

Of simplest thought

Seamlessly translated stories that dramatise human frailties without judgement

Meenakshi Shivram

When was the last time you read a story without thinking about the politics of identity or gender? Although all art is admittedly implicated in politics, in recent years, the writer, the reader, the text and the world have all revolved around the rather tyrannical framework of ideology to the exclusion of much else that art can legitimately claim to offer.

So when an anthology like *The Solitary Sprout*, written by the famous Tamil author R. Chudamani, appears, one is touched by the sheer force of simplicity that, one almost believed, did not exist any more.

Each of the 20 stories in this collection is about people whose lives are enmeshed in a web of their own making. 'From Narcissist to Artist' is about a painter, Manikkam, who has lost his creative ability. Then one day, Valli, his

sister who has a slight limp, comes back into his life for a short while and helps him unpack his locked self. The artist is set free but the reader is ensnared by the untold story of Valli.

Beyond the book

There's the story of a stepmother who despite herself does the right thing by her stepson; there's a wheel-chair bound young man who is forced to listen to the miseries of other people; there's the autocratic man whose daughters have run away and yet his wife continues to serve him to 'prop up' his crumbling ego; and there's the heart-wrenching story of the wife whose husband denies her access to her family.

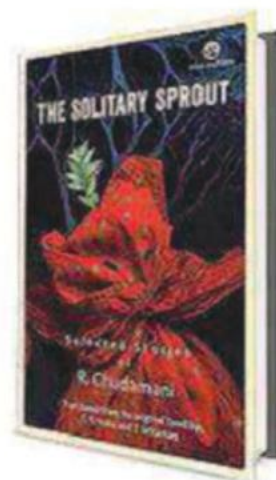
These characters are all people who stay with you long after you've put the book down.

The success of these stories lies largely in the non-judgemental acceptance of human frailties. There's no rancour, no malice – only the pain of human bondage.

A translation is successful when the reader forgets that it is a translated text. Chudamani is singularly lucky to have had her share of sensitive translators. Her novel *Yamini*, translated ever so searchingly by Vasantha Surya, meets its equal in this understated and restrained rendering by C.T. Indra and T. Sriraman.

The introduction by these translators is a bonus. A must-read for those who think that this world is not quite right for stories.

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The writer, a Sahitya Akademi translation award winner, teaches English at Christ University, Bengaluru.



The Solitary Sprout: Selected stories of R. Chudamani

Trs C.T. Indra and T. Sriraman
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