

Folklorist Gunasekaran passes away

Prominent Dalit folklorist and theatre personality K.A. Gunasekaran passed away on Sunday at his residence in Puducherry. He was 61.

Updated - September 23, 2016 01:13 am IST Published - January 18, 2016 12:00 am IST - PUDUCHERRY:

S. SENTHALIR

Prominent Dalit folklorist and theatre personality K.A. Gunasekaran passed away on Sunday at his residence in Puducherry. He was 61.

Hailing from a poor Dalit family of Elayankudi, Prof. KAG is considered to be the first Dalit playwright. His play *Bali Adugal* (sacrificial goat) was a precursor to the arrival of Dalit theatre in Tamil Nadu.

Mr. Gunasekaran passed away due to [a] prolonged illness following kidney failure. He was a teacher, folk artist, researcher and dramatist. He served as the dean of the School of Performing Arts at Pondicherry University and also [as] the director of [the] International Institute of Tamil Studies.

He carved a niche for himself in the Tamil literary sphere through his plays *Sathya Sothanai*, *Thodu*, *Mazhi*, *Maatram*, *Varaivu Kadavuthal*, and *Kanthan Valli*. His concept of Dalit theatre on the lines of the theatre of the oppressed was a revolutionary, experimental and innovative effort.

The [song of rebellion] *Manusangada Naanga Manusangada*, [written] by poet Inkulab and powerfully sung by Mr. Gunasekaran became the anthem of the Dalit Movement in the 1990s. He [sang] many songs on the theme of caste [on] innumerable stages.

As a folk singer, he [undertook] extensive research work on urban folklore and published many books and research articles. He was associated with the Progressive Writers' Movement. Later, he moved out [of the group] and started his own performance troupe, 'Thannane', and toured across the globe spreading awareness about the problem of untouchability and the plight of Dalits in India. Mr. Gunasekaran [was] honoured with [the] Kalaimamani award by the Government of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. He...also received the Dalit Isai Kurisil Award from The Tamil Association of Canada.

He is survived by [his] wife and two children.

Mr. Gunasekaran was scheduled to participate in a discussion on 'Dalit Aesthetics and Politics: How the Tamil Dalits Reclaimed their Identity' at *The Hindu* Lit for Life 2016 on Sunday.