



Sahitya Akademi

9 January 2010

*Invites you to*

**meet the author**  
**Sivasankari**



Sivasankari was born and educated in Chennai, formerly known as Madras. Her father Suryanarayan, a dynamic personality, was the founder of Suri & Co., a pioneer in the field of Chartered Accountancy. Her mother Rajalakshmi too enjoyed an illustrious heritage. Sivasankari's maternal great grandfather was none other than Lakshmana Suri, a revered Sanskrit scholar; and her great maternal uncle was Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavathar, who is considered as one of the greatest composers of Carnatic Kritis of the 20th century.

The youngest of four children, two sons and two daughters, Sivasankari spent an idyllic girlhood. "Although my father was a strict disciplinarian, we were taught to value our traditional and cultural backgrounds, but be modern in outlook. Father wanted us to flower, but was careful we had healthy roots. We grew up with positive approaches to life." Encouraged by dynamic parents she excelled as a best cadet in NCC, and also in various genres of the fine arts.

After completing her graduation in zoology and also her training in Bharatanatyam, music and athletics, she married into an equally affluent family. Chandra sekaran, a mechanical / electrical engineer trained in the UK, was nine years her senior and Sivasankari says she went to him like "wet clay". Soon after their marriage, she moved with her husband to Bhopal. In the three years spent at the BHEL colony there, she honed her culinary skills, learning to cook every type of cuisine from her colony mates.

An intellectual in his own right, Chandrasekaran, genial and serene, steadily guided her and provided all the inspiration she needed. "His guidance was subtle, but total", she says. "I was like a jungle stream and he constituted

himself into its banks and converted me into a gentle smooth-flowing river" she reminisces. "From him I learnt as a person to control the writer, and not let the writer control me. I did a lot of self analysis, also to differentiate between what I want to do and what I can do. The former is made up of dreams, the other means facing reality."

The couple moved to Madras following Chandrasekaran being posted there as Zonal Manager. The year 1968 proved to be a watershed in Sivasankari's life. It was in this year that she took up her first job as a Public Relations Officer with the First National City Bank. This was also the year that saw her make her first foray into writing. In her own words, this was, "the most beautiful, meaningful accident in my life".

Sivasankari cannot recall any formal training in writing, certainly not in the kind of Tamil prose that entrances her readers. "I am an extrovert", she says. "I like to communicate with people. My bank work threw me into the company of many kinds of men and women. I noticed their outward gaiety, their inner conflicts, their boisterous laughter and their concealed agony. When I gave up my job, I felt like a bird suddenly released from a cage into an open field. I wanted all those people to express themselves through me."

Her first story, titled 'Avargal Pesattum', was accepted for publication by KALKI, a prominent Tamil magazine, whose editor later told her that 'emotions' were her strong point. By 1969-70, newspapers and magazines were describing her as a 'shooting star with a meteoric rise' in their interviews. Sivasankari used her 'power' to infuse hope and happiness into thousands of lives, and this saw her turning into a household name.



*Sivasankari with the Stalwarts of Malayalam Literature, Vaikkom Mohammed Basheer and M.T.Vasudevan Nair.*

In 1971, both Sivasankari and her husband Chandrasekaran quit their respective jobs before moving to a remote village called Vazhudareddy, near Villupuram town in one of the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. This move was necessitated by the need to take care of their family business, 'The Spunpipe Company,' a factory which manufactured concrete pipes. Sivasankari feels that it was here that the actual 'metamorphosis' took place. The caterpillar and the butterfly - an exaggerated comparison perhaps, but Sivasankari feels that what happened to her during her 14 year stay in the rural ambience was something quite similar to this.

Even while she marveled at the beauty of the green fields, the lilting tunes of the birds and the cheerful uninhibited warmth of the poor people, she also agonized over the sight of the famished poverty-stricken woman nursing her baby at her bare, dried out breasts. The sight of the unclad, unwashed boy with a running nose depressed her while the behaviour of the rustic alcoholic, torturing his already miserable family, filled her with indignation. Away from the hectic city life, plunged into the serenity of village life and encircled by solitude and nature, Sivasankari felt her inner soul wake up. The young woman who spontaneously shared her emotions and experiences through writing till then, matured and mellowed into a seasoned writer who had an insight into the way the human mind worked, into relationships and their complexities, and into social problems too. It was then that her novels started to be imbued with a strong social purpose, as seen in her works like '*Oru Manithanin Kathai*', '*Paalanga!*', '*47 Naatkal*', etc.

Hers has been a career devoted to touching the hearts of people through in-depth research. She never hesitated to research the subjects that were unfamiliar to her and, at times, the time taken for research ran into several years even. She has visited illicit breweries, drug dens, brothels, etc. incognito to look into the minds and problems of people there from their perspectives. And yet, for all these 'social effects' that her writing generates, her stories are neither dry nor didactic in tone. They are intensely human, true-to-life narratives that readers are able to identify with immediately. A persuasive and simple

style without literary pretensions and the guts to tackle bold themes as she sees fit without any inhibitions, have combined to build her a reputation that sees her enjoy a sway over the people.

A multi-faceted personality, she is best known as the author of many novels, short story collections and novellas, travelogues and biographies. '*Avan*', her novel based on drug abuse, has been translated into several Indian languages besides English and Ukrainian. This novel, when telecast on the national television network as a tele-serial under the title 'SUBAH', was adjudged as one of the mega hits of 1987. Her writing on eye donation made a deep impact on readers, resulting in thousands of people pledging their eyes for donation after death. Articles on the physically challenged, the aged and the mentally imbalanced special persons have created a social awareness among readers and her efforts have been gratefully acknowledged by experts and welfare organisations at public fora.

Sivasankari has also reported on significant events and has also presented several in-depth interviews with dignitaries from various walks of life, including the Prime Ministers late Smt. Indira Gandhi and Sri. Rajiv Gandhi, and the Nobel Laureate Mother Teresa.

She is the first writer to have narrated a story written by her through video and audiotapes. She has presented constructive and motivating programs for television, and has also anchored a highly popular talk Show '*NETRU, INDRU, NAALAI*' on varied topics of social relevance, on the SUN TV satellite network.

Sivasankari has accompanied the Prime Minister, late Sri Rajiv Gandhi on his CHOGM tours twice and has written two travelogues titled 'Travels With Rajiv Gandhi', and these were translated into Japanese and brought as the first ever publication of its kind in Japan in May '95.

Fate served Sivasankari a cruel blow in 1984 with the demise of her beloved husband Chandrasekaran, who was also her mentor and guide. Her self-imposed and self-developed courage, coupled with the right guidance, gave her the strength to accept reality and move on. She moved to Madras following her husband's death and continues to live her life with dignity and pride, investing it with profound meaning through her various literary and other activities.



*Sivasankari with the Nobel Laureate Mother Teresa.*

Although Sivasankari has no children, she has made sure that she has lived her life to the full and without any regrets.

In 1986, Sivasankari, along with her writer friend Maalan, founded the AGNI TRUST - a voluntary organisation that believes in the betterment of the society through individual awakening. AGNI is engaged in organising meetings, workshops and seminars to create awareness on various aspects of society and to inculcate positive thinking, right values and patriotism. While conducting the awareness programmes in the slums, having felt the dire need for a de-addiction centre for the economically weaker section of the society, AGNI was instrumental in starting 'Rajaji Centre for De-Addiction' in the Voluntary Health Services Hospital at Taramani in Chennai.

Sivasankari, the writer has transcended language and media barriers. Her book 'Amma Sonna Kathaigal' ('Tales My Mother Told Me'), an illustrated collection of children's short stories, is accompanied by an audiotape on which Sivasankari herself narrates the stories. Her novels have been filmed in Tamil, Kannada and Telugu, receiving popular acclaim for their integrity and social commitment. Tele-serials based on her stories, when telecast as daily on the regional and private channels, have topped the viewership ratings on their respective channels. She is also a much sought-after speaker, resource person and participant in public fora and expert committees.

She has served as Member of the National High Level Committee for Awareness on Drug abuse; as designated Board Member of the Central Film Censor Board; as Senate Member of the Bharathidasan University, Trichy; Avinashilingam College of Home

Science, Coimbatore and Gandhigram Rural University, Gandhigram; and as Member of the Advisory Committees of many organisations, including AIR, the Central Sahitya Akademi and the Voluntary Health Services. She has twice been a member of the jury for the National Film Awards, and a committee member of the National Film Development Corporation.

'*Knit India Through Literature*' is her latest mega-project and has involved intense sourcing, research and translation of literature from 18 Indian languages. The project, she says, aims to introduce Indians to other Indians through literature and culture, and help knit them together. The interviews of the stalwart writers from all the 18 Indian languages that are approved by the 8th Schedule of Indian constitution, accompanied by a creative work of the respective writer, are published along with her travelogues of the different regions, as also an in-depth article by a scholar on the cultural and literary heritage of each of the languages. The Tamil and English editions of all the four volumes, 'the SOUTH', 'the EAST', 'the WEST' and 'the NORTH' of this project were published in January 1998, September 2000, May 2004 and May 2009 respectively.

As many as 30 scholars have so far researched her works for their doctoral theses, and many more students for their M.Phil. degrees.

A sheer fidelity in characterisations, natural flow of sequences, exhibition of real life situations, deep understanding of human (and even animal) psychology, commitment to causes - be it geriatrics, mental retardation, juvenile delinquency or alcoholism - all of these have made Sivasankari surpass her contemporaries in recent times in providing a rich, splendid and at the same time true panorama of South India.

website: [www.sivasankari.com](http://www.sivasankari.com)  
Email: [jibu\\_chandra@yahoo.co.in](mailto:jibu_chandra@yahoo.co.in)



*Sivasankari presenting a copy of 'Knit India Through Literature' to the former President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam.*

### A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

- 2002 Sivasankariyin 60  
Sirukathaigal-I & II

#### NOVELS

- 1970 Yetharkkaaga?  
1975 Nandu  
1978 Mella Mella  
1978 47 Naatkal  
1980 Oru Manithanin Kathai  
1981 Nerunji Mul  
1983 Paalangal  
1984 Karunaikolai  
1985 Avan  
1985 Nooleni  
1987 Malayin Adutha Pakkam  
1987 Verillaatha Marangal  
1989 Vaanathu Nila  
1990 Naan Naanaaga  
1993 Ini

#### NOVELLAS

- 1969 to 1994 - 23 Novellas

#### BIOGRAPHY

- 1972 Indiravin Kathai  
(Indira Gandhi)  
1989 Appa (G.D. Naidu)  
2001 Ariyaatha Mugangal  
(G.K. Moopnar)

#### COLLECTION OF ARTICLES

- 1984 Chinna Noolkanda Nammai  
Siraippaduthuvathu?  
1986 Sila Anubavangal Sila  
Manithargal

- 1991 Pudhiya Konangal

- 1991 Konjam Yosikkalamac

- 1992 Uratha Sinthanai

#### CHILDREN'S TALKING BOOK

- 1996 Amma Sonna Kathaigal  
(Book & Cassette)

#### LITERARY RESEARCH BOOK

- 1998 Knit India Through Literature  
- Volume I - the SOUTH  
2000 Knit India Through Literature  
- Volume II - the EAST  
2004 Knit India Through Literature  
- Volume III - the WEST  
2009 Knit India Through Literature  
- Volume IV - the NORTH

#### ANTHOLOGY

- 2002 Nenjil Nirpavai - Part I & II  
(Collection of Short Stories by  
60 Tamil writers)

#### TRANSLATION

- 2007 Kadavul Yen Sirantha Nanbar  
(Swami Suddhananda's  
Spiritual lectures).  
2007 Yennam Vasappadum (Swami  
Suddhananda's Spiritual  
lectures)

- 2010 Raavi Nadhiyil (A Collection of  
Short stories by Gulzar)

#### TRAVELOGUE

- 1971 to 2007 - 15 Travelogues

### A CHRONOLOGY

- 1942 Born in Madras, Tamil Nadu  
1958 Selected as outstanding NCC  
cadet to participate in Republic  
Day parade in New Delhi.  
1958 Bharatanatyam Arangetram.  
1962 Completed B.Sc. Graduation -  
1st rank in college & 9th in the  
university.  
1963 Married T.S. Chandrasekaran.  
1968 Joined the First National City  
Bank as P.R.O.  
1968 Wrote her First Short Story.  
1969 First Novella 'Shantha Yaen  
Azhugiral?' was selected as the

best story of the year by the  
readers of ANANDA  
VIKATAN.

- 1970 Wrote her First Novel  
'Yetharkkaaga?'  
1978 First writer to be invited as a  
Chief Guest by a Malaysian  
Tamil magazine.  
1985 Accompanied the Prime  
Minister Rajiv Gandhi on his  
CHOGM tour.  
1986 Visited U.S.A. under  
International Writing Program  
(IWP) and International  
Visiting Program (IVP).

- 1986 Founded AGNI TRUST.  
 1987 Accompanied the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on his CHOGM tour for the second time.  
 1998 Publication of 'Knit India Through Literature - Volume I - the SOUTH'.  
 2000 Publication of 'Knit India Through Literature - Volume II - the EAST'.  
 2004 Publication of 'Knit India Through Literature - Volume III - the WEST'.  
 2009 Publication of 'Knit India Through Literature - Volume IV - the NORTH'.

#### AWARDS

As a Writer...

- 1985 KASTURI SRINIVASAN AWARD for 'PAALANGAL' - a novel spanning three generations - as the outstanding Tamil novel published in 1983-84.  
 1988 DR. RAJAH SIR ANNAMALAI CHETTIAR AWARD for the book 'CHINNA NOOLKANDA NAMMAI SIRAIPPADUTHUVATHU?' - a series of 52 non-fiction articles emphasising on self-improvement.  
 1989 BHARATIYA BASHA PARISHAD Award from a Calcutta based literary forum, for 'VERILLATHA MARANGAL' - as the best novel among the four southern languages published in 1989-90.  
 1989 TAMIL ANNAI AWARD from Tamil University, Thanjavur.  
 1998 The BEST CHILDREN'S BOOK OF THE YEAR 1998 award from Tiruppur Tamil Sangam for the talking book 'AMMA SONNA KATHAIGAL'.  
 2001 PREMCHAND RASTRIYA SAHITYA SAMMAN Award by Rastriya Hindi Academy, Calcutta.

As an Activist...

- 1987 FOR THE SAKE OF HONOUR AWARD by The Association of Book Printers & Sellers of South India - for the service rendered to society through writings.  
 1998 The STREE RATNA AWARD by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,

Chennai Kendra & Director K.Subrahmanyam Memorial Trust.

- 1998 MANUSHREE - a national award by Athimabbe Foundation, Bangalore.  
 2006 LIFE TIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD by Rotary Club of Chennai Kilpauk, R.I. Dt.3230.  
 2006 The ASTITVA Award by Zee TV & Archana Trust Suburban, Mumbai - for Excellence as an Author 2006.  
 2008 The GOPICHAND LITERARY AWARD from YUVAKALAVAHINI of Andhra Pradesh. First writer to receive this award after the committee decided it as a National Award for writers of all Indian languages.

#### HONOURS

- 1976 OUTSTANDING YOUNG PERSON in the field of Journalism by the Madras & Coromandel Jaycees.  
 1977 One of the fifty women who have influenced the evolution of independent India under the title WOMEN WHO'VE MADE INDIA on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Indian Independence by the magazine FEMINA  
 1999 HONORARY CITIZEN by Dr. Jerry Kuhaida, the Hon. Mayor of the City of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, U.S.A.  
 2000 The WOMAN OF 1999-2000 by the International Women's Association.  
 2000 One of the four writers whose works were recorded in their own voices for the Archives of U.S. Library of Congress to mark its Bicentennial Celebration.  
 2003 Recorded her interview in Tamil on her life & times for the Archival Programme of the All India Radio.

#### ACADEMIC RECOGNITION

Madurai Kamaraj University conducted a two-day seminar with 8 Professors of five participating Universities, exclusively on Sivasankari's works. More than eighty University research scholars have so far engaged in research of her works for M.Phil and Ph.D. programs in literature.