

21 April 2001



**Sahitya Akademi**

invites you to

**meet the author**

**Tho. Mu. Chidambara Rangunathan**





Tho. Mu. Chidambara Ragunathan, is a short-story writer, novelist, poet, dramatist, biographer, literary critic, researcher, translator, journalist and editor, all rolled into one. Dr. Kailasapathy, a renowned Marxist scholar described him as a doyen in many respects in the realm of modern Tamil literature. Ragunathan is indeed a trailblazer of progressive literature in Tamil, the harbinger of the Progressive Writers' Movement of Tamilnadu, the herald of Marxist literary criticism in Tamil and a pioneer of comparative literature in Tamilnadu.

Born at Tirunelveli on 20th October 1923, Ragunathan in his emergence as a writer owes much to his ancestral legacy and the literary environment prevailing in his hometown in his boyhood days. His great-grandfather was a disciple of the saint-poet of 18th century Murugadass Swamigal, the author of *Pulavar Puranam*. His grandfather too was a poet who has written *Nellai Pallu*, the folk form of drama in poetry. His father an artist and photographer by profession has also produced some prose and

poetical works. His only brother late T.M. Bhaskara Thondaiman, has written many books on South Indian sculpture and Tamil literature. His English professor and mentor in literary studies was A. Srinivasa Raghavan, a Sahitya Akademi award-winner. Ragunathan had the opportunity of having a good library and of getting new books and journals at home itself. Thus Kamban and Shelley, Bharathi and Puthumaippithan became Ragunathan's favourite writers. Ragunathan's first short-story appeared in *Prasanda Vikatan* in 1941, while he was a teenager.

Ragunathan's brother, a revenue officer under British rule was his guardian after his father's demise. But Ragunathan developed contacts with the banned Communist Party which was underground in those days. Slowly he became a convinced leftist politically, and was arrested and detained in prison during the students' agitation of 1942. Though he was released after a few weeks his formal college education came to an end with that. In a way it was a blessing in disguise in prompting Ragunathan to become a writer by profession. He began to concentrate on writing stories, poems and articles in journals. In 1944 he joined the *Dhinamani Publications* as a subeditor. He left that job in 1946 and joined *Mullai* a monthly in 1946. He worked in Chennai for nine years and then came to his hometown and edited and published a progressive monthly of his own, *Shanthi* for more than a year. After remaining as a freelance writer for more than a decade, he

joined the Soviet Information Branch, Chennai, where he worked as editor for more than two decades and retired from professional journalism in 1988 at the age of sixty-five.

His first book *Puyal* a novelette was published in 1945. His book of literary criticism *Ilakkiya Vimarsanam* (1948) was hailed as a pioneering work of its kind.

At the turn of the 50s Ragunathan, who had already established his identity as a notable leftist progressive writer, brought out *Panchum Pasiyum*, the first socialist realistic novel in Tamil. This novel deals with the lives of the handloom workers of Tamilnadu highlighting their plight in the first years of Indian independence. Deprived of a decent living and loss of work and forced to migrate in search of other jobs, the community faced hunger-deaths and suicide. The novel tells about how the class-consciousness of the weavers was awakened and how they stood united to decide their own fate. This novel is distinguished for its powerful style, vivid description of

situations and for its ideological insight. *Panchum Pasiyum* has gained the privilege of being the first work of fiction from modern Tamil to be translated into an European language, Czech.

As a poet, Ragunathan neither belongs to the school of grammatical prosody nor of the new poetry. His trenchant poetry recitals in poets' symposia were a sure bet to draw many listeners in the 50s and 60s. He has brought out four collections of poems.

Greatly influenced by Puthumaippithan's short-stories, Ragunathan had been a close friend of that great writer in his last years of life. The biography of Puthumaippithan written and published in 1951 by Ragunathan is still acclaimed by critics and chroniclers as the best literary biography of a modern Tamil writer.

As the admirer and follower of Bharathi's ideals Ragunathan has so far brought out six research works on Bharathi, including the Sahitya Akademi award-winning work



Hon'ble Cabinet Minister Dr. Karansingh, Govt. of India presenting the Soviet Land Nehru Award (1970)



Dr. Gokak, President of Sahitya Akademi presenting the Sahitya Akademi Award (1983)

*Bharathi Kaalamum Karuthum.* Ragunathan's deep insight into the poet and his milieu and his balanced critical analysis and pleasant style have made it a notable milestone in the history of modern Tamil literature. His work *Bharathiyum Shelleyum* is a pioneering work, unique by its depth and breadth in the realm of comparative studies in Tamil.

Ragunathan's monumental work *Ilangovaligal Yaar*, an inter-disciplinary, Marxist socio-historical analysis of the first great Tamil epic *Chilappathikaaram*, is regarded as a thought-provoking study of that epic, exploring many myths woven around it.

As a translator Ragunathan has distinguished himself by translating Maxim Gorky's major novels including his *Mother* into Tamil and also translated into Tamil poetical form V. Mayakovsky's epic poem 'Lenin'. In recognition of these achievements Ragunathan was selected for the Soviet Land Nehru Award in 1965 and 1979.

Some of the short-stories, poems and literary articles of

Ragunathan have been translated into Malayalam, Bengali, Hindi, Czech, Polish, German, Russian and English. Some of his books have been prescribed as text-books in three universities in Tamilnadu and two outside Tamilnadu.

Three scholars have won doctoral degrees from Madras University and Madurai Kamaraj University for research on Ragunathan's work.

Ragunathan has so far held many responsible posts and positions including member of the Advisory Board for Tamil of Sahitya Akademi (1988 - 93), member of the senate, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli (1993 - 95) and member of the jury for Sahitya Akademi Award in Tamil, 1994.

T. G. Sivasankaran described him as 'the admirable writer who has not bartered away his soul for the sake either of position, money or power'. He now lives in his hometown Tirunelveli.

## SELECTED WORKS

### Short Stories

*Ragunathan Kathaikal* (Stories of Ragunathan)

*Setri Malarntha Senthamarai* (The Lotus in the mud)

### Novels

*Panchum Pasiyum* (Cotton and Hunger)

*Kannika* (Virgin)

### Poetical Works

*Ragunathan Kavithaikal* (Poems of Ragunathan)

*Kaviyaranka Kavithaikal* (Recited Poems)

### Biography

*Puthumaippithan Varalaru* (Biography of Puthumaippithan)

### Literary Criticism

*Samuthaya Ilakkiyam* (Social Literature)

*Ilakkiya Vimarsanam* (Literary Criticism)

### Research Works

*Ilangovaligal Yaar?* (Who is St. Ilango?) - A Sociological Study of *Chilappathikaaram*

*Pudumatppithan Kathaigal* - *Sila Vimarsanangalum Vishamathanangalum* (Pudumaippithan's Short Stories - Criticism and mischievous readings)

### Comparative Studies

*Bharathiyum Shelleyum* (Bharathi and Shelley)

*Gangayum Kaviriyum* (Ganga and Cauveri - Tagore and Bharathi)

### Research Works on Poet Bharathi

*Bharathi Chla Parvaikal* (Bharathi - some Observations)

*Bharathi Kaalamum Karutthum* (Bharathi's Times and Ideas)

*Panchali Sapatham - Urai Porulum Marai Porulum* (Panchali Sapatham - Explicit and Inner Meanings). Bharathi Endowment Lectures, Annamalai University.

### Translations

*Thai* (Maxim Gorky's Mother) - Novel

*Brammachariyin Diary* (Maxim Gorky's *Matvei Kozhmyakin*)

*Agniparitchai* (Ordeal 3 Vols. - Alexi Tolstoy)

*Soviet Naattu Kavithaikal* (Soviet Poems - An Anthology)

*Mayakovskiyin Lenin Kavithanjali* (Mayakovsky's Lenin)

### Honours & Awards

- 1965 Soviet Land Nehru Award for the translation of Maxim Gorky's *Mother*
- 1970 Soviet Land Nehru Award, for the poetical work *Lenin Kavithanjali*
- 1983 Madras Ilakkiya Chinthani's The Best Book of the Year Award for *Bharathi Kaalamum Karutthum*
- 1983 Sahitya Akademi Award for *Bharathi Kaalamum Karutthum*
- 1986 A Citation for the services rendered in Translation, Department of Tamil Development, Government of Tamilnadu.
- 1988 Tamil Annai Prize, Tamil University, Thanjavur.
- 1992 Lilly Deivasigamani Award for Senior Eminent Writer.
- 1994 New Century Book House's Eminent Writer Award.
- 2000 Honour 'Eminent Scholar' conferred by All India University Tamil Teachers' Association.



Mr. Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Minister of Govt. of West Bengal presenting the Scroll of Honour at the All India Tamil Writers' Conferences, Calcutta (1984)

## A CHRONOLOGY

1923 Oct. 20.	Born at Tirunelveli	1951	Panchum Pasiyum Novel Published
1941	First Short Story appeared in Prasanda Vikatan	1954-56	Editor-Publisher Shanthi, Tirunelveli
1944-46	S u b - E d i t o r , D h i n a m a n i Publications, Chennai	1957	Czech Translation of Panchum Pasiyum published
1945	First Novelette Puyal Published.	1967-88	Editor. Soviet Information Branch, Chennai
1946-47	Editor of the literary monthly Mullai	1988-93	Member. Sahitya Akademi's Advisory Board for Tamil
1948-52	Sub-Editor, Shakthi Chennai	1980-2000	President, Tamilnadu Kalai Ilakkia Perumanram



His Excellency Governor of Tamilnadu and Chancellor of Tamil University,  
Thanjavur, Dr. P.C. Alexandar presenting the Tamil Annai Award (1988)