



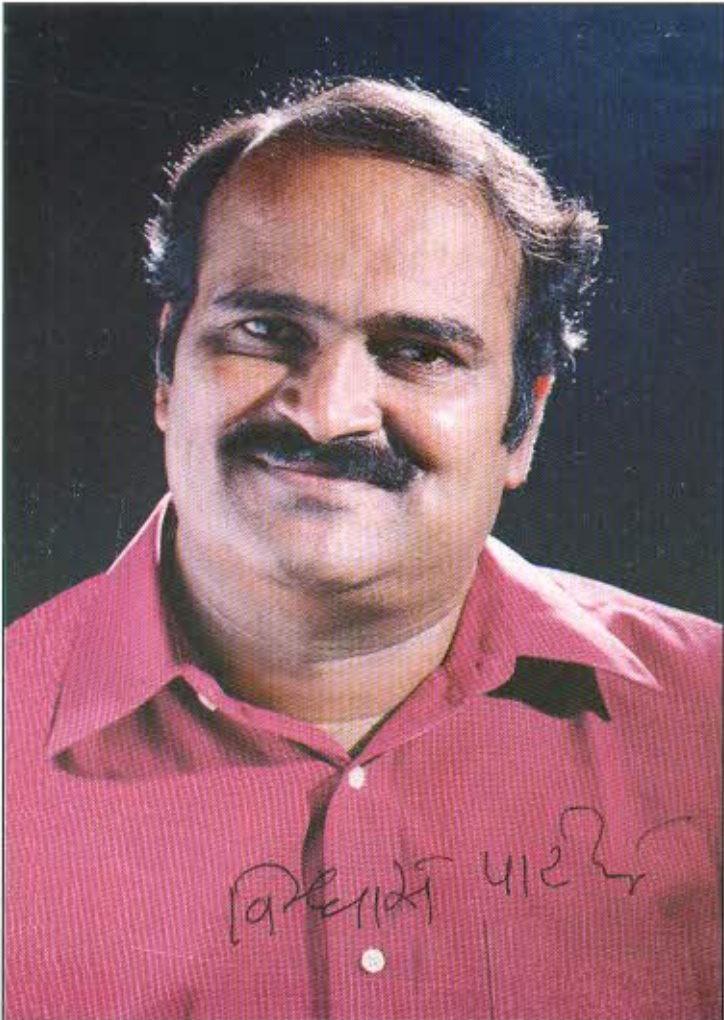
CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS
(1954-2004)

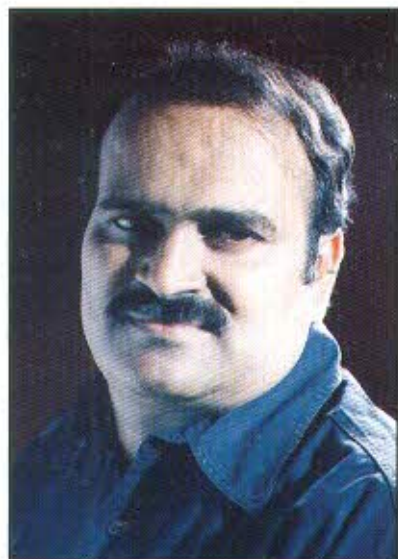
Sahitya Akademi

1 October, 2004

meet the author

Vishwas Patil

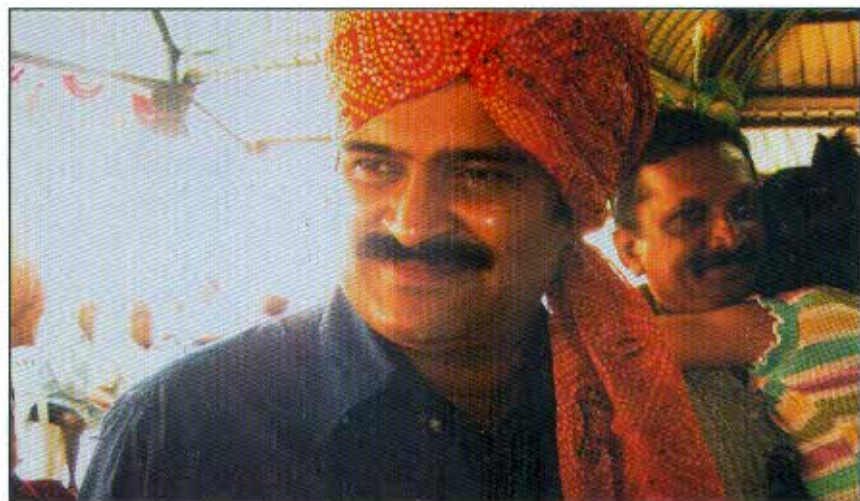




"From my childhood I was aware of irrigation and power projects coming up. The Warna, that marked the boundaries of Sangli and Kolhapur districts, was our river, and on her banks was our village, Nerle, of the one thousand-odd dwellings. A short distance away, the construction of the Chandoli dam was in progress. I had heard those huge thundering machines at work and seen the hapless farmers, lost without their lands, dazed without their homes, wander about aimlessly. Even before the actual construction began, word of the proposed project spread, and people from neighbouring villages refused to enter into any new relationships with these people. "Give a daughter into that family and have her sacrificed to

the waters? Never!" they declared. That region, long lost to the Warna, began to resurface in my mind and the displaced people who met me now seemed to be my kith and kin. I too was born into a humble farmer's family. I too had toiled on the land. In these people, who weathered the fury of sun and rain, their hope-filled eyes staring at the cloud-laden skies, willing the rain god to bless their crops, I saw my mother and brother." Reading these lines, one would suspect that they are from the autobiography of an environmental activist. No; this is an excerpt from the Introduction to the English translation of *Jhadjhadati*, the novel that made Vishwas Patil one of the youngest recipients of Sahitya Akademi Award, at the age of 33.

Vishwas Patil was born on 28th November 1959, in Dist. Kolhapur, Maharashtra. In 1975, while studying in Xth Standard, he wrote his first short-story "Kayada" (Law), about the misery of women in rural areas, sent it for a short-story competition and came out third in Maharashtra State. He graduated in English Literature from New College, Kolhapur, went on to do his Master's, again in English Literature, from Shivaji University, Kolhapur and took a law degree too. He then passed Maharashtra Public Service Commission's examination and was directly



In a festive mood



Release of *Mahanayak* in Hindi by Jnanpith; Col.Lakshmi Sabgal, Prof.Namwar Singh

appointed in the provincial services as a Deputy Collector and subsequently became an I.A.S. officer. Wherever his service took him he has had the opportunity to see the life of the people at all levels. The creative artist in him saw to it that the wealth of experience thus gained has been refined and preserved for posterity in his supreme artistic achievements. Widely translated into almost all languages of India, Patil's novels appeal to the masses as well as to the connoisseur.

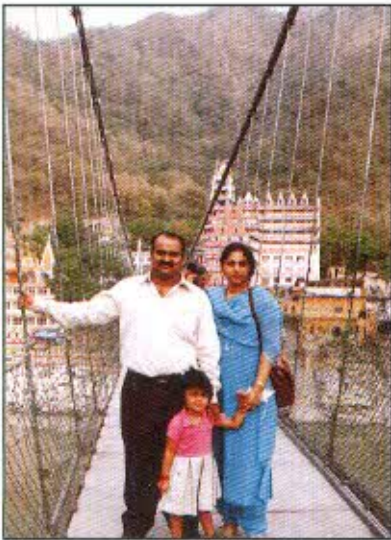
His first work, *Panipat*, a historical novel based on the Third Battle of Panipat, was a miraculous success. This was the saga of a war fought between the army of Ahmadshah Abdali and the Marathas on the famous plain of Panipat where a hundred thousand Maratha soldiers were killed. The book created its own history—it caused quite a stir in the Marathi literary world when 20,000 copies in seven editions were sold out in the first two years, and then ran into 21 editions. This novel was not only popular; it was highly regarded by literary circles too. V.V.Shirwadkar 'Kusumagraj', the Jnanpith Award-winner, wrote to Patil: "The subject of the book is so prodigious and vast, that, to write a novel around it is like skirting around a typhoon....As you dwelt on the topic, you became a denizen of that era and an eyewitness to those turbulent

times. I specially congratulate you for your picturesque language and grand descriptive style. No doubt, you have successfully come out with a monumental work." The intrinsic worth of the novel has been reiterated by the 18 awards it won, including the Priyadarshini National Award (Maharashtra), Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad Award Kolkata and V.M.Joshi Award. His play *Ranangan*, based on *Panipat*, directed by Waman Kendre and staged by the famous troupe, Chandralekha, has had more than four hundred performances, including some in U.S.A.

Pangira deals with the rapidly changing ethos of rural India and its consequences on a primarily agricultural economy and culture. In this novel, the young writer predicted that the future wars would be fought between the states and even amongst villages on the issue of water. It won H.N.Apte State Award for the best novel.



With wife Chandrasena and children

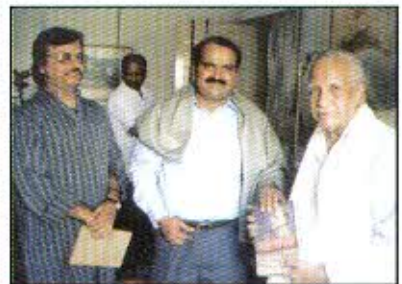


Sweet holiday!

Jhadajhadati, the novel that fetched him 14 awards, is based on his own experiences while growing up and, later, working as a Rehabilitation Officer with the government of Maharashtra, among people displaced by various 'development' projects. This novel is of great social relevance, exuding human sympathy and committed to social justice. The narrative technique is not at all dramatic; the question of what happens to the rural poor shifted from their centuries-old habitations when the government goes in for gigantic dam projects has been dealt with subtly and delicately through suggestiveness. The novelist implies that the choice between the progress of the many at the cost of the sacrifice of a few becomes somewhat acceptable only by respecting the displaced and by adequately compensating them—by envisioning a human face for such development from the early stages of planning and zealously implementing it.

Mahanayak (1998), a novel based on Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's life, was the result of extensive research and study of seven years during which Patil visited Japan, Germany, England and Myanmar tracing the trail of Netaji's activities vis-à-vis the Indian National Army, sifting through historical documents, war

diaries, maps etc. lying buried in the cellars of government offices in different countries, and biographical accounts by various individuals who came across the great leader. Patil's obsessive admiration for this great romantic, tragic hero of Indian history sustained him through the long-drawn writing process. "The fact that someone who believed in an aggressive, militant and fiery approach towards the imperialists—when in fact Gandhiji's principles of non-violence and ahimsa were being lauded the world over—should gain such recognition during India's freedom struggle, is in itself a miracle," says Patil. The novel created quite a sensation in Marathi publishing circles when a major publishing house offered Patil a million rupees for its rights, a figure unheard of in Indian publishing. Vasant Kanetkar, the renowned Marathi dramatist, has this to say about the novel: "*Mahanayak's* reading disturbed me for several days; I rate this fabulous work as one of the few outstanding novels of the 20th century I came across." It has been translated into ten Indian languages and its English version has also come out. A prominent critic wrote in the *Navabharat Times*: "This biographical novel belongs to the great tradition of world-renowned works like *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, *Life of Tolstoy* and *Ariel*." Small wonder then that its Hindi version brought out by Bharatiya Jnanpith has already run into four editions.



V.V. Shirwadkar 'Kusumagraj' receiving a copy of *Mahanayak*; at the left, Waman Kendre.

Chandramukhi, his latest novel, is about power politics in which any heinous method is pursued to trap an upcoming leader, and also about the all-embracing power of a woman's love that heals and redeems everything, and is impossible to be confined in domesticity or docile captivity. In the readers' minds and hearts, the character of Chandramukhi, the *tamasha* artiste, attains superhuman proportions, as the enormity of her self-sacrifice, and her dedication to the cause of art sink in.

Winner of several prestigious

awards and honours (besides the ones already mentioned) like the Two Outstanding Novel of the Year Awards from Maharashtra Government, Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad Award, Mardhekar Award from Marathi Sahitya Sammelan, Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad Award, Nath Madhav Award, Goa, Vikhe-Patil Award, Gadkari Award, Jaywant Dalavi Award and others, the soft-spoken, self-effacing Vishwas Patil smiles looking into the future. The great narrative artist has many more tales to tell; many more laurels to gather.

A Select Bibliography

Panipat (novel), Pune: Rajhans Prakashan, 1988 (now in 21st edition); Hindi (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, now in 4th edition); Gujarati (Ahmadabad: Nawabharat Sahitya Mandir); Punjabi (Patiala: Govt. of Punjab, Publication Division.)

Pangira (novel), Mumbai: Granthali (now from Rajhans Prakashan, in 4th edition); Hindi (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan); Kannada (Bangalore: Sapana Book House).

Jhadajhadati (novel), Pune: Rajhans Prakashan, 1990 (Now in 10th edition); Hindi (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan); Gujarati (Ahmedabad: Nawabharat Sahitya Mandir); Urdu (New Delhi: Sahitya Akdemi);

Kannada (Sahitya Akademi); Malayalam (Sahitya Akademi); English (New Delhi: Katha, forthcoming).

Ranangan (play), Mumbai: Majestic Prakashan, 2000.

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Chandramukhi (novel), Pune: Rajhans Prakashan, 2004; Hindi (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, forthcoming)



A scene from the play *Ranangan*

A Chronology



L-R: Mr.Kunizuka, Netaji's Japanese associate, Mrs.Iwanami, daughter of Tojo, wartime Prime Minister of Japan

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| <p>1959 Born in Nerle, District Kolhapur, in rural Maharashtra</p> <p>1975 While studying in Xth Standard, wrote first short-story "Kayada" (Law), sent it for a short-story competition and stood third in Maharashtra State</p> <p>1980 Graduated in English Literature from New College, Kolhapur</p> <p>1982 Masters in English Literature from Shivaji University, Kolhapur</p> <p>1982 Passed Maharashtra Public Service Commission's examination and was directly appointed Deputy Collector</p> <p>1985 Bachelor in Law from Ismilebhai Law College, Satara</p> <p>1986 Got married to Chandrasena</p> <p>1988 Published first novel <i>Panipat</i></p> <p>1989 <i>Panipat</i> got Nath Madhav Award from Goa</p> <p>1990 <i>Jhadajhadati</i> published <i>Panipat</i> received Priyadarshini National Award</p> <p>1991 <i>Panipat</i> got the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad Award, Kolkata
Vikhe-Patil award for the best literature for <i>Jhadajhadati</i></p> | <p>1992 Receive Sahitya Akademi Award for <i>Jhadajhadati</i></p> <p>1993 Bharatiya Jhanpith brought out the Hindi edition of <i>Panipat</i></p> <p>1995 Visited Japan and Thailand for the research on Subhash Chandra Bose; in Tokyo, read a paper "I.N.A. and Japan" in Konkekai World Conference</p> <p>1996 Travelled to Myanmar in the company of a group of American war veterans who fought against the Japanese in the Second World War</p> <p>Promoted to Indian Administrative Service</p> <p>1997 Visited England, France, Italy, Germany and other European countries for research on Subhash Chandra Bose</p> <p>1998 <i>Mahanayak</i> published; it received the Gadkari Award</p> <p>1999 The play <i>Ranangan</i> based on the novel <i>Panipat</i>, directed by Waman Kendre, staged by famous Chandralekha dramatic group</p> <p>2000 Received Jaywant Dalavi Award for Best Playwriting for <i>Ranangan</i></p> <p>2004 In August, <i>Chandramukhi</i> published</p> |
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