transgress them. Although this results in a lot of unpleasantness, it is Mangalam who suffers the most.
Mangalam is a conservative lady, who disapproves of Padmini joining the NCC or taking part in the Republic Day Parade. Venkittu is proud of his daughter for having been selected as the best cadet. He is firm in his decision to send her to Delhi, despite his mother’s protests. However, a few days before her departure, Padmini gets her periods. She is extremely disappointed and disheartened and continues to cry in her room. Venkittu, on the other hand tells Mythili to keep it as a secret and not to inform Mangalam about it. They can tell her all about it the next time she gets her periods. He further tells Mythili that he has full faith in Padmini. As a father he knows that his daughter would be upset and heartbroken if she is not allowed to participate in the parade.

Even during his absence, Venkittu makes it a point to know what has happened in his house. Mangalam continues to be difficult and creates a scene when a puppy that Kumar has got comes near her feet. Once again a quarrel ensues and Mythili is blamed for not giving her son a good spanking. She is tired of being the peacemaker. Although Mythili knows that Mangalam means well, but she finds it difficult to pacify her all the time. Venkittu, on the other hand is puzzled by the changes that come over intelligent and sensible women like his mother, once they become old.

Through this story one evinces a dilution in the customs and traditions in terms of not celebrating the puberty rituals with pomp and show and doing away with the ceremonies of widowhood. Importance is given to individual than to customs. Padmini’s achievements and talents are being allowed to flourish and not suppressed in the name of gender. Marriage relationships are based on companionship and love than on domination.

The third story that dates from 1965-1985 explores myriad relationships- between mother and daughter, daughter and grandmother, husband and wife. It also projects women acting as bridges to preserve relationships. In this story, we see portrayal of an entirely new generation of women who do not believe in customs, traditions. They carve a distinct identity of their own through their independence, self-assertion and indomitable will and courage to confront the oddities of life.

Charu, the central character of the story works in a bank. She stays with her father and aunt, Vimala (father’s sister). Her father, Mahadevan expresses his concern over her marriage and talks about his friend’s son visit to view her informally. Charu, on the other hand, is quite apprehensive and candidly tells her father that she is no hurry to get married as she needs some time to settle in her career. Mahadevan assures her that her interest would be kept in mind and that if she didn’t like the boy, he would be the last person to coerce her into marriage. After her father’s assurance, she agrees to meet him. In the evening Suresh comes to meet her. Charu gets completely taken in by his pleasant demeanour and easy manner of getting along well with her entire family. Then
he takes her out on a drive and generally asks her about her aunt Vimala and her mother. Charu tells him that her aunt has done her B.Ed and was initially working. Due to some deformity, she couldn’t get married. After her mother’s death in cancer, she came to stay with them to take care of Charu. Having parked his car in a secluded place, Suresh expresses his love for her. He kisses her passionately and proposes marriage to her. When he kisses her somewhat fiercely the second time, Charu pushes him and tells him that such kind of behaviour is inappropriate before marriage. Although Suresh gets angry, but he restrains himself and tells her, “as you wish”. On their way back home, he gets her a chiffon sari as a gift from his side. Suresh is quite vocal about Charu’s beauty even while talking to his parents, and even before Mahadevan and Vimala. A date is fixed for their marriage. Suresh takes her out for movies and continues to kiss her passionately, despite her resistance. Suresh justifies his sexually forward behaviour in the garb of marriage. He tells her that since they are going to get married and their elders are in the know about their relationship, it doesn’t matter.

Charu completely discovers a new side of Suresh’s personality after marriage. Day in and day out, he subjects her to new forms of sexual torture. Charu is unable to cope with his insatiable lust for sex. During their honeymoon, he doesn’t let her enjoy the beauty of Dal Lake, but immediately bundles her off into their bedroom. Charu loathes his behaviour and wonders as to how she would be able to subject herself through such a torture. She doesn’t discuss this with her father and sincerely hopes that with the passage of time, she would be able to transform him. However, as days pass Suresh’s torture increases. Charu considers him as a sex maniac, who takes bestial pleasure in crushing the cigarette stubs on her breast or likes to put burning ashes on her stomach. His bedroom is full of pornographic material and pictures of nude women. When Charu discusses it out with Suresh, he tells her that there is nothing wrong. She thinks as to what would the servant, who comes to clean his room think about him, and wonders if his parents have not objected to this. To this, he tells her that he doesn’t allow his parents into his room and whenever he goes out, he makes sure to lock the room. Suresh completely projects a don’t care attitude to everything. However, on Charu’s insistence, he removes the pictures from the walls. Before the outside world, Suresh is a complete gentleman, who shows complete deference to his wife, but in private he was a beast. Charu decides to resume her job in order to divert her mind. Suresh however, opposes her decisions and even slaps her when she asserts her desire to work. The breach between them widens. She joins work and soon discovers that she is pregnant. Her doctor advises her to completely abstain from sexual intercourse as she is quite weak. Charu takes this as an excuse and starts going to her father’s house during weekends in order to maintain distance from Suresh. He on the other hand is unable to bear this physical separation and one day brings a prostitute home and has intercourse with her before Charu just to prove that he has other ways to satiate his lust. Charu feels disgusted and immediately leaves for her father’s house. She arrives at Mahadevan’s house in a dishevelled appearance. She confesses everything before Mahadevan and
tells him that though she tried hard to reform him and put up with him, but now she wishes to snap all relations with Suresh. Her father-in-law, Gopal, is informed and he tries to reason it out with her, apologising for his son’s conduct. Charu remains firm in her decision to file a divorce. She gives birth to a baby girl whom she names Aparna. Gopal and his wife Thangam come to bless the baby. She tries hard to convince Charu not to seek divorce and pleads on behalf of Suresh and Aparna, but Thangam’s tears have no effect on her.

Charu transfers herself to Delhi and decides to stay alone. While Mahadevan and Vimala try to persuade her to stay with them, she refuses. Her father proposes that Vimala should stay with Charu to take care of the baby, but she refuses as she doesn’t want Mahadevan to be staying alone. Besides, she thinks that it would also be difficult for her aunt to get adjusted to a new place. Once Mahadevan and Vimala settle her with a maid, they leave. Charu shoulders the responsibility of motherhood and career single handedly. She gets up early in the morning, sterilizes six feeding bottles for Aparna, fills them with the formula, and stores them in the refrigerator. She gives instructions to the maid to heat the milk before giving it to the baby. She asks the maid to prepare the stew and prepares the chapattis herself after having a bath. She even bathes the baby and gives her Farex, the baby food before leaving. She asks the maid to pack sandwiches for her tiffin. Charu’s entire morning is packed with a whole lot of things.

After a few days Suresh comes to meet Charu in the office. He proposes for a patch up and tells her that they should start their life anew. Charu is extremely furious with him and asks him from where he got her office address. When Suresh tells her that her father had given it to him, Charu is taken aback. She rejects his proposal and asks him to leave. Charu is unable to concentrate on her work and incidentally when her father calls her up, she checks with him in case he had given her office address to Suresh. Mahadevan denies it. She feels that Suresh hasn’t changed a bit. For a few days, she gets a respite from Suresh’s visit and phone calls. However, one day when she reaches home from office, Charu is quite surprised to find Suresh playing with Aparna. She at once reprimands her maid servant and asks her to take the baby inside. Charu assertively tells him that all the bonds between them are snapped now. Suresh loses his cool and tells her that he didn’t need either of them. On the contrary, he decided to patch up only for Thangam’s sake. He threatens her that he can think of hundred ways to make her miserable by taking away Aparna once she is away from home. Charu feels so insecure about her child’s safety that she takes a day off from work and calls her father and aunt to come immediately by the next flight. On their arrival it is decided that Aparna should stay with Mahadevan and Vimala till she gets a divorce from Suresh. The divorce takes too long.

Charu gets Aparna’s custody only when she is twelve years old. By then, she turns out to be a spoilt and indulgent child. She is sent to a boarding school from where she
comes to stay with Charu after she completes her education. Aparna turns out to be a self-willed, stubborn and independent child. She has her say in everything and dislikes her mother’s or Vimala’s interference. We as readers meet her as a seventeen year old teenager. She is a fitness freak and is excessively conscious about what she eats. When Charu makes an omelette for her with bread and butter and a big glass of tomato juice for her, she drinks only a little juice as her mother had added sugar in it and only has plain slices of bread without butter. She even rejects the omelette as too oily. Vimala always keeps complaining to Charu about Aparna’s poor eating habits. She finds it hard to act as a bridge between the two. Aparna doesn’t discuss lot of things with her mother. One day when Charu finds a sanitary napkin packet in her room and asks her about it, Aparna tells her that it is her private affair and she doesn’t feel the need to discuss it out with anyone. Charu feels quite unhappy about the sense of alienation and distancing from her daughter. She feels that there is a lack of closeness between the two of them. When she discusses this thing with a colleague, she tells Charu about the acceleration in the maturity level of the children. She cites an incident when her daughter asked her about how one of her aunts had a baby. When she told her daughter that she had picked the child from the road and from the market, she puzzled her mother by asking her if there were no natural childbirths.

One day Aparna tells Charu about her decision to drop out from her college and instead do a computer programming course. Charu is unable to accept her decision and asks her as to why she is punishing her mother like this. To this Aparna replies that she would rather want to join a course which is interesting enough for her. Despite a lot of coaxing by Charu that there is only a year left for her to get a degree, she sticks to her decision. Charu feels helpless and seeks the advice of her friend Bhaskar. He is a very good friend of Charu and is in love with her. When he confesses about his love after she obtains a divorce, Charu is completely taken aback and expresses her discomfort about this relationship. Bhaskar respects her feelings and sentiments and decides to stay as a friend. However, he shows his loyalty towards his love by remaining unmarried. He suggests to Charu that she should ask her to give the B.A. examination and then decide for herself if she wishes to drop out or continue. Although Aparna reluctantly gives her examination, but she drops out of college and joins a course in computer programming.

One day Aparna brings her boyfriend, Siddharth home for lunch. Charu observes a keen liking in her daughter’s eyes for this boy. Later on, she tells Charu about her decision to marry him. When she voices out her apprehensions that she is only nineteen and too young to get married, she tells her mother that her age has got nothing to do with her marriage. Once again Charu bows down before Aparna’s wishes and happiness. Siddharth’s parents are against this marriage. After marriage when Aparna visits her in-law’s place at Chandigarh, she becomes so angry with their behaviour that she comes back immediately. She tells Charu that nobody there was willing to strike a conversation with her. Vimala, on the other hand thinks that her behaviour is inappropriate and asks
Charu not to encourage or support her behaviour. Aparna and Siddharth get settled in their home and invite Charu and Vimala for dinner. Her grandmother gets her favourite chocolates and Aparna also takes care to cook a vegetarian meal for her. The cordiality lasts only for a short while. When Vimala asks Aparna to address her husband with respect, she tells her that she has full right to address her husband the way she feels like. Charu receives another shock when she hears from Siddharth that Aparna had undergone an abortion. She immediately rushes to her house and asks Aparna as to why she didn’t feel like discussing this with her mother. Aparna asks her to calm down. Charu feels that there is a lack of bonding between her and Aparna, but gradually accepts it as a way of the younger generation. Both Aparna and Siddharth stay as a happy couple, but their happiness and harmony get disrupted by his sudden death in an air crash.

Aparna gets widowed at a young age of nineteen. Charu is unable to see her daughter’s plight and is inconsolable. It is Aparna who gains control, goes to the airlines office to claim his remains and compensation and arranges for his cremation ceremony. She sits in mourning for four days, refusing to talk to anyone then decides to join work on the fifth day. Aparna vacates Siddharth’s flat and comes to live with Charu for a short while. Later on, she decides to stay independently. She believes that her problems are her own and that she must learn to shoulder them without being dependent on her mother. She gets a one bedroom flat in Moti Bagh. When Charu opposes to her staying alone, she says that she is not a child and should be left alone. Charu respects Aparna’s decision, despite Vimala’s objections. Aparna is tired of her grandmother’s continuous wailing and show of grief and decides to stay alone.

After a few months Aparna announces to Charu about her decision to marry Kamal, an officer with the airline company. With a mixed feeling, Charu congratulates her daughter. The story moves to the year 1998. We see Aparna in the role of a mother. She is trying to understand her adolescent daughter, Bulbul, who is fourteen years of age. Like her mother, Bulbul too is quite independent, self-willed and stubborn. She willfully changes her name from Sindhuja to the present one. We find Bulbul arguing with her mother for going on a trekking trip to Haridwar. She gets irritated when Aparna questions her about the list of friends accompanying her. Aparna tells Bulbul that her grandmother is especially coming to see her and asks her to stay back. She tells Aparna that Charu is her mother and therefore, it is her (Aparna’s) responsibility to take care of her. Further, Bulbul considers her grandmother as a drag, who keeps on interfering in her life. She complains about the loss of privacy whenever Charu comes to visit her and therefore tells Aparna candidly that she is quite glad to be away.

Charu visited Aparna quite frequently. She gets her aunt Vimala admitted into a good old age home as the latter being aged and infirm, Charu finds it difficult to take care of her. Moreover, she also finds uncomfortable to leave Vimala alone. However, Aparna and
Charu visit her quite regularly. When Charu arrives, she is quite disappointed to hear about Bulbul’s absence. She even disapproves of her granddaughter’s change of name from Sindhuja to Bulbul. When she comes to know from Aparna that Bulbul doesn’t know how to speak Tamil, as Kamal being a Punjabi they talk to her only in English, she is disappointed at her granddaughter’s cultural and linguistic alienation. Aparna, on the other hand is surprised to evince the change in her mother. She wonders that Charu who had acted as a bridge between her and her grandmother, had become so irritable, demanding and querulous. She is reminded of her own youth that now seems to be evaporating before her daughter’s youthful impetuosity. Finally, she marvels at the ability of women acting as bridges for keeping the family bonds and relationships intact and not letting it perish. Aparna resolves to resume and grow into the role.

**VAASANTHI SUNDARAM “BIRTHRIGHT”**

“Birthright” is a novella which essentially captures the psyche of the female mind. It was translated into English in 2004 and published by Zubaan Books. Feminist in its theme and essence, the author has dexterously interwoven gender related issues into her novella.

The novella has a powerful Introduction which explores the causative factors of female foeticide, which are religious, social and cultural in nature. The author highlights a common religious belief that only a ‘putra’ can unite his parents with their ancestors. This in turn generates varied forms of gender discrimination. Female foeticide is shown as one such powerful medium. Dowry demands, heavy expenditure incurred by the girls’ parents for their wedding and mercenary motives compel people to commit such a heinous crime. Female infanticide has thus been represented as death due to social causes. The introduction also gives an insight into the crude ways of killing baby girls, such as by poisoning, choking and smothering. The ‘cradle baby scheme’ introduced by the Government of India proved to be futile as mothers preferred to kill their girl babies rather than leaving them under the care of strangers, as has been discussed as a part of Introduction. The intervention strategies in the form of roving street plays and skits recorded a modest decline in female infant mortality rates.

“Birthright” is about the struggle of the protagonist, Manohari, a practicing gynaecologist, in the district of Salem. Mano’s struggle and yearning for acceptance in her father’s house and assertion of her rights as a dutiful daughter is juxtaposed with the self-blame and reproach into which she indulges. The traditional gendered lens that she imbibes from the bitter remarks of her grandmother and mother propels her to attribute ulterior motives to her father’s actions. The devaluation of daughters, the subordinate status assigned to women and the varied forms of discrimination that she witnesses (including the preference for the male child) gets deeply embedded in her psyche. This instigates her to undertake the task of performing illegal abortions of all the women who
come to her with a plea to do so. She believes that by doing so, she is not only saving the girl child from injustice and discrimination, but also doing a great service to all womankind. Mano even shares a deep bonding with her patients, with whose sufferings she empathises. Patients like Ranjitham, freely confide in her about their plight and strain of reproducing a male child. It is the firm belief of her assistants, Paavayee and Meenakshi that the birth of the male child in her clinic is allied to the blessing of Mangamma, their deity. Vaasanthi delineates the emotional catharsis of these women through the elaborate ritual worship of this deity, who becomes a burden bearing stone for them.

Manohari tries to emerge as a self-sacrificing daughter by sacrificing her love and happiness for her father's sake. She has no scruples in terminating her relationship with Doctor Shivakumar, who refuses to bow down before her condition of him becoming a house husband. However, later on when Doctor Shiva accedes to her condition, Mano's father disapproves of such an arrangement. This comes as a blow to Mano who feels that unlike a son, she has no right over her father's house. Although, he agrees to Mano's marriage with Shiva after his heart attack despite all his earlier inhibitions about his motives, yet this does not make her happy, for she takes his assent as a sign of his vulnerability and dependence. Mano feels that her father's weak health condition had made him agree to this proposition. Manohari's romantic illusions about Shivakumar get dispelled when he backs out from his promise of staying back in the village after her father's death. She learns from her friend Kamalini that Shiva had been involved in some fraudulent dealings and was in need of money. He accedes to Mano's demands not out of love, but out of his mercenary motive of receiving a share in her property. Therefore, when he learns about her father's heavy losses in business, Shiva backs out. Earlier when he comes to her hometown, he tries to ascertain that Mano keeps her promise by trying to take advantage of her sexually. She on the other hand exercises firm self control and asks him to get out of her room. Mano blames herself for ignoring the warning signals by Shiva, when he openly proclaims himself as the son-in-law before her father's mill managers and tries to induce suspicion in her mind against her father. Shiva hints to Mano about her father's plan of adopting a male heir. Despite her insecurity and discomfort, Mano dispels all these and emphasizes before him that her emotional bonding with her father was the most important thing. She even asks him to mind his business.

The devaluation of being born as a female gets further strengthened when on one occasion her father tells her that he had to perform the funeral rites of his friend, Pandurangan, as he only had a daughter. Mano's veil of bitterness is removed after the death of a certain patient, Shanbagam, who dies of a septic abortion. She was a labourer who worked at a construction site, and was sexually exploited by a police officer, Perumaal, who promised to get her contracts. She was unable to do much about the situation, owing to her own sexual cravings. When Mano's father heard about it, he
blamed Shanbagam. This aggravated Mano and she began venting out her fury on her father, blaming the people and society who discriminate against girls. Her gender myopia is removed when she receives whole hearted acceptance from her father. Her father exhorts Manohari not to vent her anger against the female foetuses in the womb, who he believes might turn out as capable as his daughter.

Thus, from a doctor who performs illegal abortions, Mano is transformed into an active agent of social change, who strives to bring a positive change in the attitude and mindset of the womenfolk by working on their belief systems. She utilises her bonding with her female patients for the larger social good. Mano tells them that their deity, Mangamma, who they devoutly worship, has conveyed to her that all the girl children who are born in her clinic from now on, would bring prosperity to their parents’ homes. The protagonist makes a transition from victimization and self-blame to empowerment and acceptance of female worth.