

Reference Code

LH

Title

SADAA: Lakshmi Holmström Collection

Extent

4 boxes of documents, notebooks, published books, newspaper cuttings, handwritten and typed annotated manuscripts, conference papers, correspondence, press articles and flyers.

Level of description

Collection

Name of creator

Lakshmi Holmström

Administrative/biographical history

Lakshmi Holmström MBE

By Amanda Hopkinson, The Guardian, 18 May 2016

Lakshmi Holmström, who died of cancer aged 80, was, according to the author Amit Chaudhuri, “the best contemporary anglophone translator India has”. Yet Holmström was in her 50s before Indian, and specifically Tamil, literature became her focus. Her first anthology, for Virago, *The Inner Courtyard: Stories by Indian Women* (1990), exhibited what would become the hallmarks of her translations and critiques of both classical and contemporary female writers. She was determined to produce an anthology based on a common identity and experience, linking politics to literature, and avoiding “foreignisation” or “exoticism”.

Further anthologies followed at intervals, including *Writing from India (Figures in a Landscape)* (1994); *Waves: An Anthology of Fiction and Poetry* (2001) and *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry* (2009). The most recent, *Lost Evenings, Lost Lives* (2016, with Sascha Ebeling), makes a fitting swansong: it is an impassioned account of the suffering of Tamil women in the 30-year civil war in Sri Lanka, and a vindication of poetry as truth-telling, throughout a period of news blackouts.

Holmström fought hard to convey the right voice when rendering Tamil into English, such a different language: “Readers can’t quite grasp the notion that languages differ hugely in lexis as well as syntax; that one language doesn’t move into another automatically ... Words and sentences may be the bricks and mortar, but it has a structure as a whole that you are continually aspiring towards.”

Other translations, undertaken with an ever-surfer touch, were of short stories and novels by Ambai (the pseudonym of CS Lakshmi), Ashokamitran, Bama, Imayam, Sundara Ramaswamy, Na Muthuswamy, Cheran, Mowni, A Madhaviah, Salma and Pudhumaipithan.

In an interview for the *Hindu Times* in 2013, Holmström spoke of the changes in Tamil women’s literature that she had observed over 30 years: “Many women are feminists and articulate their feminism very clearly. But I believe the driving force in their writing – or in the best examples of their work – is not cerebral and generalised but springs from personal, felt experience. Hence Bama’s Dalit politics; hence Salma’s insights into the restricted world of Muslim women; hence the focus of Sri Lankan poets on the violence done to women during and after the war; hence the younger women poets of Tamil and their politics of sexuality.”

LH Collection Level Description

Holmström's background was Christian, although she lost her faith in her teens. She was born in Salem, near Bangalore (Bengaluru), Karnataka. Both her paternal grandfather and her father, Paul David Devanandan, were theologians; her maternal grandfather was the founder of the First Church of South India and her mother, Hannah (nee Amaruwati) graduated from the Women's Christian College.

Although her mother took her own life when Lakshmi was only two years old, she retained a memory of her, and always kept her photo on her study wall. Her father soon remarried, to the chagrin of Lakshmi, her older sister, Nalini, and her younger brother, Marcus, and their childhood was not a happy one. Lakshmi graduated from the Women's Christian College in Madras (now Chennai), and then from St Hilda's College, Oxford, in English literature. Her interest shifted towards anglophone Indian authors as she completed her DLitt, also at Oxford, on RK Narayan.

Lakshmi met her future husband, Mark Holmström, while they were both undergraduates. They married in 1960, and later travelled to New York, where he worked for Unesco and she as librarian at the Indian consulate general. After two years they returned to the UK. Mark became a sociology lecturer at the University of East Anglia, and Lakshmi also taught, for seven years as a schoolteacher in Norwich, and later, from 2003 until 2006, as the first Royal Literary Fund fellow specialising in literary translation at UEA.

Holmström won numerous literary awards and was made an MBE in 2011. For her, the mission always mattered more than the recognition. "The most difficult part of translation is, I believe, finding the 'right' pitch and voice of the original, and to try and match that. I won't say 'replicate'; that's impossible. But there is also the hard graft of familiarising oneself with the history and cultural background of the work. A translator should never be afraid of asking questions."

She is survived by her husband and two daughters, Radhika and Savitri; her grandchildren, Miriam, Naomi, Isaac and Noah; and her sister.

Lakshmi Holmström, writer and translator, born 1 June 1935; died 6 May 2016.

Immediate source of acquisition

The collection was deposited as part of the SADAA (formerly SALIDAA).

Scope and content

Documents, notebooks, published books, newspaper cuttings, handwritten and typed annotated manuscripts, conference papers, correspondence, press articles and flyers.

Dates

1985 to 2016 (reference to literature dated 1955-2016)

System of arrangement

Numbered boxes, folders and files.

Access conditions

Available to researchers, by appointment. Access to archive material is subject to preservation requirements and must also conform to the restrictions of the Data Protection Act and any other appropriate legislation.

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Language of material

English, Tamil, Hindi, Sanskrit

Physical characteristics

Documents, notebooks, published books, newspaper cuttings, handwritten and typed annotated manuscripts, conference papers, correspondence, press articles and flyers. Various sizes up to 29.7 x 42cm (A3).

Finding aids

A finding aid is available for manuscript material.

Archivist's note

Described by Reema Rathod, Matilda Blackwell, SADAA

Rules or conventions

ISAD (G) 2nd ed.

Date(s) of description

June 2018

Indexing

Subjects

Caste domination
Cultural identity
Dalit women
Literature
Manuscripts
Political conflict
Religion
Social / Gender discrimination
Sri Lankan Civil War
Tamil literature and poetry
Translation
Women's writing

Persons

Ahmad, Rukhsana
Alagiriswami, K.
Alexander, Moona
Anand, S.
Andal
Annamalai, E.
Antarjaram, Lahtambika
Avvai
Ayyanar, Bavutha
Balasuryan
Baru, Rama

LH Collection Level Description

Bhatt, Sujata
Bhatt, Sujata
Bjandari, Mannu
Blackburn, Stuart
Blyth
Bridglal, Sindamani
Chatterjee, Debjani
Chaudhry, Manisha
Cheran, Rudhramoorthy (Dr.)
Chowdry, Maya
Das, Kamala
Datar, Chhaya
Demale, Asha
Deshpande, Shashi
Dharwadker, Vinay
Dhingra, Leena
Ebeling, Sascha
Faustina, Bama
Ferro-Luzzi, Gabriella Eichinger (Dr.)
Friese, Afzal
Geeta
Gita
Green, Zoe
Holmström, Mark
Hyma
Iyer
Jagannathan, N. S.
James, Jancy (Dr.)
Karunakaran
Krishnan, Mini
Krishnaswamy, Subashree
Lakshmi, C. S. (pseudonym Ambai)
Maithri, Malathi
Malik, Afshan N.
Mangai
Manushi
Mathai, Anna Sujatha
Meerakshi
Mondal, Ashis
Mukherji, Rena
Murugan, Perumal
Muthuswamy
Naidu, Vayu
Narayan, R.K.
Narayanan, Gomati
Nasta, Susheila
Nayar, Pramod K.
Ogborn, Kate
Padmanabham (Mr)
Pande, Mrinal
Perera, Shyama
Rai, Naina
Ramamirtham, L.S.
Ramamurthi, Vela

LH Collection Level Description

Ramanathan, Suguna
Ramanujan, A.K.
Ramaswamy, Sundara (Pasuvayya)
Rao, Raja
Rashmy
Revathi, Kutti
Richman, Paula
Saldanha, Lyra
Salma
Sangari
Sathiyaseelan, P.
Seshadri, Malini
Seth, Vikram
Shobana
Shouma
Shubha
Sivalingam, Shanmuham
Sivaramani
Sivasekaram, S.
Srilata, K.
Sukamarayana, Vasaithi
Sukirtharani
Sundaram, Kannan
Swaminathan, Venkat
Thiagarajan, Rajeswari
Trueman, Ruth
Urvashi
Vaidehi
Vanita, Ruth
Vijayaragharan, Sujatha
Zubkova, Luba

Corporate bodies

Arc Publications
British Film Institute
Commonwealth Institute in London
Critical Quarterly
Indian Express Sunday Magazine
London College of Dance
Macmillan India Ltd
Manushi
National Book Trust of India
Nehru Centre, London
Norwich Playhouse
Outlook India
Penguin Books India
Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi
School of Oriental and African Studies, London
SAMPAD South Asian Arts & Heritage
Study Centre for Indian Literature in English and Translation (SCILET)
The Hindu
The Independent
The Women's Press
University of East Anglia

LH Collection Level Description

University of Warwick

University of York

Virago Press Ltd

Wake Magazine