



TAMIL MARGINS ACROSS BORDERS

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Bama

Bama Faustina Soosairaj (b.1958) is a Tamil Dalit feminist, teacher and novelist whose literary works pierce through the veils of caste and gender discrimination. Her style of writing echoes with raw honesty, simplicity and directness.

Rising to prominence with her first autobiographical novel *Karukku* in 1992, she earned critical acclaim despite being ostracized from her own village. The impact of this seminal work transcends boundaries and it is now a revered textbook in numerous university courses on marginalized, feminist, and Dalit literature. Her subsequent works continue to uphold the themes of caste oppression and gender bias. The use of her community's dialect mirrors her commitment to authentic representation.

She has authored a total of 10 books and most of them are translated into English and other regional languages like Gujarathi, Kannada, Malayalam and Telugu. *Sangati* has been translated into French. Her writing, as she asserts, is not merely an art form but a political tool—a weapon wielded against the dehumanizing caste structures.



Outstanding works:

- *Karukku*
- *Sangati*
- *Vanmam*

Awards:

- Kural Amaippu Award
- Cross Word Book Award
- Dalit Murasu Kalai Illakkiya Award
- Amuthan Adigal Illakkiya Parisu
- Padaipookka Viruthu

“

Dalit women are exploited ‘thrice,’ on account of their caste, class and gender – ‘triple monsters’.

”

Karukku



Autobiographical Novel, 124 p, New Century Book House, 1992. 9789388973342

Rights sold: English, Kannada, Malayalam, Telugu, Maithili and Assamese

Rights Available: World Rights except these languages

Copyright: Author

Award:

- Crossword Book Award, 2000

“

This is a community that was born to work. And however hard they toil, it is the same kuuzh every day... it seems they never even reflect upon their own terrible state of affairs.

”

Karukku brings into view the life of Bama, a Dalit Christian woman, exposing the harsh realities of caste discrimination and poverty in a society dictated by prejudice. From her innocent childhood encounters with caste constraints to her rebellious stand against discrimination on a public bus, Bama's journey symbolizes resistance. Her narrative exposes the relentless toil and meager compensation faced by Dalits, challenging the oppressive caste system. Her evolution from questioning societal norms to becoming a teacher striving for change mirrors her defiance against the status quo.

She confronts the hypocrisy within religious institutions and societal constructs, realizing the persistent discrimination even within the Christian convent. The story intensifies as Bama exposes the multifaceted ways casteism subjugates her community, culminating in the stark reality that despite efforts, Dalits continue facing exclusion and discrimination, perpetuating poverty.

The aftermath highlights ongoing struggles, emphasizing the deep-rootedness of casteism. Karukku invites reflection on resilience amidst oppression, prompting readers to confront societal prejudices and advocate for change in a compelling portrayal of a marginalized community's lived experiences.

Key Themes:

- Double marginalization
- Dalit Feminism

Events



Novel, 128 p, New Century Book House, 1994. 9789388973359

Rights sold: English, French, Kannada, Malayalam, Telugu, Gujarati and Odia

Rights Available: World Rights except these languages

Copyright: Author

Key Themes:

- Gender Struggles
- Celebrating Subaltern Women

Sangati reveals a riveting tale of three generations of Dalit women's trials and tribulations. It unfolds through conversations between the young narrator and her grandmother, Vellaiamma. Sangati means 'Events' in Tamil, the book's twelve chapters are a collection of heart-wrenching anecdotes, exposing the real-life ordeals of women like Maariamma, Maikkani, Thayi, Essaki, Mukkama, Irulaggi, Rakkamma, and the narrator herself.

Maikkani is shouldering her family's financial burden from a young age, embodies resilience amidst mental and physical abuse in her workspace. Mariamma is a victim of sexual assault by an upper-class man. From childhood, Dalit girls face biases, receiving lesser care and opportunities compared to boys. As they mature, their roles are confined to household chores and early marriages. Despite being breadwinners alongside men, they endure lower wages and abuse in the workforce.

Depicting the agony, despair, hope, and enduring subjugation of Dalit women in the 20th century, the book offers an experiential dimension to the compounded challenges of caste and gender faced by Dalit women in India.

“

But then, is it the fate of our women to be tormented both outside their houses and within?

”

Vendetta



Novel, 155 p, New Century Book House, 2002. 9788123439679

Rights sold: English, Hindi, Rajasthani and Maithili

Rights available: World Rights except these languages

Copyright: Author

A realistic portrayal of the clashes and inner turmoil among Dalit communities, emphasizing the urgent need for unity to combat caste oppression and pursue liberation.

Vanmam is set in Kandampatti village where two Dalit communities clash: one, seeking education and change, and the other, trapped in societal norms. Against the backdrop of Ambedkarian thoughts, Bama unravels one subcaste's inner struggles, trapped in caste chains and the other subcaste's quest for knowledge, challenges norms as they are ridiculed by their own people.

In each chapter, Bama carefully reveals the world of caste biases and conflicts, exposing how the upper castes exploit Dalit divisions. Marraasu and Karuppusamy, belonging to the two subcastes are manipulated by their landlords, Ranga and Palanivelu, respectively. Fields, streets, and bathing tanks bear witness to societal divides.

Amidst mounting tensions, tragedy strikes, fueling age-old grudges— Marraasu falls at the hands of Karuppusamy. Lives are shattered, and the aftermath echoes a crucial truth: unity among the marginalized is vital to prevent further tragedy. Bama's call for unity challenges norms, urging the collective fight for Dalit liberation—a bold path towards a fairer future.

“—

Review:

...brings forth how the oppressive caste system alienates an individual from his own self.

—”

Karan Karki

Karan Karki, born as Dinakaran, is a Tamil writer whose works glide us through the intricate landscapes of Chennai's diverse marginalized societies and their culture. Inspired by Maxim Gorky, he writes under the Pseudonym, Karan Karki. Growing up in a world teeming with marginalization, his parents instilled in him a profound love for reading. His venture into European and Russian literature unlocked a wider understanding of the world.

Upon finding his voice among the city's overlooked narratives, he strove to represent the essence of ordinary lives. His maiden novel *Arupadum Vilangu*, an account of his famine-stricken ancestors, was widely recognized and researched in academia. His other works, *Karuppar Nagaram*, *Varugirargal*, *Ottrai Pal*, *Marappalam* and *Sattaikkari* were critically acclaimed for capturing the struggles and socio-political intricacies of marginalized communities.

The dialect of the marginalised is the voice of his narrative which itself is a celebration, claiming their inevitable space in the city. His *Marappalam* is going to make its silver-screen presence by Vetrимaran, an Internationally acclaimed director and National Film Awardee.



Outstanding works:

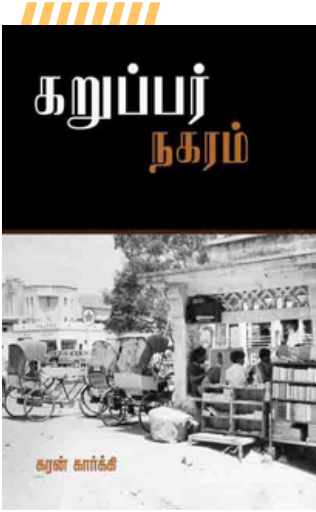
- *Karuppar Nagaram*
- *Ottraippal*
- *Marappalam*
- *Sattaikkari*

Awards:

- Tamil Nadu Murpokku Ezhuthalar Sanga Virudhu
- Ezhuchi Tamizhar Virudhu
- Kalai Ilakkiya Peru Manra Virudhu
- Salem Nagappam Virudhu
- Seethammal Kalai Ilakkiya Virudhu
- Sujatha Uyirmai Virudhu
- Vasagasalai Virudhu

“—
The dialect spoken by marginalized people in cities is mostly ridiculed, echoing a form of oppression. What would be the political reason behind this?
—”

City of the Black



Novel, 351 p, Bharathi Puthagalayam, 2011. 978-93-81908-16-7

Rights sold: English and Odia
Rights available: World rights except these languages
Copyright: Author

Depicts the true color of Chennai and the lives of marginalized individuals, exploring resilience, societal disparities, and the pursuit of dignity amidst adversity.

Senkeni, an orphan seeking survival, finds refuge in Koovam's slums and pulls handcarts for daily wages. There he falls in love with Aarayi, his world. Their love faces vehement societal and familial opposition, forcing them to flee to a new slum. He sees Aarayi as a reminiscent figure of his deceased mother.

Despite facing lot of struggles, they encounter people like the politically-driven Palayam, rickshaw-puller Mowli and lorry-driver Shiva whose lives interest them. He befriends a butcher and meets a fake liquor dealer, Peikkali. Senkeni's life takes a critical turn with a tragic accident and Aarayi is devastated.

Amidst this, Peikkali tortures Aarayi to elope with him. When Senkeni comes to know this, his mental turmoil intensifies. In a fit of traumatic rage, he goes to kill him. Aarayi comes on his way, wearing his shirt to keep warm. He kills Aarayi, mistaking her for Peikkali and gets imprisoned. Senkeni, who never realized that he killed his wife, hallucinates being reunited with Aarayi in his final moments.

Awards:

- Kalai Ilakkiya Peru Manra Virudhu
- Salem Nagappam Virudhu

“

This innovation has no history of anyone. But it cannot be said that it is just fiction. Everyone who comes in it has lived and died. Some are still living.

”

Old-man's Tooth



Novel, 260 p, Ezhuthu Prachuram, 2016. 978-93-90884-99-5

Rights: World rights available
Copyright: Author

Key Themes:

- Social Stigma and Discrimination
- Loss and Compassion
- Mental Health and Perception
- Gender Struggles

“

...I am neither gold nor tin. I don't know how to tell her that I am nothing else. (Koildas to himself)

”

Ottraipal is a tale about Koildas, an intellectually disabled man whose existence revolves around an enduring love for his deceased wife, Sarada Leenameri. Living with his son and daughter-in-law, Koildas, with just one tooth left, deeply believes that Sarada still communicates with him.

Sarada's life unfolds in a monastery where she's raised by nuns, her true parentage shrouded in mystery. Her beauty stirs jealousy and invites unwanted advances, leading to traumatic experiences within the temple grounds. Despite her innate kindness, misunderstandings arise, tarnishing her reputation among the virginal sisters and the community. Koildas, working in a destitute home, becomes a source of solace for Sarada. His unconditional love touches her, they marry and beget a son.

Tragedy strikes as Sarada succumbs to tuberculosis, leaving Koildas steadfast in his belief that she communicates with God. His disappearance leads to a chance encounter with Khushbu, who cares for him briefly before he vanishes once more. The search for Koildas ends in sorrow as he's found deceased, receiving his final rites.

Awards:

- Vasagasalai Virudhu
- Sujatha Uyirmai Virudhu

The Wooden Bridge



Historical fiction, 500 p, Uyirmai Publications, 2020.
978-93-87636-49-1

Rights held: World Rights available
Copyright: Author

Key Themes: Historical Resonance (WW II), Caste and Cultural Exploitation, Human Resilience and Friendship, Trauma, Horror and Survival, Post-War Reconciliation.

Marappalam is the journey of Mukattayan in 1940s amidst the chaos of World War II's brutal Siam Burma Death Railway construction. Born into caste-driven oppression, his transformation into George Gabe, sheltered by a Christian priest, leads him to Madras through Louis, a white merchant. As war tensions escalate, Louis, bound for Singapore promises him passage to England post-war. However, the Japanese invasion disrupts their plans.

In Singapore, he confronts cultural clashes, navigating disdain from Krishnan, a Tamil colleague, and bonding with Luly, a Chinese girl from the neighboring household. The Japanese occupation unleashes a nightmare of atrocities—massacres, sexual assaults, and suicides. His attempt to aid his imprisoned friend, Louis, leads to severe beatings and hospitalization.

Eventually, coerced into overseeing the railway construction, he befriends Sunnypurn, a Siamese woman. Post-war, George reunites with Louis, now an amputee, and finds Luly degraded by the horrors of war. Their journey back to England resonates with the haunting aftermath of trauma and loss, where identities are shattered, and the weight of suffering becomes a shared burden.

Award:

- Vasagasalai Virudhu

“

Review by Prof. P. Ravikumar:

No other novel has been written in Tamil that has so brilliantly portrayed the miseries and atrocities of life in the backdrop of the Second World War. Karki has made Tamil language proud.

”

The Shirted Woman



Historical Fiction, 313 p, Neelam Publications, 2022. B09S632KF5.

Rights held: World Rights available
Copyright: Author

Key Themes: Cultural identity and Belonging, Sports, Gender Roles, Colonial History, Transition and Modernity.

Award:
Ezhuchi Tamizhar Ilakkiya Virudhu

Set in 1958 Madras, the novel picturises the dynamics of a transitioning post-colonial India through the lives of slum-dwelling football players and the Anglo-Indian community.

Moosa, a talented footballer from the slums, falls in love with Stella, the sister of his rival, Nicholas. Their love faces staunch opposition from Stella's father, Isaac, a staunch traditionalist grappling with the diminishing influence of Anglo-Indians in independent India. Isaac plans to marry Stella off to a wealthy suitor and thwart Moosa's advances, even resorting to intimidation. However, Stella, deeply connected to her roots and determined to live life on her terms, defies her father's plans and remains steadfast in her love for Moosa.

In a parallel plot, Isaac's widowed sister Linda falls in love with Yesu, a rickshaw puller, further straining familial ties. Linda's decision to live with Yesu and support his rickshaw workshop sparks familial discord but highlights her journey toward independence. As tensions rise, Isaac's failing health forces him to confront his rigid beliefs, leading to a reconciliation where he blesses Stella and Moosa's union. They marry and move to Australia, fulfilling Isaac's dream of Stella becoming a teacher, while Linda and Yesu build a new life together.

“

Through the lens of football rivalries, love, and social struggles, the novel portrays the evolving relationships in Madras's diverse communities in the 1950s as an effect of cultural integration.

”

Breaking Shackles



Fiction, 334 p, Vasagasalai Publications, 2019.
B091H4QR5F.

Rights held: World Rights available

Copyright: Author

Key Themes: Identity, Migration, Cultural Displacement, Discrimination, Injustice, Endurance, Cultural Reconciliation and Redemption.

The novel is set in pre- and post-independence India, exploring caste oppression, migration, and the struggles of marginalized communities. It begins with Mani, a tuberculosis patient abandoned by society, seeking refuge in a temple and passing away. This temple, built by his uncle Pavadai, a marginalized man turned spiritual guide, becomes a focal point of reflection on their intertwined lives. Mani's death compels his surviving uncle to revisit the life of Gopal, Mani's father, a reluctant migrant who rose from a dockworker to a foreman in Madras.

Gopal's journey highlights the plight of rural migrants facing urban challenges and the economic disparities of the time. Parallely, the plot follows Sankaran, an upper-caste student, who befriends Samuel, a professor from marginalized community, and challenges societal norms by supporting Sulocchana, a devadasi seeking freedom from oppressive traditions. Sankaran's progressive stance culminates in his decision to marry Sulocchana, defying his family and caste, but their hopes are shattered when Sulocchana and her mother are brutally murdered.

Devastated, Sankaran dedicates his life to educating the oppressed, only to meet a tragic end in a rural village. The novel also reflects on the cyclical nature of caste violence through characters like Pavadai and Bheeman, whose attempts to confront societal norms result in brutal consequences.

“

Through its multi-generational narrative, *Breaking Shackles* brings to light the enduring struggles of marginalized communities, their sacrifices, and the systemic barriers they face, portraying the power of their resilience, social reform, and the human spirit's fight for dignity.

”

Kamaraj

S. Kamaraj is a retired banker who hails from Chatur District, Naduchurangudi. He is the deputy head of Tamil Nadu Progressive Writers' Association and Principal Advisor of Samam Trust which propagates education for women and marginalized children and social reform. He worked as an assistant director for the documentaries *Pallam*, *Iravugal Udayum*, *Iruveru Idhigasam* and *Uthappuram*.



His writings depict the aspirations of marginalized villagers, incorporating elements of communism and gender equality as part of their everyday lives. They prompt reflection on the persistence of caste in society and its impact, inviting listeners to engage with the tales through oral renditions.

He aims for deeper understanding and empathy for marginalized communities which are often overlooked in mainstream literature.

Outstanding works:

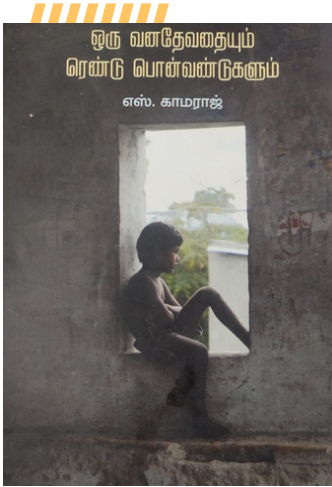
- *Oru Vana Dhevadhayum Rendu ponvandugalum*
- *Karuppu Nila Kadhaigal*

“

My works, to me, are like the water we taste while wandering with an insatiable thirst. I live with the hope that I have recorded at least a little of life through them.

”

Deity of the Woods



Short story collection, 119 p, Vamsi Publications, 2005.
978-93-94591-88-2

Rights: World Rights available
Copyright: Author

Tales of marginalized aspirations, gender equality, cultural authenticity, and intergenerational struggles in the backdrop of Naduchurangudi.

Oru Vana Dhevadhayum Rendu ponvandugalum unearths tales that lay buried in the Karisal village, Naduchurangudi. Set against a backdrop where communism and gender equality are part of ordinary life, these narratives unfold in a linear fashion in the vernacular dialects spoken on the cusp of dried land (Karisal).

This collection of stories depicts the aspirations of the villagers who are marginalized and their only hope, the metaphorical fairy and gold-wasps of the hungry woods. The story "Poochukilavi" records of a time when a woman spearheaded a movement in pre-independence Tamil Nadu, wielding justice against malefactors. The tale, passed down from a grandmother to an eight-year-old boy, weaves its own enchanting narrative within. "Pillaichoru" discloses the reality of the villagers' impoverished lives.

The stories integrate the lives and circumstances of the marginalized people from the Chatur region which are often overlooked in mainstream and Karisal literature, an invitation to step into their reality, urging a deeper understanding and empathy from every reader.

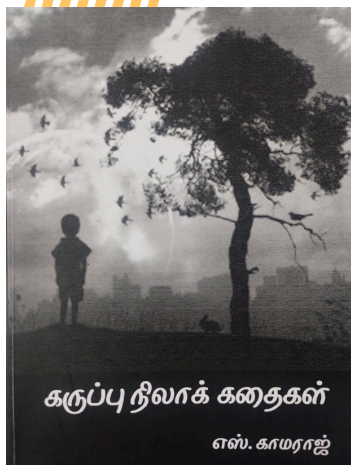
“

Review by writer Melanmai Ponnusamy (Sahitya Academy Awardee):

The anger and turbulence of Chinnakka tear apart the shackles of patriarchy.

”

Anecdotes of the Dark Moon



Short story collection, 112 p, Vamsi Publications, 2010.
978-93-80545-36-3

Rights: World Rights available
Copyright: Author

Key Themes:

- Labour and Exploitation
- Identity Complexities
- Urban Rural Dynamics

The collection *Karuppu Nila Kadhaigal* zeroes in on the roots of social disorders that pervade the Indian landscape, shining a spotlight on caste as the prevalent cause. It exposes how caste erects insurmountable barriers, hindering the recognition of one's humanity. It illuminates the formidable laborers who form the foundation of the caste structure within Chatur's topography in the Karisal region. They echo the sentiments of ownership and entitlement to land, rights, and a fair share.

The story, "Maruladiyin Melirangiyavargal", unveils Lakshmi's tale, challenging the notion that economic compulsion alone drives women into the sex profession. She emerges as an oracle, exposing societal cruelty inflicted on her as a result of caste prejudices. "Verai Viratiyaman" follows Salamuthu, born to a laundry worker, as he journeys to Chennai in pursuit of social justice. The city becomes his nurturing haven, embracing him like a compassionate mother.

These stories provoke pertinent questions: Does society still accept the concept of caste? Has caste truly vanished? The villages harbor answers to these queries, inviting listeners to absorb these narratives through their oral renditions.



Review by writer J. Madhavaraj:

Kamaraj's thoughts are always on the side of those who are at the bottom of caste construction...he offers their burdened lives as bread and wine to the readers.

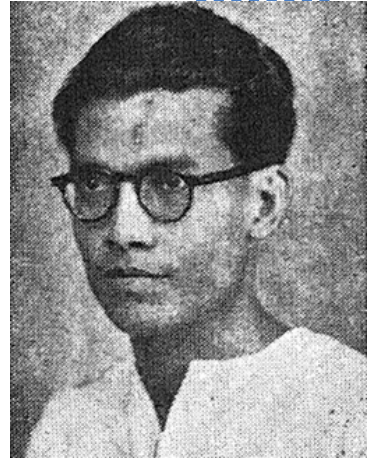


Tho. Mu. Si. Ragunathan

T. M. Chidambara Ragunathan/ Tho. Mu. Si (1923 –2001) was a Tamil writer, translator, journalist and literary critic. Being the harbinger of the Progressive Writers' Movement of Tamil Nadu, he pioneered in Marxist Literary Criticism and Comparative Literature. His first short story appeared in *Prasanda Vikatan* in 1941. He was jailed in 1942 for his participation in the Indian independence movement. He worked as a sub-editor in *Dina Mani* briefly in 1944 and later joined the literary journal *Mullai* in 1946.

His first novella *Puyal* was published in 1945. His first noted work was the literary criticism *Ilakkiya Vimarsanam* (1948). He followed it up with the novel *Panchum Pasiyum* in 1951. His progressive literary monthly, *Shantohi*, introduced many writers to the world including – Daniel Selvaraj, Sundara Ramasami, Jayakanthan and Ki. Rajanarayanan.

In the mid-1960s, he joined Soviet Land Publications (Soviet Information Branch), where he edited and translated many Russian works into Tamil. Some of his noted translations include Maxim Gorky's *The Mother* and Vladimir Mayakovsky's elegy *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*. He belonged to the socialist-realist school of writers. In his literary career, he produced four short story anthologies, three novels, three poetry collections, two plays and one biography, besides his non-fiction (research and critical) works. He was a member of the Advisory Board and Jury for Sahitya Akademi in Tamil. His works have been nationalized in the year 2008.



Awards:

- Sahitya Akademi Award
- Soviet Land Nehru Award
- Tamil Annai Prize from Tamil University, Thanjavur.
- Bharathi Award

“

**Thi.Ka. Sivashankaran
(Writer and Critic) on
Tho. Mu.Si:**

The admirable writer who has not bartered away his soul for the sake either of money, power or position.

”

Hanging by a Thread



Panjum Pasiyum narrates the harrowing plight of handloom industries in India in 1950s, shedding light on the intricate loom policies of the nation. Rooted in Marxist ideology, it explores the societal base and power structures in the rustic backdrop of Thirunelveli and Ambasumuthram, grappling with the repercussions of economic disparities.

The characters Thathu Linga Mudhaliyar and Minor Mudhaliyar, symbolic giants in the local loom industry, epitomize the unscrupulous pursuit of wealth. Their dominance extends to the exploitation of labor and their community, casting a shadow over the lives of the villagers. In contrast stands Kailasa Mudhaliyar, a man who transitioned from laborer to owner, initially supporting the cause of labor but eventually succumbing to the adversities imposed by governmental loom policies.

Novel, 347 p, Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, 1951.

Nationalized: 2008

Translations available: Czech and English

Rights: World Rights available except these languages

Copyright: TNTBESC

Shankar, the son of Thathu Lingamudhaliyar, is a staunch socialist. His sister Kamala follows his path, aligning with the ideals of social justice. Meanwhile, Kailasa Mudhaliyar's son, Mani, falls in love with Kamala. The tragic demise of Kailasa Lingamudhaliyar leads to the climax. In the meanwhile, Mani, finds support in the face of adversity, aided by the missing son of the laborer Konar—Veeraiya—and his commitment to communism. The aftermath portrays their rise against capitalism.

“

The book was translated into Czech and sold 50,000 copies within weeks of publication.

”

Expand your horizons. Secure our grant.

The Tamil Nadu Translation Grant Program, launched by the Government of Tamil Nadu, aims to promote Tamil literature worldwide and facilitate its broader reach. Through this program, non-Tamil publishers in India as well as foreign countries will be able to translate and publish Tamil titles into their languages, thus making these works accessible to readers everywhere. More details: <https://chennaiinternationalbookfair.com/tamilnadu-translation-grant/>

Global Literary Agent Training Program

The Tamil Nadu Government's Global Literary Agent Training Program is a comprehensive initiative designed to equip literary agents with essential skills. Led by accomplished resource persons, the program covers diverse subjects crucial to the profession. Classes incorporate various activities, fostering practical insights and hands-on experience. Participants engage in interactive sessions, workshops, and case studies, gaining a nuanced understanding of global literary dynamics. Beyond traditional aspects like negotiation and rights management, the program addresses emerging trends and technologies. With a dynamic learning approach, it empowers literary agents to navigate the evolving landscape, ensuring they are adept at meeting the demands of the global literary market. A literary agent plays a pivotal role in securing translation grants, as they also oversee both inward and outward rights.

Certified Global literary Agent

“

"Books are the carriers of civilization. Without books, history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled, thought and speculation at a standstill," says Barbara W. Tuchman. Standing on the shoulders of giants, I aspire to exemplify the power of books through my representations, showcasing how diverse narratives and marginalized voices in Tamil literature serve as great carriers of civilization, nurturing connections and critical analysis.



Rajalakshmi B

”



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