

Tamil works must be translated into European languages as well

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Indran, winner of Sahitya Akademi Award for Translation. Photo: G. Moorthy | Photo Credit: [G Moorthy](#)

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A Puducherry-born writer, translator and art critic, **Indran** (B.G. Rajendran), has won the Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize for 2011. He received the award for his translation of Oriya poetry (Ethara Gaan Se by Dr Manorama Biswal Mohapatra) in Tamil, titled Paravaikal Oruvaelai Thoongi Poiyrukkalaam.

Indran, now based in Chennai, has published more than 25 books in Tamil and English, which include eight collections of poetry, nine books of translations and nine books of art criticism. Indran's landmark translation of Black writings into Tamil 'Araikul Vandha Africa Vaanam' (1982) greatly influenced Tamil writing in the 1980s. His poetry collection, 'Syllables of Silence,' 'Acrylic Moon,' Muppattai Nagaram, Saambal Vaarthaigal, Minthughal Parappu, and Anniyan were acclaimed by many.

Indran has made significant contributions in the Tamil cultural milieu. Most of his writings discuss aesthetics in literature, art and cinema. He has written articles in major English dailies and journals of art and aesthetics. He has produced documentary films, The Sculptural Energy, and A dialogue with painting.

He has also translated Indian writing in English, Dalit writing from Kannada, Marathi and Gujarati, Adivasi poetry and third world literature into Tamil. With a travel grant from the Association of British Scholars and British Council, Chennai, he went to the UK to study Indian art object collections in British museums. He has participated in a international poetry meet in Dublin, Ireland.

He has curated many art shows and one such significant event was an art exhibition during the unveiling of the 133-foot-high statue of Tamil didactic scholar Thiruvalluvar in Kanyakumari. The highlight of the exhibition being participation of 133 painters showcasing as many paintings reflecting the 133 couplets of Thirukkural. The event was organized by the Department of Culture of Tamil Nadu government.

His translation of Sangam novel of K.Chinnappa Bharathi in French will be released during the World Conference on Tamil Literature to be held in Paris. At the conference, his translation of Thirukkural in French and English will also be released. His favourite authors include Jean Paul Sartre, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, besides Tamil writer Joseph Thaninayagam.

During his recent visit to Madurai to deliver a talk, he found time to interact with **D. Karthikeyan**.

On Dalit literature's connection to Black Literature?

The world of Dalit literature could well be viewed through the lens of black literature. In fact Afro-American literature was the springboard for Dalit literature. The lower-middle class among Dalits was emerging in the Indian context in the 70s and 80s and it was during this time that Dalit literature was slowly surfacing out, mostly of autobiographical and self-narrative genre, like what happened in the US during the Harlem Renaissance.

After the end of slavery, the emancipated African-Americans began to strive for civic participation, political equality and economic and cultural self-determination. Blacks in the south migrated to northern parts. They were then an emerging middle class there and, among other places, started settling down in a deserted place called Harlem which was thickly populated and had Black churches, black entertainment spots, pubs, and night clubs.

Many white intellectuals were attracted towards this cultural ensemble and were visiting Harlem to entertain themselves during which time a very good dialogue started there between white intellectuals and black intellectuals who were emerging then. It was when Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes and Ralph

Ellison and others came into existence. A similar thing happened in India in the 1970s, but it still has a long way to go.

On transformation of Dalit narratives of pain into narratives of resistance

If you look at Dr. B.R.Ambedkar's writings, they were not only voices of pain and suffering but it was also a voice of protest and that legacy was brought out into Tamil Dalit literature. However Dalit writings in Tamil are still lingering around the sufferings and protest voice, but black writing has crossed that stage with many writers such as Toni Morrison and Wole Soyinka.

Ralph Ellison used to tell that first a person should prove to be a writer and then only the question of whether he is a Black or White comes. Such a voice of confidence is still unheard of in Dalit literature.

On anthologies of Tamil Dalit writing by major publishing houses

The recent anthologies of Tamil Dalit literature brought out by two major publishers, Penguin and OUP, is really a welcome one. Like how the major publishers in the US came forward to bring anthologies on Black Literature, it is a good beginning. However, there is a glitch as there are historical distortions and a kind of bias which should be taken care of by editors.

Aime Cesaire and Leopold Sedar Senghor, despite the fact that they are Black French writers and promoters of Negritude, are considered among the finest of French writers. Dalit writers in Tamil should live up to the level of producing texts that are of high literary value.

On the significance of winning Sahitya Akademi award and his future plans

I consider myself a serious reader in a corner. Whenever I come across an inspiring text — whether it is prose poetry or fiction — I immediately resort to share it with fellow writers and I involve myself in the activity of translation.

When I receive an award for such a translation I feel happy that it's an honour given to original authors in other languages who inspired me to translate them. I consider this as honour for not me but for my translation.

In the area of translation with particular reference to Tamil, I think we are always conditioned to think of translating works of other languages into native Tamil. Sparingly we think of translating Tamil works of literature in languages other than English because of our colonial legacy. We never think of translating

works in Tamil to French, German, Danish and Spanish languages. This trend should be reversed.