



E. K. Janaki Ammal

Portrait of a Woman as a Nomad Scientist:

E. K. Janaki Ammal 1897-1984

by Dr. Savithri Preetha Nair

Friday, February 10, 2023 at 4 p.m.

YouTube Live Link: <https://youtube.com/live/pyXH6wSO6gs?feature=share>

The movement was central to E. K. Janaki Ammal's life. Modeled around such key fluid figures of modernity as the nomad, the exile, the pilgrim, and the bhikshu, or the wandering religious mendicant, her evolving subjectivity was heavily marked by her geographical wanderings in pursuit of science. Mobility ("adapt, move or perish"), or following one's dreams across borders, was not only a way of being but also of thinking for her. This biographical case study demonstrates that Janaki chose the liberating figure of the nomad as a way of being, and producing scientific knowledge, to break free of the tyranny of hierarchy, patriarchy, and pseudo-science she encountered in the male bastions of state science. She was a border crosser in more ways than one, from her biological and social origins to her nomadic subjectivity, her solitary travels of exploration, and the nature of her scientific practice. Crossing borders and devising adventurous escapes made her life and science all the richer, and her story especially enthralling. Simply stated, this biography aims to reveal something of what it meant to live, dangerously at times, and make a career in the twentieth century as a nomad woman scientist.



*Savithri Preetha Nair received her doctorate in 2003, from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), the University of London for her dissertation on the museum and the shaping of the sciences in colonial India. Nair's research interests include the history of science, modernity, and enlightenment at the turn of the nineteenth century, the history and politics of collecting for science, the sociology of knowledge, the public museum, and women in science in colonial and post-colonial India. Among her books is the co-authored (with Richard Axelby) *Science and the Changing Environment in India: A Guide to Sources in the India Office Records 1780-1920* (British Library, London, 2010), the monograph, *Raja Serfoji II: Science, Medicine and Enlightenment in Tanjore, 1786-1832* (Routledge, 2012), and the most recent *Chromosome Woman, Nomad Scientist: E. K. Janaki Ammal, A Life* (Routledge, 2023), besides several papers in peer-reviewed international journals and edited volumes. Nair is an independent scholar and divides her time between London and Kerala.*

The talk is co-hosted by the TIFR Committee on Gender Harmony to commemorate the International Day of Women and Girls in Science.

ASET Forum of TIFR

1-Homi Bhabha Road, Colaba, Mumbai 400005

Phone: 91-22-22782368, email: aset@tifr.res.in, web: tifr.res.in/~asset