



CENTRE FOR MEDIA AND CULTURAL STUDIES
Tata Institute of Social Sciences

SheWrite Presskit

SheWrite

DVCAM, 55 mins, Tamil with English subtitles, 2005
Directed by Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar



SheWrite weaves together the narratives and work of four Tamil women poets. **Salma** negotiates subversive expression within the tightly circumscribed space allotted to a woman in the small town of Thuvankurichi. She is able to defy and transcend family proscriptions on writing to become a significant voice questioning patriarchal mores in a powerful yet gentle way. For **Kuttirevathi**, a Siddha doctor and researcher based in Chennai, solitude is a crucial creative space from where her work resonates, speaking not just for herself but also for other women who are struggling to find a voice. Her anthology entitled *Breasts* (2003) became a controversial work that elicited hate mail, obscene calls and threats. The fact that a number of women poets are resisting patriarchy and exploring themes such as desire and sexuality in their creative work been virulently opposed by some Tamil film lyricists, who have gone on record with threats of death and violence. This has been resisted by a group of poets and other artists who have formed a collective called **Anangu** (Woman), which is attempting to expand the subversive creative spaces available to women writers and poets, across Tamil Nadu. **Malathy Maitri**, who lives in Pondicherry, is a social activist. She is a founder member of Anangu. Her poems attempt to explore and express feminine power and spaces. **Sukirtharani**, a school teacher in Lalapet, writes of desire and longing, celebrating the body in a way that affirms feminine empowerment and a rejection of male-centred discourse. The film traverses these diverse modes of resistance, through images and sounds that evoke the universal experiences of pain, anger, desire and transcendence.



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On the Making of the Film

The film has been made as a collaborative project with the poets, giving each one the space to present themselves and their work. It has been made on a shoestring budget. The directors have researched, scripted, shot and edited the film, done production management, graphics and special effects as well as the sound mixing and subtitles. It has been a mutually enriching experience, for the protagonists and the directors. The protagonists regard the film as a useful device in their struggle to open up spaces for creative feminine discourse in Tamil Nadu. The directors have attempted to explore the very different, yet similar ways in which the protagonists challenge the dominant discourse, through the use of image and sound, in non-indexical, sometimes playful modes that offer the viewers spaces for their own interpretations. A Tamil version of the film is also being made.

Awards:

Best Documentary award at Muestra del IV Festival Tres Continentes del Documental (IV Three Continents International Festival of Documentaries) 2005, Venezuela

1st prize for Sound Design and 2nd prize for Cinematography, Indian Documentary Producers Association Awards, 2006

Festival Selection:

- 12th Festival Internazionale Cinema Delle Donne (12th International Women's Film Festival), Turin, 2005
- Film South Asia, Kathmandu 2005
- Platforma 2005, Athens
- Karafilm Festival 2005, Karachi, Pakistan
- Madurai Film Festival 2005, Madurai, India
- Aurat/Woman Indian Film Festival, Oberlin, 2005
- Ethnographic Film Festival of Montreal, Canada, 2006
- Vibgyor Film Festival, Trichur, India, 2006
- IAWRT Festival, New Delhi, 2006
- Bollywood and Beyond, 3rd Indian Film Festival, Stuttgart, 2006
- 9th EthnoFilmfest, Berlin, 2006

Television acquisition by YLE, Finland



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Interview Translation

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Assisted by

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Audio Engineers

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Editing, Audio Mixing and Subtitles

K.P. Jayasankar

Anjali Monteiro

Location Sound

Elangovan R.

Camera and Graphics

K. P. Jayasankar

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Anjali Monteiro

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About the Directors

Anjali Monteiro is Professor, and K.P. Jayasankar is Professor and Chair, Centre for Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Monteiro has a Masters degree in Economics and a Ph.D. in Sociology. Jayasankar has an M.A. in German language and a Ph.D. in Humanities and Social Sciences. Both of them are involved in media production, teaching and research. Jointly they have won thirteen national and international awards for their films. These include the Prix Futura Berlin 1995 Asia Prize for **Identity- The Construction of Selfhood** and a Special Mention of the Jury at MIFF `96 for **Kahankar: Ahankar**, the Certificate of Merit at MIFF `98 and Best Innovation, Astra Film Festival 1998, Sibiu, Romania for **YCP 1997**, the Second Prize for **Saacha** at the New Delhi Video Forum 2001 and the Best Documentary Award at the IV Three Continents International Festival of Documentaries) 2005, Venezuela, for **SheWrite**.

They have several papers in the area of media and cultural studies and have contributed to scholarly journals such as **Cultural Studies**. They are both recipients of the Howard Thomas Memorial Fellowship in Media Studies, and have been attached to Goldsmith's College, London and the University of Western Sydney. They also serve as visiting faculty to several leading media and design institutions across India, such as Asian College of Journalism, Chennai, National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad and University of Hyderabad and Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai.

Some relevant Links:

<http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/mp/2002/10/07/stories/2002100700770300.htm>

<http://www.screenindia.com/20020315/rtoly.html>

<http://www.indianexpress.com/ie/daily/20010404/ien04027.html>

<http://www.indianexpress.com/ie/daily/19980417/10750334.html>



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Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar

Video-biography

Pani Panchayat

1986, U-matic (PAL), 50 mins.

Tanda

A Document on the Denotified Tribes in Maharashtra

1988, U-matic (PAL), Part I and II, 60 mins

The Fifth Schedule

1988, U-matic (PAL), Part I & II, 44 mins

Lage Jiva Ghar Ghar A Document on Women and Shelter

1990, U-matic (PAL), 44 mins.

From the Diary of a Genetic Counsellor

1991, U-matic (PAL), 30 mins.

Best Programme Award in the Open\General category at the Fifth UGC Country-wide Classroom Video Festival 1992

Magra Mewar Vikas Sanstha

1991, U-matic/(PAL), 68 mins.

One Hundred Years Of Drought

1993, U-matic (PAL), 21 mins.

Sudha Police Station Gayi Thi: On the Demystification of Police Procedures for Women

1992, U-matic (PAL), 16 mins.

Odhni: A Collective Exploration Of Ourselves, Our Bodies

1993, U-matic(PAL), Col., 23 mins.

2nd prize in the Health and Population category at the International Video Festival, Thiruvananthapuram, Sept. 1995.

The Plot Thickens...

1993, U-matic (PAL), 14 min.

First Prize and the Award for Individual Technical Excellence in Editing at the Sixth UGC Country-wide Classroom Video Festival 1993, Calcutta.

Identity The Construction of Selfhood

1994, U-matic(PAL), 20 mins.

Prix Futura Berlin 1995, Asia Prize for the best Asian entry in the TV documentary section

2nd prize in the Education and Literacy category at the International Video Festival, Thiruvananthapuram, Sept. 1995.

Selected for the following festivals:

13th World Wide Video Festival, April 1995.

Social Communication Cinema Festival, Calcutta, 2002



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Punarvasan

A Document on Reconstruction in Post-earthquake Marathwada
1995, U-matic(PAL), 58 mins.

Kahankar : Ahankar (Story Maker : Story Taker)

1995, U-matic (PAL), 38 mins.
Special Mention of the Jury, Videovista, Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF)
1996. Selected for the following festivals:
Astra Festival of Anthropological Documentary Film, Sibiu, Romania, 1996
14th Worldwide Video Festival, The Hague 1996
Nordic Anthropological Film Association Festival and Conference, Bergen 1996
South Asian Film Festival, Kathmandu, 1997
Prakriti 1997, Hyderabad

YCP 1997

1997, U-matic (PAL), 43 mins
Certificate of Merit, Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF)1998 and the Jury's
Award for Best Innovation, Astra Festival of Anthropological Documentary Film, Sibiu,
Romania, 1998.
Selected for the following festivals:
Astra Festival of Anthropological Documentary Film, Sibiu, Romania, 1998
Sakshi Film Festival, Bangalore 1998
Dhaka Film Festival 1999
6th International Festival of Ethnographic Film, Royal Anthropological Institute, London,
1998
New Delhi Video Festival, 1999
Munich International Film Festival 1999
Himal South Asia Documentary Film Festival 1999
Parnu Film Festival, Estonia, 2002
Social Communication Cinema Festival, Calcutta, 2002

The Striders

U-matic (PAL), Col., 7 mins, 1997
Selected for the following festivals:
15th Worldwide Video Festival, The Hague 1997

Water to the People

Towards Community Participation in Rural Drinking Water Schemes
U-matic (PAL), Col., 34mins., English, Marathi, 1998

Jungle Tales

Surviving Development in Uttara Kannada
Beta, 52 mins., English, 1999
Selected for the following festivals:
Prakriti, 1999
Mumbai International Film Festival, 2000



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Self Representation

DV, 5 mins, English, 2000

Saacha (The Loom)

DV, 49 mins., English, 2001

Second Prize, New Delhi Video Forum, 2001.

Selected for the following festivals:

Kalaghoda Film Festival, Mumbai, 2001

People's Film Fest, Bangalore, 2001

Film South Asia (FSA), Kathmandu, 2001

Travelling FSA 2001

Chingari, Wisconsin-Madison, 2001

Nottam, Kerala, 2001

Lahore Moving Images, 2002

Social Communication Cinema Festival, Calcutta, 2002

Mumbai International Film Festival, 2002

Reconstructing Communities

DV, 52 mins, Part I & II, English, 2002

Naata (The Bond)

DV, 45 mins., English, 2003

Selected for the following festivals:

- Film South Asia 2003, Kathmandu
- Travelling Film South Asia, 2003-4
- River to River Film Festival 2003, Florence
- The First and the Last Experimental Film Festival 2003, Sydney
- World Social Forum Film Festival 2004, Mumbai
- Vikalp-Films For Freedom 2004, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai and New Delhi
- Social Communication Cinema Conference and Festival, Kolkata, 2004
- Goettingen International Film Festival 2004, Goettingen, Germany
- II International Visual Anthropology Festival and Conference, Moscow, 2004
- Zanzibar International Film Festival 2004, Tanzania
- The Fourth Annual Festival of Visual Culture 2004, Joensuu, Finland
- 8th Ismailia International Festival for Documentary & Short Films 2004, Egypt
- International Film Festival of Human Rights of Spain 2004 at Barcelona, Madrid, Bilbao, Girona and Vinaroz
- Matteela Film Festival '04, Lahore
- 7th International Festival of Documentary Film & Visual Anthropology - Astra Filmfest 2004, Sibiu, Romania
- Platforma '04, Athens, Greece
- The 8th Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin, 2004
- 1st Annual International Human Rights Film Forum, Budapest, Hungary 2004
- South Asian International Film Festival, New York, 2004
- 3rd Forum for Visual Anthropology 2005, Geneva



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- CRONOGRAF- International Documentary Film Festival, Chisinau, Moldova
- Signs 2005, Festival of Documentaries and Short Features, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala
- 9th RAI International Festival of Ethnographic Film 2005, Oxford

Telecast:

YLE Finnish Television Network, Finland

Mumbai

DVCam, 10 Mins, English, 2004

Selected for the following festivals:

Zebra International Poetry Festival, Berlin, 2004

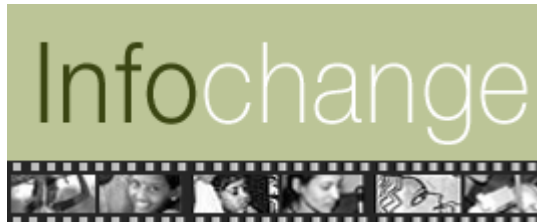
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DVCam, 55 mins, Tamil and English, 2005



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InfoChange News & Features, August 2005

SheWrite (Tamil, with English subtitles) 55 mins, 2005

<http://www.infochangeindia.org/documentary44.jsp>

This is a film that speaks richly and in many layers, both in its words and in its images about poetry, about space and about freedom of expression. Following a 2003 story in *Tehelka* that talked about women poets in Tamil Nadu being vilified by males because they wrote “obscenely”, the film makers track down the group called *Anangu* (“woman”) and speak to its members, some of whom have been criticized with such violence by fellow writers and critics. The violence of the critique must be mentioned: Palani Bharati and Snehan, themselves writers of lyrics for film and television, asked that these women be burned and a certain Abdul Rehman asked readers to slap them if they met them. Their crime: writing about their bodies, about their emotions and about sex and sexuality without shame and without euphemism.

The four poets that the film focuses on are all young women, Salma, Kuttirevathi, Malathy Maitri and Sukirtharani. One is married, with children, one has a daughter, the other two are apparently single, but all of them speak about the space that writing affords them as women. Each of them also speaks of the freedoms of girlhood that are snatched away as we get to be teenagers. Salma says that while we can accept these restrictions in our lives, we cannot in our writing, for “writing has many more spaces”.

The poetry these women write is not comfortable or easy to digest. There is anger and bitterness, even as they claim the inner and outer spaces of their bodies for themselves. But what is far more astounding than the strength and ease of their poetic voices is what they say to the camera. Clearly and without a flicker of hesitation, they speak of their experience and expression as having been dominated by patriarchy and male-centred language. They are also sure that what they articulate in their poems, even though it arises from their own lives, speaks not simply to, but for other women. As Kuttirevathi says, “I write the voices of other women...(the poetry) belongs to all women who have not written.” These are not women who grew up in urban centres, exposed to various politicised and articulated feminisms and self-conscious women’s writing, or to growing feminist (or simply female) solidarity. Their words speak with absolute



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integrity and one cannot doubt the universality of women's experience and the way it colours our expressions of how and where we are located in the world around us. Eve Ensler, the self-celebrating author of *The Vagina Monologues*, would find her material completely up-staged here. The writers that form *Anangu* go well beyond the specificity of their body parts to mirror and reflect upon a woman's experience more holistically and with far greater depth than the borrowed voices that Ensler showcases.

As much as *SheWrite* focuses on the poetry of the four women, we also see them in the wholeness of their lives: arguing with their mothers about marriage, cooking for their families, playing with their children and chatting with friends and, in Salma's case, running the local *panchayat*. The film reminds us that as much as they are poets, they are women, with multiple social relationships that create multiple, simultaneous identities.

Monteiro and Jayasankar have extended themselves in this film, working away from an obvious correspondence between word and image and then, breaking down the materiality of the image itself. These are new and exciting areas in "documentary", where filmmakers attempt to resolve issues of form and content in increasingly defiant and interesting ways. *SheWrite* is an excellent contribution to the growing documentation of women's experiences and also to expanding the boundaries of non-fiction film.

For more information, contact: Unit for Media and Communication, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai 400 088. Phone: 022 25563290
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Review

TimeOut Mumbai, July 1-14, 2005, page 52

Dual Purpose

Nandini Ramnath meets Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar, who've made a new docu, SheWrite.

Even in the worst weather conditions, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences campus, with its thick trees, rolling corridors and staff rooms with French windows, looks very inviting. In the monsoon, TISS Deonar looks like an enchanted forest, and maybe it's the romance in the raindrops that makes filmmaker Anjali Monteiro suggest that we photograph her and her working partner and husband, K. P. Jayasankar, under an umbrella.

Just what we'd wanted, but were too deferential to ask. Monteiro and Jayasankar teach media and communication at TISS and have been making documentaries together for 19 years. They married in 1989 and have made over 25 films. Neither of them has made a film individually. They've won praise and a truckful of awards for films like *Identity – The Construction of Selfhood and Kahankar:Ahankar*. Their absorbing new film, *SheWrite*, premieres at the Vikalp Film Club.

"Jayasankar is an artist, his forte is visualisation," She says. He cuts in: "One of us is a left brain and the other is a right brain." They laugh heartily, and Monteiro continues. "I do a lot of the interviews and the writing, the people management." He adds, "We've spent so many years together, there's no difference between personal life and work at all."

In their new collaboration, four women poets open their hearts, bare their souls and set themselves up for slanderous rebuke and threats of violence from their male compatriots. The film grew out of a report in the *Tehelkaweekly*. Two Tamil film lyricists were getting outraged at the "vulgar" and sexually frank poems that were flowing out of the pens and hearts of modern women poets. The poems spoke of bodies, breasts, bedrooms; of womanhood, patriarchy and loneliness. "If you see them on the road, slap them," one of the men said. The other lyricist expressed his desire to "kill them" if he ever met them. The women went into a huddle and emerged as a team: they formed Anangu, a collective of poets.

SheWrite meets four of these poets – Salma, Malathy Maitri, Kuttirevathi and Sukirtharani, each distinct in personal history and style, yet each with a heard-before story of oppression and eventual resolution. "We were very excited by the



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powerful work coming out of a grassroots context,” says Monteiro. The filmmakers scripted each of the stories separately instead of mashing them together, so that each woman gets the chance to leave a lasting impression.

The word “SheWrite” has the same intent and agenda as “herstory”. Both the words imply that women’s experiences and sexual lives have been silenced for decades and need voicing.

“There were commonalties among the four women, but there were also differences. Each has her own style of negotiating relationship of power,” says Monteiro. The fact that the women express themselves in Tamil adds a layer of marginality. “These women are also writers in regional languages. We are so overwhelmed by Indo-Anglian writing, we don’t hear voices from the so-called backwaters,” Jayasankar says. “Also, there is an intolerance of any mode of speaking up. You can’t even smoke in a film any more! In that context, the work of the poets becomes more significant.”



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THE HINDU

<http://www.hindu.com/fr/2005/08/19/stories/2005081903000400.htm>

Our body, our space

BAGESHREE S.

SheWrite talks about four Tamil women writers who have dared to speak out boldly and have fought for their right to do so

FIGHTING MINDSETS Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar's film is inspired by women who refuse to be reined in

Can you name the one "object" that has been tirelessly described down the ages in creative writings of all genres — from ancient epics to the latest film song? Of course, anyone can. After all you need nothing more than plain commonsense to know that it's a woman's body.

Used as they may be to this kind of endless "exposure", why do women themselves feel ashamed and even "dirty" about standing in front of a mirror and facing their own bodies? And when a rare woman dares to shed inhibitions and speaks openly about her body and asserts that it is her "own space", why is she instantly dubbed shameless, bad and even a blot on our "pure" culture?

These were, quite predictably, the charges hurled when a few Tamil women writers wrote about things forbidden — their own bodies, their own spaces. Brickbats, interestingly, came from male writers who were famous for their double entendre-loaded lyrics in Tamil films. One of them went to the extent of urging people: "If you see them on the road, slap them."

But these women were in no mood to show the other cheek. Those who were directly under attack and others who believed women have the right to speak about themselves came together to form a forum called Anangu (meaning "women") which has since then fought patriarchal mindsets and their ugly manifestations.

It was a report in *Tehelka* on this controversy that got documentary filmmaker couple Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar interested in the issue. Their film *SheWrite* brings together vignettes from the lives and works of four women writers involved in the controversy — Salma, Kuttirevathi, Malathy Maitri and Sukirtharani S. "This was particularly interesting because we, as documentary filmmakers, are constantly addressing questions of censorship. The way these women have fought for their precarious spaces is inspiring," said Jayasankar at the recent screening of the film at Centre for Education and Documentation.

Salma, the first woman featured in the film, lives in the small town of Thuvankurichi. An avid reader as a young girl, her schooling is cut short when she and her friends dare to go to a film, which turns out to be an adult film. Then begins the search for a husband and some suitors reject her because she does "disgraceful" things such as writing poetry and reading Lenin and Marx.



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Post-marriage, she writes under a pen name and pretends sick and tells people at home that she is going to the hospital and sneaks off to the launch of her book! She is now a Panchayat President, which gives her a new sense of power, though within a circumscribed space.

Kuttirevathi, on the other hand, believes that the most important and creative space for a woman is her solitude. It is here that she questions all established notions and rethinks her own self and what surrounds her. Her bold and remarkable poem "Breasts", for instance, looks at the "politics of breasts", rejects its representation as a "plastic, quantifiable object". It then moves to the level of owning up one's body on one's own terms.

The space that Malathy talks about is marked by her awareness of Dalit, Leftist and Feminist thoughts. Her articulations have an activist edge and she talks in the film about a period of lull in her writing, when she couldn't decide if she should write romantic stuff like all others or should write in the Marxist mould. She finally decides to write about "herself and those like her".

Sukirtharani, a school teacher in Lalapet, writes boldly on body and sexuality and the empowerment that comes with this articulation. In a remarkable conversation at the end of the film, she tries to patiently convince her aged mother why we should reject male-centric discourses on the female body. This unselfconscious mother-daughter banter reflects two worldviews and the manner in which they can touch each other, if not come to a consensus all the time.

SheWrite shows that the four women writers have their own diverse ways of carving out their space — ranging from finding a space within the traditional community, marriage and so on to rejecting it and wanting to breathe free beyond it all. But the space, for all of them, is precious and what brings them together is the aspiration to doggedly preserve it. Through an interesting play of images, the film visually explores the spaces within and without.

The film moves between straightforward documentation style and a more metaphoric representation as the narrative itself moves between specific details of the women's lives and their creative works. Some images — for instance, of two puppets churning in a washing machine as Salma reads her poem on matrimony and of several rounded objects and their reflection in two mirrors as Kuttirevathi reads her poem, Breasts — manage to find visual reflections for the written word and lend it a new dimension.

For details on the film write to the filmmakers on umctiss@vsnl.com.



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Sunday Herald Art & Culture

Sunday, August 28, 2005

Poetic licence or porn?

Shewrite is a film about four women who refuse to buckle down to societal pressures of propriety and write poetry that is provocative and bold, says Mala Kumar.



"If they don't want you to write, why do you want to write?" asks a mother of her unmarried daughter, Sukirtharani, a schoolteacher in Lalapet who was hounded for writing 'obscene' poetry. The young poet writes of desire and longing, celebrating the body in a way that affirms feminine empowerment and a rejection of male-centred discourse. "But do you think what I write is vulgar?" persists Sukirtharani.

The poems in Tamil are, in fact, beautiful, brave and bereft of the motive to titillate. The poems and their creators make up SheWrite, a documentary film in Tamil with English subtitles, made by the award-winning duo Dr Anjali Monteiro and Dr K P Jayashankar.

They were in Bangalore recently at the screening of the film that weaves together the narratives and work of Sukirtharani and three other Tamil women poets. "We read about the attack on these women by lyricists in Tamil Nadu and were keen to document the stand taken by these women," says Dr Anjali Monteiro, Professor and Head, Unit for Media and Communications, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai.

"As a group of over 250 documentary makers in the country, we are fighting against thought control," adds Dr K P Jayashankar, Reader (Production), TISS. "Social documentaries face several levels of censorship— first there is the thought-control from institutions and society on what they think are appropriate topics to be filmed. Then we have the marketing censorship— some films are acceptable by theatre owners and some are not. Our films are therefore screened at informal gatherings and through an informal network of people who are interested in social issues," says the filmmaker who has an MA in German language and a PhD in Humanities and Social Sciences, from IIT, Mumbai.

SheWrite was screened to a small audience at the Centre for Education and Documentation. The film starts with Salma, who had to quit school when her family found out she and her friends had sneaked in to see a movie, which they later found



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out was for adults. "I loved to read, and all I wanted to do was to read and write," says Salma in the film.

Salma negotiates subversive expression within the tiny space allotted to a woman in the small town of Thuvankurichi. She has been able to defy and transcend family proscriptions on writing to become a significant voice questioning patriarchal mores in a powerful yet gentle way. When her anthology of poems was launched, she had to feign sickness— a male cousin accompanied her and her mother to the book launch instead of to the hospital.

'Not just my poetry'

For Kuttirevathi, a Siddha doctor and researcher based in Chennai, solitude is a crucial creative space from where her work resonates. "I write about my own feelings, but I also write about the feelings that other women are unable to express. So, my poetry is not just mine but also of other women," says the young lady who took to Siddha because it involved learning content in verse!

Her anthology entitled Breasts became a controversial work that elicited hate mail, obscene calls and threats. "Why is it that the world only talks about sizes and shapes of breasts as though they were something made of plastic? Why is it that they are so rarely seen as the human part that nurtures life?" questions the poet.

The rubbishing of many women poets by film lyricists led to the formation of 'Anangu', a group of poets and other artists which is attempting to expand the subversive creative spaces available to women writers and poets, across Tamil Nadu. Says Malathy Maitri, a Pondicherry-based Dalit and Marxist activist and founder member of Anangu, "We were upset that people who use double entendre and bad language to attract people should call our poetry 'vulgar'."

Monteiro and Jayashankar worked on a very small budget in unknown territory to document the lives of these four poets. "We allowed them the freedom to tell us what we could and what we should not shoot," says Dr Monteiro. "We are not here as activists trying to set free the 'victims'. And we do not believe we can change the world with our documentaries, but we do believe that the strength and personalities of these remarkable women needs to be documented," adds Dr Jayashankar.

The couple, married now for 16 years, are both Howard Thomas Memorial Fellows in Media Studies at Goldsmiths College, London and complement each other. Jointly they have made 25 films, and won nine national and international awards for their videos.

"We want to show the complexities around people and situations. Everything is not black or white. In SheWrite, for instance, Salma's husband is not a 'bad' man just because he has not openly encouraged her writing. She is not a 'rebellious working woman' just because she is now the Panchayat President. And the poets are not



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'modern' just because their writing is bold. They continue to live conservative lives.

"We did a film where we showed prisoners writing poems. The dominant identity of a prisoner is that he is 'bad' and therefore incapable of the finer arts like writing poetry, but we found that so untrue," reveals Dr Jayashankar, a poet himself.

Using straight documentation and cinematic techniques like soft focus, Monteiro and Jayashankar have made a film that gives wing to the poetry of the poets. Whether society gives them the right to write or not, these women invite readers to take a glimpse of the world that their mind sees. "Poetry burst out from me like a spark," says Sukirtharani in the film. And the sparks have flown to light many minds across the country now, with SheWrite.

<http://deccanherald.com/deccanherald/aug282005/finearts636212005827.asp>



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Poems in the Film

Translated by Pritham K. Chakravarthy

Salma:

Night's Second Quarter Story

In those nights
After childbirth
in habitual nakedness
you search dissatisfied for
my beauty unblemished

Heavy body
Stretch marked abdomen
are extremely disgusting
you say
today and ever
never is it going to change, my body

In silent valley
is buried my voice
will murmur within

It's true
unlike any body
Is yours
In broadcasting
In exposing

Even before these
Your children, anywhere,
To anybody, could have been born
Because you bear no traces
You may be proud
What can I do
Like my demise, are
These stretch marks
Cannot be repaired easily
To cut and be restuck;
This body is no paper
More than you
Great treachery has been done
By nature to me
It is from you that began



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The first stage of my defeat

More than the first quarter
Dangerous is the second quarter
When dreams invade

On the wall, peacefully
The Tiger that sat
At my headstand
Stares unblinking

Salma:

This Evening

Unlike any other time
Unable to bear
How does it become so heavy
This evening
Like soaked in wetness
Period napkins

Salma:

Agreement

Each time
What mother politely says
Sister would say with anger
In the bedroom
All that is wrong
Are mine

Every night in the bedroom
First thing that is said
'What is it today?'
Usually, the last thing also
Would be this...

The pointing finger at prostitution
Extends from a million twinkling stars
In the shivering nights
Floating warnings

To feed the kitten
Futile cat's



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Wailing child voice
Grabs at the guts
For you too
May have complaints
My stand
By time
By history
Has been clarified

From you
Even if soiled
To earn some love
The responsibility of a mother
To your child, to fulfil
To purchase from the world outside
Sanitary napkins
And condoms
For other small favours
If possible
To order you a bit
My tiny power
To stabilise

With all this knowledge
My vagina opens

Kuttirevathi:

Solitude Hides its Face

Solitude hides its face
Then beckons a strange wind
Beginning in the toilets
It spreads its vapours
into the bedroom
Into the street it grows
The feeding mother's silence
It does not disturb
It blocks no woman
Bearing the noose for herself
No respectful hesitation:
Can I enter please?
Grabbing the quiet deep
Where serpents sleep
It swirls



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Like a silent beast
It was created with a curse
At the feet of sorrow;
That, which begins in the terrace
Is visible to your mortal eyes
Like spiders walk, majestic
Disturbing nothing
Into the rooms of your sleeping kin
It places you in their midst

Kuttirevathi:

Breasts

Breasts
Marsh bubbles
In puberty
I watched them fill out
In amazement

Speaking to none
With me always
They sing
Not throbbing
Love
Stupor

Roots of
Changing seasons
To kindle they never forgot

Meditations
Insolent posture
Flickers of lust
They swell with melody

Copulation's embracing love
Wonder at seeing the child
Blood's milk
It juices forth

In inadequate love
That cannot be swept away
Like two tear drops
They swim



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Malathy Maitri:
Elephant Story

Long ago
From the story her mother told
An elephant,
My mother gave me as a gift
After a long time,
unable to bear the heat
I went to the sea
with the elephant

Mountains and mountains
of waves rose
Into the water
submerged and swirled
Tossed and tossed and out
It threw me
The sea
Along with the half melted trunk

Sea and the sky
joined and trumpeted
In grief I returned
The town gathered to see me
Like an entertainment
Puzzled I turned around
The street flooded with waves
Followed me

That the elephant
Which melted in the sea
Had thousands of trunks
Is the story
My daughter tells them

Malathy Maitri:
A Race of Homes

All the homes in the town
Stand like planted women
The windows eyes, the vagina doors
The whole life in wait
For some man



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A relationship
At every age

Murderer robber
Drunkard traitor cheat
Corrupt fraud pimp
Dictator sex fiend
Casteist religious faggot racist
None of them is ignored by homes
Each has a home always

Body stays as the cradle
Breasts give life and food
Comfort and secure
Male relationships

Men by copulating the home
Breed the earth
Not women
Women who rule the time
Do not become home

Sukirtharani S.:
Night Beast

Like a young woman's love-sickness
Engulfing darkness
After locking doors
In the orange candle light
I sit alone.
Then, that which I dislike
Everyday arrived
Even as I was watching
Stripping me of me
Replacing with another me
Even as I want to be shocked
The book printed with secrets
I had finished reading
My eyes light rays
On him sleeping in the front hall
Stared at his loose clothes
Cup brimming with wine
My body dived in and floated
Using dirty words



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Whispering them softly
As I was masturbating
On hearing the birds' wings
Dropping me in me
Fled the night beast.

Sukirtharani:

Trees

My luscious body
Bows down like a mushroom
In front and behind
Carefully woven secret parts
Hair-ends aroused on skin
Aroma of moist fragrance of lust
From the blooming waist
Warm round cheeks
Cowries of lust
Pour and swim in the body
Now like steam
Like a street artist without makeup
Remove the front straps of the bra
Tasting the feeding ends
You are bashful to name them
My breasts music
You extend as murderous arms of war
Now in my power zone
Young breast
Sing aloud from the core
Long since my breasts have been trees.