

Spotlight on Women in Translation:
Fragrance of the Womb: 3 Women Poets
Translated from the Tamil by Thila Varghese



Today, we continue NTM's established tradition of featuring the work of women authors and translators from around the world with these **3 new poems by 3 women poets from India translated from Tamil by another woman, Thila Varghese**. We fell in love with these poems that evoke the scent of womanhood with a strong feminist perspective.

We'd love to hear from you! Let us know how you like our posts, or attend, share, and spread the word about our readings. Open your heart to the beauty of the world and celebrate its cultures and voices, using **#TranslationMonth**. Happy National Translation Month and happy reading!

—*Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman*

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Fragrance of the Womb *By Kanimozhi Karunanidhi*

It is not sandalwood.
It's an aroma that is quite unlike musk
or the fragrant perfumes
sold in pretty bottles these days.
At a very young age,
when I used to go to sleep
hugging her tightly,
her aroma would gently fill my nostrils.
As I wandered about the house
wrapping myself in the saree
she had cast off,
I would feel as if I had smeared myself
with her aroma;
like the earthy smell of the first rain,
my mother's aroma
would kindle my desire to fill my lungs
with it to the brim.
The aroma, like a panacea,
would heal many an injury incurred elsewhere,
and would protect me as I slept
resting my head on her lap.
Who she is encompasses that also.
Even when the walls of the mind
that have risen up high
don't let me hug her tight,
it still passes me by
softly stroking me like a petal
Although I've moved far away
following the trail of my needs,
I still yearn to sprinkle her womb's aroma,
which I alone can grasp,
abundantly all around my house,
curl up and go to sleep!

Lullaby

By Sakthi Jothi

You
have never been free
from the many reasons
that cause me distress.

Perhaps
we have never realized this,
and you are also unaware of it.

When we look at the sky,
it would either be blue
or have black smeared all over,
and the stars that sparkle like tinsels
would remind me
of your eyes or mine.

When I want to be myself,
you torment me.

You insist that I can't be myself.

You drift away from me,
knowing that I can't bear
being separated from you
even for a few seconds.

You walk,
and I panic thinking
that your feet will get sores.

You swallow whatever
you lay your hands on,
and I worry
that you'll suffer from hiccups.

You see,
even today,
you are sleeping somewhere afar;
I am fanning here
in order for
this breeze
to put you to sleep.

Silence

By S. Vijayalakshmi

I wrapped myself
using silence
as a long blanket.

Silence would extend its hand
as payback
to the gruesome face
that found pleasure
in poking into and scratching at
the happiness lingering within me.

When curses and anger
surge within me,
silence would suppress them with ease.

In response to all the critical remarks
crowding in on me,
I served silence with a smile.

My silence is the mirror
that would show them all,
each and every one,
their own respective faces.

About the poets and translator



Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, author of the original Tamil poem, *Karuvarai Vaasanai (Fragrance of the Womb)*

An advocate for women's empowerment, **Kanimozhi Karunanidhi** is the author of three books of poetry and two collections of essays in Tamil. She has also authored the script for a Tamil dance drama production entitled *Silappathikaram, A Woman of Substance* based on a Sangam Tamil epic of the same name. A former sub-editor of *The Hindu* (English edition of the Indian newspaper) and features editor of *Thamizh Murasu* (Singapore-based Tamil newspaper), Kanimozhi Karunanidhi is currently serving as a Member of Parliament in India.

Publication information: *Karuvarai Vaasanai (Fragrance of the Womb)* by Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, from *Karuvarai Vaasanai* (V.O.C. Noolagam, Chennai, India, 1995).

Sakthi Jothi, author of the original Tamil poem *Thaalaatu (Lullaby)*



A social worker by occupation, **Sakthi Jothi** is the author of eleven books of poetry and two collections of essays and a recipient of numerous awards. She is the founder of Sri Sakthi Social, Economic and Educational Welfare Trust that focuses on empowering rural women through sustainable socio-economic development and educational programmes. Sakthi Jothi had previously served as a member of the Indo-China Goodwill Team to promote social welfare through bilateral initiatives.

Publication information: *Thaalaatu (Lullaby)* by Sakthi Jothi, from *Kadalodu Isaiththal*, (Uyirezhuthu Publishers, Tiruchirappalli, India, 2009)



S. Vijayalakshmi, author of the original Tamil poem *Mounam (Silence)*

A teacher by profession, **S. Vijayalakshmi** is actively engaged in the Tamil literary field, penning poetry and articles on literary and social issues. She has contributed poems and essays to several mainstream and alternate Tamil magazines and has to her credit four published books of poetry, one book of short stories, and two collections of essays. An ardent feminist, Vijayalakshmi continues to participate in literary and social forums that explore the place of women in society.

Publication information: *Mounam (Silence)* by S. Vijayalakshmi, from *Peruvelipenn* (Mitra Arts & Creations Pvt. Ltd, Chennai, India, 2007)

Translator Thila Varghese lives in Canada.