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Sahitya Akademi

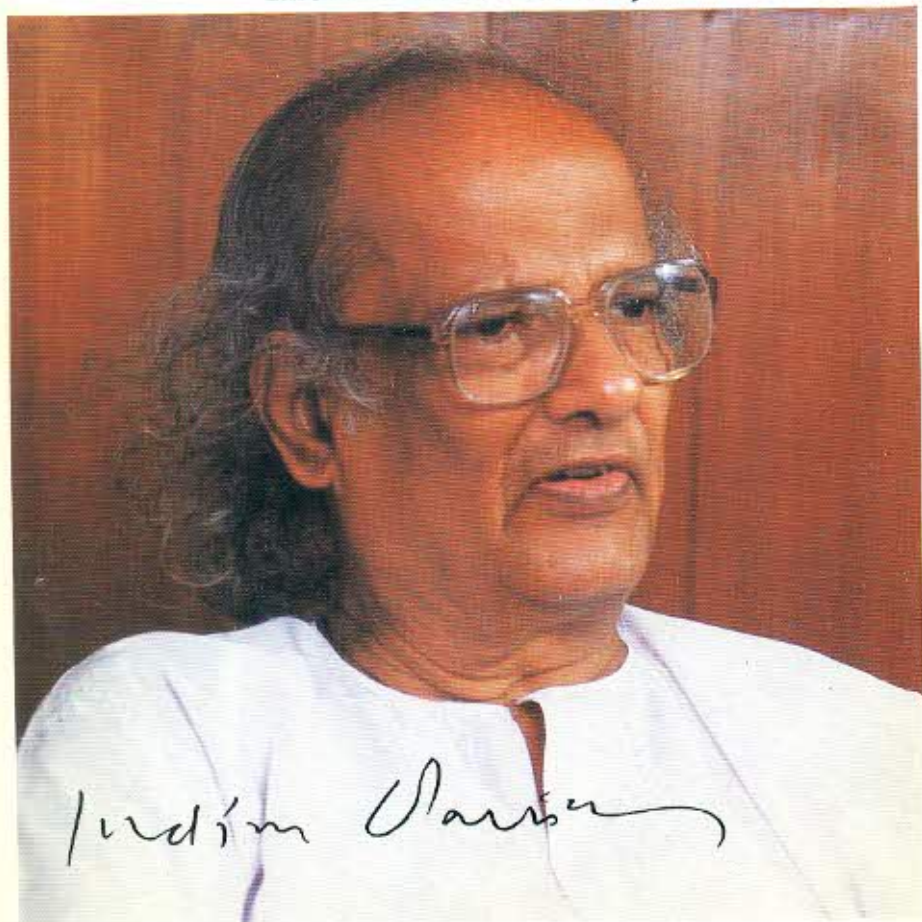


India International Centre

invite you to

meet the author

Indira Parthasarathy





“To aspire to be like God is overweening ambition. To be like a computer is wholly impossible. Being born Man, why should Man deny his human quality?” asks Meena in Indira Parthasarathy’s novel *Tandira Bhoomi*. This reflection may equally well have been made by the author himself, whose writings reveal that for him, as for Alexander Pope, ‘the proper study of mankind is Man.’

Pre-eminently an intellectual, Dr. Parthasarathy directs his powerful critical attention to the alienated conditions of human exist-

tence. His concern is with situations of conflict—conflict between the powerful and the powerless, between conventional certitudes and divergent uncertainties, between community norms and the individual conscience. Through the essential definition and redefinition of issues which these conflicts continually engender, he underlines the relativism of concepts of morality and truth. In his own telling words, “My attempt is not to repair established systems or to build new ones, but to criticise. I am not trying to replace the old reality by something equally dogmatic, assertive and solution-bearing. Mine is a negative approach, all questions and no answers. Metaphysics is a foggy illusion, truth merely what works, value judgements just bad syntax, freedom merely a synonym for anguished uncertainty and the condition of man absurd.”

Ranganthan (pseudonym ‘Indira’) Parthasarathy was born in 1930 in Kumbakonam in a Vaishnav Brahmin family. He had his early education at Government Arts Degree College,



With Ka. Naa. Subramaniam and Naa. Parthasarathy, 1987.



Kumbakonam and took his M.A. degree from Annamalai University. He obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Delhi for his thesis on Ramanujacharya, the finest exponent of the doctrine of 'qualified non-dualism', *Vishistadvaita*.

Dr. Parthasarathy has been a teacher and researcher for over thirty-five years in Delhi, Poland, Canada and Holland. He has specialised, among other things, in teaching Tamil to non-Tamil Indians and foreigners; for his outstanding contribution to Dravidian studies, he was awarded a special citation by Warsaw University, Poland.

Sometime editor of *Kanayazhi*, Dr. Parthasarathy's writings include fourteen novels, four anthologies of novellas, four collections of short stories, two volumes of seven plays and the well-known *Life of Ramanujacharya* which has been translated into all the major Indian languages. As thinker, scholar and writer, he has contributed to many international conferences and is a member of such key bodies as the High-power Review Committee

of the Department of Culture, the Advisory Panel of the National Book Trust and the General Council of the Sahitya Akademi.

He is presently a visiting Professor and Director of the Sankaradas Swamigal School of Drama and Theatre Art, Central University, Pondicherry.

Indira Parthasarathy's range and vitality, his rich and varied experiences of cultures other than his own, his ever present concern with human existence give his writings tremendous intellectual depth. One might, at best, hazard that literature for him is a way of knowing without being prescriptive. This is powerfully exemplified in his novel *Kuruthippunal* (The River of Blood) which received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1977. Based on a real-life event when forty-two harijans were set ablaze in their huts as a direct consequence of a peasant struggle against a rich and powerful landowner, the novel vividly recreates the dramatic tension which must have preceded the tragedy. Most convincing is Parthasarathy's treatment of the

crisis of conscience and the transition which the protagonist undergoes from being a silent observer to being an actor.

Indira Parthasarathy's facility with different themes is truly impressive: if *Kuruthipunal* is convincing, so are his novels *Tandira Bhoomi* (Tricky Ground) and *Sudandira Bhoomi* (Independent Land), irony laden portraits of contemporary society with all its pretensions, hypocrisies and absurdities. *Yesuvin Thozhargal* (Companions of Jesus) which emerged from Dr. Parthasarathy's years in Poland, follows yet another direction in its handling of the theme of 'identity crisis' set against a backdrop of social turbulence and emotional trauma. In *Thiraiyalukku Appal* (translated as Through the Veil) he handles the theme of a woman's right to choose.

Equally expert with short fiction as with longer works, Parthasarathy's range is enormous. He can be devastatingly iconoclastic as in *Devan Varugai* or cynical as in *Sathya Sodhanai* or not un-optimistic as in *Chuttum Vizhi Chudar Dhan*.

Although Dr. Parthasarathy began to write plays at a relatively late stage of his literary career, he is as much at ease with this genre as he is with fiction. The structure of the play has, if anything, enabled him to give a sharper edge to the verbal interaction in which his characters engage. His plays, on stage, have proved extremely popular although he uses none of the stock ingredients of the popular play in Tamil.

His first play *Mazhai* (Rain) staged first in Delhi, made an immediate impact not only because of its technical perfection but also because it was a significant depar-



Inaugurating a Literary Seminar in Warsaw, 1983.

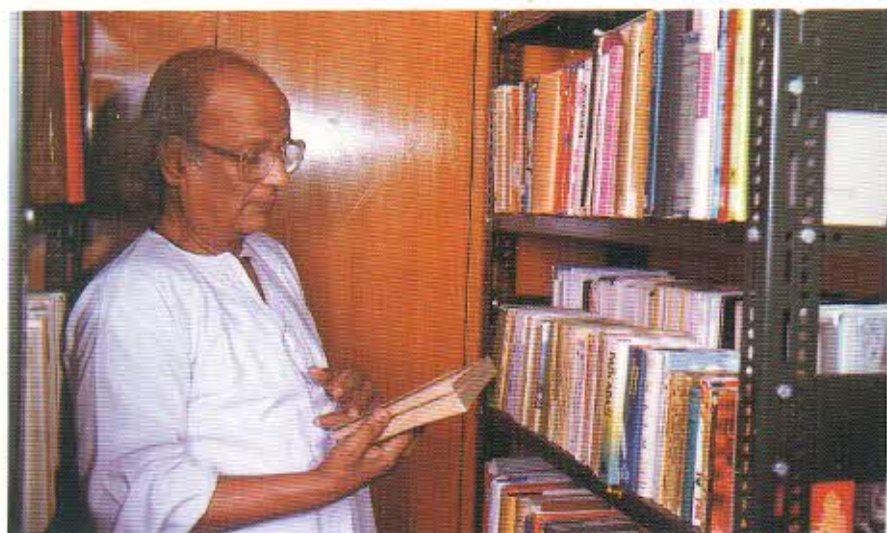
ture from prevailing modes of play-writing and play-acting in Tamil. 'Off-beat, cynical, clever, artful, and modern' as Kamil Zvebil described it, it was also an indication of what was to follow from Indira Parthasarathy's pen.

"I write only psychological plays", Parthasarathy has said; and, elsewhere, "I believe in dialectics". *Pasi* (Hunger), *Porvai Porthiya Udalgai* (Layers of Blankets), *The Time Machine*, *Owarangazeeb* (Aurangazeeb), *Koil* (The Temple) and several of his other plays are sensitive explorations of ideas which have often been internalized by the many and questioned by the few.

Indira Parthasarathy has received several awards for his writing, the foremost being the Sahitya Akademi Award for *Kuruthippunal* in 1977 and the Tamil Nadu Government Award twice for his novel *Sudandira Bhoomi*, in 1973 and his play *Owarangazeeb* in 1978. His plays *Owarangazeeb*, *Nandan Kathai*, *Pasi* and *Mazhai* have, on being staged, received all-India awards.

In his preface to *Pasi*, Parthasarathy says, "Freedom moves under conditions of enslavement to Idea... Is there no escape?" One might venture to sug-

gest that an important function of literature is precisely to explore the limits of freedom; this is surely something in which Indira Parthasarathy excels.



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1985, 191p. 22.5 cm.

A Chronology

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|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1930 | Birth | Advisory Board,
National Book Trust |
| 1951-
56 | M.A., Annamalai
University
Completes Ph.D.;
begins teaching
career in Delhi
University | 1984 Visiting Scholar at
various Canadian
Universities |
| 1967 | <i>Manidha</i>
<i>Theivangal</i> , first
short story
collection | 1985 Lectured at
Institute Voor
Talen, Utrecht,
Holland |
| 1968 | <i>Kaala Vellam</i> , first
novel | 1987 Kasturi Srinivasan
Trust Award for
<i>Yesuvin</i>
<i>Thozhargal</i> |
| 1973 | Tamil Nadu
Government
Award for
<i>Sudandira Bhoomi</i> | 1988 Member, High-
Level Haksar
Committee, Ministry
of Culture, New
Delhi |
| 1977 | Sahitya Akademi
Award for
<i>Kuruthippunal</i> | Member, Sahitya
Akademi General
Council and Tamil
Advisory Board |
| 1978 | Tamil Nadu
Government
Award for
<i>Owrangazeeb</i> | Director of
Sankaradasa
Swamigal School
of Theatre Arts,
Central University,
Pondicherry |
| 1981-
86 | Visiting Professor,
Tamil Literature,
Warsaw University,
Poland, Member, | |

