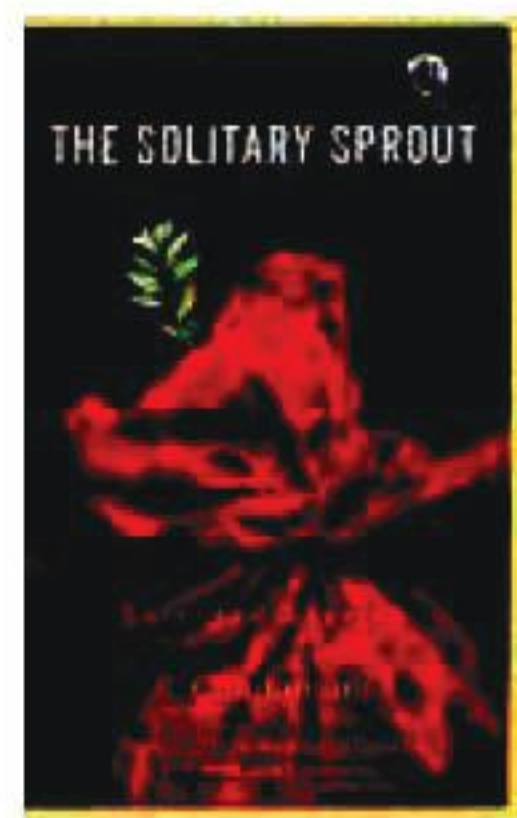


The gentle irony of Chudamani revisited

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CHENNAI

The surprising breadth and spread of her canvas and her ability to delve deep into the minds of her characters make it hard to believe that writer R. Chudamani (1931-2010) spent her life within the four walls of a house.



Daughter of T.N.S. Raghavan, an ICS officer, who also served as the Chief Secretary of Tamil Nadu, Chudamani suffered a bout of small pox when she was three which impaired her growth severely.

Confined to her home for most of her life, Chudamani did not attend school, and was taught at home by her mother.

Yet, she wrote around 500 stories, some novellas and novels. A volume of her short stories, *The Solitary Sprout*, will be released on Tuesday. It is published by Orient BlackSwan. The stories have been translated into English by noted English academics C.T. Indra and T. Sriraman.

The book will be released by the Chudamani Memorial Trust, along with another collection of Chudamani's short stories translated by K.S. Subramanian and published by the New Century Book House.

"There is a kind of deviation from regular stereotypical representation of characters and there is no propaganda in her writings. She was no card-carrying ideologue, but dealt with subjects that were considered taboo. She shows enormous empathy for her characters," said Ms. Indra, former Head, Department of English, University of Madras.

Mr. Sriraman, former Professor with the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, said Chudamani's fiction was a gently ironic or delicately satirical portrayal of our individual and social selves, but always holding out hope of higher self-knowledge.

Ms. Indra first translated a story '*Senthiru Aahivittaal*' when Chudamani was alive. Chudamani edited the translation and gave the title 'Herself' to the story. The Sahitya Akademi published it in its journal, *Indian Literature*, with Ms. Indra's introduction after Chudamani passed away.

"Chudamani assails conventions calmly, or to be more accurate, she calmly sets aside conventions without resort to a battering ram or verbal theatrics," say Ms. Indra and Mr. Sriraman in their introduction.

He attributed revival of interest in Chudamani's stories to the strong sense of individuality she accorded to the marginalized.