

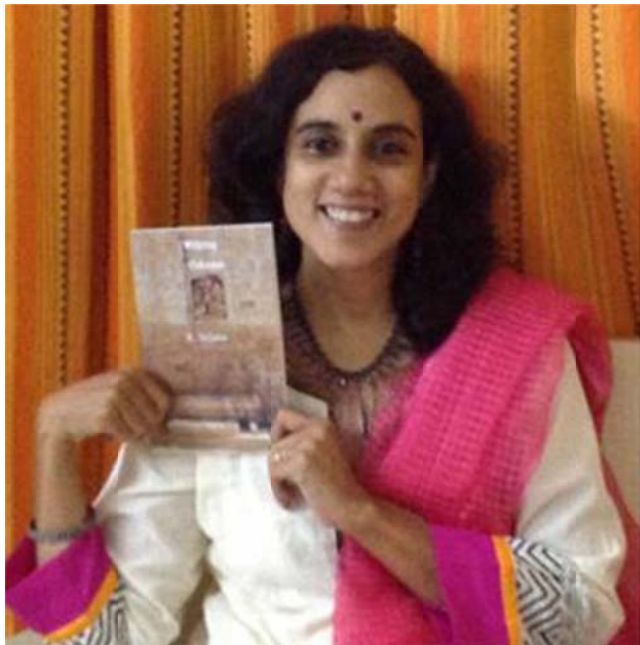
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## Penning verse

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**BOOK K. Srilata's *Writing Octopus* is a collection of 45-odd poems that talk about everything from the colour blue to ruminations**



SPRINKLED WITH METAPHORSK. Srilata's poems

The eight-arm octopus is a recurring motif in many of K. Srilata's poems. So many, in fact, that it became the title of her new collection of poems — *Writing Octopus*. Launched in the city recently, the 45-odd poems talk about everything from the colour blue to ruminations on writing. The book was released by freelance writer Geeta Doctor.

After a novel and two other collections of poems, *Writing Octopus* was the fruit of a year-long sabbatical that Srilata took recently. "IIT-Madras offers time off to staff after some years of teaching, and I took mine 10 years into service. It's just some quiet time to think. I was hosted by The Institute of Mathematical Sciences and went to South Korea for a residency (supported by

InKo). I was supposed to work on a novel, but a lot of the poems in this collection were written then,” she says.

Some of the poems talk of the colour blue (‘Bright Blue Bird’), or the ocean (‘Mind’s Eye’), while there are others that talk of writing (‘A Brief History Of Writing’ and ‘I Wear My Wordlessness Like A Tattered Dress’). The octopus, of course, makes an appearance in many of her poems — ‘Stealing Oysters’, ‘Octets In Octopus Ink’, ‘My Vestigial Octopus’... “While I was sitting down and arranging the poems for the book, I realised that the octopus was a common theme in many. I guess it had to do with the number of arms it has and the Octopus ink. I found it a better metaphor for writing,” says Srilata. In fact, her poems on writing are sprinkled with interesting metaphors. “You work with metaphors to push language so that you can work outside clichés.”

How her poem ‘Graveyard Of Faces’ came about is interesting. “I recently switched to contact lenses and the whole disposability aspect of it perhaps played in my mind too much. One night I had a dream about burying my face and wearing a new one. When I woke up, I remembered those parts so well that I began to work on it,” she adds.

What kind of response does a book on poems get, especially in a market dominated by prose? “There is a lot of awareness about poetry now, especially among the younger people. I find that students want to read poems and engage with it. So, there is hope. Also, there are so many online poetry journals where one can put out their work. These sites are a blessing,” she says. In fact, many of the poems in *Writing Octopus* were already published by online journals.

Srilata is now looking forward to working on her second novel. “The book will also be about writing, in a way,” she says.

ANUSHA PARTHASARATHY