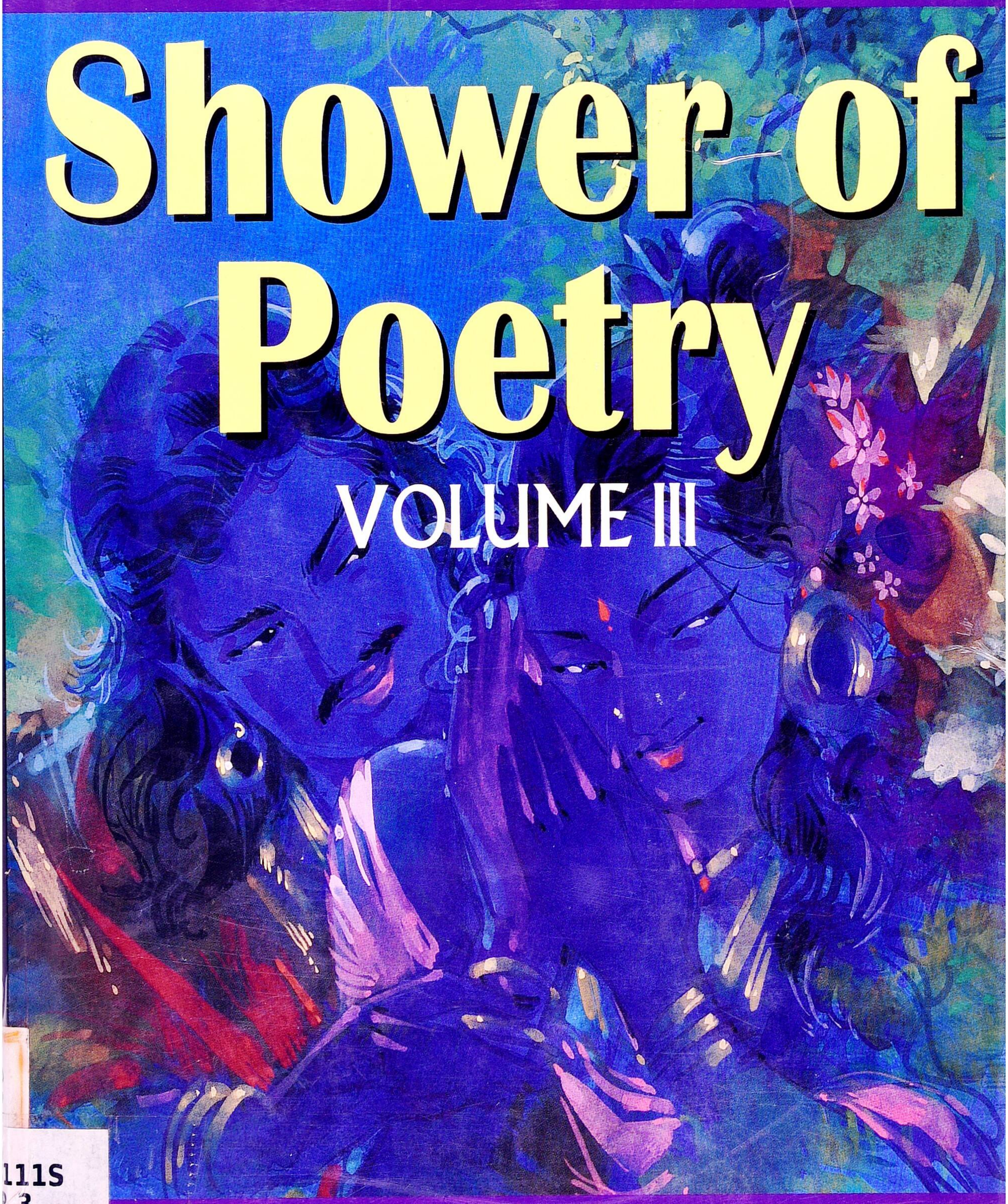
Kalaignar in English Translation

Shower of Poetry

VOLUME III



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BHARATHIAR UNIVERSITY

Kalaignar M Karunanidhi is essentially a poet, and even his prose writings have a heavy preponderance of poetic diction and poetic deviances. His intrinsic passion for poetic expression transcends his apparent limitations on technique, and the resultant poetic style has become a defining characteristic of all that he has written, both prose and poetry.

Kalaignar's is poetic prose or prose poetry, which is poetic insofar as it is infused with imagery of an original kind, and expresses things in adequate language, matching language to the thought and the mood. His poems, in particular, demonstrate his uncommon ability to strike at the right word and the right image by which to evoke his thoughts.

Most of his poems touch and disturb the mind of the learner or the reader, born as they are out of the disturbance the poet feels at the innermost depths of his heart over the external happenings, which range from the significant socio-political events of the day through concerns about the Tamil language and the Tamil culture to things romantic at one end and rational at the other.

Kalaignar's poetic expression is natural and spontaneous. It is not interesting thoughts dressed up in flowery language, nor is it a mental exercise of a laboured kind, metrically structured. He neatly fits into the Keatsian conception of poetry coming naturally as leaves to a tree, surprising by fine excess, and not by singularity.

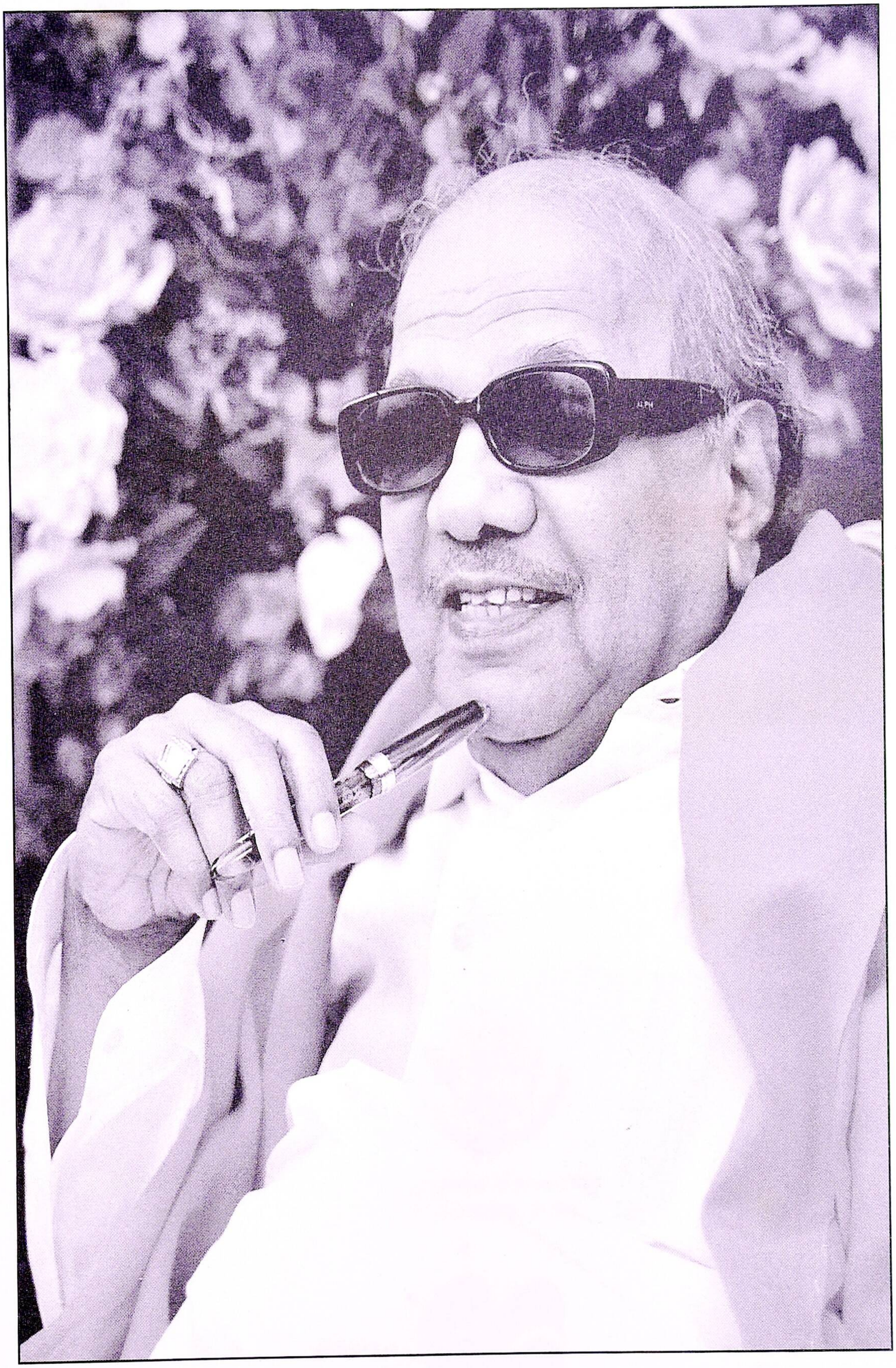
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Kalaignar in English Translation

Shower of Poetry

Volume III

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8826

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P. Marudanayagam

V. Murugan

Bharathiar University
Coimbatore, India

MACMILLAN

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M. Karunanidhi
Chief Minister

Secretariat
Chennai - 600 009
Date: 12.05.2009

Foreword

I am extremely happy to know that Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, has taken the initiative to bring out a selection of my writings in English.

Bharatidasan, a formidable revolutionary poet, instilled in the Tamils an intense love for Tamil in such exhortations as

May you thunder, O Conch!
That the never diminishing Tamil
Is our life-breath and our prosperity.

Periyar E.V. Ramasamy and Perarignar Anna devoted their entire lives to promote among the Tamils an awareness of the dignity of their race. Following in their footsteps, from my childhood to this day I have immersed myself in the task of writing in order to keep the Tamil youth ever vigilant because of my desire that the Tamil land and the Tamil society should progress rising to the level of the rest of mankind. With this end in view, my writings have taken numerous forms such as poetry, drama, fiction, essay, epistle and travelogue.

Many have admiringly observed and continue to observe that my literary output has also contributed to the onward march of the Tamils in several spheres. In such a context, let me unreservedly and to my heart's content praise Bharathiar University, especially its Vice Chancellor, Dr G. Thiruvasagam, for his efforts to publish the most significant of those writings in English.

My thoughts have always centred round the idea that the Tamils should awaken and that the Tamil land should achieve worldwide progress. May these translations effectively serve that cause dear to my heart!

To
Dr G. Thiruvasagam
Vice Chancellor
Bharathiar University
Coimbatore

அன்புடன்

(M. Karunanidhi)

Vice Chancellor's Note

There is a close parallel between the nationalist Tamil poet Subramania Bharathi (after whom this University is named) and Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi in that both of them have a deep-rooted conviction in art being an agent of social transformation and the writings of both seek to release people from the shackles of slavery and show them the way of dignity and self-respect.

Bharathiar firmly believed that at the root of all social problems lay the evil of the caste system. All his life, he stressed that there were only two castes – the righteous and the unrighteous, the former superior and the latter inferior. A standing example of the might of the pen over the sword, Bharathiar's writings played a very significant role not only in gaining freedom for India from foreign yoke but also in unfettering his countrymen from the utterly dehumanizing beliefs and practices of the Indian society.

Kalaignar, remaining in the forefront of the fight against social inequality in all its forms, is a writer with ingrained social consciousness and has fathered numerous social reforms as the head of the government and as the leader of a political party, thanks to which people from the sections of the society once looked down as being incapable of thought and knowledge are today intellectuals, professionals and leaders of men.

A grand fusion of Periyar, Anna and Bharathiar, Kalaignar stands as a towering personality. Kalaignar now at 86, age has not withered his intellect nor has time made his writings stale.

Determined to secure a presence for Tamil literature and culture on the global scene, this University has already translated Bharathi's poems into English and conferred the"Bharathi Tamil Chemmal"award on Kalaignar in 2007, the University's Silver Jubilee year. The present endeavour, translation of Kalaignar's works into English, is a major step towards realizing this goal.

G. Thiruvasagam

Prologue

Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi's literary works in English translation should constitute a gift of the Tamil language to world literature.

In so far as Kalaignar is both a visionary writer and an active practitioner of his vision, he is a phenomenon unto himself, standing a rung or two above his fellow artists of all genres.

Kalaignar's significance in the history of Tamil literature primarily lies in his restoration and renewal of the pristine glory of Tamil, the language that is the mother of the Dravidian family of languages and that is one of the primary classical languages of the world.

Kalaignar's creativity began to manifest in his concern for the ethnic identity of the Tamils and the aesthetic exuberance of the Tamil language, and today it has matured into a seminal contribution to world literature.

Looked at the need for winning international recognition for Tamil literature, especially in the context of the other pan-Indian language, Sanskrit, enjoying worldwide attention and study, the present translations of Kalaignar's selected works into English are an attempt in the right direction.

Such of these translations are also a need of the hour for the Tamil language to demonstrate its capacity for indestructibility and rejuvenation, at this hour of the prognosticatory threat of the social scientists that globalization would in its wake see the languages of ethnic communities either wear off or die out.

Kavipperarasu Vairamuthu

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Introduction

Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi, born in 1924 in a hamlet of Thanjavur in the southern part of India, has eminently succeeded in making spectacular contributions both as a statesman and as a man of letters. His has been a full life providing ample space for diplomacy, social reformation and creative writing. Neither a philosopher nor a full-fledged academic living in an ivory tower, he has the courage and the wisdom to think and to act remarkably. A prolific writer endowed with unusual powers of observation and meditation, he has been ceaselessly adorning his beloved Mother Tamil with a steady stream of writings, leaving no genre untouched. It may be poetry or prose, song or verse, essay or story, play or fiction, social novel or historical novel, creative writing or criticism, memoir or autobiography, script for a film or a play, broadcast or speech – he can handle it with astonishing ease. What he has written till today may run to more than fifty volumes of 300 to 400 pages each.

What Karunanidhi states in the first volume of his autobiography about the year in which he was born is a telling comment on the ethos of the times as well as on the political, social and cultural forces that moulded his world-view. That was a year that witnessed momentous events. Lenin, the supreme architect of the communist revolution in Russia, died and Stalin came to power. Trotsky's advocacy of violent worldwide revolution was abandoned in favour of Stalin's plan for *"socialism in one country"* and the communist leaders decided to adapt the movement to the differing situations in various countries. Turkey became a republic under the presidentship of Kemal Ataturk during whose fifteen-year reign, the country's political and economic structure as well as its religious and social bases was totally transformed. Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, written during his incarceration in Bavaria, preaching anti-semitism, power worship and disdain for morality and outlining his strategy for world domination later became the bible of

the Nazi party. Since all the empires had been weakened by the first world war, many colonies boldly rose in revolt against them.

When Nazism, Fascism and Communism were becoming prominent in the West, Gandhian ideology started taking shape in India. It was in 1924 that Gandhiji, released from prison, became the President of the Indian National Congress and Jawaharlal Nehru was elected its General Secretary. India had awakened from its deep slumber and Gandhiji's appearance on the political scene electrified the Indian masses. The Belgaum Congress meet had the party's future course of action mapped out. Though most of the Indian political leaders were unanimous in their view that the British should be driven away from the country, they were hopelessly divided with regard to the strategies to be developed for dealing with the foreign power. The labour unions in the country were gradually becoming stronger and stronger. The feudal lords and zamindars were waging a losing battle against the tillers of the soil. If in the south seeds were sown for organized fights for social justice, in the north there appeared signs of disruption of communal harmony.

It was in 1924 that Periyar E.V. Ramasami planned an epic battle against the evil of untouchability that later earned him the title of Vaikkam Hero. Besides laying a firm foundation for the labour movement in Tamilnadu, Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliyar became a fierce fighter for the country's freedom. Finally, Karunanidhi significantly adds that it was the year in which "the revolutionary of revolutionaries, who dispelled the thousand-year-old darkness of the Tamil land," Arignar Anna, was a high school student equipping himself for the historic role he was going to play.

In this chronicle he is able to identify, of course with the benefit of hindsight, the intellectuals and men of action who later became his models as well as those against whom he had to define himself. Though all those personalities, movements, parties and ideologies might have attracted his attention at an impressionable age, he was going to choose Periyar and not Gandhiji, Arignar Anna and not Jawaharlal Nehru, the party wedded to Dravidian ideals and not the Congress, Periyar's Marxism and not Nehruvian socialism, and Tamilnadu and not India. To him, as to his guides and companions in the Dravidian Movement, the social and cultural emancipation of the Dravidians was of greater importance than even the political freedom of the country.

Even as a fourteen-year-old adolescent, Karunanidhi was captivated by the self-respect movement of Periyar E.V. Ramasami, whose fiery speeches and writings exerted an irresistible influence on several thousands of young men and women of Tamilnadu during the early decades of the twentieth century. To the politically,

socially, economically and culturally oppressed of the Tamil land, Periyar appeared as a new messiah who could save them from the atrocities perpetrated against them in the name of religion. His words and deeds, ideas and activities, principles and practices took the southern part of India by storm as he travelled the length and breadth of it tirelessly, asking the Dravidians to become aware of their racial identity and to boldly fight for their release from the shackles of slavery, superstition and inferiority complex which, in his view, had been the handiwork of an alien race. The young Karunanidhi was one of his prize catches.

If Periyar's thoughts made an indelible impression on him, Arignar Anna's powerful oratory became a perennial source of inspiration. He thoroughly soaked himself in Anna's speeches and writings, committed numerous admirable utterances of his to memory and revelled in quoting them as often as possible. When it came to his own speeches, he didn't slavishly imitate Anna but scrupulously developed a distinct style of his own. If Anna's ornate and colourful prose is almost verse and if every paragraph of his can be turned into a *viruttappā* by a few slight modifications, Karunanidhi's prose is punchy, heavily ironic and full of witticisms. If every sentence in the former's speech, having a lyrical charm of its own, is a case of "linked sweetness long drawn out," every sentence in the latter's speech moves fast and quickly reaches its carefully planned climax. If Anna's mastery of Tamil prose is almost unsurpassed, every speech of Karunanidhi is a sparkling performance. One would be reminded of the comparison Dryden draws between Demosthenes and Cicero:

> One warms you by degrees; the other sets you on
> fire all at once and never intermits his heat. …
> One persuades, the other commands.

Of all the modern poets, it was Bharatidasan, the organ voice of the Dravidian movement, who won his heart by a poetry that galvanized the Tamils into action. He can use Bharatidasan's similes, phrases, lines and whole poems to dramatic effect in his own speeches and dialogues for films. Inspired by Bharatidasan's play *Iraṇiyaṉ allatu Iṇaiyaṟṟa Vīraṉ*, he reconstructed the myths relating to Ravana, Vali, Hiranya and Indrajit. The Dravidian stance on many more legends, myths, literary representations and historical personages was later exquisitely articulated by Karunanidhi in different genres and modes.

Kalaignar's lack of college education or of classroom learning of ancient Tamil writings never stood in the way of his becoming an accomplished writer and competing with the university wits of his time. Energetic and strenuous self-schooling more than made up for it. Plunging into studies of classical and modern Tamil works, he got as much out of them as any contemporary Tamil scholar

could. He took to *Tolkāppiyam, Tirukkuṟaḷ, Eṭṭuttokai, Pattuppāṭṭu, Cilappatikāram, Maṇimēkalai, Kaliṅkattupparaṇi* and Sundaraṉār's *Maṉōṉmaṇiyam* just as fish take to water, and a sound knowledge of these stood him in good stead by shaping his vision of life and having quite an impact on the texture of his prose and poetry. Besides writing learned expositions of some of these texts, he could provide new renderings of many of these into lucid modern Tamil so that they could easily reach the masses. Because of his re-presentations of *Tirukkural* in more than one form, Tiruvalluvar became a household name in Tamilnadu.

There is no simple yardstick with which the performance of any writer can be assessed. It has to vary from group to group if not from individual to individual for there are writers and writers. Their missions vary; their methods differ. Gandhiji was a prolific writer but would never claim the title of an artist. Among those that have produced many works of lasting value, there have been political revolutionaries such as Lenin, Trotsky and Mao Tse-Tung, political theorists such as Hobbes, Thomas Paine and Karl Marx, statesmen such as Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill and Malraux, philosophers such as Voltaire, Bertrand Russell and Sartre, activists such as Mahatma Gandhi, Periyar E.V. Ramasami and Martin Luther King and scientists such as Charles Darwin, Julian Huxley and Einstein. The writings of these can't be measured against those of creative artists such as Flaubert, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, who firmly believed that artistry was of primary importance and that their loyalty to language came before everything else.

Karunanidhi is almost equally split between his responsibilities to art and politics. He may be in or out of power; he may be the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu or the Leader of the Opposition but his creative vigour shows no signs of abating. The older he grows, the more voluminous the literary output happens to be. For the life, career and achievement of Karunanidhi, we can find three amazingly close parallels in contemporary world histoy: Arthur Koestler, Pablo Neruda and Wole Soyinka. Koestler, who, interestingly begins his autobiography with an account of what happened in different parts of the world on his birthday, was a communist when he was in his twenties, left the party during the Stalin purge trials, became an influential spokesman of the non-communist left and is now remembered for his writings characterized by an impressive journalistic style and a sense of commitment. Neruda earned a name as a poet, diplomat and communist leader, received the Nobel Prize for literature while serving as ambassador to France and is known for his highly personal poetry in the collection *Twenty Love Poems and One Song of Despair* and for his writings that glorify his home country's landscape

and condemn the exploitation of the Red Indians. Soyinka, a Nigerian revolutionary, playwright, poet and novelist, has won international acclaim for his writings which combine Western and Yoruba traditions.

Karunanidhi's writings, dashed off in the white heat of inspiration in the midst of a hectic schedule, are in Tamil, at once a classical and modern language that has, because of several centuries of constant use, become a supple medium of prose and verse. They have to be made available in English if the world at large, especially the West, has to recognize their power and glory.

Prof. P. Marudanayagam

Preface

Dr M. Karunanidhi, popularly known as Kalaiñar M. Karunanidhi, and endearingly called Kalaiñar, is a multidimensional personality. Even though the Tamil term 'Kalaiñar' refers to an accomplished person in an art or arts, such is the achievement of Karunanidhi that 'Kalaiñar' has come to be particularly associated with him, so much so that 'Kalaiñar' is no longer a title but a proform designation of Karunanidhi in the same way as 'the Bard' is used to refer to Shakespeare.

Kalaiñar, one among the select 'who is who' of contemporary India, is a ripe political personality of more than seven decade standing, a statesman and a proven administrator with the rare distinction of being the chief minister of a state for five terms, who has dominated the public life of the State of Tamilnadu longer than any other politician, past or present.

Kalaiñar, past 85, has acquired a national stature in the political arena of India, notwithstanding his studied decision to confine himself to the affairs of the State. His counsel and views are being sought and respected by the political class in India. He has on many occasions played a pivotal role in shaping and guiding the political destiny of the country over the decades from the Indira Gandhi era in the seventies down to the present decade of the twenty-first century. He is singularly responsible for prevailing upon the Government of India to officially accord the status of a classical tongue to the Tamil language. He is known as an undaunted political activist, a never-say-die fighter for social and political causes, and a relentless crusader for rationalist revival in the State.

M. Karunanidhi is credited with all these qualities and accomplishments. And yet, it is the title Kalaiñar, 'an artist par excellence' by which he is universally identified and characterized. Such is the preponderance, substance and weight of his literary personality. And it is justifiably so.

For Kalaiñar Karunanidhi is a multifaceted, prolific writer with an amazingly large volume of literary output in an equally amazingly wide variety of genres to his credit. He is a poet, a playwright, a novelist and short story writer, a letter writer, an elegist, a journalist and a columnist, a scriptwriter, a political satirist, an essayist, a translator, an autobiographer and a social and literary critic, besides being an eloquent, powerful speaker in a variety of fora ranging from legislative assembly and political platform to poets' meet and cultural gatherings. His creative and critical works have been published in 59 volumes, autobiography and memoirs in another 8 volumes, political writings, public speeches, convocation addresses, talks on sociocultural and literary issues, etc in 115 more volumes, large and small.

What astounds one is the fact that he has been writing on all these genres contemporaneously, and that he has put the same amount of energy and interest in each genre. It is even more astonishing to see that his primary field of activity is politics, that he is a professional politician, and that for the last 40 years he has been either the chief minister of the state or the opposition leader, besides being the president of a major political party, heavily charged with the responsibility of running the party in the thick of electoral politics; and naturally, writing can have only a secondary place in his priorities, of course in terms of time to be spent. At 85 now, he still keeps writing. In a poem written on 6 December 2003, he speaks of his longing that he has 'miles to go'.

. . .
None the less,
The longing of mine
That I should write things so prolifically
That they pile up to the height of the Himalayas
Remains sadly unfulfilled.

(I Must Write That Pile up to the Himalayan Height)

Undoubtedly then, Kalaiñar is an extraordinary phenomenon, one without a parallel in contemporary India.

Kalaiñar's poetry is not metrical poetry written in adherence to the norms and conventions of classical prosody. He does not pretend to be a poet with technical perfection. In one of his poems, he makes a confessionary statement to this effect:

Even though I didn't have opportunities to learn prosody
I don't want to remain a tree unproductive.

Guided by the conviction
That my land, language, honour and feelings
Shouldn't go unprotected
Even if my poetry stands uninformed by norms of prosody,
I would make verses
Where the feelings that well up in my heart
Would translate into lines of these verses
Which would impact betrayers of their clan,
The folks of shifting stand that they are.

(I Must Write That Pile up to the Himalayan Height)

An urge for poetic expression has all along been a burning passion in Kalaiñar, that transcends his apparent limitations on technique, and the resultant poetic style has become a defining characteristic of all that he has written, both prose and poetry. He writes in the poem "I Must Write....", which reads like an autobiographical fragment:

My mind doesn't consent to keep my thought hidden within
Till I get versed in the conventions of versification.
Therefore,
I have chosen to present my standpoint on things in poetic prose
With honesty of purpose running through my words.
....
Who would make a visit to it for bathing
Were the Kuṟṟālam Falls to be turned into a channelled course of water
Rather than letting it fall from a height?
....
Are there folks around
Who would brush aside
Richness of imagination and profundity of thought,
Making out a case for traditional poetry?

Kalaiñar's is then poetic prose or prose poetry, which is poetic insofar as it is rich in original imagery, and expresses things in adequate language, matching language to the thought and mood. He has, in poem after poem, demonstrated his ability to strike at the right word and right image by which to evoke his thoughts.

Look at the following lines, where he makes out a case for writing 'metreless' poetry:

Would anyone pluck out and throw off aubergine and bitter gourd
Saying they are unripe?
Do see that
Like these vegetables that go into making curry,
My verses too would serve a purpose of their own;
You may do well to have a taste of them.

(I Must Write....)

The following lines mark a Byronic charm and intensity:

There comes a damsel
Swinging like a jewelled chariot,
Walking on the verdant grass
Where the eggs of snow are being hatched.

Or look at the poem where he speaks about the relationship between a leader and his followers, conveyed through a refreshingly new, Donne's-like image that runs through the whole poem, where his fertile imagination finds out that the fingers of great masters of wind and percussion instruments are endowed with 'eyes':

For
Could the fingers
Every now and then
Take instructions from the musician
For them to run through the instrument,

Opening or closing the holes therein?
Should they do so,
Wouldn't then music turn into
A thing blemished?

The activists of a movement
Are verily like these fingers.

Like the involuntary movements of the fingers
That work on the surface of wind and percussion instruments
Without looking for instructions from the musician

For each and every movement they make,
And thereby produce exquisite music
In tune with the musician's intent,

The activists of a movement
Put into deed
What their masterful leader intends
With no hesitation as from a vacillating mind.

(It Would Endure Sunlike)

Kalaiñar's poetry is essentially an intellectual manifestation of human spirit. Most of his poems touch and disturb the mind of the hearer or the reader, born as they are out of the disturbance the poet feels at the innermost depths of his heart over an external event or happening. That is, some sort of force or pressure builds up in the poet's mind which demands release in the form of a poetic event. It may be sudden and explosive like a thunderclap, or slow and gradual like the growth of a tree from a seed.

Kalaiñar's poetic expression is natural, spontaneous. It is not interesting thoughts dressed up in flowery language, nor is it a mental exercise of a laboured kind structured metrically. He neatly fits into the Keatsian conception of poetry:

> If poetry comes not as naturally as leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all.... It should surprise by a fine excess, and not by singularity; it should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts.

And Kalaiñar does not surprise us by resorting to things unworldly or irrational. There are no religio-philosophical abstractions, no escape into mythology in Kalaiñar. In most cases, he treads the path of reason and logic, thanks to his unwavering belief in the correctness of rational thinking and scientific temperament.

The two ruling qualities of Kalaiñar's poetry are naturalness and surprise which go together in most of his poems. For poetry which has no appearance of naturalness cannot hold it for long, and the magic of poetry lies in its ability to surprise the reader by what Keats calls "a fine excess". Here is a poem composed at the prospect of Abdul Kalam, the son of Rameswaram town in Tamilnadu, becoming the President of India:

The waves too
That keep breaking on the beach of Rameswaram
Do rise up hilllike today

And go about dancing in ecstasy!
Should you and I take it to be due to a midsea depression,
We should be making an error of judgement sure!
...
The dance of the waves here on the Rameswaram sands
Is but the dance of joy
At the prospect of this (man of) science
...
Coming to rule this sprawling country!

(The Opportune Hour has Come)

Kalaiñar is endowed with a natural gift for wit and humour, irony and sarcasm, pun and repartee, which remain the inseparable, intrinsic components of his poems, just as they are infused into his speeches and hold the audience enthralled, be it a literary meet or political platform. At one level, these qualities secure his poems against monotony and insipidness. At another level, they serve to mask his treatment of contemporary political issues and personalities, and thereby invest his poems with an abiding aesthetic appeal and character. A significant mention must also be made of his numerous political satires and allegories, which Kalaiñar, along with his political mentor C.N. Aṇṇāturai, has developed into a distinct literary genre. This genre, among others, constitutes a lasting contribution of Kalaiñar to Tamil literature in general and contemporary Tamil literature in particular.

Kalaiñar is a people's poet more than a scholar's delight. Striding the length and breadth of Tamilnadu for over seven long decades, he has grown into a man of the people, an out and out social being, acutely and clinically aware of and sensitive to the pulse of the Tamil people at large. Inevitably, his writings, including his poems, are his reflections on and portraits of the contemporary realities of the Tamil society as much as his responses to the current political and social events to which he has been an authentic witness.

Kalaiñar is then a poet speaking to his fellow men through his power of articulate speech and exceptional command of language, through his overdeveloped faculties to exploit the resources of the Tamil language in refreshingly new and original ways. It must also be said that most of the time we feel that there is an irrepressible urge, an intrinsic compulsion in him to speak to his fellow men, which alone can explain his finding time day in, day out to write poems in the midst of his exacting schedule of official responsibilities and

programmes as the chief minister of the state and as the head of a large political party.

Obviously, Kalaiñar's is not art for art's sake. His poems, in particular, are almost obsessively and yet unobtrusively concerned with edification rather than entertainment. He closely looks at and interprets the issues and happenings of the day or the problems of larger social and political implications and takes them to the reader looking for their impact on him. There is always a message or a propagandist strain running through almost all his poems, but they seldom degenerate into message hunting or propagandist pieces. It is this trait that lends the poetry of Kalaiñar an abiding literary value and significance. Here are some samples:

Thanks to ill-gotten money flowing on hand,
The unripe ones pass for ripe corn,
Men of conceit pose as leaders,
Slipperiness parades as politics,
And scribble masquerades as public statements!

What a fall!
Even the chaste periodicals turn to Akalikais;
How many are the middlemen with tainted hands
Readying themselves to set the posterity on funeral pyre!

(The Dying Histories of Living Corpses)

* * * * *

Is it atheism
To find God in the smile of the poor?
Is it theism
To hold that the lot of the poor is God's will?

(What is Theism? What is Atheism?)

* * * * *

(Strolling as I was),
I could hear a baby flower
Talking to its mother creeper
In the Tamil language:

"O mother!
You keep making mistakes persistently
Why do you go on bringing us unto this world forever
For us to remain lying on the ground and fade away?
For pity's sake,
Do stop bearing us!"

The anguished demand of the flower
Utterly unnerved the verdant mother creeper.
"My prized child!
Should you feel lowered
That you remain running on the ground?
Forget not the fact that
Gold burnt in fire
Turns into a wedding badge.
....."

(The Distress of a Baby Flower)

* * * * *

His heart set on a divine boon,
He set out in search of God
Through woods and wild tracts.
God was not found anywhere.

Sighting an old destitute woman
Collecting firewood in the forest,
He enquired of her,
"Where can I find God?"

She opened her toothless mouth
And gave out a laugh.

He was struck with a great surprise;
For God must live in the smile of the poor.
How come he is not seen therein?

(The Story of the Boon Accomplished)

V. Murugan

Transliteration Key

Vowels

Short		Long	
அ	a	ஆ	ā
இ	i	ஈ	ī
உ	u	ஊ	ū
எ	e	ஏ	ē
ஒ	o	ஓ	ō

ஐ ai

ஔ au

Consonants

Hard		Soft		Medial	
க்	k	ங்	ṅ	ய்	y
ச்	c	ஞ்	ñ	ர்	r
ட்	ṭ	ண்	ṇ	ல்	l
த்	t	ந்	n	வ்	v
ப்	p	ம்	m	ழ்	ḻ
ற்	ṟ	ன்	ṉ	ள்	ḷ

Āytam

ஃ ḵ

1 The Opportune Hour Has Come!

The waves too

That keep breaking on the beach of Rameswaram
Do rise up hilllike today
And go about dancing in ecstasy!

Should you and I take it to be due to a midsea depression,
We would be making an error of judgement sure!

It is not the chant of the sea that we hear day in, day out;
We are used to seeing the dance of the waves every day.
But why is this dance of ecstasy today, the sightly spectacle?

The dance of the waves here on the Rameswaram sands
Is but the dance of joy
At the prospect of this (man of) science -

That agile little boy,
Who had moved up and down and left his footprints

Not just on the soil of Rameswaram
But on the loved Indian soil and its space above as well,
The man that has marked his stamp of scientific knowledge
And abilities of mind in the reigning world of science -
Coming to rule this sprawling country!
He rose from a family middle class in standing,
And carrying newspaper bundles for sale
Was his means of income.
He had a teacher endowed with a reasoning mind
Who had cast off the orthodoxies of the old
And extended a caring hand to the precocious boy -
Abdul Kalam,
A teacher who had burnt down sunlike the fanaticism religion bred
A brahmin by birth he was though.
Kalam stands now to shine like the jewelled lamp of the nation
Dispelling darkness of ignorance and holding up religious harmony
With a heart holding fast the spirit of humanism.
He has ascended the summits of science
With a mind undistracted
And risen up to towering heights
Through unswerving commitment to duty.
Men on earth need mind's resolve to the extreme
To see science take a rebirth
Wherein nuclear weapons are no longer arsenal of ruin
But shields of protection for peace to remain secure;
Wherein missiles flying up through the sky
Turn into ambassadors to countries next door.
Roars of delight there sound all around
With the clamour of approval
That Abdul Kalam is the right man
To instil this resolve into men's minds,

Religiously committed to constructive uses of science that he is.

With Kalam coming to be the President of the country,
Let us proclaim that
The time has come well and truly
For our people from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin,
Whosoever he or she be,
To live in fraternity as if related by blood
With a sense of inseparable comradeship.

13-06-2002

2 The Dying Histories of Living Corpses

There is a poem

That censures the poets unversed in Tamil
Which begins with
"Piḷḷaip Pāṇṭiyaṉ is not around to rap their knuckles!"
And ends in
"They can freely go round the country under the guise of poets"
Had the poet of this verse been alive today
He would have squarely condemned
Not only the untutored versifiers
But the fakes in all walks of life as well.

Now that he is no longer there,
I venture into this composition,
One that is a flower offering
Where gold is due.

Thanks to ill-gotten money flowing on hand,
The unripe ones pass for ripe corn,
Men of conceit pose as leaders,
Slipperiness parades as politics,
And scribble masquerades as public statements!

What a fall!
Even the chaste periodicals turn to Akalikais;
How many are the middlemen with tainted hands
Readying themselves to set the posterity on the funeral pyre!

Pray, what does public service mean?
Is it something being on sale in stuffed bundles?
Is it something available free of charge in drunken parties?
Even now one could resort to falsehood sky-high,
Proclaim oneself a man with a mission,
Beguile men taken to spiritual calls,
And go in for daylight robbery.

Is not this what the heads of mutts do now,
Of course in competition with the politicians?

Who are the people indulging in vainglorious talk
That their sway of renown extends to heavenly abodes,
Calling themselves the Buddha, the Jesus and the Mohammed?

Are they the ones who bathed in the fire of sacrifice
In the days of the war of independence of the country?

Are they the victims of repressive measures
In the righteous war for the cause of Mother Tamil
Holding that
Their mortal frames are of little avail
When their sweet honeyed Tamil is lost to them?

These are the people
Who hold such causes futile things
And turn their backs fast on them.

They keep filling their coffers
With money
In thousands, tens of thousands, lakhs and crores
Piling up thereby an accumulated mass of taint.

They get the gooseflesh lionlike
As they stand in devout prayer:
"O Mother Ganga, Yamuna, Kāvēri!
We kneel down at your feet,
Grant unto us your kindly bliss!

May we be endowed with the strength unfailing
For us to go everywhere and sing your glory!"

And yet these men go down under money's spell.

Sure, not even the likes of crow will stop by their graveyards;
Will men of virtuous wisdom be inclined to visit them ever?

Corpses are usually honoured with homage and wreaths.
But is it a wonder that
These living corpses make history
That is destined to perish?

02-08-2002

3 What is Theism? What is Atheism?

What is theism?

What is atheism?
Let's see what they mean;
Let's understand what they truly signify.

"O the stupid ones
That believe in a thousand gods
And go roaming around in search of them!"
Do these words of Pārati mark atheism?

Is it theism
That one obstinately demands that
There be thousands of crores of gods,
Not just a thousand?

"O the thoughtless ones
That adore Māṭaṉ, Kāṭaṉ and Vēṭaṉ
In bewildered awe!"
Do these words of Pārati imply atheism?

Is it theism to insist that
We will keep mindlessly worshipping
What represent the blockhead, the evil-minded and the violent-tempered?

Is it atheism to ask of people
In the words of the Buddha:
"Should you be debasing yourself
By unwittingly falling into
Religions fanatical?"

Is it theism
That the Buddha himself is deified
And offered worship seven times a day
Thanks to the work of impostors?

Can the spiritual feel
Which instructs one
That wisdom alone is God
Be branded atheism?

Are theft of idols of gods
And foreign exchange fraud
Under the veil of spiritualism
Things theistic?

Is it atheism
To find God in the smile of the poor?

Is it theism
To hold that
The lot of the poor is God's will?

Is it atheism
If one asks,
"Where does God exist?"

Is it theism
To fool people
Saying,
"God exists right here?"

Is it atheistic of me
To take the stand that
I am concerned about the plight of the poor
Rather than about God?

Is it theism
To say that
God alone is my prop,
God is my prop through my end,
God is my prop and mine alone?

Is it atheism to look at the common good?
Is it theism to work for self-interest?

What is theism?
What is atheism?
Let's see what they mean;
Let's understand what they truly signify.

06-08-2002

4 As the Vindhya Hills Lie Fallen Here

The two Tamils –

Bearing the names Kaḷaivāṇar and Pākavatar –
The sun and the moon in the sphere of performing arts,
Earned unmatched fame and radiated brilliant glow
Like the vantage lamp of the fortune's abode.

There were folks with malicious intent -
Men skilled in the art of dissembling -
Who kept adoring the two holding them aloft
And yet looking for an opportunity to floor them.

Intunēcaṉ handed the opportunity right to them -
A print magazine given to feeding on lies -
That prostituted itself
By publishing despicable reports
About these two brilliant artistes of unmatched talent.

It carried tales
Of these two men lying on the beach,
With not even clothes of a finger's breadth on,
Cuddled up with women all and sundry,
And enjoying promiscuous sex.

The magazine manufactured proofs of the acts -
Verily in the manner of eye-witness accounts -
The day and time of the event,
The exact hour and minute by the watch.

The magazine went on carrying these lewd fairy tale reports
About these two stars in forbidding postures with women,
Providing seemingly telltale details of their names and identities.

The magazine had its circulation on the rise:
Copies were sold in thousands, tens of thousands and lakhs.

These were sheer fabrications true,
But isn't there a class of men in the world -
The worthless lot -
Who relish things
When they come salted with erotic stuff?

No spot could we spot around
Where these two stars
Were not subjected to scandulous comments.

"A bitter feud is raging
Between the Kalaivāṇar - Pākavatar duo
And the said investigative magazine."
A concocted tale of this kind started doing the rounds.

Meanwhile,
The editor of *Intunēcaṉ* was murdered,
Put to inhuman death by an enemy.

"The enemy is Kalaivāṇar - Pākavatar duo sure"
The wicked-minded loud-mouths made out gleefully,
And got the tale spread across the country.

Obviously,
The intent was to discredit the stardom
Carved out for themselves
By our Tamiḻ artistes.

Should these two Tamils
Enjoy such a towering popular note?

The jackals of men,
United by racial affinity,
Worked their way with unhindered ease
To see the duo reduced to nonentities in the Tamiḻ land.

Their efforts coming to fruition,
The two lions of artistes were put behind the bars.

The looked-for justice
Not forthcoming from the courts in India,
The case went up to the Privy Council in England.

Ettirāj, the tallest of his tribe, argued the case,
And our two Tamiḻ artistes were set free exonerated.

What for should I dwell upon this event of the past?
It is all to tell you to ever remain wakeful and alert;
For
A misfortune falling upon us,
There are the evil-minded folks waiting on their toes
Who would blow it up in gleeful earnest
And work to see our Movement,
Nay, our Tamiḻ race
Obliterated.

The moment it happened that
The famed maestro and the monarch of comedy
Were incarcerated,
A community of men
Found it an occasion for fun and delight.

This community took up their pens
And wrote things of unbridled revilement.

This class of men jumped in joy
As they saw this event open the way
Which remained closed to them for long;
The grinding stones flew up in the air,
Nay, these men were in seventh heaven!

Freedom secured for our two men,
This community felt shivers down their spines
And they started scrambling for cover.

My fraternal souls!
There's one thing
You should take note of and keep in mind:
The protection of our Tamil race
Is the charge of our Movement.

Where adversity comes unto us,
Be it thin as the skin of fenugreek,
Many a wicked-minded man is around
Who would make it large as the Vindhya hills
And seek pleasure out of it.

Now that the Vindhya, our precious gold, is fallen,
Isn't it natural for the wicked and the black-hearted
To set out to make a murderous assault on the Movement
Which he nurtured with protective care?

Do wake up and arise
And see that
This Movement is protected with vigilant care
For it to blaze undimmed for long
Like the gold pure and unalloyed.

24-05-2003

5 The Deception of a Proxy

Kuṟṟālattuk Kompukkāraṉ had implicit faith
In the goodness of Varataṉ's character -
A lawyer by study.
He was sure that
Varataṉ would be a Nakkīraṉ
In calling a wrong a wrong
Even if he were to face (Siva's) eye in the forehead,
And that
He would ever plead for truth's cause.
Kompukkāraṉ was sitting on a step
Of the sacred temple tank of Maturai;
Kumaraṉ came then
And stood by him with his head down
Returning as he was from the court.
Kompukkāraṉ queried:
"O man! You are here!
Tell me about the court case".

Kumaraṉ knew for sure
His reply would open out things unpleasant,
And yet he opened his mouth
Wearing a drooped countenance:

"We thought
The lawyer was arguing in our favour,
But he let himself slip into gutter
As there appeared
A bitch of a woman in style
And stood shaking and twisting her body;
To my consternation
He started taking our opponent's side...

And what to say, O my master!
All our property has changed hands;
Our opponent, that wily man,
Is in all jubilation, uncontained joy".

Saying this,
Kumaraṉ cried aloud in grief uncontrolled.

Kompukkāraṉ,
A picture of an elephant with its tusks broken,
Burst out in distress:

"Goodness me!
Whatever did you say?
Has he turned such an ungrateful creature -
He that grew from impoverishment
Feeding on my supply of food?
O what a pity that I trusted him,
Treating him like my younger brother
And entrusting with him all the money I had!
O that chaff of a man!

I did not realize that
He would grow to be such a dissolute fellow

As to betray me under the guise of intimacy,
That he would be one
After widowing the women of the town.

How insolent he is! How impudent!
What a big betrayal it is!
How did this treacherous fellow make so bold
As to argue for our opponent
And get all my possessions handed to him?"

Saying thus,
Kompukkāraṉ,
The embodiment of honesty that he was,
Squirmed in heart's pain.

(Intervening, Kumaraṉ said:)
"Did he need boldness at all to do this deed, master?
All that he wanted was an amount of rupees five lakhs
Through means dishonest,
And he, the lawyer boy that you nurtured,
Did finish the job as a favour returned."

"Finished the job!
Be it so,
And his life I will finish off."
Kompukkāraṉ rose up, his blood boiling:

"Should this proxy of a boy make a fool of me!
I will see him dead and gone, take note of it!"
Kompukkāraṉ shouted in frenzied fury.

The news of Kompukkāraṉ's burning rage
Reached the lawyer,
Striking his mind
As if by the sting of a scorpion.

"What if I finished him off
Before he could finish me!
That ill-gotten five lakh rupees would be an additional gain;

Besides his possessions all and his lands with well
Would fall into my hands.

I should see him killed,
And then make a show of shocked grief and wailing,
And make politics out of it."

Varataṉ worked his scheming along these lines.
He kept revelling in this wild thinking,
And saw his designs materialized too,
Though for the moment.

His sinister mind worked on
And got the innocent men incriminated in the act;
A heinous sinner that he was!

He aimed at two mangoes with a single hit,
Jumping as he did into the lap of Kompukkāraṉ's rivals.

The world caught up in darkness
Tended to believe him at the start.

When the darkness cleared and the dawn broke
His acts of deception too stood exposed.
The morning sun rose up on the eastern sky.

21-06-2003

6 Two Blossoms on a Single Stem

'Two blossoms on a single stem' -

It is not a line in a verse.

A profile of new poetry inscrutable it is!

The Iranian sisters -
They were born twinned
As if they would live unseparated ever.

'Is there anything mightier than Fate?'
Science moved up to address this question
With stately determination it commanded:
'Even Fate can be put behind'.

An effort human was in place
To see nature's design altered.

An unbroken continuity does not always mark nature's course
Where it takes human intervention.
The Iranian sisters exemplified this tellingly.

Had it not been so,
Human hand would have won out
Triumphing over what nature willed.

Many are the fields witnessed
Where science has taken on nature
And come out successful.

But in the war for the Iranian twins
Science ended up with an elegy
Sung on its campaign against nature.
Isn't it nature's power going beyond the might of science?

For years thirty but one
These sisters -
The full moon-like faces -
Remained twinned
Holding the world captivated
By their smiles jasmine blossom like.
Alas! They are no more today.

Has it so happened
That we should be reminded of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* verse:

> He that was alive yesterday is seen not today;
> Such is the wonderment about this world.

Or that we should keep our eyes in tears?

The entire world mourns for the Iranian twins today.
Perhaps the sisters took to this extreme
After pondering it right.
Having suffered discomforts all through
With their two-headed frame,
They had attained relief - a welcome one.

Relieved they might be by losing the twinned heads!

But for us,
Relief from grief -
Even as much as a sesamum seed -
Looks impossible.

11-07-2003

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7 (A Blade of) Grass and the Magnifying Glass

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Sure
I am quite lean in size
Just like a blade of kaus!

Even so
I stand before the magnifying glass
Reading and enjoying the beauty of my form -
The glass that measures to the height of a man,
And that is especially made for me to use
With its height and width cut right as befitting me.

My size,
Barely that of a blade of grass,
Now challenges comparison with the earth's.
Make no mistake
It is all the work of the magnifying glass!
But I tend to delude myself
In the headstrong vision of
Fawning folks
Kneeling before me servilely.

My size shows up
Enormously large in the glass,
Far bigger than the all-inclusive sky
That encompasses the heavenly bodies
All joined and teamed up together.

In the flooding light,
My image looks taking wavy patterns
With twists and turns,
Showing my head
Stretching forth at one side
And widening at the other side.

I pull out the penknife in my hand
And look at it;
It dazzles forth in the glass
With its sharpness and size
Far exceeding that of Alexander's fighting sword.

I tend to forget the fact that
It is all the work of the magnifying glass
That my size, verily grass blade-like,
Takes the hugeness of a mountain range;
(Misled by which),
I throw my humility to the winds.

It is this obliviousness
Thanks to which
I plunge into the make-believe world
Wherein
The penknife in my hand
Looks like
My holding the sword of Alexander.

It is just a penknife.
What a fantastic vision of it!
Be that as it may,
This vision holds a truth within.

How many are the untruths
That this knife gives birth to!
How many are the made-up cases
That come off of this knife's tip!

I keep revelling in the fact that
The magnifying glass
Reflects only my face
And not my back.

I go about acting wild,
I keep going about it
As part of this wild behaviour;
I give vent to my ire too.

The intensity of this wildness
Gets the palace unpeopled.
I stand before the magnifying glass
And shout in exultation:
Victory! victory!

Suddenly,
A sort of acid rain starts pouring down,
Which leaves the glass
Washed off of its coat of amalgam.

The magnifying glass turns out to be mere glass -
Glass without the amalgam coat.

I am now awakened to the naked reality:
I am no more than a blade of grass.

The uncoated glass lets me see
All that happening outside:

There is the spectacle
Of the army of people collecting around
With a tumultuous shout of daring -
An explicit warning
From the community of dauntless folks.

"Warning?
It is just a castaway thing"
Saying so
I burst into laughter.

The burst of this laughter
Leaves the glass
Broken into bits and pieces
And each broken piece
Reflects my face.
These images are seen
Shedding tears in pearly drops.

30-07-2003

8 Paḻaiyavalam Pakkiri, the Maker of Money

The working class comrades of Paḻaiyavalam

Were going in procession in their multitudes
Holding flags and banners in their hands.
The banners carried slogans in flashy letters:
"Hearty welcome to Pakkiri, the maker of money!
Welcome to our leader of sterling qualities,
The resident of Bombay renamed Mumbai!"

Velan, the rustic from the neighbouring village, queried:
"Pakkiri? Whoever is he?
Is he a man of wealth?
Will his fortune be worth crores ten or a hundred?
Is he a hoarder, keeping unaccounted money in lakhs of rupees?

Does he enjoy income from the cinema?
Is it an earning
Made from killing people in numbers in Bombay
Through bomb explosions in the time past?
Is it wealth amazed hilllike
By launching an unprincipled political party
And professing promotion of some caste or religion?

Pray, how else has this man come
Worthy of acclaim
As one who has made money?"
Asked the countryman with artless curiosity.

The Paḷaiyavalam native addressed his inquisitiveness
With words of reiterative intensity:
"Billionaire, millionaire, one with lesser fortune, landlord
Whosoever he may be,
No one can outdo him in affluence;
He stands at the top of all".

The rustic man Vēlaṉ was in no mood
To leave things at that.
He darted another query sharply:
"Are his riches then a loot,
With this man
Taking the guise of a mendicant
And fraudulently promising boon of children
To women who come and pray to him
Falling prostrate at his feet?
What else was the means
That lifted him up
To the lap of this large fortune
And to the honour of munificence?

Is he the one
That heaped up a fortune
Through clever scheming -

Offering sacred aches, basil leaves and holy water
And beguiling the naive folks
Into believing that
Their wishes and expectations would materialize?

All this I ask of you
Just to satisfy my curiosity to know things.

Has his money come from buying and selling house plots?
Has he turned affluent by bringing the government under his thumb?

Is it the money accumulated by taking to a procurer's job?
Is it the balance on hand
Out of the earnings
Through the practice of bribery?

My dear Paḷaiyavalam resident!
Do enlighten me
On how Pakkiri grew rich in the city of Bombay.

For
In these days
When the people
Who gather riches by honest means
Can be known by the count of fingers,
Pakkiri should have got his moneyed possessions
By ways fraudulent for sure."

The Paḷaiyavalam man gave out a laugh
As he set out to clear his misgiving:

"O crazy man!
Don't get stirred up
Without understanding what the 'maker of money' means!

Take this word of mine!
Who is the maker of things on the earth?
What do the tales of the old say thereon?

Do answer me with the seriousness of a believer:
Wouldn't your answer, best made, be like:

It is God who made this vast earth,
And it is Brahma who made all beings born."

The countryman Vēlaṉ responded:

"True! true!
There is no doubt about that.
It is Brahma who is the maker of all living things."

The native of Paḷaiyavalam remarked:
"Well said! O Vēlaṉ, my rustic man!
The term *paṭaittavaṉ* in Tamil
Does not just mean 'possessor';
It also signifies 'the maker'.

Four years ago
Pakkiri joined as an employee
The mint at Bombay alias Mumbai.

It is the money being coined at this mint
That circulates in our hands
In accord with our standing.

It is that Pakkiri,
The maker of money,
Who is the former leader of our workers' union.

Some four days ago,
He has been transferred from Mumbai to Kolkata.

On his way,
He is coming here to meet us
Thanks to his old affinity to our village.

As he comes to see us,
Shouldn't we greet and welcome Pakkiri -
The maker of money,
The Brahma
From the working class?"

02-08-2003

9 Gold is Easier to Come upon than Wednesday

Coming to know that

Their daughter Pūṅkōtai is in love with Kaṇṇaṉ,
Poṉṉaṉ and Poṉṉi set out to the priest's house
To fix an auspicious day
And to get them married.

The priest consulted the almanac and said,
"Wednesday next is the day and time auspicious".

"Wednesday? So soon?
Priest, Sir!
See if another day comes opportune.

For, at the moment,
We do not have a single penny in hand.

We must arrange some loan and do things.
We must go around straining our legs
And look for a lender to help us out.

We are a family of peasants
With no clothes for replacement too.
Look at the neck of Ponṉi my wife!
She has just the turmeric-smeared cord for her nuptial chain.

See if there is a way in your almanac
That would give us room
So that we can strain our nerves
And bring in some money.

Can we have a date and day
That falls a month or two later
Allowing us some gap thereby?"

The priest flared at Ponṉaṉ:
"You senseless man!
O Ponṉaṉ, take heed of my word:

'Wednesday is more difficult to come by than even gold.'
It is a saying our ancestors have handed unto us,
That keeps ruling amongst us from antiquity.
It is amazing that you disfavour Wednesday."

Ponṉaṉ answered back:
"I do have sense, O priest!
Wednesday is a day
That keeps coming every week.

Toil all through the year
Will provide no means in a poor man's life
For him to buy gold even of the size of a crab's eye.

Therefore, O priest!
Do change that 'Wednesday' proverb.

Wednesday will come week after week for sure;
But gold would not come unto a poor man
Even if he slogged round the year."

24-08-2003

10 The Plant Nurtured in Poison*

What a heartbreaking thing it is

That people were felled dead en masse
In the Mumbai bomb explosion
And the Kumbh Mela bath at Nasik!
The death toll they say would exceed a hundred.

Yesterday,
The reactionaries cultivated the plant of religious fanaticism
Defying the sane counsel of the right-thinking men.

The plant nourished by poison that it was,
India, the land venerated of ours,
Has turned into a sanctuary of the young of snakes.

Where love and affection get drained up,
The disease contagious of revenge will fan out for sure,
And the death toll will but keep mounting.

People hunt down and kill the rats
Finding them causing the plague.

Coming to human rats inimical to humaneness,
The rational-minded alone could put them down.

Poverty in India touching the Himalayan heights as it does.
The destitute lot jostled for the coins
The ascetic men threw at them as alms,
Drowned into the river
And met their watery grave.

For the folks suffering the inhuman conditions of the slums,
The Kumbh Mela in the Godavari river
Opened out a direct entry into the abode of Heaven!

Religious faith
Led to a disaster unmitigated at Nasik in Maharashtra;
Religious fanaticism
Witnessed the fallout of the most horrendous killings in Mumbai.

29-08-2003

*Composed on 29 August 2003, sparked off by the explosion of two car bombs in Mumbai on 25 August 2003 which killed more than 60 people, and the Kumbh Mela stampede at Nasik on 27 August 2003 that took a death toll of more than 40 persons.

11 Getting the Fingers Burnt by Taking the Gandhian Path

The colourful posters

Pasted on the arcade walls of every temple
Announcing the holding of
A conference of the speechless,

All creatures - the reptiles, the four-legged and the flying -
Gaped their mouths in excitement,
Decided to make it a grand affair,
Girded themselves up in all earnest
And set out in a massive procession.

Isn't it a must
That one take the permission of the government
For one to hold a procession?

But these creatures cared not a wee bit
About official permission.

Such restrictions and controls
Apply only to the human species
Endowed with the sixth sense.

Beings with lesser faculties
Are absolutely free
Even to indulge in love sports in the open.

Such huge freedom itself was the cause
For them to go discontent
And clamour for more privileges
Regardless of what they enjoyed.

Realizing that
They needed unity to achieve their ends,
They thronged there in their multitudes.

O what a mammoth gathering!
The pandal was overflowing with the crowd.

Kōmātā, the representative of the cows,
Moved the first resolution of the conference.
It spoke of their grievance
That the law banning cruelty to cows
Was yet to get the approval of the Parliament.

At which,
The other animals joined together
And raised their high-pitched, strident voice of protest:

"Are your lives so special?
Are ours a mere trifle?
There must be a single common resolution
Against cruelty to animals in general.
Or else we must put on hold
The resolution
Demanding ban on cruelty to cows.

Don't discriminate between animals
By being considerate towards just one species;
Don't create a divide amongst us
In the way
The whirling action of the churning rod
Separates butter.

Take back the resolution immediately."
Demanded the other animals vociferously.

And the resolution on the cruelty to cows was withdrawn.

Next came a resolution
Congratulating the government of the state
On an announcement it had made.

No sooner was it put forward
Than there stood up delegates
Representing one animal species after another
And they all wondered aloud:

"What is new in this announcement
That warrants our congratulating the government?"

The conference chairman thundered:
"Are you not aware of the government order
Banning inhuman sacrifice
Of cows, sheep and fowl in temples?"

"We know it, Chairman! we know it for sure.
But that is not the government order;
It is the Act of the year 1950.

It goes to the credit of the then government
To have this Act enacted and implemented.
That Act having fallen into disuse,
Like the prohibition Act,
The present-day government has issued an order".

An explanation of this kind offered,
The chairman responded:
"Be that as it may,
We shall pass a resolution still
Placing on record
Our appreciation of the present government too."

"Finely said! Finely said!"
Someone was heard saying in a feeble voice.

The animals of all species cast their looks intently around;
All eyes were on the rove
Trying to see where that feeble voice came from.

There came then 'an animal' from some corner
With a veil on the head and legs limping,
And stood in the front in a wretched state,
Verily like sugar cane crushed in the mill.

"It is a two-legged animal;
How did it come into this place?"

"Should I be unwelcome to a conference
That is appreciative of the government?"

As the question, faintly articulated, came
From the emaciated frame of that 'animal',

The whole gathering got to their feet and queried:
"Who are you? Tell us first."

"I am the one rendered more vulnerable
Than the voiceless ones that you are.

I have burnt my fingers
By taking the Gandhian path
As a way of protest
Against the designs of the cruel-hearted
To deprive me of the rights I enjoyed
And to play havoc with my life.

You may pass any resolution you choose to -
Be it one of congratulation on prevention of cruelty to cows
Or expression of gratitude for the ban on animal sacrifice -

Along with these all,
O kindly animals!
You may in this conference of yours
Pass a resolution
Expressing your pity
On this employee of the government.

31-08-2003

12 The Dream Ring

A skinny woman prayed to God for a boon -
The boon of a plump body -
Wearing herself out.

She tried eating things varied and various
Nothing helped her with a full rounded shape.

Her body looked lean like a lily stem;
This body frame she herself resented.

"It is but the charge of the Maker
To see it turned into a portly form."
Furthermore,
She desired that
She hold sway over the world,
And the wavy oceans all take her dictates.

It was for a divine boon towards this end
That she took to doing penance.

The grace of God not descending upon her,
She went around unsettled
With a mind restive and disoriented.
A thing of pity she must indeed be.

She could not realize the beauty of form she desired;
Nor did the political power she longed for come unto her.
Ambition thwarted started telling on her nerves.

Then came a magician to see her,
An extremely crafty man he was.

He pondered
And made up his mind
To hold a check
On the arrogance and ambition overweening
Of the woman he felt called upon to.

Accordingly,
He handed her a magic ring
And counselled her thus:

"A sacrificial ceremony
You must perform once a month,
Wherein without fail
And in secret,
You must offer goats and fowls as sacrifice,
In whose blood
The magic ring must be bathed.

You must wear this ring on your finger then.
Should you keep doing this,
Extraordinary loveliness of form
And a body of mango fruit like rotundity
Would be yours.

You would also come by
Storeyed mansions and stately homes
And a dreamlife all enjoyable.

But my dear woman!
There is one thing
Which you must bear in mind.

For the said miracles to happen
This ring you must put on your finger
Only once a day.

Otherwise -
I should not be blamed later -
You will get back the state skeletal
You were in in the past.

Therefore,
Should you seek after lofty heights,
You must wear this ring just one day,
That too only one time a day."

The words of the magician
Came a thing for rejoicing and revelry
For the goody-goody lady,
Who then had the ring promptly worn on the finger.

What a wonder!
Her body,
Thin like a finger of the hand,
Did now put on flesh
In superb measure,
And turned into a lovely sight.

But she was not the one
Given to simple contentment.

She wanted to be a little more plumpy;
She wanted to roll in more of wealth;
She wanted to rule over an extended empire.

A burgeoning ambition impelling her,
She kept that prized ring unremoved.

And,
Her body now grew stouter and stouter
And puffed up like a (barrel-like) grain receptacle,
And her riches swelled swiftly:

What with her acquirements like
Jewellery, palatial houses numbering a thousand,
Lands provided with irrigation wells
And thugs ready for action with whetted swords!

The magician stepped in to caution her:
"Do see that
The magic ring is removed;
Or else your body will bloat and swell
And look like the huge Himalayas;
People will laugh at you
Calling you a mountain of flesh.
Do pay heed to the word of mine".

His advice falling on deaf ears,
The magician further said:

"Listen to me O lady!
Ponni, another woman,
Whom I gave a similar ring to,
Used it prudently for a limited hour,
Acquiring thereby beauty and wisdom.
She turned into a woman of humility
Drawing the admiration of all.

You, on the contrary,
Behave outrageously like a shrew
Being given to overbearing conduct.
You insist obstinately
That you would keep wearing the ring,
And you are thereby abusing the power conferred on you.

You have gone to the peak of excessiveness
Taking to ways intractable and conceited;
Gone headstrong,

You go about demolishing things indiscreetly.
You have thus got
Everything of you bloated, head included.

Having lost all sense of balance
You stand now helpless and restive;
I see you totally unnerved.
Should you want to keep your respect,
Do hand me my magic ring."
The magician spoke with burning rage.

The one who is no longer a womanly being
Stirred up as if the Himalayas were moving
And said unto the magician:

"Whoever are you to ask for the ring?"

"Do you dare to ask of me thus?
Keep it in mind,
It was I that gave the ring
And wished to see you held high!
It all looks a wasted effort now.

Dear lady!
See that
The magic ring is
But the power of people.

Having used it impulsively and wildly
You have brought disgrace on it.

Take off the ring from your finger
And hand it to me right now!
Otherwise,
It will come out by itself.

Your crown falling off,
Your head will go whirling."

The warning stern
Coming with volcanic fury as it did,
The woman woke up
Only to realize that
All this was but a dreamy vision.

03-09-2003

13 It Would Endure Sunlike

The grandeur of the *nathaswaram* play

By the outstanding genius Tiruvāvaṭuturai Rājaratinam
And Maturai Cēturāmaṉ Poṉṉucāmi,
The play of the flute by Māli,
The beat of the *tavil* drum
By Malaikkōṭṭai Pañcāpi,
And the *mattaḷam* play
By Pālakkāṭu Maṇi -

When we think
Of the universally acclaimed skill of these hands
At the wind and percussion instruments,

Our minds are full with a feel
Of the blossom of a flower garden within.

We realize with wonder
That the fingertips of the exponents of music
Are endowed with eyes,

As we look at the fact that
These fingers work their varied movements
Absolutely involuntarily
With no external stimuli
By running through the instruments
With effortless ease.

These eyes the fingers have acquired
Through constant practice.

That is why I say
The fingers are endowed with vision.

For
Could the fingers
Every now and then
Take instructions from the musician
For them to run through the instrument
Opening or closing the holes therein?

Should they do it so,
Wouldn't then music turn into
A thing blemished?

The activists of a movement
Are verily like these fingers.

Like the involuntary movements of the fingers
That work on the surface of wind and percussion instruments
Without looking for instructions from the musician
For each and every movement they make,
And thereby produce exquisite music
In tune with the musician's intent,

The activists of a movement
Put into deed

What their masterful leader intends,
With no hesitation as from a vacillating mind.

A movement would endure
As a self-respecting movement
Marked with no misdirection whatever
Like the sun that radiates light from the sky.

Where it has in it

Excellent leaders
Like musicians

And activists
Who work with open-eyed alertness
In tune with the mind of the leader
And rightly store up his intention within them
As do the fingers of the musician
That work the instrument
With no deviation from
Time measure, musical scale and the song.

13-09-2003

14 The Distress of a Baby Flower

It was the few days

That I spent
In the confines of prison.

As I had a walk
Along the sides of the flower garden
I sighted a *pūṅkoṭi*

You seem to ask:
"Even at this age of eighty?"

I didn't mean a damsel
When I referred to *pūṅkoṭi,*
Remain as I did in that womenless domain.

It was but a flower creeper
Running on the ground
And wearing cool blossoms
In the flower garden of the prison-house.

(Strolling as I was)
I could hear a baby flower
Talking to its mother creeper
In the Tamil language:

"O mother!
You keep making mistakes persistently.
Why do you go on bringing us unto this world forever
For us to remain lying on the ground and fade away?
For pity's sake,
Do stop bearing us!"

The anguished demand of the flower
Utterly unnerved the verdant mother creeper.

"My prized child!
Should you feel lowered
That you remain running on the ground?
Forget not the fact that
Gold burnt in fire
Turns into a wedding badge.

It is this sacrificial bath in fire
That has earned it
The hallowed name of 'sacred wedding badge'.

It is because
Gold bears being burnt in fire
That it turns into ornament,
And gets the governmental mandate too.

That being so,
O my dear baby flower!
Take it not to be a thing of slight
That you lie running on the ground.

It is you who remain holding to the ground
That women keep holding up on their heads.

It is you,
As you take a garland's form,
That go up to the front to welcome men of note.

Again,
Be it temple consecration
It is you
That are seated in grandeur
On the dome of the temple tower.

You are the one, O my darling!
That beautify the bed chamber
Of a virgin with cuplike breasts
As she enters into the nuptial state,
And radiates the chamber with your fragrance of unfolded petals.

Carrying so much of worth as you do,
Go not dispirited
With inferiority complex."
Mother's words of wisdom
Heeding in all humility
The baby flower let its fragrance out
Keeping itself confined within though.

16-09-2003

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15 The Volcano from Erode

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Periyār,

The volcano of Erode,
Broke out on the scene,
Holding out fiery truths
Hot like a crore rays of the sun.

The thoughts that emerged through his advent
I shall put together here
With no watering down or dropping off:

Phew! O men!
These castes and the doctrines of religion!
Wherever have they come from?
They are all evils in society
Put in place later in time.

Do undo the dogmas of religion!
Root out the beliefs
That tend to befool men!

Do note that
The Buddha raised his eyebrows

At folks
Prescribing worship of idols of gods!

They are men of stupidity undiluted
Who fold their hands in worshipful reverence
Before those cheats
That made a god of the Buddha himself!

Whoever was he
That pronounced that
Women were slaves unto men?

Marriage is
Where
Men and women come together
In a spirit of fellowship.

Why should there be someone
Brokering (officiating at)
This union of fellowship?

Where
All are beings God has made,
Why should there exist
Layers of men upper and lower -
The high and the low?

Tell me O folks!
When the (lower caste) *sudra* man
Takes to priestship,
Will God get offended?
Will that God
Choose to step out of the shrine?

'One thousand castes there are in this land' -
It is but the data
That would bring disgrace unto us,
Whoever it be that says so!

If untouchability comes into play
Even when (lower caste) folks walk on the streets,
Of what avail is this public averment,
'We are of one caste and God is one'?

Look at the ruler of that principality
Performing the sacrificial ritual
For the destruction of foes

Targeting Periyār,
When Periyār
Set out on his non-violent struggle
To eradicate the evils of orthodoxy
And took on the traditionalists at Vaikkam!
And the ruler himself met his doom.

Were it to be possible
That one could wipe out one's enemy
Through the means of sacrifice,
Wouldn't it be open to questions?
Wouldn't there be voices of ridicule?

Had it been possible,
The Allied forces needn't have worked then
To bring down Hitler!
Imelda too could have accomplished his victory
By taking the path of sacrificial ritual!

Wouldn't such questions arise?
Wouldn't there be voices of ridicule?

Comrade!
Keep your self-respect!
No *sudra*, the lowly among men, you are!
Fall not into the trap of the cunning lot!

Try to understand
What all indignity entails!

Even the cow's cry sounds *ammā* (mother)!
Therefore,
Be intensely aware of
What the term *aṉṉai* (mother) signifies.

Its true meaning discerned,
Articulate this term *amma*
With a truly human feel.

18-09-2003

16 What Kind of Ink is That?

The anklet in question handed to Kaṇṇaki,

She hurled the charge in the royal court
That King Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ had pronounced a verdict
Hotheaded and ill-considered
Without that ornament duly examined.

It was only then
That the query was raised:
"Are the stones within the anklet rubies or pearls?"
The anklet was broken open
And the truth came out.

By then Kōvalaṉ was felled to death.

The Pāṇṭiya monarch chose not to offer any specious reasoning;

He did not pronounce a protective verdict
Under the cover
That it was an anklet all the same
No matter it had rubies or pearls within.

He confessed to his guilt:
"Am I a just ruler?
I am the thief myself."
And he inflicted the punishment on himself.

Such is the glorious history
Of justice administration of the Tamil land
Where people jealously guarded justice
At any price,
Be it even their heads.

"Are those days gone?
Has justice become a commodity
That is available at a price?"
Bewailing this state of the day
With a deep sigh of longing
And with eyes tearful,
I did petition to the Goddess of Justice
Holding Her feet:
"Should God be born on the earth
For us to be redeemed?"

The Goddess of Justice responded saying,
"I am feeling asleep!"
And she gave out a yawning then.

Mightbe she was feeling asleep,
Or exhausted after counting the currency notes.

"O Mother!
May you remain awake a while
And write down the judgement!"

"O don't be fussed about things!
Amma will write the judgement herself;
Leave me free for a sleep,
Don't trouble me!"

The Goddess of Justice
Was heard snoring,
Minding not the mosquito bite.

How long would this delay (in writing the verdict) go?
Would it be days, weeks or months?
Why is this delay?

The pen is empty and dry;
Where is the ink?

O, it is here in the inkpot to its fill!

Maybe the inkpot is full,
But is it that ink
In which to write the fair judgement
Bowing to the demands of justice?

What kind of *mai* (ink) is that?
That is what is called *vāymai*,
The ink of truth.

28-09-2003

17 They Are in Search of God

The temple-car was in state

Ready for procession.

The people gathered there in their multitudes
To draw the car by holding its cables.

There came a throng from the north.
They thundered
Making a demand that
They be accorded the first preference,
Then and there,
In doing the temple honours,
That by convention went to the southern people.

The southern people answered back
With the beat of drums:

"Should one conceal the fact that
It is but the people of the south
That had built the temple
And made the temple-car as well?"

And there broke out a wordy duel
Which then developed into an armed fight.

"Why make a fuss
Over the north and the south?
Since it is one god
That we all worship,
Why should there be contention between us?
Come on!
We shall hold the ropes all as one
And draw the car.

Let not the quarrel be allowed to escalate!
Let there be no bloodshed!"

(Reasoning out thus),
A peace committee tried to soothe the frayed tempers.

Its efforts notwithstanding,
The two parties threw themselves up
Into a violent clash.

The portals of the temple
Turned into a pool of blood.

The wail for succour of the dying
Was the reply received
To the question of
Who should do the temple honours first.

Severed heads floating in blood
Was all that the dispute left behind.

The gory happening coming to an end,

The folks of the northern and the southern sides
Held the hands of men left uninjured in the clash
And sobbed their hearts out,
With their tongues articulating a common appeal:
"We shall draw the temple-car unitedly;
We shall offer worship to God all together."

(The unity of minds coming about),
They mounted the temple car
And found the idol of the Lord of procession missing.

He had jumped off the car
And escaped into the shrine,

Unable as he had been
To bear with the spectacle
Of chopping and stabbing and wailing,
And with blood dripping over his eyes.

13-10-2003

18 The Story of a Boon Accomplished

His heart set on a divine boon

He set out in search of God
Through woods and wild tracts.

God was not found anywhere.

Sighting an old destitute woman
Collecting firewood in the forest,
He enquired of her,
"Where can I find God?"

She opened her toothless mouth
And gave out a laugh.

He was struck with a great surprise;
For God must live in the smile of the poor.
How come He is not seen therein?

He ran into a farmer
Watering a field
With his sweat flowing into water.
Swift he went
Looking for God
In the beads of sweat of the peasant.

Before he approached him
The peasant had walked down the river
And had a bath.

Gone as he had
To find God in the sweat of toil,
He came back seeing not even the sweat.

He then waited
As long as he could
At the doorsteps of men of liberality
Hoping that
God would
Of His own
Visit places of open-handed charity.

But such places marked folks
Thundering out resounding, high-pressure petitions to God:
"O God!
Grant me more of positions!
Bless me with riches!
Endow me with that much of might
For me to vanquish my foes!"

The homes of the munificent
Witnessing such of these prayers,
He stood
Despair and disheartenment writ large on his face.

God appeared before him then
Throwing a sarcastic look at him,

And said:
"O my devout man!
Whatever boon do you need?"

Responded the man:
O God, the Lord of all beings!
I need a boon
By which I should be deathless."

"Excellent!
Be you blessed
With the boon of immortality!

Where is the question of death
For a corpse?
Goodbye!"

Saying so,
God,
That granted the boon to man,
Disappeared into the forest
His lips giving out a long smile.

19-10-2003

19 The Verdict and the Confusion

"Write the number one
And add seven noughts next to it;
The value of the number
Will then go up enormously
And become as much as one crore.

Where there is no number at the beginning,
Of what avail are the noughts
Added or taken out?

Isn't it the number
That is verily the eyes of a (numerical) value?

Take the monarchic order -
The ministers and counsellors
And the people as well
Are but trunkless trees;
They are all but zeroes.

It is the king,
Seated in splendour in the royal court
With his flag hoisted atop the palace tower,
Who is the eyes of his subjects one and all;
He is the base number
Which a number begins with."

Thus ran the argument
Presented by the leader of a side
In a forum of debate.

Stood up the leader of the opposing side
And put forth his refutation:

"Monarch can go well sure,
But till the moment
The truth dawns on folks
That it is the people called zeros
That enhance the credibility of the king.

Where the ruler comes to imagine
That the number one at the start
Will suffice and carry exclusive worth,

That he ever holds such volcanic might
As to see all opposition smashed to smithereens,

And behaves with reckless abandon,
Worked up by the lure of power,
And is given to ways audacious and impudent
Without carrying the people along
And sharing their concerns and feelings,

Such a ruler -
The power-mad one that he is -
Will surely meet the fate
Which befell King Louis,
The ill-advised ruler of France,
Who treated his people with disdain,

Who disregarded the counsel of his ministers,
And went about with whimsical ways
Of making laws and rules and administering them
And who eventually met his end -
Beheaded on the guillotine that he was."

The arguments of both sides heard,
The judge of the forum
Delivered his verdict:

"The monarchy
That ruled the days of old
Will also pass the test of benevolence,

Where the ruler's heart remains uninfected
By malice, vindictiveness and ostentation.

This surely applies to democracy too.

For
These are the days
When the green-hued whipsnake
Goes parading as the verdant creeper.

Irrespective of
Whichever argument
This forum may hold acceptable,
Here is a point of view of mine
That I would like to put forth:

Given the fact that
It is the noughts
By which
A number has its value added up,

It is the rule of the people
And not monarchy
That holds best for this world.

It is so because
While the sword wielded by men of muscle
Goes to determine the monarchic order,
It is the ballot paper
That determines democracy.
For you to understand my viewpoint,
You must discern the difference
Between the way of the bullet and that of the ballot."

The audience could hardly make sense of
What this difference was.
They stood baffled
Staring about blankly.

For
They were not clear as to
Which form of government they had
At that point.

20-10-2003

20 The People Have Woken up

Kicking the floor wild
Causing it to shake,
The king ordered:
"I can't bear with that Valluvar any more!
Get him arrested
And bring him here."

The courtiers wept,
Their eyes filled with tears.

They gathered courage then
And addressed the king:

"O king!
May we know the reason for this fiat?
Should we put the author of the *Kuṟaḷ* behind bars

We are inviting the blame of the world for sure;
Would people at large acquiesce in this act?
You may do well to ponder about your dictate."

The king answered back
Turning towards the courtiers:
"Should we be a passive witness
To men instigating?

Phew! What a shame!
An insult unto the king it is!

Go off swift!
Go and fetch that 'truth-teller' Valluvar."

"O our king!
May we, the courtiers, have the privilege to know
Whatever that venerable man has instigated?"

The king came out answering their query:
"Is it not a provocative act
Inimical to the government
That Valluvar has written out the distich,
'Wielding an unkind tongue and dealing out punishment excessive
Do work like a file wearing out the ruler's conquering might',

Warning the king thereby that
His winning power over his foes would waste away
Should he take to using harsh words
And giving out punishments to the extreme?"

Shocked at the reasoning the ruler handed,
The courtiers sought to counsel him:
"You have taken words of wisdom for intimidation;
And seeking to punish the venerable Valluvar thereat
Would amount to a thing indiscrete."

"Criticising an action of the government
Would also mean incitement against the government.

You call Valluvar a venerable man!
Not only that venerable man
But you all too
Will be inviting the charge of instigation;
I shall put you to torture
And see you writhe in pain
As does a worm put into a fishing hook,
And I shall hang you to death too.
Be you warned!

You guards there!
Go and bring here by force
That white-attired man
Called Irāmaliṅkam of Vaṭalūr too
Along with Valluvar!"

Reduced to tears
At the roar of the king,
The courtiers spoke:
"Has he too instigated the people?
Alas! A poor thing he is!"

"Yes, sure!
It is beyond a doubt!
It is much of a bother for me
To keep disclaiming his *Aruṭpā!*"

"O king!
Whatever do you mean?
Are there things of treason
In the composition on the Most Gracious Lord?"

"What else is it?
Should you need an explanation too?

Whatever does this mean:
'My heart keeps withering away

Whenever I see a plant withering'?
Tell me if you could, O courtiers!

Doesn't such a composition
Amount to instigating the destitutes?

It deserves no special mercy to the poet;
Nothing short of a punishment
Is what it warrants for certain."

"O king!
Excuse us!
'Destroy the world we should
If one single man goes without food!'
So has the immortal Pārati said."

"O courtiers!
Don't blurt out nonsense!

I say
Pārati must also be arrested.

Not only Pārati
We must arrest Pāratitācaṉ too!

The steely heart of mine
Will brook no consideration whatever
To any one
That speaks out
Commiserating with the toiling lot of the world
Over their sufferings.

Do get away from here!
I should hate to see you
In my presence!

'Use of harsh words',
'Handing out outrageous punishment',
'Showing mercy at the sight of eyes in tears,'
'Plants withering'!

They speak of such things
With a sting!

It is not just Valluvar
Or that Vaṭalūr man!

Most of their sort in a row,
Pārati included....

Whoever it be...
Be it Pāratitācaṉ or Paṭṭukkōṭṭai!
Whoever speaks
Pleading for men in distress,
Men fallen to deception;

Whoever incites folks,
Saying,
'If those on the run
Turn into men
Daring to kick back...
And speaks their cause girding up their loins -

Their words for sure
Are instigations,
I have no doubt whatever!

We must have their heads chopped off."

Going on shouting things of this kind as he did,
The king stirred up from his sleep,
And looked around rubbing his eyes.

Unabashed,
He kept thinking about
Uncovering his dreamy vision to someone -
His dream of himself and his high-handed behaviour.

Unable to decide on
Whom to reveal his dream to,
He rolled on the bed
And put himself resting on his sides.

There came then
From outside of the palace
The vibrant shout
Of a verse of new poetry
Composed by a people's poet:
'People have woken up;
The king keeps sleeping'.

It is the voice of the people
That recited the verse.

The king,
Given to slothfulness that he was,
Failed to discern
The makings of a revolution
Running through the verse recited,

And he relapsed into seductive sleep.

03-11-2003

21 Worry Flew off

Worry was seen sitting down
With hands holding its head
And with eyes wide open,
Hoping that
Comfort would come unto it unsought.

Everyone had things innumerable to attend to.
Therefore,
People going up and down the way
Hardly took notice of it;
Nobody stopped
To talk to it;
Nor did they make enquiries of it.

Suddenly,
Worry found itself grown with legs.

It started roaming about
Street after street.

It went around
Looking for employment,
One or the other,
Only to find 'No vacancy' boards
Hanging at the office doors.
Having walked on and on
With its new grown legs aching in their joints,
Worry found itself exhausted to the extreme;
It came around and sat on the sands of the beach.

Happiness,
Sporting about on the sands,
Had a pair of wings grown on it,
Coming unto it as they did
Somehow and from somewhere.

Fluttering its wings
Happiness started flying into the sky.
When enquired
What names the two wings were called
The answer received was:

One wing was hard work
And the other perseverance,
One closely related to the other.

The wings of Happiness
Glittered in the evening sun
As if they turned into gold
Yellowish in colour.

Honours new coming unto Happiness
Didn't find Worry
Turn red-eyed,
And become a Kāntāri.

(On the contrary)
Worry looked upon these honours

As the fortune of Happiness
And was heartily pleased;
Nothing disdainful about it
Crossed Worry's mind.

A sense overweening pride
Filled the mind of Happiness
Flying too far above the earth
As it was.

Still higher did Happiness fly
And went invisible to the eyes on the earth.

Even then,
Worry stretched its head upward
And wished Happiness well.

As Worry kept looking up,
The two wings,
Looking a little charred,
Came down to the earth.

Worry enquired of the wings:
"Where is Happiness?
Whatever has happened to it?"

Replied one of the wings
That have turned back midway:

"Wings grown,
Happiness became conceited,
Flew higher and higher into the sky
Until it began
To cross swords with the sun itself.

We the wings
Have but come back."

Tears profuse shedding
The wings fell on the lap of Worry.

One can fly up in the sky,
But without crashing into planets.

Holding this lesson in mind,
Worry set out to fly,
With toil and perseverance
For its two wings.

Sure,
Worry flew off.

14-11-2003

22 The Eyeless Needle

It is not wise

To despise things
Terming them useless.

I should say
Even saline soil
Be spared from revilement.

For
It comes handy in a way
For one to draw an analogy
With the unlettered.

In a verse of his,
Paṭṭiṉattār speaks of an eyeless needle
As a thing unprofitable.

Surely, it does serve a purpose of its own.

There was a school girl Pavāṉi
Endowed with silky feet that she was.

Passion for learning
Working on her
She walked barefooted to school
Through a lane
Dotted with stones and thorns.

For
She had no means
To buy a pair of sandals.

One day
As she was treading the path as usual,
A thorn ran sharp into her heel.
Writhing in pain
Pavāṉi was unable to walk further.

Parimaḷā, Pavāṉi's schoolmate,
Didn't get panicky,
But sat down
And threw her eyes around.

An eyeless needle there came into her view.

It struck Parimaḷā
That like things work well,
One countering the other's effect.

What if the needle had its eye broken?

She picked it up
And found its tip unblunted.

Parimaḷā drove the needle deftly into Pavāṉi's heel
Right at the side of the spot
Where the thorn pierced,
And removed the thorn neatly.

Pavāṉi, delighted,
Shook her friend by the hand
And admired her smartness.

Is this not a story instructive,
Where two rustic girls
Extracted use from a thing
Which Paṭṭiṉattār termed useless,
Thereby proving him wrong?

Therefore,
Let not anything be branded worthless
And condemned.

16-11-2003

23 Movie Tamiḻ

A movie company
Produced a film
Titled 'Curṟṟup Payaṇam'
Through a restless toil of seven months,
Going all around
From the pleasantly chill Ooty
To the Kuṟṟālam Falls.

Iṉiya Tamiḻaṉ
Was the name of the director;
The producer was Iḷaiya Kampaṉ;
Eḻilaracaṉ was its music director;
The lyricist was Pāvalar Vāṇaṉ;
Tiruñāṉacampantam wrote the screenplay and dialogue;
Iṉiyaṉ, Iḷaṅkō, Ēntiḻai -
Such were the names of the cast.

Thus
The film had all names cast in Tamiḻ.

An astrologer,
A malicious one that he was,
Entered into the scene then.

"Surely 'Currup Payaṇam' is a title well-chosen
But
How come you have forgotten
That it has eight letters in it?

It is not just the number of letters
That goes ill with the norms of astrology;
There is impropriety in the use of letters too!"

Hardly had the astrologer's pronouncement come
When the producer was besieged by friends and relations all;
And they started advising him:

"Why should you go ruining yourself
By giving an eight-letter title to the film?

Do pay heed to our words!
It is all a simple thing
For us to change it to a seven-lettered one!
Want to know how it is?

Remove the consonant 'p' in 'Currup Payaṇam'

And call it 'Curru Payaṇam';
The articulation causes
No impairment of meaning whatever.

For you to make a fortune
From the collection of the film,
Go in accord with the astrologer's word;
Change the title to 'Curru Payaṇam'
By taking off the consonant in between.

Some will raise a hue and cry
Saying
There is an error in the title,
Novices of men that they are!

Mind not such outcries!
It would be no big deal to handle them.

The loss of consonant in coalescence
Will work no hurt unto your film."

Preachings of this sort
Reaching their crescendo,
The producer responded to them,
His voice pitched high:

"I can understand your goodwill for sure.
You do say
We can make it
By making an error in the film's title.

But
Whatever harm will it inflict
When we let these eight letters stand?

Look at (the eight-lettered) 'Eṅkaḷ Taṅkam'!
It witnessed a roaring success
Everywhere throughout the South.

I would say
Observing propriety of letters in words,
Astrologically prescribed,
Will come to an exercise in futility.

My virtuous men!
Look at the invasion
Of the titles of Tamiḻ films
The influence of alien tongues perpetrated!

It happens because
We cherish no love of the Tamiḻ language.
It is not just a matter of consonantal propriety.

We nurture not unity in Tamiḻ film industry
Just as we close our eyes to consonantal integrity.

What have you done, O men
To stamp out this hostile trend?

My heart
That feeds on the feel for Tamil
Will never stoop
Into acquiescing in such a flaw.

I do not like to see posterity
Hold me to censure
Rather than praise,
Holding that
A film
We the Tamil fraternity made
Is flawed in its title."

Seeing the steely resolve of the producer,
The friends and relations,
The almanac readers included,
Wore a sheepish grin
And started making a shamed retreat
One behind the other.

'Currup Payaṇam'
Ran for many a week
Marking its pervasive rationalistic appeal.

In place after place
The viewers inundated the film
In their shower of acclaim.

17-11-2003

24 The Yellow Towel

Osho was the one
Who had mapped out
A style of his own
In both speech and writing.

I do not agree with him
On all that he says,
Holding that
His is all black hair
With no grey hair in between.

Osho is not credited with thoughts
That are all in consonance
With the high-minded views
Of the Buddha the exemplar,
Who keeps enjoying universal acclaim.

And yet
We find Osho report in acquiescence

That the Buddha had asked of people
Of what avail it was
For eyeless men to enquire about light,
Implying thereby that
Gauthama Buddha
Had not concerned himself about God.

There is yet another thing from Osho,
A gemlike utterance that it is:

The Buddha
Neither denies nor believes in God,
Taking the stand that
Whatever is unseen is unknowable.

The number of gods
Going beyond count,
Tirumūlar questioned
The need for such multiplicity
And averred
God was but one.
This is the enunciation in Tirumūlar's canon
Unambiguously articulated.

Pārati the immortal ageless poet
Denounces belief
In the multiplicity of gods:
"O fools of men
That believe in the existence of a thousand gods
And go scrambling in search of them!
And he proclaims that
Wisdom alone is God.

Superstitious beliefs and duplicity
Must die out root and branch.
Hell and Heaven
Do but exist in our imagination.

The fourfold caste and vedic prescriptions
Are things incompatible with reason.

Brahman being the creator,
Vishnu the preserver,
Siva the destroyer, destroyer of the God of Death too -
Things of this sort are sheer myths,
Unbelievable fabrications!

Should one raise a sacrificial fire
For one to accomplish
What one desires?
Is it wisdom's part
To water the sedge?

For what reason
Has the adored son of Añcukam -
He who holds wisdom in esteem
And had bidden farewell to ignorance -
Chosen to wear a yellow towel?

It is that
Doctors recommended it;
Dissenting it not,
I have chosen to wear this towel,
Also assuming that
It would lend me
An individual identity.

The Buddha too holds a view
With regard to the yellow colour:
"Whoever had achieved self-conquest
And keeps his self reined in,
His egoism overthrown,

And whoever is endowed with
Lustre of mind, clarity of thought and truthfulness,

He is the one
Fit to wear yellow clothes."

That I have taken this yellow wear
Is not to make a conceited claim
That I have attained those qualities in entirety.
It is only to prepare myself to earn these qualities
That I keep persevering all along.

And,
There is for me the soothing comfort
That the thoughts of Gauthama the venerable
About the colour of clothing
Are in my favour.

18-11-2003

25 Men and Women Are of One Kind

I had a dream

While in sleep.

It was about an old story,
And yet
A story for womenfolk to relish.

Cāvittiri implored the God of death for a boon,
The boon to get her dead husband back to life.

A firm 'no' was the reply she received.

"Do grant me another boon at least!"
Cāvittiri begged prayerfully.

The God of death said:
"Yes, what boon do you ask for?"

Cāvittiri prayed for the boon of a child.

Granting her wish,

The God of death blessed her with the boon sought.

Cāvittiri queried then:
"How can the boon materialize without my husband?"
Taken aback,
The God of death threw his hand hard on the buffalo's back
And exclaimed,
His head hanging down,
"O I am outsmarted!
I bear witness myself
To the assertion that
Women are not the ones
That do things in haste and repent in leisure;
You for sure stand witness
To the fact that
It is men
Who are given to reckless hurry."
Her husband Cattiyavāṉ redeemed,
Thanks to her shrewdness of mind,
Cāvittiri asserted,
"I would henceforth be a challenge
To the overbearing male chauvinism."

Counselled the God of death:
"O sharp-witted damsel
That throw a challenge!
You may do well
To cast aside such unwarranted issues.
Look at the unique composition 'Pāratam'
Which sage Viyācar wrote,
Where Taruman stood as a picture of spotlessness
And Turiyaṉ trod the path of evil!

Where Pāṉumati was the wedded wife of Turiyaṉ
While Pāñcāli was conjugally committed to five men;

Where Turiyaṉ's wife kept alive a lofty culture
That glorifies chastity unadulterated.

As Tiraupati chose to have her amorous play
With one husband a day,
Wasn't she aware that
It was a practice abhorrent?
How did Tarumaṉ acquiesce in it?

Thinking that
You would be a woman of Tiraupati's kind,
I granted you the boon of a child forthwith
Without demur.

You have wonderfully outwitted me
With the dazzling smartness of your womanly wit.
You stand here
As if the God of fire had taken a woman's form!

No more of things contentious between us!

Mores and values
Are things shared between men and women.

All talk of
Superiority of men or superiority of women
Is unwarranted.

The difference manifests all in the physical make,
And does not exist in the mind's realm.
Strength or weakness of character
Is a matter of individual mould,
Where no question of sex crops up.

Men and women are of one race
The race of humankind."

Thus spoke the God of death,
And he departed then
On his buffalo mount.

19-11-2003

26 The Elephant That Trampled Down Gratitude

Strayed from the herd

There came a wild elephant alone,
Its trunk,
Along with its upcurved tusks
Looking like swords held aloft
Scaring away folks on the way.

It managed to make its way
Without being sighted by the hunters.

Spotting the clear water
Brimming to the fill
In a reservoir fortlike around,
The elephant came leaping and jumping

To quench its thirst.

It noticed a dreadful crocodile
Lying about
At the edge of the long reservoir.

It is said that
A crocodile has its strength increased manifold
When it goes into water from the ground.

Haven't we seen people
Taking to lawless conduct
When power falls into their hands?

The moment the elephant stepped into water
To get its thirst quenched,
The crocodile came darting up
And seized the elephant's leg by its mouth.

The reptile
Biting and tearing up the elephant's leg
And drawing it in,
The elephant trumpeted piteously with tearful eyes.

The terrible scream of the elephant
That reverberated like the call of distress (to the Primeval Lord)
'Ātimūlam! Ātimūlam!'
Was but the piercing cry of the beast
In pain unbearable.

The play of fortune had it that
The chief of the hunters' clan
Who came around then
Also bore the name 'Ātimūlam'.

Hearing the deafening wail of the elephant
Ātimūlam rushed towards the beast
And found the crocodile swallowing its leg.

In no moment
The hunters' head flung his spear
Into the back of the reptile.

The killer crocodile,
That threatened to be the death of the elephant,
Loosened its grip
And made its retreat
With its mouth gaping and tail striking around.

The folks who were collected there
All heaped their praises on Ātimūlam's feat of prowess
And acclaimed his humanity towards the elephant.

But the elephant took absolutely no notice of him.

Would not the simple artless folks
Take it for granted that
The elephant,
Secured alive
Thanks to the caring act of Ātimūlam,
Would have looked upon him as its saviour
And expressed its gratitude
A thousand times?

But
Isn't this elephant
A beast of the present *Kaliyakum*, the Age of Deceit?

Do you know what the elephant said?
"Ātimūlam has turned a celebrity
Making use of my plight!"
It chose not to utter
Even a half-hearted word of gratitude,
Guided as it was
By a (specious) reasoning:

Would Ātimūlam have turned for help
Had I not been in danger through the crocodile?

The elephant made an audacious show of joy
And went off then past the reservoir.

Throwing a smile at the elephant,
Ātimūlam reflected:

The elephant stands a perfect exemplification
Of the truth of the *Tirukkuṉaḷ* couplet:

> Measure not the help rendered
> In terms of its quantity;
> Help's worth lies
> In the quality of its recipient.

The elephant but represents the way of the world,
Ātimūlam stood comforting himself.

21-11-2003

27 There is Only One Birth

Belief in rebirth is a sort of comfort

For men
Who keep wailing and weeping
About the reality of death.

Why then,
Does many a man of ripe wisdom
Deny that there is rebirth?

However,
There is a problem
With the belief in rebirth.

It is urged that
People eschew evil deeds
And take to acts of virtue
In this birth

For them to avoid
Being reborn as worms and insects.

Have the pursuits of meritorious deeds
Attempted by people
Who commit sins after sins
With the fond hope that
They would be relieved of the evil effects of these sins
Through performing ceremonies of atonement
Ever borne fruits?

The view
That there is no rebirth after death
Can bring many a good in its wake.

Awakened to the reality
That death will come sooner or later,
People would take to worthy deeds
Works of ethics enjoin upon them
And finish these deeds
Well within their life-span.

On the contrary,
Belief in afterlife
Would result in
People leaving their tasks unfinished
In the hope of continuing them in the birth next.

The talk of rebirth is a thing of deceit.
Do realize that
There is only one birth.

* * *

They put out a piece of news
That a man ate worms in hundreds,
Showing it as a thing astonishing.

Don't they know that
Men in thousands and in lakhs
Are being eaten up by worms?

Remaining in blessed oblivion thereof
As man is,
What revolution is it
That he eats worms?

* * *

As they pay homage to the dead
People endow them
With positions of Siva's heaven and Vishnu's heaven.

Why should we keep burdening men with positions
Even after their departure from the earth?

Is it that
It is power and position
That lends validity
Even in Heaven
To the letter of recommendation one issues?

Money's reach extends up to the nether world!
And position's sway goes up to the Heaven above!

* * *

What blabbering
Is all this talk of men
Living through eternity?

It sounds meaningful
When one says
Man lives
Through what he leaves behind.

But
When one says
Man has no death,
Doesn't it mark a jarring note?

Those
That one has written, spoken, created or guided through
Are things
Which can live timelessly
Beyond one's death.
One becomes deathless
Because
One has given unto posterity
Things deathless.

It stands to reason
When we speak of living through fame;
It militates against reason
When we speak of living through deathless soul.

22-11-2003

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28 Will It Come to Something Good or Get a Thrashing?

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He vilified women in verse
Calling them
Crafty witches taking the guise of women;
It was the same he
Who was born to a woman.

He poured scorn at them
Saying
They stupefied him by their eyes
And lured him by their breasts;

It was he only
Who grew up
Feeding on the breastmilk of a woman.

Just because
A star in the sky loses its footing
And drops down,
Can we conclude that
All stars in the heaven's expanse
Are falling stars?

Having no regard for things of this kind,
Should we go about
Being hostile to women?

My heart
Is deeply hurt.

Alas!
There are still folks
Who look down on women
And treat them like dust
Despite words of counsel by the wise.

We are witness to
Womenfolk living in tears
Which ever keep pouring down like rain;
They turn to flooding the world
As if through a sluice unshuttered
When their marital prospects get thwarted.

It is the height of cruelty that
Even when a woman gets married,
The in-laws and her wedded man
Demand
Loads of money, gifts and the balance of the dowry,
And do away with her
By driving her to the ordeal of fire,

The very fire
She circumambulated to enter into the marital home!

There is a scheme
Called cradle baby scheme;
Just because it works not well,
It is distressing to see that
Female infanticide has been on the rise.
Even some women connive in this inhuman act.

Benign-hearted people
Spit at the faces of men
Who go acquiescing in female infanticide.

Can we remain patient anymore
Seeing the suffering of womenfolk?

Will a bow choose to break its own arrow?
Will a lute snap its own string?
When even things inanimate
Will shrink from such an act,

If the animate things,
That men and women are,
Find the perpetration of cruelty against women acceptable,

Will this society come to any good
Or will it get a thrashing in future?

23-11-2003

29 Let's Treasure the Values of Life

A teacher counselled his students in the classroom:

"The words *kaṭumai* (harshness) and *koṭumai* (heartlessness),
Found to be a little mild in their senses,
The Tamils borrowed the term *kurūram* (sadism)
And assigned it a meaning
That marks the height of cruelty.

They are of a class
Who are harsh and heartless towards others;
And those that enjoy seeing others suffer are sadists
Deserving to be called the most hostile kind.

When the 'Supreme Leader' (Kāmarācar) suffered an electoral reverse
Our 'Exceptional Leader' (Aṇṇāturai) stood greatly anguished.
When he (Aṇṇā)won
He went to the former seeking his blessings
And found himself accorded a hearty welcome.

Alas!
How are all these roads to culture
In ruination today,
Dented along
Like the pits in the game of hollows?

That -
The yesteryear's -
Was a culture
That shunned malice and vindictiveness.

It is only the depraved minds
That would rejoice in the adversity of the opponents.

Being sadistic is the pastime of some persons.

Look at the inhuman cruelty of folks mean-minded
Who derive bizarre pleasure in
Hunting out cockroaches that hop and fly freely,
Ripping their wings apart little by little,
Looking at what are left over in the insect -
Breaking their legs one after another,
Putting out a gentle smile
At the twisting and rolling of this poor thing,
Putting it to relentless torment and affliction
And enjoying the slow death of this creature!

Therefore,
Seek not to find pleasure
In the sufferings of others."

The teacher then narrated a moral tale
Relating to his advice:

"A scorpion fell into a stream
And was being carried along the current.

An ascetic noticed the plight of the scorpion.
Moved by compassion,
He took it out with his hands
And landed it on the bank of the stream.

Secured from danger
The scorpion rewarded its saviour ascetic
By working the skill of its poisonous sting
On the very hand of the ascetic that rescued it.

The ascetic stung by the scorpion though
Did not let himself seized by anger.

The scorpion that stung him
Fell into the stream again by accident.

And again,
Brushing aside the rebuke of others,
The ascetic took out the scorpion
And saved its life.

Once again,
The scorpion stung the ascetic.

Dumbstruck
People around spoke to the saintly man:

'Have you lost your senses?
Don't you see the scorpion stinging you?
Do you think of you as the Saviour?
Knowing the nature of the scorpion,
Should one commit the mistake repeatedly?'

The ascetic responded:
'It is no mistake,
My dear brothers!

To be compassionate is my nature!
And to sting is the nature of the scorpion!

That is the reason why
Great men have enjoined upon us
Not to find pleasure in the pain of others
And not to inflict pain upon others.
It is beyond the comprehension of the scorpion.

But,
Shouldn't man
Endowed with the light of reasoning that he is
Understand this?

My dear brother!
Do understand
This enlightening truth of life!'

24-11-2003

30 Which to Opt for - That or This?

Your journey is easy to comprehend.

You walk into the first step of life in this world
Weeping and wailing.

Destination of the journey unknown
You keep wavering and vacillating.

There is a smile on your face;
You give in to the mood of anger.

You walk lion-like now;
Then you get shrunk into a mouse.

The passion of love moves you to the extreme;
You also accomplish extraordinary tasks
With penance-like devotion.

You are weighed by cares
As if carrying the foetus;
And you hope to unburden them
Somewhere on the way.

Ungrateful men and betrayers
Obstruct your journey midway.

No matter
How many the vexations are
And which direction they come from
You can tread your path undeterred.

Death stares you in the face
At the end of this journey all.

You are burnt into ashes,
Or you are interred and entombed.

Be it cremation or burial
What does it matter?

Will the milk drawn from the teat
And the flower dropped from the stalk
Get back to their sources?

Will the life gone unseen
Ascend the ladder of the physical frame?

The slippery board called the path of life
Will take you and me along its course with ease
And drop us into the goal of life.

Isn't death the full stop that nature marks?

Once you arrive at that stop,
Gape not around
Looking for signboards
Marked Heaven and Hell.

Hell is where you remained all along;
Heaven is where you reach at your journey's end
From which you cannot come back.

You have in you
Power and mind's strength
In ample measure

That could turn
Heaven into hell
And hell into Heaven.

The way
You put the power and strength into use
Will provide you answer to the question:
Which to oft for - hell or Heaven?

30-11-2003

31 I Had No Mind to Leave

I was but going along the way

I used to go.

"O you, stupid fellow!"
I could hear
Your master scolding you,

And I stopped shocked,
Of course
To see what would happen next.

Your head down,
You were telling your master
In a subdued cringing voice:
"This humble servant of yours
Begs your forgiveness."

A sharp sound of a slap
Came striking my ear,
Followed by the voice:
"Would you still be demanding
More wages?"

Even then
I saw you rub your cheeks
And answer softly:
"Master!
The price of things has gone up;
I find it beyond my means
To manage my household."

You had then the taste of the strikes sharp
Of the whip
Lashing your body repeatedly.

I rushed towards you
And stood between you and your master
With my arms stretched out.

There came your wife running
And stood hanging on your shoulders
Shielding you from the strike of the whip.

Crying aloud piteously
Your child was seen
Clinging on to your knees.

"Why are you beating him?"
I asked your master.
(There was the retort):
"Are you telling me not to beat him?
Would you come forward
To provide for his wages?
Additional wages?"

"A poor thing he is!
He the destitute of a man
Is only asking for
What you have snatched away from him,
Isn't he?"
I said.

"Have you come mouthing off justice?
Mind it!
My whip will make no distinction
Between you and that fellow."

I responded,
"Be that the case,

I will take the whip's lash
And you may give the salary to him."

"Don't you know that
It is a crime here in this estate
To show compassion and fellow feelings
Unto others?"

"If it were a sin
To show compassion and affinity towards others,
I would commit that sin,
Come what may!
I would commit it publicly,
And I would do it ten thousand times!

I beg of you,
Have pity on him!
Be kind to him!"

* * *

The master shouted
Turning towards that poor man:
"You fellow!
Is this man your advocate?"

That destitute sized me up for a while;
Then he looked at his master with his body trembling;
He turned towards me with a stern look
And said:

"O you man!
Whoever are you to interfere in my problem?
Mind your own business
And do keep out of this matter.

The salary problem is our own issue;
And how does it concern you?

O my God!
I can take no more of these whip lashes."

He stopped asking for any more wages,
And I saw him wriggling like a worm on the earth.

Reminded of the words of the revolutionary poet (Pāratitācaṉ):
"O you, the little insect! The wretched toad!
Keep wailing! Grin sheepishly!
Go shivering in fear!
Stoop down! And go about blabbing!"

I stood there with a heart wounded;
I could not force myself to go off.

01-12-2003

32 The Medicine Not Prescribed by the Physician

"Losing him?

That intellectual, activist,

That man
Who lives enshrined in every atom
Of the minds of people of that little village!

Even if
Indra's Heaven,
Non-existent though,
Be offered to us on a platter,
We do not want it.

Keep it for yourself
And spare the life of our man."

The people of that village prayed
Weeping and wailing.

Meanwhile,

The man remained lying on the bed
Suffering unbearable pain
That shook every limb of his body.

Friends, relations and the village folk
Were there around by his bedside
Day and night.

There was no medicine
That they didn't give him;
There was no doctor
Who wasn't concerned that
His prescriptions didn't work on that man.

The disease
That come unto him like a guest
Showed no signs of taking leave.

There was no one around
Who didn't fall into the grip of anguish
Over the plight of that man.

His friends came forward and swore
Patting themselves on their shoulders:
"We are at the ready
To go and bring
Even the herbs-rich Cañcīvi Mountain
To see our brother back to health.
We will not be deterred by hardships whatever!"

The man
Who did never privilege self-interest
Pleaded with them
Not to put themselves into difficulty for his sake,
In a faltering voice choked with emotion.
Even as he spoke to them
He squirmed in agony unrelenting.

He was unable to sleep;
He could not drink even a drop of water.
He was writhing in a sea of pain
As does a boat on water
With cracks developing all around.

He said
He needed to repose in mind's quietude
For him to be relieved of his affliction,
And no medicine there was to get it for him.

Death,
The medicine no doctor prescribed
Came as the cure ultimate
For his illness
That came unto him as a hill
To go off as mist.

02-12-2003

33 The Burden of the Mind

He stood robbed of
Sardonyx, diamond, ruby, pearl and the like -
The gems of the seven precious stones known.

For some days
He kept wailing over the deprivation
In uncontained burst of grief.

He then started comforting himself
Pretending that
What he had lost were mere pebbles.

And
His mind rejoiced,
As there came up
A memorial structure with a domed tower
With many a piece of sculpture chiselled in.

He acclaimed it as the temple of art
Filled that he was with ecstasy unbounded.

An intimate friend of his confronted him:
"At that time
You went about reeling out fibs
That they had taken away from you
Things of the worthless kind, mere pebbles.
Now look at the form
Those pebbles of yours have turned into!"

He spoke then unlocking his mind:
"Dear my friend!
Can't you see
Why I had talked in that vein?

That was the hour
I was in the grip of fear in the extreme -
A fear that
The deep-rooted grief at the deprivation of my treasure
Would finish me off.

Urged by my mind's desire
To see the rest of my lifespan
Devoted to the service
Of this richly endowed Tamil land,

I healed the sore of my heart
By calling the rubies and the gems of their kind
Mere pebbles strewn on the ground.

I sought to drive away my despondence
By professing that
Things lost were things of inferior worth.
The anger one gets at the loss of things prized
Will mean that
One brings disrepute to those things.

It is for this reason that
Saint Paṭṭiṉattār,

Who bemoaned the loss of his mother
In melting passion,

"Alas!
In which birth will I see her again -
She,
Who bore me within
To the aching of her limbs
For months twofold five,
Who brought me into this world,

Who would take me up with loving care
In her ruddy hands both
The moment she heard me cry
And suckle me from her golden breasts?"

Reviled women later,
In the way
One calls a consecrated tower
A heap of pebbles:

"A stinking body,
A fox in the human frame,
A pot of rice and meat,
A thing of harm,
A flesh-packed perishable frame of skin,
A leather bag for stuffing food
A frail, air-filled vessel"

All with a view to
Putting out the burning pain of his heart
And bringing soothing relief unto himself.

Why have these words of worshipful vein,

"My mother
Who observed penance-like austerities for the bliss of a child,
Who then carried me in her womb for three hundred days

With her belly coming down under my weight,
And who brought me into this world!"

All turned into
The abuse of an unsettled mind?

That praise is called dispraise
Is a studied strategy
To unburden the burden of the mind.

* * *

No one among the citizenry
Rose up in rage uncontained
Brandishing billhooks
With anger at its peak,
And blamed Māṇikkavācakar
That he had squandered a fortune of the funds
By raising a temple -
The money which the king had entrusted him with
For the purchase of horses.

They knew
It was a hill-like fortune that he had spent,
And yet they played it down
Saying it was but a small amount.

Māṇikkavācakar came in for acclaim
By men of wisdom
For diverting the funds of the state
To the service of God,
He kept the king in the dark though.

Had he purchased horses
They might have served for a time limited
Guarding the fort;
They might have perished thereafter
And been buried under the earth.

On the other hand,
There is the Siva shrine he built
That remains an ageless temple of sculpture
An unperishing treasure-trove of our culture,
That is held in praise by the tongues of the poets
And that fills us with wonder beyond measure.

Therefore,
When a hilllike fortune of ours goes out of hand,
There is a way
For deflecting the burden of the mind;
It is the way
Of playing down the worth of the fortune
And deriving comfort thereby.

For which
There is the attestation of history too.

The money granted by the king
Transformed into a temple,
And not a mound of earth,
Which remains as an abiding monument.

It is because
The worth of money given to Māṇikkavācakar
Was made light of.

An instance instructive enough
Of the way
To unburden the burden of the mind.

04-12-2003

34 I Must Write That Pile up to the Himalayan Height

In his book *Kavitai Alla* (It is No Poetry)

My dear friend Ciṉṉakkuttūci speaks
In a flattering vein:

"There is a poet indwelling in *Kalaiñar* (specialist practitioner in an art)
As is the lovely pearl in the depths of the wavy ocean -
A truth I had come to know with ease
As far back as sixty years ago

When I read your revivifying poems
On Hindi imperialism."

He further says:
"Our valour would resound through the Himalayas;
The strings of the lute here at home would give out sweet music,
That music would go proclaiming our honour."

Though those were the times
When a composition of this kind of yours
Would hardly be accepted
As falling within the grammar of poetry,
Yet it was also the age
When racial awakening was also articulated
In a measure trumpet-like!

And today
We feast on your
Heartrending elegiac verses,
Poetic tributes,
Thunder-like strains on the heroic feats of the Tamils,
Poems of rational fervour that sound sweet to the ears,
Philosophical reflections striking like the thoughts of the Siddhas -
Which come all together
And hold our hearts captivated."

Compliments many of this kind
Keep pouring on me day in day out.
True I take delight in them.
None the less,
The longing of mine
That I should write things so prolifically
That they pile up to the height of the Himalyas
Remains sadly unfulfilled.

I feel obliged to give an account,
Briefly at least,

Of how I made it
To the fringe of the ocean of poetry.

They speak of inborn talent.
I should say it is a myth.

Be that as it may,
Although no Muse appeared in my vision
And initiated me into poetry,

Because my father Muttuvēl had composed many a poem
Of the kind:

> "It took him ten days for steaming,
> Twenty days for washing,
> Thirty days for starching;
> And yet
> The wash of my friend Vaitti's son
> Comes like
> The shade of the crow,
> The colour of kingcrow's tail,
> And the colour of the cloud."

And because I,
Thanks to my being his descendant
Have acquired the resourceful Tamiḻ
For my companion in my journey of life,

It may not be wrong on my part
To speak of inborn talent
As bearing on my poetic being.

"Because I sing of the heroes
That broke the fetters of bondage *(taḷai)*
My verses too remain halting,
Unfettered by the metrical bonds *(taḷai)*;
Because my heroes
Striking their thighs *(toḷai taṭṭu)*

Trounced the traitors,
My verses too falter in their rhyming *(toṭai taṭṭu)*.

Even though I didn't have opportunities to learn prosody
I do not want to remain a tree unproductive.

Guided by the conviction
That my land, language, honour and feelings
Shouldn't go unprotected
Even if my poetry stands uninformed by norms of prosody,

I would make verses
Where the feelings that well up in my heart

Would translate into lines of these verses
Which would impact the betrayers of their clan,
The folks of shifting stand that they are."

This verse of mine,
A knife-edged sword that it is,
Is the one
I presented on the Tiruchi All India Radio.

My mind does not consent to keep my thoughts hidden within
Till I get versed in the conventions of versification.
Therefore,
I have chosen to present my standpoint on things
In poetic prose
With honesty of purpose running through my words,

Unlike those people
Who bend and break the verse lines
Into two or three
Taking recourse to hocus-pocus in words
And calling them all things of their own.

Who would make a visit to it for bathing
Were the Kuṟṟālam Falls to be turned into a channelled course of water
Rather than letting it fall from a height?

Because we could not regulate its fall,
Would it be right of us
To obstruct its natural course at the source?

Are there folks around
Who would brush aside
Richness of imagination and profundity of thought,
Making out a case for traditional poetry?

Would anyone pluck out and throw off aubergine and bitter gourd
Saying they are unripe?

Do see that
Like these vegetables that go into making curry,
My verses too would serve a purpose of their own;
You may do well to have a taste of them.

The lines,
    There comes a damsel
    Swinging like a jewelled chariot
    Walking on the verdant grass
    Where the eggs of snow are being hatched,

And the thought running through,
    The eyeless needle too
    Has a use of its own;
    There is nothing
    That is devoid of use,

Are among the things prized
My poetic pen has brought forth.
I would assert that
My poetic prose is a particle of light from heaven
That has come out of the orbit of folks
Who but write prose in the guise of poetry.

As I rebelled against the tyranny of the order
Enforced at the tip of the sword
Banning the wearing of shoulder towel,

As I changed my tufted head to cropped head -
It was the pen that my hand held
That worked
For turning the hamlet of Tirukkuvaḷai
Into a fortress of the Dravidian movement,
Which saw me grown into *Kalaiñaṉ* (specialist practitioner of an art)
Who keeps treading the footsteps of Periyār and Aṇṇā
And who adores the luscious Tamil of Pāratitācaṉ the king among poets.

From being a hollowed earthen lamp
I have grown,
And now I stand out as a star in the heaven.

For me having grown into a cocount palm -
The palm that answers the riddle:
'The egg buried into the earth
Is a thousand eggs when it looks upward',
Are not those leaders of men of universal note
Truly responsible?

Hasn't the reality of my becoming
Been made possible
By the fortified base of my innate abilities
Which shaped up
As I trod my father's path?

06-12-2003

35 The Vision That my Heart Relished

Even as they lived

One apart from the other
In the regions nature apportioned -
Mountain, sylvan tract, maritime region,
Agricultural plains and arid desert land,

The Tamils lived
Imbedded in cultured ways.

The Tamils are a race of extreme antiquity
Whose advent on the earth
Preceded the formation of soil from the rocky layers;

And yet
They were versed in
Making habitable regions out of woodlands
And building up their prosperity by digging tanks.

They had bows on their shoulders,
A mark of valour that it was.

There grew paddy on their fields
Demonstrating their skill in cultivation.

Newer and newer words there appeared
That revealed the resourcefulness of their language.

The ripe-witted and high-minded Tolkāppiyar,
Apart from letter and word,
Gave unto his race the grammar of life too
For them to be guided into the fullness of living.

Valluvar wove the *Kuraḷ*
In the Tamiḻ language of unplucked fruit's sweetness
For the world to benefit from.

Let's listen to his words of authentic truth
And exult in them
As if we had rains after a drought.

Cilappatikāram, Vaḷaiyāpati, Maṇimēkalai
Cintāmaṇi and *Kuṇṭalakēci* -
These works shine forth as ornaments true
Of Mother Tamiḻ,
Thanks to the labour of love
Of the poets of that day.

How many were the works they composed!
How many were the poets who lived in that age!
The Tamils then had for their assets
These treasures of wisdom
Gifted by men of ripe learning.

One day
I had been on my bed
Thinking about the great works
That the ancient Tamil mind brought forth.

I found a damsel close by my side
Who embraced me
Throwing her sense of shame to the winds.

Even while
I made no attempt to take her into my hands,
My mind was not inclined to dismiss her either.
I kept quiet letting her have her way.

Then came another woman by me,
Wearing a seductive charm rainbow's like;
A deceitful woman that she looked
Gifted with the tongue of a skylark.

I could see you wondering:
"What is all this?
Two women around! And one bed!"

Wait a while.
The first woman was sleep,
The other dream.

The dream unfolded a picture of Tamil life!
The glory of the Tamils!

A musician was treating his audience
With a shower of his music in a hall.
The audience went into raptures
And remained intoxicated like bees drunk on nectar.

The performance coming to a splendid close,
Some among the audience asked of the artiste in all eagerness:
"Would you kindly sing *Pattuppāṭṭu* (Ten Songs) too?"

Surprised,
The singer clearing his throat said,
"I shall sing.
But what *tokai* (amount of money / anthology)
Would you be offering me in addition?"

A poet among the audience stood up at once
And responded to the singer:
"We shall give you *Eṭṭuttokai* (Eight Anthologies / an amount of eight)".

Discerning what it meant
The musician said:
"Is it fair?
Would I be getting only *Eṭṭuttokai*

For my *Pattuppāṭṭu* (Ten Songs)
It is just a *Kuṟuntokai* (a small amount / an anthology of classical love poetry) for me".

"O are you after *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* (fivefold of the amount / an anthology of 500 verses of classical love poetry)?"

Chided the poet.

The music maestro answered back:
"Not *nūṟu* (a hundred),
No, I won't touch it at all.
Could you give me *nāṉūṟu* (four hundred),
O the lion of poets!
That too
Nāṉūṟu of *Akam* (love poetry)
And *nāṉūṟu* of *Puṟam* (non-love poetry)?"

The eminent poet understood what the musician implied,
And said,
"O *nāṉūṟu* in *Puṟam* and *nāṉūṟu* in *Akam*!
Puṟanāṉūṟu (an anthology of 400 non-love poems) - that is *nāṉūṟu* publicly
And *Akanāṉūṟu* (an anthology of 400 love poems) - that is *nāṉūṟu* clandestinely?

O how bad! How bad!
This is an act of deceit by tax evaders!
A wrong-headed thing,
Like the traitorous act of felling a fruit-bearing tree.

Therefore,
Drop your demand
Of asking for *Tokai* (an amount of money/an anthology)
In lieu of *Pāṭṭu* (song / Ten Songs).

We shall give you
Cow's milk (*pāl*) to quench your thirst.
If you need anything further,
We shall give you *Muppāl* (*Tirukkuṟaḷ* of three parts) too.
Do sing the song."

The musician said in reply:
"O respected poet
That have come forward to give me *Muppāl !*
Henceforth
My tongue will respond
To *Poruṭpāl* (money / the section on wealth in *Tirukkuṟaḷ*) only."

Thus saying,
The exponent in music set out to leave.

I woke up then
From sleep prolonged,
Stirred up as I was
By *Neṭunalvāṭai* (the chill north wind/one of the Ten Songs).

The dream recollected,
My mind relished it sugarlike.

20-12-2003

36 The Roots That Turn into Seed

It is only one tree.

The stem,
Rooted in the earth that it is,
Grows upward towards the sky;
But its roots
Grow down into the earth.

Parts of one tree they are both,
And yet
Why do they take directions different?

For the tree to stand firm
It needs the earth's prop;
For it to breathe
It needs the help of the sky.

These two working in unison,
The tree exists;
Were it to be otherwise,
The tree would turn into manure for the earth.

Assuming that
The tree is the social structure,
The branches and leaves
Would then be the organs of the society,
Of course
Without the distinctions of the high and the low.

That the tree branches out and seeks sustenance
Is like people
Moving around looking for jobs

That would get them
Food for subsistence and money for livelihood.

A terrible storm and deluge occurring,
The tree would shake and tremble;
The branches,
Though grown thick and rounded,
Would break
And the trunk would fall down on the earth.
What survive are but the roots.

Let's realize this truth unchanging
And keep our self-respect unimpaired.

They are roots-like
Who hold that
Principles are the breath of life
Even when
Upholding these principles
May cost them
Fall from power and loss of government.

Only when the roots remain intact
Will there be sprouting of shoots
And the flourishing
Of the stem, branch, leaves and all.

26-12-2003

37 The Tragedy of Iran

Alas!

That thing called earthquake
Has swallowed up
Twenty thousand people in Iran
And exults in pride!

Gone are they in thousands -
Budding lives, tender ones,
The unripe and the ripened folks as well -
Either wounded or unwounded,
Drawn up in the boggy pit
Dug in an instant by the earthquake
And sent to their graves!

Here at home
We have heard of a moving incident
Of a temple elephant in Kerala
That was charged with planting a column in a pit
But that returned without doing so
Seeing a cat in the pit as it did.

But in Iran
Look at that heartless elephant called nature
That slaughtered people en masse
In utter thoughtlessness!

Oh! The earthquake has torn off in a flash
The fringes of Iran,
And the sky there has turned reddened
In the blood spilled!

Let us mark our condolence
To those slumbering in the graveyards there
By sending our deep sigh of distress
Through the wind in motion.

Let us bathe their corpses
In the tears we shed,
And extend our hands of succour
To the wounded amongst them.

It is our tradition
To go to the aid of people in distress
In all ways possible,
Whichever country they belong to.

At this hour
Let us be guided without fail by that tradition
And share the sufferings of Iran.

28-12-2003

38 A Proverb in Torment

Vaṭivēlaṉ had loads of stone chips
Carted home and heaped up in his garden.

When asked by folks
What these stones were for,
He said
He would be building a house.

Marutappaṉ, surprised,
Made a query:
"You already have a storeyed house,
Haven't you?
Should you need one more house?
Is it necessary at all, O my man?"

Vaṭivēlaṉ,
A clod of a man that he was
Said in answer:
"My dear Marutappaṉ!

Don't be hasty!
Wait and see!
Let another house come up on this plot.

What I do by a reasoning of my own
Dull-witted folks cannot make sense of.

You will see for yourself
How quickly the construction progresses
And rises up hilllike
With compound walls all around!"

"Do get me pots of pigments
And make pastes of them;
Colours red, green and blue in line
Let me have in my front."

Thus flung his instructions
Which in earnest his attendants carried out.

His invitation to the house-warming in hand,
There gathered relatives close and distant, and friends.

Welcoming them,
Vaṭivēlaṉ, all smiles, said:
"Afflicted with illness serious,
I went to the chief doctor of our village.
He advised me
To keep off from medicine
And take a rest.
He further said
I should lessen the burden of my work immediately.

When I said
I could not keep idling away,
The doctor said,
'Listen to me carefully!
Don't take my words lightly!

It is all for your health.
You cannot draw a painting without a wall.'

For a long time
I had been nursing a desire.
It was that
I should become a painter unmatched.

Urged by this desire to learn painting
I went to places one after another:
Nowhere was I able to acquire this art
To the content of my mind.

One instructed me to practise on paper,
Another said I should use plaited bamboo board.

I tried one and all
And nothing turned out to be of any avail.

And finally
It was the doctor of our town
Who offered me the suggestion
That painting could be learned
Only when there was a wall.

Understanding the secret of the art as I did,
I started raising walls
And constructing the house.

I will learn painting with ease now.

These walls will aid me
To become versed in this art."

Marutappaṉ responded then;
"My dear brother!
Could we find around
A more dull-witted person than you?
You have misread the words of wisdom of the doctor.

When he said
There must be a wall
For one to draw a painting,
All that it meant was that

You should have a healthy body
For you to put it to diligent use.
Misinterpreting his advice,
You go about
Erecting a wall and building a house,
Intending to use it for a drawing board
And learn painting thereby."

People one and all mocked at him,
Saying
The world hasn't seen a fool yet
To match him.
But our Vaṭivēlaṉ was seen standing
With a bewildered look.

01-01-2004

39 The Scene That Moved My Heart

In the epic play of exceeding relish, *Maṉōṇmaṇiyam,*

Composed in lovely Tamil by Cuntaram Piḷḷai,
There is a scene
Which moved me much
And filled me with ecstasy.

The Cēra prince Puruṭōttamaṉ
Intent on invading the Pāṇṭiya country
Was encamping with his army
On the borders
Adjoining the fort
At Nellai of the Pāṇṭiya king Jīvakaṉ,
The beat of drums proclaiming his intention.

Kuṭilaṉ was the minister of Jīvakaṉ,
A black-hearted counsellor
Who put on the guise of nobility
And pretended to be the protector of Pāṇṭiya sovereignty.

His words of guile veiled in his smile
Kept the Pāṇṭiya under his spell
And made him acquiesce
All too readily
In Kuṭilaṉ's officious assertions.

The unsuspecting Jīvakaṉ
Took the high-sounding rhetoric of Kuṭilaṉ
For words of unmixed truth
And reposed his trust absolute in him,
Blissfully unaware as he was
That his minister's conduct
Masked the deadly sting of a scorpion within.

Armed with the confidence of his ruler in him,
Kuṭilaṉ turned increasingly bold.
And one day
He fortuitously sighted a secret tunnel in the fort;
He took this underpass clandestinely
And made his way toward the encampment of the besieging Cēra.

Running into Kuṭilaṉ on his way,
The Cēra prince queried in a taunting tone:
"O the honourable keen-witted minister of the Pāṇṭiya king!
What are you here for?"

Kuṭilaṉ fell prostrate at the feet of the prince
Like a tall tree felled at the trunk,
And addressed him in words submissive:

"O Cēra prince a mighty bull like!
I the humble servant of yours
Have come here

To show you an excellent way
To vanquish the Pāṇṭiya with ease
And take him captive
Rather than to mount a bloody campaign
Sacrificing soldiers in thousands in the battle."

The Cēra prince asking him of his plan,
The wily Kuṭilaṉ replied:

"O prince!
The plan of mine demands no daunting effort;
It is all too easy.
Look at this passage underground
That leads to the fort of the Pāṇṭiya king!
You may take this way,
Take the Pāṇṭiya a captive right now
And capture his kingdom without a hitch.

Should it be acceptable to you
You could follow me O prince!
It involves no risk whatever."

The prince said,
"You the treacherous man!"

Shocked,
Kuṭilaṉ stood
His head hanging down.

Added the Cēra prince :
"A traitor is worse than a wicked man!
Hasn't the Pāṇṭiya taken you for a friend,
Reposed his trust unsuspecting in you
And given you the eminent position of ministership
Hoping you would be loyal to the country?"

Kuṭilaṉ countered:
"I beg your pardon, O king!
Have you forgotten the history of that person -

Originally Maruḷnīkkiyār,
Who went up to Pataliputra,
Turned a Jain,
Earned the title Tarmacēṉar
To the acclaim of one and all
And came back home
As a Saivite again
Taking the name of Tirunāvukkaracar?"

The prince answered back:
O you Kuṭilaṉ!

Yours is an analogy ill-conceived;
The conversion of Tirunāvukkaracar
Was prompted by an urge to serve God.
On the contrary,
You have turned treacherous
Driven by greed for rulership as you are.
What assurance is there
That you,
The one ready to stab the Pāṇṭiya in the back
And place him in the hands of the enemy,
Will not turn your sword against me
After enjoying my hospitality?

Therefore,
You traitor!
I will take you into custody
And right now hand over to the Pāṇṭiya king
Who keeps holding you in trust."

Saying thus,
The Cēra prince put him into fetters,
Took him along by force
And cast him at the feet of the Pāṇṭiya king.

Taken aback was the Pāṇṭiya king
Hearing the prince
Detail the tale of Kuṭilaṉ's treachery.

I should hold that
This event in the play -
Where
The Cēra prince
Even as he knew
He could vanquish the enemy with ease
When he had the help of a betrayer,

Chained Kuṭilaṉ
And exposed his treachery,

Believing as he did
Victory accomplished
That is aided by breach of trust
Is no better than a defeat -
Is a touching one in the extreme.

Should I be asked,
"Which is the most captivating act in *Maṉōṉmaṇiyam?*"
I would only point to this scene
With no hesitation whatever.

03-01-2004

40 The Blind Man

Look at those naive folks

Who remain uninformed of the truth
That love is that instinct in nature
Which binds two people,
And desperately go about
With a heart hot and bothered,
Hoping to see the door of love open out
Whichever place they knock at!

I shall take the case of one of this class
No matter whether this one is a male or a female.

This person is seen crying his eyes out
Wearing his heart on his sleeve:

"I keep seeking after love
In the college classroom
And through the campus around.

The love of mine,
Turned down once by one,
I have lost somehow,
And it has winged away somewhere.
Therefore
I have taken to searching for it
Through places one and all.

I looked for it on the beach;
All that I got was
A sight of the spot covered in sands
Where in dream we rendezvoused.

Even the sea breeze
That had given us a pleasant feel
In those days of our rapturous frolic
Remains quiet and still now
And pays tearful homage to our love.

I now go wandering around
In search of love
Thinking back to and exulting in
My prankish acts on the beach
Performed in the dream:
Someone cried out,
"Would you like to eat *kaṭalai* (groundnut; also a reference to sea)?"

And I responded with the repartee:
"One cannot eat *kaṭal* (sea)
It can only be drunk."

In the look I run into
I yearn for love's strain,
And fall into despair then.

In the smile there on a face
I long to see a streak of love,
And I go in pursuit of it.

It turns out to be no love.

My search goes on with more of vigour.

My mind knows all too well
That it is a search vain and futile;
And yet
The quest of mine goes on and on
To see my dream of love realized;
And I wilt and wither exhausted.

I am determined
Not to attend the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* classes,
Not to turn my eyes to texts of history and geography,
Not to touch books of mathematics and physics
Till I get someone for me to love
Or till someone falls into love with me.

Should it not be materialising,
Of what avail is this life?
Of what avail is this handsomeness of my body?

I even go begging of people for love!
And yet this daydream of mine remains unrealized.
Whatever can I do?

Whoever a person be
That takes love for a commodity
Which can be bought from someone or other,
Or that considers love
Which can be had on a loan,

He or she is no more than a person
Who goes after an outlet
For their lust to be gratified.

He or she is surely a visionless person
Ignorant of the greatness of this perennial stream called love.

07-01-2004

41 We Need to Cultivate a Mind for Service

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This is the poem I composed

After I received him with hearty greetings
Holding a banner of welcome

When Neṭumāṟaṉ,
Having sojourned for months eighteen
In 'the flower grove
Where koels on mango trees coo' (prison),
Came out
With his heroic self unshrunk
And with his head held upright,

And hugged me in joy
With a mind in unison with mine.

"Goodness!
Should you be holding a banner in your hands?"
Are you asking me thus,
O my fraternal soul?

Listen to me, my younger brother!
For our unbroken journey to come to fruition
A mind for service we need to cultivate.

If the hands of mine,
That moved to lift the banner
In the year nineteen thirty-eight,
Hold that banner still on my shoulders,

Hold it they would
When I turned riper in age too,
And I would jealously protect the ancient glory of our race.

That I have grown into a leader
Or that I am a former chief minister
Is no impediment whatever
Making me hold back
From holding the banner over my shoulders!

Be you reminded of it!
In those days
When we were hemmed in
By the fire of Emergency,
I took to taking the banner
And got arrested,
When I got my brief birthday message printed in pamphlets
And tried to distribute them on the Aṇṇā Cālai
With the censor board official adamantly refusing to let it be done.

I stood not on the image of the self!
I didn't timidly shy away from taking banners!

My cherished brother!
Endowed with sharp wits that you are,
You can well understand
What I mean
When I refer to this instance,
Can't you?
The revolutionary poet Pāratitācaṉ
Shows us
With telling illustrations numerous
That many and varied are the types of hearts of men
Such as mustard seed heart and pigeon pea heart.

Aṇṇā (turai) would say that
Some folks have just a hollow
Where there should be the heart housed in.

Be it marked!
Among all kinds of hearts we speak of,
It is the heart committed to service
That stands lofty and superior.

Look at Appar,
The author of the devotional *Tēvāram* verses,
Who performed the service of weeding grass in temples of God
And was rightly acclaimed as the devotee of devotees
In the ancient world!

There is for you to see
Mother Teresa the spotless,
The pride of women,
Who rose to the heights of humanism
By virtue of her compassionate heart
That extended loving care to folks!

My loved younger brothers and sisters
Endowed with hearts of benevolence!

Let's thunder out the glory of our race
Cherishing at heart the principles of our movement
And holding its flag fast in our hands ever!

Let's keep our heads high
Proclaiming that
We are ever ready to extend our services
To the destitutes and the distressed!

Let's be the protectors and defenders of honesty!

10-01-2004

42 The Umbrella of Power and the Umbrella of Victory

My fraternal soul!

I wake up from sleep.
It was the early hour of dawn
Before the break of day.

Every morning
It is my wont to take a walk.

Before I got up,
My mind's child called thoughts
Started playing on the lap of quietude
Softly stirring its hands and legs.

I seek to make here
An epistle of this thought child,
Of course in the form of a verse!

* * *

"Transience"
Is the title of this verse.

O transience!
How many folks there are
Whose waves of thoughts,
Of myriad kinds they must be,
You turn upside down!

You are endowed with the might
To turn the ambitions,
Lying fast and deeply ingrained
In the depths of the minds of men,
Into things transitory,
Aren't you?

Look at the humans
Who prostitute themselves
By falling a prey to your disconcerting lure,
Even as they know that
You have but a fleeting existence!

What is it
That is deemed transitory?
What is that ephemeral thing?

'Life is transitory!'
So is it said.
It is not the proclamation of a new truth.
It is the expression of anguish voiced in tears.

'The rolling coins of money are impermanent!'
It is also said.
But there remains no spot
On the naked bodies of these impermanent things
From head to heel
Where one has not stamped one's lips.

And for the sake of these coins
One sells out oneself!

The words of Pāratitācaṉ,
The king of a poet,
"Don't offer yourself for sale!"
Is but a fiery reaction to this tendency.

O transience!
These traders of men
Keeping their interests to the fore
And blinded by the lures of position and money
Completely lose sight of the yawning gap
Between you and permanence.

An impermanent thing can be money,
But character should not be impermanent.

An impermanent thing can be your crown,
But it should not be your self-respect.

An impermanent thing can be your life,
It can be your body,
But honour
And fame that honour flowers into
Should not be things impermanent.

They live on the pages of history
Who cherish uprightness
Caring not about things ephemeral.

There is no dearth of men
Who are no longer men,
Who go about
Taking impermanent things for permanent things,
Fall upon things shadowy
And embrace them.

With no concern
About securing an abiding note in history
After their death,
These men remain tied down to fleeting concerns
And try to make a show of lofty standing.

Finding it impossible,
They wilt and droop
Becoming no more than a sedge.

The weight of power
And money's plenty
Are but writing on water.

They are chaff of men
Who take this writing
For Brahman's writing on their heads,
And trip and fall in their life's journey.

A water bubble's is a momentary life.
There are folks
Who take this bubble
For their umbrella of power.

Sacrifice
Resoluteness of mind
Perseverance

Honour
Self-respect

Are things unperishing
Which will remain one's umbrella of victory
Even when one trips and falls.

11-01-2004

43 Pieces of Straw on the Wavy Ocean

Many years ago

Our revolutionary poet Pāratitācaṉ had composed a poem
Titled 'The Distress of *Kaimmai*' (Widowhood)
Wherein he pictures the misery of women widowed:

"Should love be a mirage to women
Who have lost their marital partners?
Wouldn't the hearts of these women yearn for conjugal pleasures?

You demanded of them
To put out the fire of their love,
The fire that is inextinguishable.

This love choosing to break the bounds,
Could any of your curbs hold it up?"

Following up this missile of a question,
I did raise a query
In a verse I had written sixty years ago:

"You would say,
'My wife has died;
I want a remarriage.'

When it comes to your wife
Should she sacrifice her passion of love
Were you to die before her?"

Years ago,
A young poet,
Whose name I have forgotten,
Had come out with quite a streak of imagination
In a piece published in the *Vikaṭaṉ* magazine
Wherein he had bemoaned:
"Say the world *vitavai* (widow) in Tamil!
How distressing it is!
No letter in this word
Takes a *poṭṭu* (dot over the consonant letter / mark on the forehead)!".

I was struck with amazement in the extreme
At the way the poet's ingenuity worked.

Nevertheless,
As I regained my composure
After the feel of astonishment,
I did suggest an alternative
To the upsetting word *vitavai*
In a literary meet
Held in a public hall in the evening hour
Where were people gathered in strength,
"It is only when we write *vitavai* (widow)
That we feel the absence of *poṭṭu* (consonantal dot / mark on the forehead),
And grieve over it!

Do use the pure Tamil word *kaimpeṇ* (widow),
A word from the stock of our sweet Tamil,
You would find yourself for sure,
Putting two (consonantal) dots over it."

As I made this point
The clap the audience raised
Matched up the roar of the wavy ocean.

But
Does it mean much?

For
There are still women,
Thousands and thousands,
Living in this country
Just like the pieces of straw on the wavy sea,
Aren't they?

13-01-2004

44 Paccaiyappaṉ and Piccaiyappaṉ

One day

Paccaiyappaṉ was seen reeling off
The heroics of Ciṅkarāyar
To Piccaiyappaṉ:

"The moment they sighted the huge moustache of Ciṅkarāyar
Running on either side of his upper lip,
That verily looks like the upcurved tail of a cock,
The gangs of boys would fold up their acts of devilry.

As he walked through the street,
He would send shivers down the spine of folks.

An intrepid man,
A man of prowess with beefy shoulders he is.

Whoever dared to take him on with hostile intent,
That person would but turn into a wall all in ruins!
Never would he wear a sheepish grin before his enemies.

The hero of a man that he is,
Never would he kneel down
And beg for forgiveness
Showing his teeth shamefacedly,
No matter were it a command from a king of kings.

Why all this!

Even if Amarāvati of exceeding beauty was around,
Even if the celestial damsels -
Arampai, Tilōttamai and Ūrvaci -
Lined up before him enticingly,

Even if he ran into a woman
Who was beyond compare in all the three worlds,
Who was verily a gold statue-like,
The most inviting kind for a man
To take her close to his arms
On a bed of swan's down,
To hug her
And stamp his kisses all over her body
Taking this act to be the ultimate object of his birth,

Ciṅkarāyar is not the one
Given to such uncontained temptation,
Given to showing his teeth at them
And inviting them
For sports of love on a soft stuffed bed.

A very honourable man deserving much respect,
Ciṅkarāyar is not of the kind
To show his teeth in greed even forgetfully
Even if he runs across money

Heaped up hill like
In tens and hundreds and thousands of crores!

As Paccaiyappaṉ showered his praises on Ciṅkarāyar
Listing out his sterling qualities,
There came a voice of interruption high-pitched.

"O man!
Ask your Ciṅkarāyaṉ
Why he showed his teeth before me then."

Paccaiyappaṉ and Piccaiyappaṉ turned their eyes
From side to side.
And Paccaiyappaṉ said
Baring his teeth at the direction the voice came from:
"Do you say
He showed his teeth to you?
A downright lie it must me!"

The owner of the voice replied,
"What I say is no lie for sure!
Go and look at the board there!
See that
The name 'Dentist Paramāṉandam' is written on the board.

Can you seen what that board shows?

Did he or didn't he -
Ciṅkarāyaṉ your hero of heroes -
Come here even yesterday in broad daylight
And show his teeth to the dentist?

Then why on earth
Do you keep lying that
Ciṅkarāyaṉ didn't show his teeth to anyone?"

Right at that moment
Paramāṉandam was seen coming out.

And Paccaiyappaṉ and Piccaiyappaṉ
Set out to go their way
Splitting their sides with laughter.

14-01-2004

45 Let Progressiveness Blossom

Pongal festival!

There is joy bubbling up on every face!
Homes of folks overflow with happiness
Like floods gushing forth from sluice gates raised!
Thus do we cry out in delight;
We jump in cheer beating our heels down!

These festivities marking Pongal apart,
What does it mean
To folks of diverse calling around?

Here are the realities plain and simple:

The farmhand,
Who toils treading down the slush,
Who turns the fallow into cultivable fields

And wears a hearty smile thereon,
And who protects the world
By turning the grain into foodstuff,
Just ekes out his livelihood
With poverty ever remaining his kindred.

The weaver works his feet on the loom
Which turns cotton into yarn
And yarn into garment in variety.
And yet,
Dearth of money ever stares him in the face,
Unable that he is
To buy a piece of clothing
For his prattling child at home.

The washerman beats the dirty clothes on the stone
And all of the town gets the washing
Neat and clean like the petals of the white dead nettle
Which he carries and hands at their doorsteps.
And yet,
His wife Aṟivukkoṭi's
Is a wear of soiled saree dotted with tears,
Which she seeks to cover up
By asserting that
It is a saree grey-coloured
Newly bought for the first day of Pongal.

Oh, Look at the government employees and the feted teachers
Who serve the state and the people with commitment!
They are being victimised outrageously.
These classes of men too
Share the lot of the workmen above
And keep boiling.

O for the joy of Pongal!
Let's celebrate it!

Such are the realities
That mark the Pongal celebration this year!

Let the call of the Prime Minister
Made at Hyderabad come true!

Let the course of the sun
Mark a change of direction
Starting on this Pongal day!
Let him tread south to north!
Let the setbacks go
And progressiveness blossom forth!

Let the hairdresser,
Who tidies the hair on the head,
Set right the crown of the government too
That has gone unsightly.

15-01-2004

46 May You too Live Long Acquiring the Training I Have Acquired!

Meditation goes thus:

Mark a dot like a fullstop
On the wall in your front.

Put a tripod in front
And sit up straight on it
Without bending the back.

Keep your eyes both straight
Above the tip of your nose
And keep them firmly focused
Upon the dot on the wall.

Let the look direct remain fixed on the dot
With no thoughts whatever crossing your mind.

Meditation comes to nought
For folks
Who cannot concentrate their minds,

Just like those men
Who lose the efficacy of medicine
By taking to heart the physician's word
That they avoid bringing monkey to mind
As they take medicine in,
And by working their minds obsessively over this counsel
Whenever they have to consume medicinal stuff.

I should say
We the folks
Should never be reminded
Even unwittingly
Of these tales of the medicine and the monkey.

Where the mind stays determined
Never giving in to disconcertment,
Our bodies gain lustre for sure.

Should we take to meditation regularly
At certain hours of the day at least,

It ensures a sturdy body and a resilient mind.

This is what the practitioners of meditation aver.

In the same way,

One must practise yoga,
An excellent exercise that it is,
At least half an hour a day.

There are teachers specially versed in this art.
Learn it from them at the start,
And practise it every day without fail,
And your breath stays pure all through;
It provides for the strength of your lungs too.

Play works your well-being at your youthhood;
Yoga comes even more rewarding for ageing folks.

Breathing exercise will keep the nerves tenser
And will hold the brain more alert and active.
The tortoise of ageing will outsmart the hare of youthhood.

Similarly,
Waking up along with the breaking of the day
In competition with the crowing cock
Will do us a power of good.

Should we take then to liberal walking
Along the tracts of the beach

Or in a park thick with fruit-bearing trees,
And make it a practice day in day out,

We could then give an emphatic nod
To the query of the *nadaswaram* instrument
'Are you well? Are your body and mind fine?'

Our nervous system will turn into a nice system;
The flow of blood within
Will be like
The flow of a stream free and spontaneous.

We will suffer not exhaustion in the least,
And walking will see it vanish altogether.

Endurance and robustness will come unto us
And our life will gain an extended span.

I have had this training and practice all
And I keep reaping their benefits.

You may do well to acquire them
And get the fruits attendant.

May you live long!
May you flourish!

23-01-2004

47 A Word of Counsel to Our Cricket Team

Many a sport there is
That they play in many a country
Each with matchless zeal;

And yet,
What a wonder it is
That the sport of cricket,
Inexplicably,
Has caught the imagination of people
And draws crowds in their multitudes,

As do *Makāmakam,*
The great bathing festival at Kumbakonam,
And Kumbh Mela
The popular bathing festival at Allahabad,

And has become a sport of extraordinary note!
It is possible certainly
To watch this sport on television
In the comfort of our homes
With no hassles whatever.

Even so,

Believing as they do that
Pleasure unbounded
Comes of discomforting experiences,

People in thousands and lakhs
Throng the stadiums
And view the action of the play
Direct on the field
And derive a sense of joy!

Look at the excitement of these viewers!
Dividing themselves into two groups
They take positions in the stand
As supporters of
The home team and the alien team.

It is a spectacle indeed
To see their high-pitched cheers of support
And their beating of drums
And throwing of bottles of glass all around!

My goodness!
The bustle and uproar they raise
Would relegate a real battle

To a secondary position for sure!

Such is the volume of excitement and frolic
And such are the actions involuntary of the throng
That we really come to wonder
Whether we are in a cultured human habitat
Or somewhere out in the wilds!

Look at the action on the field!
There are eleven men in each competing team
Hailing as they do from different nations;
They plant sticks on the ground,
They hold bats in their hands
Which they hit the ball with,
And do the running in haste;
At length, a win they accomplish
As do racing horses!

It is but natural that
We wish to see our country
Take the lead
And win the laurels.

However,
When the win expected
Doesn't happen unto our team at times,

A piercing sense of disappointment
We are prone to fall into,
Aren't we?

A patient pondering,
Working wrinkles on our foreheads,
Over the causes of victory slipping off
Does show that

There are some players
Who are after feats of individual supremacy

Rather than working for the collective strength of the team,
Who aim at no more than adding centuries to their individual scores

And holding themselves up as achievers par excellence!
Surely they run aground in our esteem!

Only when team spirit prevails over individual ambitions
Can we hope to see the real victory of the team in question.

Bloated individual enterprises do no good to the team.
Even worms have their hours of triumph over tiger cubs.

When a wicket falls at the throw of a ball
There can be elation over the feat;
But surely
It is no occasion for bursts of wild uncontained revelry.

When a team comes to enjoy an upper hand,
There must be less of fuss and more of magnanimity.

And I should say one thing definitely:
That players act in commercials

Playing to the tune of the producer
Taking as they do
Antic and lightweight roles
Would bring them no credit;
Nor would it do any good to their public face!

Viewers are hardly enamoured of these advertisements
Tiring and monotonous as they often are;
More often than not,
Such commercials would hurt their cricketing renown too.

We must cultivate the art of sport
Where sportspersons lend their singleminded commitment;
Multiplicity of commitment
Would hardly help the cause of sport.

Deflections may bring money to a player.
But

Shouldn't he have that frame of mind
By which to bring honour and glory to his country?

It applies not just to cricketing,
But should bear on the political parties as well.

24-01-2004

48 The Mother Who Voted for Tamiḻ

Ellappaṉ spoke to Iṉpacākaraṉ

Breathing fire:

"You do have a bungalow now
Built in the city for yourself;
A woman dolllike
You have taken for your life partner.
Comforts of position and wealth
And things of relish of many a kind -
No longer are they daydreams for you.

They have verily become realities
For you to savour.

Look at the folks
Numbering ten thousand, even twenty thousand
Who fall prostrate in worship devout at your feet!

O Iṉpacākaraṉ!
Of what avail are these pleasures and comforts all?

Do tell me now -
How long it has been
That you keep your mother abandoned!
How come you have acquired such a heart
That acquiesces in living apart from your loved mother?

You call a conjuror your foster-mother!
You take a consummate deceiver, a wile woman
Into your loving fold
Calling her a motherly soul next door!

Do see that
They all cannot be mothers
Equalling the one
That bore you and brought you up.

That mother -
The loving one related to you by blood
The one that rejoiced in feeding you,
She who is worthy of honour and veneration
Which no other motherly person can lay claim to -

Your real mother
Is away in another place
Lying shrivelled without a meal.

Look at the folks
Who keep calling those things—
The dumb entities,
The ones dead and gone—
Classical languages!

And these people
Kick out Tamiḻ,
The language
That measures up to the designation of a classical tongue.

How long do you want to see your mother suffer -
Phlegm blocking breathing,
Persistent coughing,
Rheum secreting from the eyes -
And wearing the appearance of a corpse?"
A new leaf of a man that he is now,
Iṉpacākaraṉ answered his friend:
"Ellappaṉ!
You said it right!
I accept it all, my dear friend!

I do realize my folly,
What you have said now
Is what has been grieving my heart.

When the day breaks tomorrow
We have election in our town -
The election that will well decide the fate of our Tamiḻ language;

That is,
Should it be recognized
As a language of classical status or not?

I am left with no time
To go and attend to my mother.

All my concern and worry at the moment
Is to see
How to accomplish a win in this election."

As they kept talking to each other,
There came another man in haste and said,
"O Iṉpacākaraṉ!
Your mother is in a critical condition!
She is suffering much,
And is hardly able to breathe!"

Iṉpacākaraṉ cried out grief-stricken,
"O mother!

I shall be there right now!"
And he rushed off to his house.

All skin and bone,
His mother was lying on the bed.

Iṉpacākaraṉ took her up on his shoulders,
Put her into the car with extreme care
And reached the hospital.

Mother entrusted to the care of people in the hospital,
Iṉpacākaraṉ went off in haste
The work for the next day's election calling.

The day of judgement dawned,
It looked verily like a festival
With people thronging to cast their votes.

In the crowd were people holding tridents.
Ellappaṉ seeing that
They were the people
Who would hurl burning missiles at Mother Tamil,
Warned his friend Iṉpacākaraṉ :

"I am somewhat apprehensive about it all.
Don't forget that
Even one vote or two votes
Could be a thing of death and life!

Go around losing no time,
Collect people wherever they be
And bring them here."

"One vote! Two votes!
Their holding our lifeline!"
Iṉpacākaraṉ stood unnerved for a moment;
He set out then running.

A few minutes remaining for the polling to end,
Iṉpacākaraṉ came back

With his mother on his shoulders
Verily close to her final moments of life.

She signed the ballot paper
And voted for Tamiḻ to win.

And she closed her eyes
Never to open them again.

People around asked Iṉpacākaraṉ :
"Your mother has gone buried under the earth.
Will Tamiḻ now become an official language at the Centre?
Will it see recognized as a classical tongue?"

Iṉpacākaraṉ
A man of exemplary traits now,
A Tamiḻ genuine and real,
Said in reply:
"An answer to your question depends on
How many more of us -
Our mothers, fathers and brothers -
Will sacrifice their dear lives,
Hindered by no fear whatever,
To see Mother Tamiḻ rise up in glory."

03-02-2004

49 This is a Book of History

Do set out

O my young man of the Dravidian stock
Wearing the moustache whetted sword-like!

Set out
Clapping your sturdy shoulders!

Hear!
The election front is calling you;
Set out!

Set out!
To get the crown of dictatorship
Of those
That pour boiling water

At the root of the tree of democracy
Crushed!

Set out
Dart like
To demolish the conspiracy
Of those wile-minded folks
That seek to drive a wedge into your ranks
As you enter into the election front!

I could hear
The victory tidings
Resounding all around!

And this report
Goes bitter,
Strychnine fruit like,
To the host of Ettappan, the betrayers!

Things sounding sleight of hand
They resort to
To see us defeated
By hook or by crook.

Through their writings in the media
They subtly play one against the other,
Narada like,
To wreck the country's interests.

But
Are we made of that stuff
That would go scared off?
Look at the youngsters of our movement
Swearing
They would sacrifice even their lives!

I assert
I too am ready
To take the plunge.

"We have but one life;
Should we need to lose it,
Let's lose it for a noble cause',
So said Aṇṇā(turai).

What I say
Is a repeat of Aṇṇā's words.

It is cowards only,
And not men of conviction,
Who would shrink back in fear
When it comes to translating words into deeds.
I will proclaim this
Standing on the top of the tower!

This I swear
By the principles I cherish!

They will go into nothing,
Not even a pennyworth,
Who go out to make their fortune
By betraying the movement
Which works for the honour of their race.

Let's not hesitate
To give in this body for the earth to devour!
But let's do it
By planting our fame fast on the earth!

And let's then close down our eyes
With the comforting thought
That we have identified
Those men of base intent.

Let those folks
Who stand before others
With sheepish grinning
To secure nothing but power and position
Be ever in the ranks of our opponents!

We but need only those
Who look at power and position
As a symbol
In the war
For protecting the honour of our race,
As an opportunity rarely got
To be one in this war.

Let these men alone
Seek their electoral fortunes!

Do note that
Our Party, our Movement
Is a text of history;
It is surely not a wayside rest-house
For the likes of those folks
Who would lay claim to the grain
Leaving the toil on the field to someone else.

19-02-2004

50 Opposition Will Go to Smithereens

Let the lightning of impediments

Blind our eyes;

Let thunder
Rather than spear
Strike the head;

Let vile tongues
Worse than the above
Pierce the ears.

But
When the words of Aṇṇā(turai),
The genius among men
And the Buddha of Kāñci:

When you sight a hoarding
Kept at the front of your house
By foes
Rooted in vedic faith
That contains things abusive,

Do keep a light by its side
For folks passing your house
To read the content on the billboard
Even when it is the darkness of night,
And understand the quality inborn
Of these miscreants.

Are borne in mind,

You all will acquire for sure
A heart that bears up against anything
However trying may that be,

And all opposition will go to smithereens.

17-04-2004

About the Project Makers

Bharathiar University, Coimbatore – named after the nationalist Tamil poet Subramanya Bharathi, who exhorted the Tamils to identify things worthy in their language, and give them unto the world for enjoyment and edification – conceived this Project viz., *Kalaignar in English Translation* by which to make available in English the extraordinarily rich and varied literary works of Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi, who, by the sheer volume and weight of his output, makes a compulsive demand on us that he be studied and given his due.

Prof. G. Thiruvasagam, Chairman of the Project Committee and Vice Chancellor of the University. The genesis of this Project owes to his academic vision. His initiative and leadership as much as his passionate and studied interest in the excellence of Kalaignar's creativity has seen this Project through within a short span of ten months.

Kavipperarasu Vairamuthu, Vice-Chairman of the Project Committee. An intellectual poet in Tamil endowed with an astonishingly fecund poetic energy and representing a rare blend of ratiocinative powers and aesthetic sensibility, Vairamuthu has brought a sense of direction and significance to bear on the dynamics of the Project.

Dr P. Marudanayagam and Dr V. Murugan comprising the editorial team – the former a ripe Professor of English and a comparatist of towering erudition, and the latter a bilingual lexicographer and a distinguished translator with the translations of *Tolkappiyam, Kalittokai, Tirukkural* and *Narrinai,* and *Oxford English-English-Tamil Dictionary* to his credit.

Dr C. Sivashanmugam, Professor of Linguistics, **Dr R. Palanivel**, Professor of English and **Dr S. M. Ravichandran**, Professor of Tamil, Bharathiar University, the coordinators of the Project, who kept the Project on track.

The late **Dr S. Agasthialingom,** a renowned linguist and former Vice Chancellor, Tamil University, **Sirpi Balasubramanian,** a highly decorated poet in Tamil, **Prof. Tamizhachi Thangapandian**, **Poet Kayalvizhi Venkatesh** and **Dr N. Ramani,** members of the Expert Committee, whose learned counsel, suggestions and views have added to the strength and credibility of the translations as a whole.

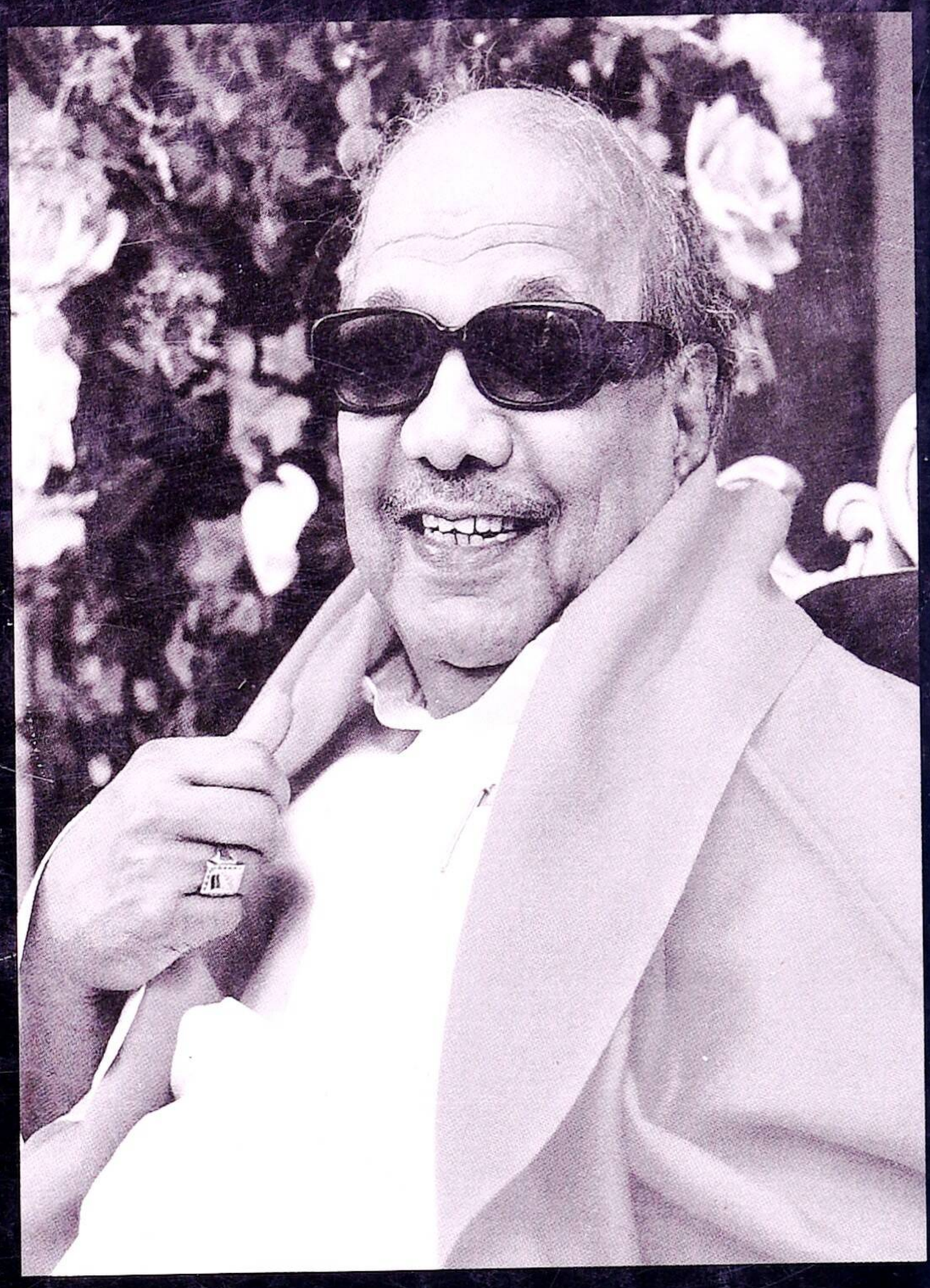
Macmillan Publishers India Limited, who have done an excellent job through their passionate commitment to the project, their legendary technical expertise and their unfailing feel for accuracy and perfection.

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And Kalaignar does not surprise us by resorting to things unworldly or irrational. There are no religio-philosophical abstractions, no escape into mythology, and no aesthetic exclusivism in Kalaignar. Thanks to his unwavering belief in the correctness of rational thinking and his scientific temperament, he, in most cases, treads the path of reason and logic.

Kalaignar is endowed with a natural gift for wit and humour, irony and sarcasm, pun and repartee, which remain the inseparable, intrinsic components of his poems, just as they are infused into his speeches and fictional and non-fictional prose. At one level, these qualities secure his poems against monotony and insipidness. At another level, they serve to mask his treatment of contemporary political issues and personalities, and thereby invest his poems with an abiding aesthetic character.

A significant mention must be made of his numerous political satires and allegories, which Kalaignar, along with his political mentor C N Annadurai, has developed into a distinct literary genre. This genre, among others, constitutes a lasting contribution of Kalaignar to Tamil literature in general and contemporary Tamil literature in particular.



Kalaignar M Karunanidhi, one among the select 'who is who' of contemporary India, is a ripe political personality of more than seven decade standing, a statesman and a proven administrator, with the rare distinction of being the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu for five terms, besides being a relentless crusader for rationalist revival and an undaunted, missionary-like fighter for social and political causes.

Notwithstanding, it is the title 'Kalaignar' meaning 'an artist par excellence' by which he is identified and characterized, so much so that it is no longer a title but a proform designation of Dr M Karunanidhi, in the same way as 'the Bard' is used to refer to Shakespeare.

For Karunanidhi, whose formal education did not extend beyond the secondary school, is a multifaceted, prolific writer with an amazingly large volume of literary output to his credit. He is a poet, a playwright, a novelist and short story writer, a letter writer, an elegist, a journalist and a columnist, a script-writer, a political satirist, an essayist, a translator, an autobiographer and a social and literary critic, besides being an extraordinarily eloquent and powerful speaker. His creative and critical works have been published in 59 volumes, memoirs and autobiography in another 8 volumes, and other writings in 115 more volumes, large and small.

What astounds one is the fact that he has been writing on all these genres contemporaneously, putting the same amount of interest and energy in each kind, that too in the midst of his most exacting administrative and political activities.

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