

BOOK REVIEW

A Pedestrian on a Highway by Gayathri Devi Dutt, Published by Notionpress.com, 2019. This is the autobiography of an educationist, gender development visionary, wife, mother, and grandmother. ***A Pedestrian on a Highway*** – a contradiction in terms? Does a nondescript pedestrian have any right to walk on the highway? The cover page illustration mystifies you all the more! It depicts a young girl with a long plait, in a sari, walking on the highway, carrying books. Well, in order to unravel the mystery, you must read the book from cover to cover and I can assure you the book will ensnare you even as Mephistopheles held Faustus captive.

This book is of interest to English teachers, as it tells the story of an English teacher, Gayathri Devi Dutt. She has made a significant impact on ELT at all levels. We may highlight, for instance, her remarkable contribution to the Regional Institute of English, South India. When she took over as Director, the institute was not doing too well. Here are some of her major contributions: She was the first woman director of the institute. Her vision document, presented by her at the first Board Meeting was a plan of infrastructure improvements, a new ladies' hostel on the campus, new appointments, new publications, and training programs to keep the institute active: "These rooms needed doors, those cockroaches had to leave, and the women needed their own bathrooms."

The curriculum was revised; the thrust was on communication. The training program for trainers had three advantages: The RIESI faculty in the role of a trainer, getting a feeling of what the training would feel like to be a participant, and the feedback from the institute on their own material. On the RIESI

teacher training manual, ***A Passage to English***, Professor Jacob Tharu remarks, "An interesting innovation is placing the entire training program in a journey metaphor A lot of fun learning, without trivialising anything . . ."

The earlier chapters tell us the story of a girl child, ignored by her father, the humiliations she faced, the challenges she overcame, the financial burden she had to shoulder as the eldest child of the family, the hurdles she had to face as a female employee in a male-dominated milieu, and so on. What stands out is her indomitable courage, her passion for education and her concern for women. Generally, ELT practitioners are regarded as anti-literary. However, in Gayathri Devi, we find a creative writer to whom poetry came as leaves to a tree. She describes the reactions of her mother and father on her birth:

"Lovely eyes and long hair/What a beauty could I bear/The mother thought.

On the news of birth/Babuji exclaimed/Oh, a girl? /And dark and dusky?"

What Gayathri says in the Preface epitomises her personality: "I must confess that I am not one of those who changed art, culture or history, but definitely one who took every experience seriously. I believed in doing things differently and have lit some light through education, keeping my desires and aspirations in an imaginative, parallel world."

"Thank you, Gayathri, for giving other readers and me, a chance to take this extraordinary journey with you. A very inspiring life," says Deepa Dhanraj. I hope the readers of this review will read the book in full and experience the same feeling.

Reviewed by Dr V. Saraswathi