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Sahitya Akademi

meet the author

Gnanakoothan





At the age of 30

"I believe that nobody who is chuvanistic about his language and full of hatred for other languages can become a poet of great significance".

- Gnanakoothan

Born in 1938 in Thanjavur District in a Kannada speaking family, Ranganathan, donning the pseudonym 'Gnanakoothan' writes poetry in Tamil. Gnanakoothan, who has published more than 200 poems in the span of 20-25 years is the second son to his parents followed by 8 children. He spent most of his childhood in the village temple, playing reading and listening to religious discourses.

Beginning his literary career as a devotional poet, Gnanakoothan moved towards humanistic poetry. Gnanakoothan may be considered as one of the pioneers of *Pudu Kavithai*. His poems have been recognised as superb examples of committed poetry.

In the sixties, the new poetry movement ushered in and the literary magazine *Ezhuthu* was the base for these young poets to

publish their poems. All his poems have been compiled in a volume entitled *Meendum Avargal*. As Prof. Indira Parthasarathy has rightly said his poems can be categorised under three heads:

1. Social Satires
2. Political leg-pulling without holding anything sacred.
3. Mystical Poems

'His idiom is refreshingly contemporary but his poetic flow conforms to the rhythmic beat of conventional prosody. He has happily integrated them which distinguishes him from all others. He is a major poet with out a high profile.'

His publication *Meendum Avargal* is itself a treatise, in as much as it contains the entire span of the poetry, of this poet who has been writing poems for quite a long period. The book reveals an indepth concern for the ordinary man and poetic sensibilities towards a degenerating society.

Writing in the Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature, Venkat Swaminathan observes: "Steeped in the old and weighty tradition, Gnanakoothan's poems retained elements of traditional metric form and at the same time broke free of it to his needs. Besides, the innate qualities of humour in him took on dimensions of uninhibited lampooning of all things happening around him in society and politics. That lampooning gusto had an infectious charm and it caught on making Gnanakoothan a popular figure among the younger generation, no matter what one's credo was,



Translation workshop at Hospet

traditional metrical form or the new poetry. Consequently, Gnanakoothan succeeded in acquiring quite a few young poets as his admiring disciples. The first collection of his poems, *Andru Veru Kizhamai* (That was another day) came out in 1973. In his second phase, however, Gnanakoothan's poetry underwent a change both in style and in content. It took on a prosaic form, shedding his earlier satirical bite considerably in the process. In the second phase he edited a poetry magazine *Zha* in collaboration with another poet Atmanaam, for some time, and later another magazine, *Gavanam*, under his sole editorship. Two volumes of his poems of this phase have been published: *Sooriyanukku Pinpakkam* (The other side of the sun, 1980) and *Kadarkarayil Sila Marangal* (Some trees on the seashore, 1983)."

It is interesting to note what he has said in an interview about '*Pudu Kavithai*'... "Some believed the verse structure is not necessary for poetry and wrote very loose verses. But how is poetry possible without verse structure? Verses are necessary because they give rhythm to

poems. Moreover, *Pudu Kavithai* does not indulge in rhetoric and tries to communicate through the common man's language. It uses the modern metaphor of the people."

In 1972, Gnanakoothan published a poem under the title *Eight Poems*. This poem shocked many readers. No one could understand it properly. After the well-known Tamil writer Nakulan wrote a short essay about this poem, the readers took Gnanakoothan seriously and searched for meaning beyond the words. The first poem spoke of the person murdered in his bed by another person for the sin of bearing the name of the latter. The second poem mourned the death of a man who was hit by a falling coconut when he sat urinating under the tree. The fourth poem lamented at the plight of a man who sold parts of his body for small cash and saw himself in his dream being burnt by unidentified person. The fifth poem shed tears for the lady of a house who turned herself into food and offered it to the children

and her husband as well. The last poem praised dreamless sleep as the most valuable thing attainable in this world.

Gnanakoothan who has introduced surrealism in modern Tamil poetry is a remarkable poet.

Most unromantic, he has a peculiar elfish spirit of mockery. His semi-serious raillery springs from a feeling that the generally accepted code is all wrong.

You made this world a latrine,
By your words, 'Do the work'
Which stinks like the fart. (tr.)

The expression of Gnanakoothan is unique. That he has broken all the old traditions and has written his poems in his own way speaks for the success of his poetry. In earlier days the poets wrote poems in Tamil mixing Sanskrit. Though Gnanakoothan knows Sanskrit, he wrote poems in pure Tamil. Among the new wave poets, Gnanakoothan has individuality and depth. He has also handled many subjects with ease in his poems.

"In my poetry, I am not an individual, I represent a whole

class, and am part of a trend in Tamil Poetry" says, Gnanakoothan.

'It is Pudumaipithan who got a place in satirical prose writing; Gnanakoothan got the same place in poetry. Like Ashokamitran's Short Stories, Gnanakoothan's poems also speak about the emotions of life' says Jaya Mohan. He never bothered about any observations as he went on doing his work systematically undisturbed.

Gnanakoothan refused help which would see him flourish. But he has not forgotten the help received from friends when they came to publish his works and take it to the masses. Gnanakoothan is a stranger to the stifling atmosphere where poetry is commercialised and his poetry command attention of one and all.

Gnanakoothan is an exponent of both eminent and modern criticism. His articles are collected for publication. He has also translated Bhasha's *Prathima Natakam* into Tamil which is under print.

He lives in Madras with his wife and two children.



With Balakumaran, a popular Tamil novelist

A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

POETRY

1. *Andru Veru Kilalmai*, 64 pp., Ilakkiya Sangam, Madras, 1973.
2. *Soorianukku-P-Pinpakkam*, 32 pp., 'Z' Veliyeedu, Madras, 1980.
3. *Bharathiyin Puthuk kavithai kal*, 48 pp., 'Z' Veliyeedu, Madras, 1982.
4. *Kadarkarayil Sila Marangal*, 34pp., Maiyam Veliyeedu, Madras, 1983.
5. *Zha Kavithaigal (Anthology)*, 160 pp., 'Z' Veliyeedu, Madras, 1990.
6. *Meendum Avargal*, 198 pp., Maiyam Veliyeedu, 1994.
7. *Kavithaikaga (In Print)*, 160 pp.
8. *Prathima Natakam* (Translation - in Print), 64 pp.

EDITED

1. Associated with Nadai - a literary magazine, 1968.
2. Associated with: 'KA CHA TA THA PA RA'. Responsible for

the publication of as many as 200 new verses, 1970.

3. Associated with *Gnanaratham* a literary monthly magazine, 1975.
4. Co-edited the first ever non-political literary poetry magazine 'Zha', 1978.
5. Edited *Kavanam* a literary magazine, 1981.

PARTICIPATION IN SEMINARS & POETS' MEET

1. National Poets meet at Vorkala, Kerala.
2. Translation Workshop on South Indian Poetry at Trivandrum conducted by Kerala University.
3. National Poets Meet at Cochin.
4. Seminar on Indian Poetry, Mysore.
5. Translation Workshop Tamil - Kannada Poems, conducted by Sahitya Akademi and Kannada University, Hampi.
6. Seminar on Art and Literature during 80's conducted by Munril, Madras.



Gnanakoothan at Rajaji Hall.

A CHRONOLOGY

		1972	Married
1938	Born in Thiru Indalur, Mayiladuthurai, Thanjavur Dt., Tamil Nadu.	1973	Published the first collection of Poems <i>Andru Veru Kilzhamai</i> - Reissued in 1983 and 1991.
1952-55	Participation in the agitation for the retrieval of Tamil Areas.	1983	Third collection of Poems published.
1957	First Short story published in Dinamani.	1990-92	Essays on literary concepts published in Kanaiyazhi and helped in the selection of poems for that magazine.
1959	Left for Madras to take up job in the State Government. Took Voluntary retirement in May 1994.	1994	Collected Poems of 25 years under the title <i>Meendum Avargal</i> published.
1960	Adopted the pen name 'Gnanakoothan'	1994	Awarded the best collection of Poems Award 1994 by Thirupur Tamil Sangam.
1960-62	Participated in various agitations in connection with the Christening of Madras State as Tamil Nadu.		



With Wife