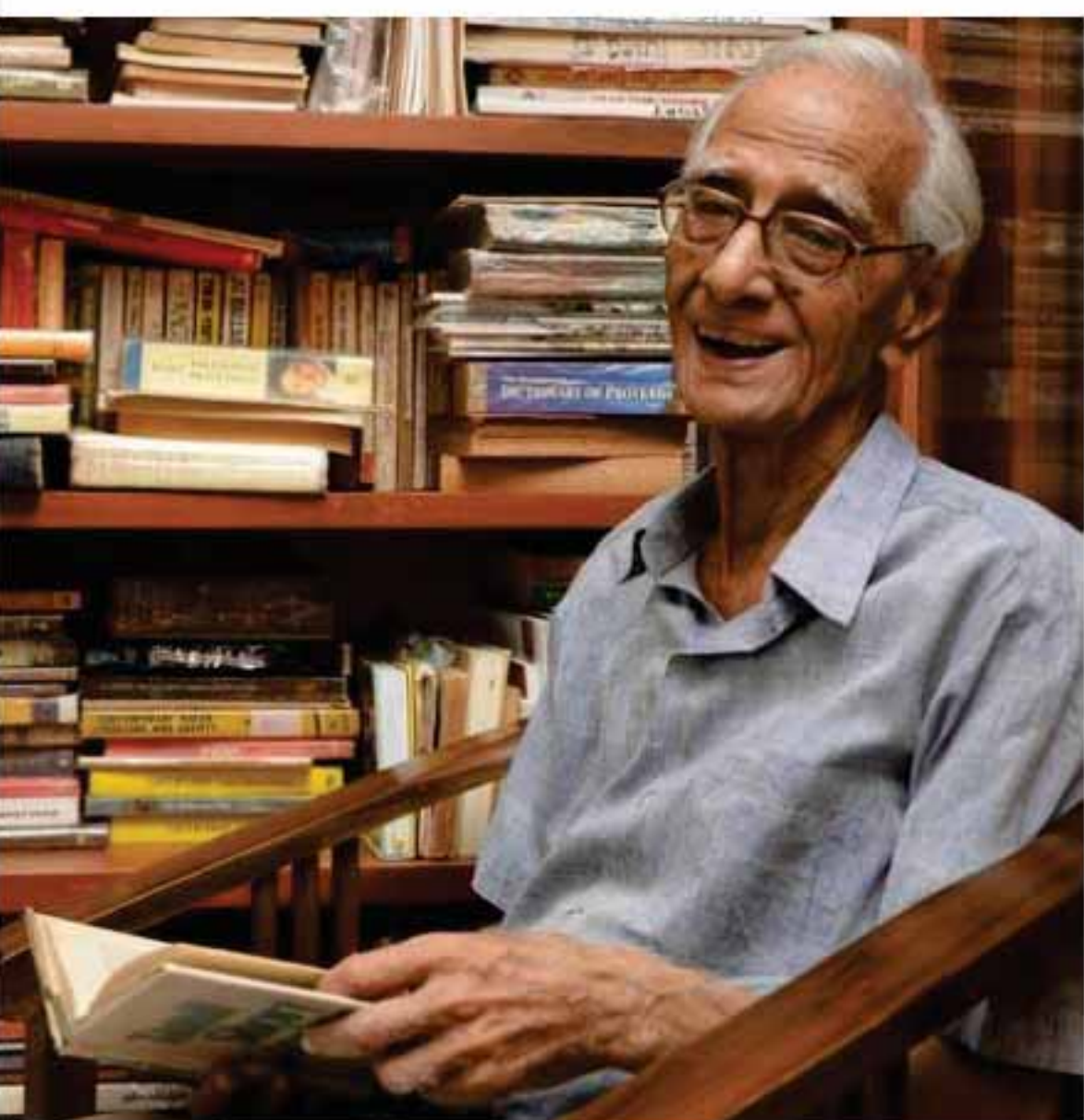


Writer Ashokamitran passes away




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His oeuvre includes now over 200 short stories, eight novels, some 15 novellas, besides other prose writings.

Prominent Tamil writer and Sahitya Akademi winner Ashokamitran, who powerfully portrayed the lives and struggles of the urban middle class life in his literary works, died, aged 86, on Thursday night. He collapsed at home. He is survived by wife and three sons.

Born Tyagarajan on September 22, 1931, he later assumed the pen name, Ashokamitran. He was one of the few writers who wrote fluently  in both Tamil and English and was also known outside Tamil Nadu as most of his works were translated into English and other Indian languages.

In a career spanning over six decades, he wrote eight novels, 20 novellas, hundreds of short stories, commentaries on a wide range of issues, and profiles of personalities. He was given the Sahitya Akademi award in 1996 for *Appavin Snegidhar*, a collection of short stories. Twice, he was awarded the creative writing fellowship at the University of Iowa.

Full-time profession

He took on writing as a full-time profession at a time when it was 'unviable'. "I have witnessed all kinds of difficulties that a full-time writer will face," he said in an interview to the now defunct magazine *Subhamangala*. Satire and, sometimes, subtle humour were the trademark of his writings.


Tamil writer Jeyamohan said: "Without any doubt, Ashokamitran and Pudumaipithan are the two geniuses of modern Tamil literature. And in the case of Ashokamitran, he has been writing for almost 40 years, and retained the fire right through."

Journalist and writer Gnani called Ashokamitran a friend, philosopher and guide to all his associates. Talking about his prose, Gnani said, "It was shorn of all adornments, but was very profound. He used to say that the reader would doubt if he was indeed a good writer, going just by the prose." He went on to add that Ashokamitran's women characters were very strong and sustained life despite several odds.

Amsan Kumar, who made a documentary on Ashokamitran in 2003, said it was admirable that he never considered himself the celebrity he actually was. He was grounded, humble, and friendly.

As the editor of Tamil literary magazine *Kanaiyaazhi* for almost 25 years, Ashokamitran always maintained close links with the mainstream media and his works were published in all the leading journals and newspapers.

Authority on films

He also wrote with authority on films. His novel, *Karaindha Nizhalgal*, was an insider's fictionalised account of the Tamil film world. Everyone  involved in film-making, from drivers, light men, choreographers, to assistants found a place in his book.


He gained intimate knowledge of the film world and the making of films when he was an employed in the public relations department of Gemini Studios. Later, in *My Years with Boss*, he wrote on his association with S.S. Vasan of Gemini Studios. He recalls an incident when the latter asked him to perform some menial task and he resisted and quit.

His father was a friend of Vasan, who published *Ananda Vikatan*.

"Even though P.S. Ramaiah and Pudhumaipithan also worked closely with the film world, their literary works hardly touched upon the film world," said S. Ramakrishnan, Tamil writer.

Ashokamitran also wrote about classical music. It was a strange coincidence that he spent his childhood days in Polagam, a small village in Thanjavur where Papanasam Sivan lived.

Though his family belonged to Mayiladuthurai, his parents lived in Secunderabad until Ashokamitran was 20. He based his novel *Pathinetaavathu Atchakodu* on the city. Later in life, he developed a great fondness for American writing and films, and was a regular at the library in the American Consulate.

Ashokamitran kept himself abreast of the latest writings in English and Tamil, and had a good relationship with other writers . He had close friendship with T. Janakiraman, Ka. Naa. Subramaniam, Indira Parthasarathy, Sundara Ramasamy and Nakulan, and has even written about their works and his relationship with them.

His youngest son T. Ramakrishnan is an Associate Editor with *The Hindu*.