

Classic Poetry Series

**Vaidehi
- poems -**

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Vaidehi(12 February 1945 -)

Janaki Srinivasa Murthy (Kannada: ಜನಕಿ ಸ್ರೀನಿವಾಸ ಮುರ್ತಿ), popularly known by her pen name as Vaidehi (Kannada: ವೈದೇಹಿ) is a well-known writer of modern Kannada language fiction. Vaidehi is one of the most successful woman writer in Kannada and winner of many prestigious national and state level literary awards. She has won the Central Sahitya Akademi Award for her collection of short stories, Krauncha Pakshigalu in 2009.

Early Life

Vaidehi was born on February 12, 1945 to A.V.L Hebbar and Mahalakshmi in Kundapur taluk of Udupi district, Karnataka. She belongs to Kota Brahmin community, a distinct Kannada community mainly found in Kundapur. She grown up in very large family. she lived in a large traditional Brahmin house with many children's, servants, guests and family friends. Her father, r, is a lawyer and her mother was a second wife of a Hebbar and focal point of the family. Vaidehi speaks a dialect of Kannada, called Kundapur Kannada and uses this dialect in her works. Vaidehi's birth name is Vasanti. the pen-name Vaidehi was given by a Kannada weekly magazine Sudha, she sent a story to Sudha magazine for publishing, but few days later she sent a letter to Sudha weekly magazine editor requesting not to publish the story, as it was a real life story; however, the editor went ahead and published the story by changing her name to Vaidehi, thereafter she become popular and known by name Vaidehi. She did her (Bachelors of Commerce) in Bhandarkar's college, Kundapur.

Married Life

Vaidehi was married to K. L. Srinivasa Murthy at the age of 23. they have two daughters Nayana Kashyap (née Nayana Murthy) and Pallavi Rao (née Pallavi Murthy). after marriage Vaidehi changed her name to Janaki Srinivasa Murthy and went to Shimoga leaving her native place Kundapur. later they moved to Udupi and then to Manipal. Vaidehi currently lives in Manipal.

Vaidehi daughter Nayana Kashyap is a translator, Kannada writer and English teacher. Nayana has translated many of the Vaidehi's works into English, including five of Vaidehi's stories. she has translated Vaidehi Kannada novel Jatre into English as A Temple-Fair. A Temple Fair was one of the novel included in Five Novellas by Women which was published by Oxford University Press. Nayana's first collection of poetry in Kannada is Mettila Haadi, she received Attimabbe Pratishthana Award and Kodagina Gowramma Award in 2005 by

Kodagu Kannada Sahitya Parishat for her collection of poetry Mettila Haadi. she also translated Pablo Neruda's memoirs as "Nenapu Tereda Kavimana" which has been published by Moulya Prakashana, Karkala. Nayana received M.A and degrees and she works as English lecturer in Field Marshal ppa College, Madikeri. she now lives in Madikeri.

Awards

Vaidehi has won numerous awards for her writings in Kannada.

Sahitya Akademi Award in 2009 by Government of India for her collection of story stories Krouncha Pakshigalu

Geetha Desai Datti Nidhi by Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha in 1985 for her collection of short stories Antharangada Putagalu and in 1992 for her collection of poems Bindu Bindige

Vardhamana Udayonmukha Award in 1992 by Vardhamana Prashasti Peetha, Mudabidire for her collection of short stories Gola

Katha Award by Katha Organisation, New Delhi in 1992 for her collection of short stories Hagalu Geechida Nenta and in 1997 for her collection of short stories Ammacchiyemba Nenapu

Anupama Award in 1993 for her collection of short stories Samaja Shastrajneya Tippanige

Karnataka State Sahitya Akademi Award in 1993 by Government of Karnataka for her Five children's dramas

Karnataka State Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998 by Government of Karnataka for her collection of essays Mallinathana Dhyana

Sahtya Kama Award for her collections of short stories Ammachi Yemba Nenapu

Sadodita Award in 2001 by Shashwathi Trust

Sudha Weekly's Award for her novel Aprushyaru

Daana Chintamani Attimabbe Award by Government of Karnataka

Attimabbe Award by Attimabbe Pratishtan

A Song For Shiva As She Gives Him A Bath

Having sprinkled some holy water
over the head of the tramp
of the three worlds
Gowri took Shiva to his bath.

Seating the three-eyed one
lovingly on a tripod,
seemingly concerned at his fatigue
at having travelled the three worlds,
she flicked off a speck of dust.
Holding back her grief,
although she knew the street
and the house from which the dust had come,
she took Nataraja to his bath.
"How was the chase?" she asked pointedly.

"Here, a pot of water for Ganga's birth,
Here, one for the Manikarnika pool,
A pot each for every one of the rivers
you have been in, and here, the last one,
filled with my perennial rage. . . ."

When a teardropp fell
to mix with water making it boiling hot,
Shiva cried out, breaking into a sweat,
"What do you think I am?
When you aren't there, I'm a monk, remember,"
"Where do I figure in your list of girls,
O God, to hear this?" she asked and pinched him
gently, washing him.

Scrubbing the monk's body of ash,
she looked at him. Gently rubbing him dry,
she offered him the cushion of her thighs
and whispered an appeal. "O my Shiva,
recall all the rivers you have known
and sleep, my lord."

Under the silken words

the hunter's heart,
having conquered the world's poison,
was like a light pleasure-boat,
and the boat took him away,
far far away, from Gowri.

It was nothing new, this marvel
of Shiva being there
and not being there.
She sat without fretting, controlling
her anguish. Though tender,
our Gowri is a proud, proud girl.

When Ishwara the monk comes back
from his wanderings,
Gowri calls him for his bath.
Rubbing his body with medicinal oil
and washing the evil eyes that have fallen upon him
she gives the fever-wracked tramp
a decoction of kiratha twigs.

[From: Bindu Bindige
Publisher: Akshara Prakashana, Sagar, 1990]

Vaidehi

My Mother's Sari

There, in the wooden box
my mother's sari, enveloped in white muslin,
with mothballs.

Her sense of order is in each one
of its folds,
and the press of her palm.
A universe of ironing lies beneath the pillow.
Tiny packets of camphor, incense and
fragrant roots –
her perfume.

My mother's sari's tucked-in eagerness
coupled with the jingling of bangles
is the zest to get down to work.

Lines running across the broad pallu,
the unbroken bridges of an upright life,
keeping all evil at bay –
a cane to reprove naughty children.

Folds tucked into a knot,
a mysterious treasure-house of meanings,
the pretty yellow Madhura sari
with its green border of blooms . . .
. . . that queen was perhaps like my mother.

Endless is my mother's sari –
the more I wrap it around me, the more
it grows.
I remember becoming a midget once
trying to measure it,
trying to drape it.

My mother's sari –
the latex of mango and cashew,
a heaven of Ranja, Kepala and Suragi
golden wheat beads auguring
the New Year Kani,

the old rolling over each year
to yield a new import.

My mother's sari,
with stars all over its body,
shields those in distress
from rain or shine,
it glows uniquely in the darkness.

My mother's sari
of voile or handloom,
with a small dream of silk
When the dream came true,
Father was no more.
She wears it now
but the dream is gone.

There! My mother's old, Udupi weaver's sari
looks at me from where it hangs.
I unfold it and envelope myself in it
uttering with a long sigh
the word 'Amma' –
a word that remains forever fresh,
however worn with use.

[Note: Original from Parijatha;
Publisher: Christ College Kannada Sangha,
Bengaluru, 1999

Note: Translation: Dr. Ramachandra Sharma and
Ahalya Ballal, 2009]

Vaidehi

She, He And Language

She said, hunger, thirst.
He said, eat well, drink.
She wept.
He smiled.

The other day he said, window,
not door as she'd imagined.
Wall, he said.
She thought it was space –
was it because all is revealed
when a wall breaks?

She prepared his favourite payasam
What he ate was rayatham.

Why is everything so topsy-turvy?

Was there no air between them,
and so no waves either?
Heads down, words in water
send out a forlorn cry.

It was then that suicide was mentioned.
What did he say?
He found it funny, didn't he?

It happens sometimes.
The sea isn't the sea.
What one assumes to be the shore
is the mere hump of fish-back.

You say something
Another meaning unfolds.
The banter of words, you know.

She: Be honest and tell me,
Which one of us is more insane?
He: What did you say?
Which one wishes to die first?

She: It's hot. Shall I open the window for some air?

He: What? Hunger, thirst?

[From: Parijatha

Publisher: Christ College Kannada Sangha, Bengaluru, 1999]

Vaidehi

Tell Me, You Who Know

Tell me,
you who know of poetry –
I know nothing of it
but I know what rasam is.

Do you think it's a mere nothing?
It calls for a blend
of the principles of water,
aroma and essence –
a tempered state reached after simmering . . .
Thus . . .

There it was in the corner,
a container with rasam,
on a seemingly dead and ash-covered
coalfire, waiting and waiting . . .
Does it matter that it waits?

In the great durbar of meat dishes
seasoned with spices that sparkled,
of servers who danced as they walked,
of laughter and chatter,
it had waited, since morning,
the clear rasam on a seemingly dead
coalfire, simmering,
still fresh even at night.

You who know all about poetry,
tell me,
do you know what rasam is?
Forgive me,
I don't know any poetry.

[From: Bindu Bindige
Publisher: Akshara Prakashana, Sagara, 1990]

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