

## 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 Amaruvati) 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.

### Archival history

This collection is part of the The South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive (SALIDAA) which was founded in 1999. The aim was to preserve sources and information about the contribution of the South Asian community to literature and arts in Britain.

### Immediate source of acquisition

SADAA deposited their archive with Birmingham Museums Trust.

### 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 SADAA, Reema Rathod, Matilda Blackwell.

### **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