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meet the author

Vaidehi





"Why should we talk like men? Let's sing in our own voice. Be it a lullaby or a love-song or a passionate cry... let it be 'our' voice,"

- Vaidehi

Janaki Srinivasa Murthy, better known as **Vaidehi** (her pen-name), was born into a traditional Brahmin family, in Kundapur (coastal Karnataka), in the year 1945. Her parents were A.V.N. Hebbar (an Advocate) and Mahalakshmiyamma. As she writes in one of her articles, it was a "large family that had many children, and had relatives and friends visiting every day, sometimes staying over." She grew up in an atmosphere of literature and music, and also one of total male domination; for girls, even speaking out loudly 'like a man' was taboo. Vaidehi, in her adolescence, would often jealously wonder, "how fortunate men are!" She studied in Kundapur itself and got her B. Com. degree in 1966; and then married Sri K.L. Srinivasa Murthy from Shimoga. Since Srinivasa Murthy was also interested in both literature and music, he constantly encouraged her and prodded her to write freely. They lived in Shimoga for some years and then moved on to Udupi, and later to Manipal (D.K.), where they live now. Their two daughters, Nayana and Pallavi, are happily married and settled.

Though Vaidehi began to write stories early, her first collection of short stories was published in 1979.

Since then, Vaidehi has ventured into many different forms and has made each one her own. Today, she has to her credit 36 works: collections of short stories (6), poetry (2), novel (1), children's plays (13), essays and reminiscences (4), biographies (3), translations (4) and edited (3). Her stories and poems have been translated into many other Indian languages including English (*Gulabi Talkies and Other Stories*, Penguin, 2006; *Jaatre, O.U.P.*, etc.); many stories have been anthologised by 'Katha,' Virag press, London; and Feminist Press, New York; and selected stories and poems have been prescribed as texts for graduate classes at the college and university levels. Her story, "Gulabi Talkies," turned into a film by Girish Kasaravalli, has won international and national awards. She has won many awards including the Sahitya Akademi Award (2009); she has participated in many national and international seminars; and has presided over prestigious conferences.

Although Vaidehi's creativity is many-faceted, her special *forte* is short story. Her stories are well-crafted and are, generally, centred on finely chiselled and varied female characters. In her essay, "About My Writing," she speaks of her childhood: "Staying mostly inside the house, for the most part with women only, experiencing directly or indirectly all their sufferings, cruelty and mutual torture, I entered the world of writing." As a result, the vast world of her stories is peopled by "child widows, married



With husband K. L. Srinivas Murthy and children Nayana and Pallavi, 1975



Receiving award from Jnanapeeth Awardee Dr. Shivaram Karanth, as a college student - February, 1966.

women deserted by their husbands, destitute old widows struggling to get maintenance, widows who got pregnant, dull-witted women, hot-tempered women, prostitutes, rich and dominating women, eccentric women," and such. However, Vadehi also registers the 'hidden strengths' of such women who devise their own ways of resistance and protest against such a patriarchal system.

'Akku,' for instance, is the story of a young woman whose husband runs away from her, thus denying her, Akku, the experience of conjugal life and motherhood. In course of time, Akku lapses into a fantasy world of her own in which she is always 'pregnant' and nursing her child despite the verbal and physical assaults on her. This fantasy life (or being 'possessed' by a ghost) gives her the freedom, denied to a sane woman, to do and talk freely, even to expose the adulterous adventures of the male members of the family.

'Shakuntaleyondige' ('One Afternoon With Shakuntala') retells the old story of Shakuntala and Dushyanta. Narrated as an interior monologue of Shakuntala, the story does away with Durvasa's curse and the lost ring (introduced into the story by Kalidasa to save the king's thus male's reputation), and makes Shakuntala realise that she fell a victim to the king due to her own cravings. In the end, when Dushyanta returns to her, she realises that though he is indispensable to her, she may not be indispensable to him; hence, she sends her son with him and stays back.

"Gulabi Talkies," more ambitious than other stories, depicts the 'waves' generated by a permanent cinema theatre in a small and remote town. Since the town's midwife became the gatekeeper, even women were permitted to go to the theatre. The old films screened there introduce to the town's women a different world; slowly, women begin to assert themselves, dress differently, and go to the theatre by themselves. They begin to talk about 'time for themselves' and their 'own life.' Though, after some time the management of the theatre changes and a man is appointed as the gatekeeper, the 'waves' it created stay on.

"Krauncha Pakshigalu" (one of the stories in the award-winning eponymous collection) is a daring and unusual story, both in setting and in narration. Against the backdrop of partition riots, the story describes the experiences of a cook and his wife in Delhi. During the riots, the wife is kidnapped by a mob and the heart-broken husband returns to his hometown in Karnataka. After a year or so, through social service agencies, abducted women from both sides are brought back to be identified by their relations. According to the husband, he did not find his wife among the abducted women; and he goes on lamenting over his separation from his wife. When the social scientist meets the wife after a few decades, the wife declares that her husband recognised her but refused to accept her. Whose version is true? The story raises the primordial question of 'what is Truth?' The story of *Ramayana*, alluded

throughout, functions as a frame of reference; it juxtaposes the broken union of the *krauncha* birds, the desertion of Seetha by Rama, and the separated modern couple.

Asprushyaru ('Untouchables') is a multi-layered novel. At the general level, the novel lays bare the hierarchical relationships between the upper castes and lower castes, and between the upper-caste Hindus and non-Hindus like Muslims and Christians. At another level, it exposes the way upper-caste women become literally 'untouchable' during their menstrual periods and child-births. At still another level, the novel documents the way lower-caste-women are treated as 'untouchables' by the 'untouchable' upper-caste-women. And, such exposure is done so subtly that it opens various and vicious layers of untouchability with its complexities, woven unconsciously into the daily life of all of us.

As a poet, Vaidehi continues the tradition of the medieval *Dasa pantha*, in which the Bhakta surrenders himself/herself totally to the Higher Power; but with a difference. Even in such poignant lyrics, Vaidehi speaks as a 'woman,' registering both biological and social male-female differences. Mythical characters like Shiva and Parvati become, in her poems, contemporary husband and wife though they retain their mythical aura.

Vaidehi's children's plays have been successfully staged at Neenasam (Heggodu) and Rangayana (Mysore), directed by such stalwarts like

B. V. Karanth. Among the many reasons for their success on stage, one is that Vaidehi doesn't try to preach or instill moral lessons through her plays; they are full of songs and group dances, and quick stage-movements. She has not only written her own plays but has also adapted famous plays from other languages (*Tempest* as *Dhaam Dhoom ...*; *Macbeth* as *Gombe Macbeth*; *Kotu Gumma*, an adaptation of a Russian story).

The biographies written by Vaidehi are unusual too. One biography is that of a senior (and forgotten) woman writer, Saraswatibayi Rajawade, who married an old man to fulfill her worldly ambitions and, in the end, turned a devotee of the goddess Sharada. Another is of the theatre-genius B. V. Karanth; Vaidehi collected, over a period of three years, details of Karanth's life through interviews and cassettes recorded by Karanth off and on, transcribed and edited them, and finally organised them in a chronological form.

Vaidehi is a writer who writes with full and rich 'feminine sensibility'; but she refuses to be considered a 'Feminist' writer. In one of her major essays, she writes: "My desire is to achieve in my writing the balance I have heard about in the inner world of the home. Today, if we women lose balance, we slip into emotionality or rant and self-pity. Or, we go in another direction, our words lending themselves to anger, rage and despair. To sway to either extreme is to acknowledge defeat" ("About My Writing").



Release of the first book of short stories 'Mara Gida Balli' by Magsaysay Awadee Sri K. V. Subbanna. - September, 1979.



Receiving the 'Katha Award' for Short Fiction from
The President of India Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma in 1992

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

A) SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS:

1. *Mara Gida Balli* (1979)
2. *Antarangada Putagalu* (1984)
3. *Gola* (1986)
4. *Samaja Shastrajnyeya Tippanigalu* (1991)
5. *Ammachchi Emba Nenapu* (2000)
6. *Krauncha Pakshigalu* (2005)
7. *Alegatalli Antaranga* (2006; collected stories 1979-2004)

B) POETRY COLLECTIONS:

1. *Bindu Bindige* (1990)
2. *Parijata* (1999)

C) NOVEL:

- Asprushyaru* (1992)

D) ESSAYS:

1. *Mallinathana Dhyana* (1996)
2. *Jaatre* (1998)

E) REMINISCENCES & BIOGRAPHY:

1. *Nenapinamgaladalli Mussanje Hottu* (1984): Reminiscences about Shri Ko. La. Karanth
2. *Sediyaapu Nenapugalu* (1996): Reminiscences about Pundit Sediyaapu Krishnabhat
3. *Illiralaare, Allige Hogalaare* (2003): B. V. Karanth's auto-biography, as narrated by Vaidehi.
4. *Muntaada Kelavu Putagalu* (2008): Biography of Smt. Saraswatibayi Rajawade

F) TRANSLATIONS:

1. *Bharatiya Mahileyara Swatantrya*: tr. of *Indian Women's Struggle for Freedom*, by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya.
2. *Belliya Sankolegalu*: tr. of *Silver Shackles*, by Maithreyi Mukhyopadhyaya.
3. *Sangeeta Samvada* (1999): tr. of *Lectures on Music* by Dr. Bhaskar Chandavarkar.
4. *Surya Kinnariyaru* (1996): tr. of *The Sun Fairies*, by Swapna Datta.

G) CHILDREN'S PLAYS:

1. *Aidu Makkala Natakagalu* (1992) ("Dhaam Dhoom Sutaragali," "Mukana Makkalu," "Gombe Macbeth," "Dhaanaa Dhangura," and "Naayimari")
2. *Muru Makkala Natakagalu* (1997) ("Surya Banda," "Jhum Jhaam Aane Mattu Putta," and "Kotu Gumma")
3. *Eradu Makkala Natakagalu* (2002) ("Hakki Haadu" and "Ardhachandra Mithaayi")
4. *Somari Olya* (2004)
5. *Makkala Eradu Natakagalu* (2009) ("Alilu Ramayana" and "Satru Andre Saytara?")

F) MISCELLANEOUS:

1. *Meju Mattu Badagi* (2007): Collection of essays, stories, interviews and translations.
2. *Aayda Kathegalu* ('Selected Stories,' Dept. of Kannada and Culture)
3. *Aayda Ombhattu Kaihegalu & Asprushyaru* (Prescribed as textbook for Mangalore Univ.)
4. *Vaidehiyavara Aayda Kathegalu* (Selected Stories, for the series 'Modala Odu')
5. *Vaidehiyavara Aayda Kavanagalu* (Selected Poems, for the series 'Modala Odu')

TRANSLATIONS OF VAIDEHI'S WORKS INTO OTHER LANGUAGES:

1. Niranjana, Tejaswini et al., tr. *Gulabi Talkies And Other Stories*. Penguin India, 2006.
2. Kashyap, Nayana, tr. *Jaatre: The Temple Fair*. O. U. P., 2008.
3. Kulakarni, Uma, tr. into Marathi. *Antareeche Paane*.

INCLUDED IN ANTHOLOGIES:

4. Holmstorm, Lakshmi, ed. *The Inner Courtyard*. London: Virag Press.
5. Sharma, Ramachandra, ed. *From Kaveri to Godavari*, Penguin India.
6. Tharu, Susie & K. Lalita, ed. *Women Writing in India*. New York: The Feminist Press.
7. Hariharan, Gita, ed. *The Southern Harvest*. Katha.
8. Zide, Arlene R. K., ed. *'In Their Own Voice': The Penguin Anthology of Contemporary Indian Women Poets*.

FILMBASED ON VAIDEHI'S STORY:

1. "Gulabi Talkies Mattu Sanna Alegalu," based on this story, Girish Kasaravalli produced his award-winning film, *Gulabi Talkies*, in 2008.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION:

1. **2011: Masti Award:** for lifetime achievement.
2. **2009: Sahitya Akademi Award** for *Krauncha Pakshigalu* (collection of short stories).
3. **2001: Satyakama Award** for *Anmachchiyemba Nenapu* (collection of short stories).
4. **1998: Danachintamani Attimabbe Award:** Govt. of Karnataka, for lifetime Achievement.
5. **1998: Attimabbe Prashasti:** (Attimabbe Pratishihana): lifetime achievement.
6. **1997: Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Award:** for *Mallinathana Dhyana* (Column Writing).
7. **1997: Katha Award:** for *Anmachchiyemba Nenapu* (collection of short stories).
8. **1994: Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Award:** for *Aidu Makkala Naatakagalu* (plays).
9. **1994: M. K. Indira Award:** for *Asprashyaru* (Novel).
10. **1994: Anupama Award:** for *Samaja Shastrajnyeya Tipanni* (collection of short stories).
11. **1994: Katha Award:** for the story "Hagalu Geechida Nenta".
12. **1992: Vardhamana Udayonmukha Prashasti:** for *Gola* (collection of short stories).
13. **1992: Gita Desai Datti Nidhi Prashasti:** for *Antarangada Putagalu* (short stories).
14. **1985:**for *Bindu Bindige* (Poetry collection).

CHRONOLOGY OF IMPORTANT EVENTS:

- 1945 :** Born in Kundapur, Coastal Karnataka.
- 1961 :** First story, published in *Karmaveera* (Kannada weekly).
- 1967 :** Bachelor of Commerce.
- 1968 :** Marriage with K. L. Shrinivasa Murthy of Shimoga.
- 1986 & 1989 :** All India Writers Conference held in Bharath Bhavan, Bhopal.
- 1992 :** Literary Seminar conducted by "Katha" in Delhi.
- 1997 :** Eduthachan Commemoration Seminar at Trichur.
- 1999 :** Member of the Quality Films Selection panel.
- 2001 :** National Seminar conducted by 'Anveshi', Women's organization, in Hyderabad.
- 2003 :** All India Writer's conference held in New York conducted by Central Sahitya Academy, Bharatheeya Vidya Bhavan.
- 2005 :** Member, Karnataka Sahitya Academy.
- 2007 :** Southern Asian Women Writers Conference held by Women's World in. In New Delhi.
- 2009 :** Chief guest in the *Vasanthotsava* of WASHINGTON KANNADA SAHITYA RANGA, in Washington D.C.
- 2010 :** President for the Three- day Literary Conference, 'ALVA'S NUDI SIRI-2010' in Moodabidare (DK).



Receiving Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award for her short story collection 'Krauncha Pakshigalu' from Akademi President Dr. Sunil Gangopadhyay. Feb. 2010.