

French teacher of Pondicherry varsity awarded Chevalier title

Her contributions to language, culture studies recognised

M. DINESH VARMA
PUDUCHERRY

Nalini J. Thampi, who has been teaching French, Gallic culture and Francophone literature for over four decades, has been awarded the 'Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques de la République Française' or the Knight of the French Order of Academic Palms by the Republic of France.

The honour is in recognition of her "exemplary career, determined and continuous commitment to the service of French Literature, Francophone Studies, French language, Civilisation, Women's Studies and Academics."

A professor of the Department of French at Pondicherry University, Ms. Thampi has a career spanning over 40 years at university-level teaching and academic and administrative service at the Pondicherry Central University and the English and Foreign Language University, Hyderabad. "This is definitely the crowning achievement in my long career. The Chevalierit is a rare title in Indian academia and rarer so for a woman to be a laureate," said Ms. Thampi. French Consul General Lise Talbot Barre will award the honorific title during the Festival of Francophonie on Saturday.

Of Indo-Mauritian des-



Nalini J. Thampi

cent, the multilingual academic studied in Algiers, Phnom-Penh, Pondicherry and Hyderabad.

Apart from her vast contributions to numerous academic/administrative committees and various statutory bodies of the Central University and various others, she is also the first woman to hold the position of Dean, School of Humanities, at the Pondicherry University.

Ms. Thampi has also headed the Department of French and directed the Centre for Women's Studies and the Centre for Foreign Languages. "French is very much the preferred foreign language choice in the student fraternity. The short course we offer for non-French departments is always oversubscribed, and I guess this is the case in other universities with similar programmes," she said.

While learning French

has been a value-adding differentiator in the resume for job-seekers, the renewed spike in demand can be attributed to globalisation and the increasing presence of French multinational companies on our shores, she said.

A jury led by Ms. Thampi selects students from the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, who are to pursue a year of study at the Pondicherry University under double degree memorandum of understanding, which was signed in 2019. She also coordinates student exchanges with several leading French, Canadian, Spanish, Japanese and Hungarian universities.

Ms. Thampi has served as an expert for the University Grants Commission NET/Junior Research Fellowship, helped revise the French curriculum of the Union Public Service Commission exams, served as a member of the Executive Committee of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient and has been part of recruitment committees for French teachers in India. She was a jury member for the Romain Rolland Prize awarded by the French Embassy in India for the best translation of a French work into an Indian language and for the Franco-Indian Gitanjali Prize awarded to the best French and Indian works.