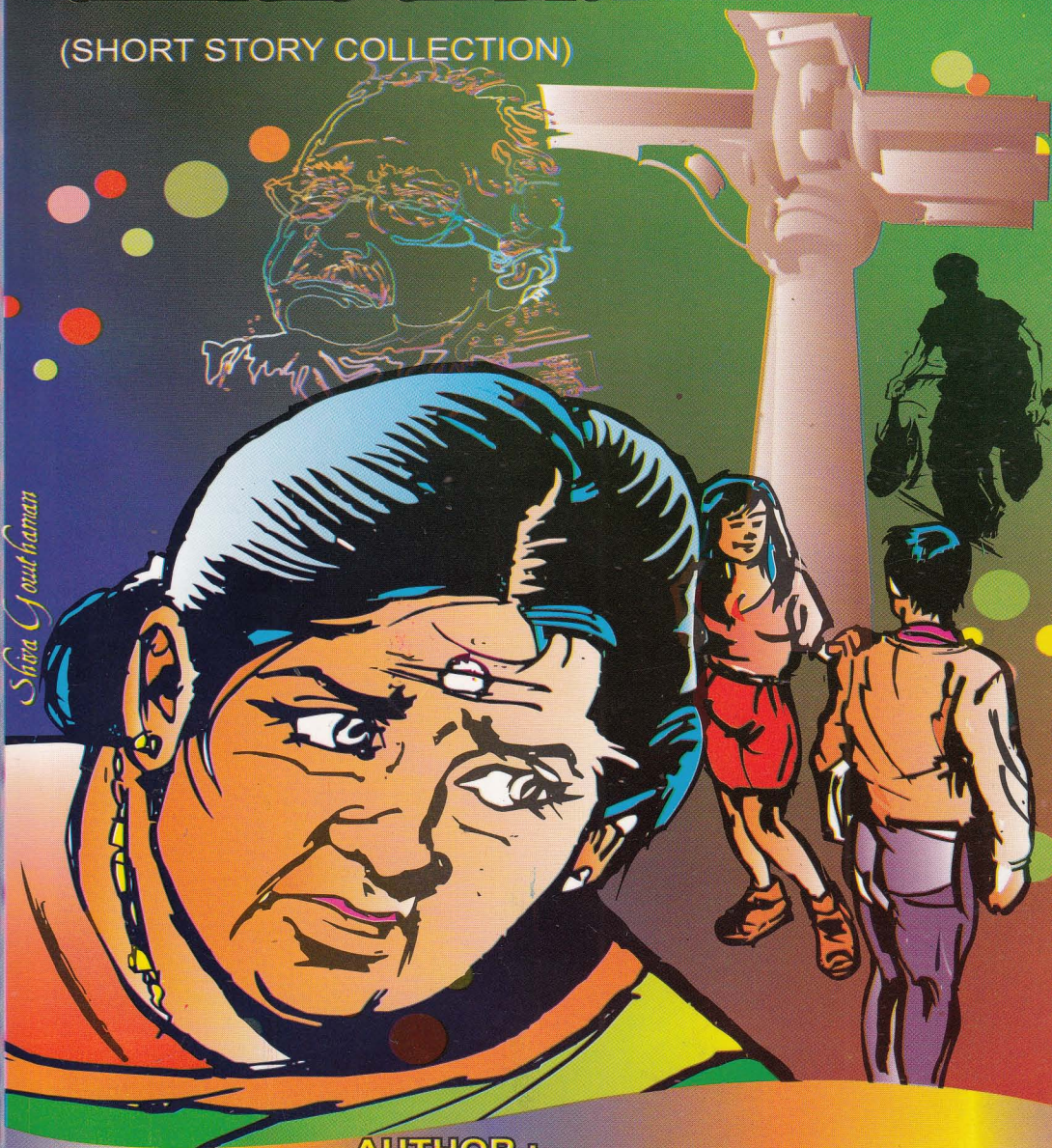


# CHANGES CANNOT BE DENIED

(SHORT STORY COLLECTION)



**AUTHOR :**  
**N.P. ARULANANTHAM**

**TRANSLATOR: (TAMIL INTO ENGLISH)**  
**M. JAMES PULLE**



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## Book Index

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## Preface

This collection contains fifteen short stories of Mr. N.P. Arulanantham, a well known Tamil Writer and award winner.

Mr. N.P. Arulanantham has distinguished himself as a creative writer and critic for more than four decades. He is the author of several books on Poems, Fictions, Essays and criticism and has published extensively in reputed formal.

The author used his own life as the content of his fiction. His literary material was abundant since he lived intensely among different levels of Tamil Community.

His stories reflect close relationship between reality and fiction. His settings and descriptions tended to be more meticulously literal and accurate. His stories are crowded with discretions he had met and incidents that had occurred in the recent history.

His social thoughts have enriched the content value of the stories. Descriptions of persons and events were often faithful to reality and so easy to identify. He developed his characters and situations along distinctively moral lines. It is very easy to find his social perception and cognition.

Social contradictions were reflected in conflicting characters in real situation.

The stories reflect tension between tradition and modernity in the Tamilian environment. The First hand experiences of social life provided him with resource for his creative life. His message grown out from the structure of human experience, subjectivity and eclecticism.

He regards human values as the fundamental structure of an ideal society. Through the interactions of the story characters the author offers

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clear resolutions to the conflict he sets up between opposing forces. The authors skill in portraying serious and sensitive issues in a way that is both funny and critical furthermore he realizes the conventional representation of social life.

The emptiness of certain human qualities were also reflected in the short stories. Corruptions aided by selfishness undermine the moral fibre of social life. The author has the ability to offer serious social and cultural commentary through a variety of symbols and styles.

I thank Mr. N.P. Arulanantham for his creative contributions to the development of Tamil Short - Stories structures.

Prof . Saba Jayarajah.

I am so happy that I was privileged to translate fifteen short stories written by Mr. N.P. Arulanantham, who is a great imaginary Tamil Story writer and had received Saithya Awards of the Govt of Sri Lanka on three (03) occasions and one award by the President of Sri Lanka for the Novel produced by him.

Mr. N.P. Arulanantham's stories touch the day to day life of the people. Specially in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. The titles of the stories in this book are as follows :-

1. "Palmayrah tree" - Focused on the life of the people in the North during war days and the value of Palmayrah trees.
2. "Changes cannot be denied" - It shows how things changed in the traditional life of the people in the North, when many of them migrated to foreign lands.
3. "Search" - Portrays the life of an elderly couple without children, who showed extraordinary love for their dog till the end.
4. "Fortune Letter" - Shows how dissapointments to certain ones over certain matters bring delight to another.
5. "White washed tombs" - Story which exposed the hypocrisy of humans.
6. "Nature of tortoise" - Clarifies the inner feelings of man and woman.
7. "Sound of the drum" - With the demise of the hero in the story "Vinaci" sound of the drums closed and nothing good happened to "Vinaci's" family.
8. "Rat hunt" - Margerates life was a barren land never brought real satisfaction, as she did not "make hay when the sun was shining".
9. "Taste" - Changes he noticed after he returned to the village after the war.



10. "Mother's Mercy" - When you say mother's mercy, immediately one would think of her mercy towards her children and other humans but this mother's mercy is different.
11. "Seasonal Breeze" - Life of a young boy and a girl in the north, though loved each other sincerely and heart of hearts nothing materialized due to economic crisis and family obligations.
12. "Gnam's push cart" - Gnam touched the hearts of the people because of his honesty and sincerity, though poor.
13. "Darkness won't you depart here after" - Potrays the life of a successful farmer, but due to improper plannings and weather faitune brought unexpected sorrow to his family.
14. "The wheel turns" - Determination would open the way again though many valuables were lost - due to war. Portrays the life of a energetic youngster.
15. "Fragrant smell of the apples and the irritations of the thorns" - For some who went to well developed countries as refugees, life was not a bed of roses. They fell from the frying pan to fire.

My continued best wishes to Mr. N.P.Arulanantham is that he should produce stories, the thoughts and ideas should make people think and change their wrong attitudes, which would enable them to avoid isolation and treat everyone with human feelings irrespective of cast, creed and race.

Though I am not a professional translator, I have done my best so that these stories can be understood by everyone who has a basic knowledge of the English Language.

M. Jamespulle  
Translator  
Sri Lanka

T.P: 077 9338571

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## Palmyra tree



There was no room for the sun light to fall on the front compound of the house. Leaves from one or two coconut trees bar the sun light. Grey coloured bird was pecking the fibre from the coconut stem and filling its beak. What a lot of varieties of birds, butterflies, insects roam in Colombo also. Beautiful beaches and beautifully decorated shops. Happy lives for the ones who

have and sorrow for the have not. Before he finishes thinking like this, the bird flew away, he imagined may be going to build a nest. He walks further towards the tin sheet gate, the ones who were working in the lane yesterday were there. One person was looking at me and rolling a white paper. After that he bites pieces from top and bottom, spat them and fixed the rolled up paper between his lips and set fire. With the opposite breeze the smoke came towards him also. Like yesterday to fix a water pipe they are cutting a drain. In the lane it is now coming towards the front. He also went and saw the drain. The worker who was smoking is also now working. About four times he dug the ground, looked as if he was tired, sat on a stone and start smoking again. What would happen to his health? But the ones who were with him continued with their works.

Watched these and returned back, according to yesterday's time, today also the planes had their display. While displaying they were going around the village, but could not guess their destination. Nonstop irritating noise, don't know whether our ear drums would burst? When the noise was nearing he was frightened. Planes, bombs and pits again and again came to his mind. Past thoughts started working in his mind. His life with his family members, those memories were sweet as honey for him. Until the last breath anyone will have the love for his birth place. He also could not forget it, though the children have gone abroad today, what a happy life we enjoyed in the village? He was thinking. Though the son was born after the girls because of his height more than his age he was taller than all of them. At that time he was only 15. Though his hands were



thin like sticks he had strength like the bamboo poles. For security purpose each one was in need of a bunker, he might have spoken to various ones about the charges for erecting a bunker "Sir, give us 1000 Rupees" "Such a big rate? don't want! I don't have so much of money". Job will not be over with the digging of the pit, valuable Palmyra trees are also to be cut. Let us think about it later. He allowed that idea to get disappeared with the wind. Imaginary fright, what fright, this is what he was thinking and talking to himself. But both the eldest girls Thatbarra and Shamini are highly frightened. One day from the helicopter flying above gun shots were fired and in the verandah wall there were cracks to the depth of two inches. They brought the mother and father forcibly to show the cracks. "There is no point in hiding behind the mango tree anymore they pleaded, we must also have a bunker". "go and tell your appa". Mother always knows to tell only that, and she went. He looked at the mango tree at the front entrance. That is the best place to hide, we will erect the bunker, he took the decision now.

From the manjona tree behind the well son Daya was cutting the sticks and drying them in the sun. Must do something like this. Otherwise we can't turn the bicycle wheels and listen to songs. Thatabara was bathing the dog near the well. That was a very intelligent dog. If the planes fly around the area, the dog will pull her by her dress, bring her towards the mango tree, and make her sleep and he too would sleep. Due to this she was so fond of the dog. "Daya, now the father is thinking about erecting the bunker for us", "will he employ somebody to make the

bunker?" Daya stopped his works and asked his sister, "otherwise who would come and do it free for us?" "Why can't I do it?" "No! it is a big job", "what big job I will do it and show, but the wages must come to me." "go and tell your appa" Now she started wiping the dog after bathing.

Father was wheeling the bicycle and now ready to go out of the main entrance "appa, do not employ anyone, I can do it" "You are a small boy, how can you do it?" "No, I can also do it, I will do" He was a small boy and uttered a thing like that, it was not a satisfying suggestion to him, but he thought I must not discourage and worry him. "appa, what is there to think? you only watch, I will finish and show you".

He started the job. Amma prepared the tea. Sisters used the buckets to pull out the sand. Two days work and the pit was dug. After that Palmyra tree was cut, logs were put over the pit and over them the sand bags were placed. If someone comes to know it was my son who did it bad omens for him. So the mother quickly took some sand under the feet of her son, said something to get the bad omens pass away from her son.

In the jewellery shop father has a job to write accounts. But since the bunker is available he was not worried about the house. War situation was becoming worse. Shell attacks were increasing and their family had to be in the bunker. Apart from that the next door neighbours also come to take shelter inside the bunker. They come rushing, when they hear a small noise. That woman and children may not be bathing regularly. Bad stench spreads all over and amma uses to curse. If you remain



inside the unventilated bunker for hours it will be a death trap. Body was itching for fresh breeze. Even if the house leaks for the rain no harm they were not bothered. They were bothered whether the bunker will get wet inside. One day Daya killed a snake inside the bunker and lifted it with a stick and showed everyone. Shamini was frightened after that. During the cooking hours they have to run between the bunker and the kitchen, so mostly half cooked meals are served. During the shell attacks amma's tongue will be calling for the help of gods. The day finishes those days with these war thoughts. One night there was a slight drizzle and it continued till dawn. He and Daya held an umbrella and checked, water was above the bunker. Due to this all were terribly worried and frightened. "appa, we leave this place, and cut another new place." "No, Dayabara here after we don't want anymore bunkers" "why are you telling like that appa. "Let us make another good one." "don't want son, this problem will not end with bunkers." In vain we may have to cut those valuable Palmyra trees also. I am not willing". "what appa, everywhere people are cutting the Palmyra trees in their own premises and making the bunkers. Are the Palmyra trees more valuable than our lives?" "You do not know, they were grown by my father, within 20 years they are giving good benefits. My father did something good and we are enjoying the benefits and existing, for generation they will speak. Like a good child born to establish the name, Palmyra also would establish. So thambi, we must protect them, so if you destroy these beneficial things we are doing a damage to the future generations. If there are no Palmyra Trees we will not have our culture also, No son we don't want this job." He became very sensitive and spoke

everything that was in his heart. He knows the value of the Palmyra trees very well. Appa's lecture completely changed Daya's attitudes. He was silent for some time and went off.

After this he was compelled to leave the village and go with the family to Colombo. Because the children are not closer to him he felt he does not have a solid hope in life. Though he has money now there was some thirst within himself, and that was really worrying him.

He looked at the coconut tree again. Those grey coloured birds now come as a pair, and sat. Again they peck the fibre and flew off. He wants to go and see the house in Jaffna. He got this long standing desire again to his mind.

Near the gate the bell rang. The daily paper has come. The paper man puts it into to the box and went. He took the paper and sees the headlines "Jaffna Kandy A9 Road is Opened Today". He is happy his long time desire is going to get fulfilled. He is satisfied now.

(2002)



## Changes cannot be denied

She not even read a small portion of the letter came from Canada. Ponnamma felt a shock. As if she had understood the whole contents of the letter. More than quarter part of the letter she had read, only on certain lines she got stumbled. Over and over again she not only uttered those lines by mind but started lamenting over those lines by her mouth also. "amma, your grand daughter Kamalini married the son of Sinnayee under marriage registration, who sells fish in our village market". This news was like a thunderbolt pierced through her heart. Her body sweated and started shivering very badly.

She is now at the inside verandah of the four square house given as dowry to the daughter in Canada. She was standing near one of the pillars huge as the temple pillars. Fully disappointed her legs becoming feeble and lent against the pillar close by. Due to this shock she felt numbness to her head, lent herself to the pillar and looked up at the sky, visible through the centre of the front garden, when she slightly lowered her sight, she noticed the dried coconut and palmyra leaves owing to breeze moving hither and thither. But today they were almost frightening her.

When mentioned about Mudliyar's house members, those days within everyone there was a fright. Ponnamma also came through that generation of Mudliyar and up to today she lived with that pride. Ponnamma's father held very prominent posts – like Udayar and village headman. When he was a young man he visited almost every day and supervise the labourers

working on his father's estate. One day when he was standing at the estate he saw a person walking through the tobacco plants, he felt so angry and furious, he shouted and said "low caste dog is this your footpath through the tobacco plants every day?" That person listened and without thinking about the consequences and asked "Are you expecting me to keep my legs over my shoulders and go?" By his words he insulted Mudliyar's son and crept into the toddy booth close by. Flabbergasted by the reply of that person he felt very angry. "Mean down cast fellow from where did you get such pride to speak" In his very bad hot temper, cut a firm stick with the knife and rushed to the toddy booth. He mercilessly hit that person until the stick broke, when that person was peacefully seated and enjoying the toddy. He could not bear the pain of the assault, strugglingly, ran and fell into a thorny bush and hurt himself very badly and blood was pouring from his body very profusely. After that this person determined to tell Mudliyar about it without fail and rushed to Mudliyar's home. He met Mudliyar and told all what happened showed the blood and wept bitterly. Mudliyar was highly surprised to know that his son has treated him so badly. He asked him "what did you do in order for my son to treat you so badly?" He told Mudliyar, "that Mudliyar's son told him not to walk through the estate, so he asked him for fun, "whether to keep his legs over his shoulders and walk", it is for that he treated me like this" Mudliyar instead of feeling sorry or sympathy cursed him and asked "can you walk like that? just show me whether you could so wonderfully walk, if you can walk like that teach us also." Without sympathizing over the tragedy faced by that person he scolded and chased him.



Mudliyar for the surprise of everyone in the village organized the wedding of his son in a very grand manner. For the wedding procession he got down the Sivan temple elephant with the carriages and the couple was seated on the long extraordinary carriage and it was carried through the procession. It was a glamorous sight. Ponnamma remembered the funeral homes those days. The funeral undertakers come with all ritual applications. Corpse will be made to sit in the bier, dishevel the hair, fix the jewels and then it is being carried along with the beat of the drums, crackers will be lit and with dancing they go up to the cemetery. All these were considered as honor and respect for Mudliyar's family. Why is Ponnamma shivering now? She is shivering because in such a respectable and honorable family, that kept everybody under its feet, a girl is born to disgrace. Even though the scene of the world is changing today, for the people who have lived according to their own customs and traditions lead an isolated life. It is very difficult to change according to the situation and environment. It is an unbearable sorrow for such ones.

The ones who have toiled in their gardens were considered as unclean and not taken into their homes, kept them only in the verandah. She is now frightened whether the ones who never stepped into their premises will claim relationship and come into their homes. This thought frightened her very much. She is now slightly got freed from these thoughts and is now anxious to know what else is said in that letter. So she started reading from where she stopped "how much I reasoned out with Kamalini? but she never listens amma. Let the cast and creed be in our villages, this is Canada. This country treats everyone

alike and equally, that is what we also desire, between us there are no revengeful attitudes. At least now give up your foolish policies and change yourselves" She told like this and left. Read the whole letter with irritation and said "Let her go, the one who disgraced all of us, and let her go and get destroyed." Because she could not bear the pain she cursed her as much as possible. And after that she found a new idea and said "okay she could have started a love affair and married a white man" This thought to some extent brought some consolation to her. Because all the people here think that among white people there is no cast distinctions, marrying a white man would have been alright. Just to console her she thought like this. The whole day ended for her with these miserable thoughts. Now a week has passed since the letter came. Ponnamma did not go out of the house, even to the bazaar to buy the necessary commodities. She managed with the leaves from drum stick tree near the well, and some dhal available, cooked rice and filed her stomach. She could not tolerate any longer. So she decided to go to the fair that day. By about ten o'clock in the morning business was at a very top level at the fair. Ponnamma also crept through the people and bought the necessary vegetables. Thereafter she got into the fish market also, pretending as if she does not know anything. But unlike other days Sinnayee who is selling fish on a plank welcomed her in a sarcastic way "amma why are you feeling shy now you have also become one of our relations so why are you feeling shy?" Sinnayee was sprinkling water to the fish on the plank and very relaxingly she spoke. This has humiliated Ponnamma a lot. She felt like a fish out of water. When all the others in the fish market looked at her she felt that



her pride and respect gone with the wind. She did not want to wait there even for a minute and came home rushing "can't live in this village any longer". This was the last decision taken after she came home.

"People in the village are wondering without knowing the fact why Mudliyar's house is closed. Where would have Ponnammamaachi gone?" This was the question going from person to person. Some say "madam might have gone to Colombo", certain others say "she might have gone to reside with her daughter in Canada". However Sinnayee only by being in the market has come to know everything. While selling fish in the market she told her cousin who is also selling fish by the side of her. "Mudliyar's house will come as dowry hereafter to my son. In the last days I would like to live there and pass away from that house". As a habit while talking she was also sprinkling water to the fish. And the latest new thoughts in her mind are like holy water for her.

(2001)

## Search

It dawned at that time. For the noise of morning hours I woke up. Had only a bitter cup of plain tea due to my sickness. Thereafter went to the boutique to buy bread. When I went I got this news. In our area all the dogs are having diarrhea and purging, the ones known to me told this. I got a shock to hear this. I came home rushing. And with that thought when I looked at the dog it had all the symptoms. At once I again got out of the house and went to the pharmacy and brought the necessary medicine for the dog. And in the morning itself I gave the medicine to the dog twice consecutively. Now my worry is whether the dog would get cured for the medicine. I could not come to a conclusion. There is a native physician closer to our home. He is clever at diagnosing the sickness by just looking at the patient. He treats animals also according to what he knows. That day he came to our home it was a sunny day. He saw the condition of the dog and said "Oh! God. what happened to this dog?"... he very interestingly inquired. I told him "from yesterday the dog is like this. Very often it purges. I got some medicine from the pharmacy and gave. But I don't see any improvement". He told me "that all the dogs are suffering from the same sickness. Our hand medicine will not work. Due to this so many dogs have died. However your dog looks very fresh and beautiful. I am so sorry about your dog". He also sympathized. My wife was standing and listening to all what he said. Her face became pale. She felt so sorry..... "Do not just get frightened. Now only we gave the medicine, if we continue to give for another two days the medicine would work and the purging also will stop. "Just to console her I told. When I finish talking the native physician also gave her some confidence". Do not worry, the same medicine is given by all to their dogs in this area. Fortunately some dogs have escaped. "My mind says





that this might also escape. Whatever it may be, give the medicine properly. Okay, then I am going Amma, then he called me Thambi” shook his head and went. I went up to the gate to send him and came back to the verandah. My wife was seated there very sadly on a chair. I also pulled a chair and sat next to her. From morning the dog has drunk only water.

I felt very sorry. She looked at the dog and asked “whether the dog will get cured.” Due to sadness her face has got shrunk. For the questions she asked I looked at her and shook my head twice. She kept her right hand over the chair and one finger over the mouth she was thinking. I also sat there and looked at the dog. For the few minutes I watched my eyes got tired I made a sigh.

I am not very old but I feel fatigue more than my age. My wife also has come to the same situation. The worry that we both have is that we don’t have a child. For the life that we led all these days there is no meaning. This worry has eroded our feelings made us suffer. Today we both are patients due to this. I thank God for keeping us at least in this standard and consoled myself.

Dog is standing but he finds difficult to stand. The legs are wobbling. Very weak state. Up to now it has purged so many times. Looks at me in a very sad way. I called him by his name. .... Joe Joe very lovingly. It slowly wagged its tail. After that in a very inactive manner walked out of the house went to the front compound. Now Joe Joe is serious. But even then it never dirtys the house inside and closer to the house. In the weak state also it acted well using its 5 senses. In some situations I compare humans with animals. Joe Joe went to the corner of the premises purged and came back. I went with a mamoty dug a small hole and buried the dirt. When I washed myself and came into the house Joe Joe looked at me in a very pathetic way. At that time my wife also came and stood near the dog. When Joe Joe saw my wife started wagging the tail. She very tenderly felt its head. Joe Joe again slept over the mattress cloth. I understood that the situation is very serious. I told my wife shall I go out and bring somebody so that we could take the dog to a veterinary



surgeon? At once my wife said, "Go and tell that Gunam Thambi. He is a boy who helps everyone. We will take it by a trishaw." Yes. That is good. "Without any problem you could take Joe Joe" my wife said. Immediately I went out to Gunam's house, stood near the gate and called "Thamby Gunam". Somebody heard my voice in the house and asked "what is that?" After that Gunam came out of the house. He asked "Uncle what is the problem?" I told, that our dog also got the sickness..... "What is the sickness?" .... It is purging very badly. And it does not cease. It is good if it can be taken to the veterinary surgeon. When I told..... Gunam stood there and thought for awhile, "Uncle you didn't give any medicine?" .... I went to the pharmacy brought some medicine and gave. For that also the purging did not cease. Yes! Thamby it did not stop. So come let us go and see. When Gunam Thamby told I walked in front of him and opened our gate and went toward the entrance of the house. Sun light was flashing towards the verandah. There were so many unnamed colours in that flash. But only towards the side where the dog is sleeping there was a little shade. When Gunam saw the dog, he stood there and looked intently at the dog. Now my wife started telling about the dog.

"The dog that was fat and steady after this purging it has become bony". Thamby you know about this dog, what a beautiful dog it was? I continued after my wife stopped. Yes definitely it was a beautiful dog, Gunam also supported my statement. I developed a doubt. Whether Gunam is sympathizing over the dog or sympathizing over us. Because we are so worried over the dog. But for the sake of him, I was not prepared to change myself. I did not come out of the worry over the dog. I told everything about the dog thinking that if I tell someone about my worries that I might receive consolation. "Look at the colours of the fur on his body. When the light falls it shines". My wife also told the same thing.

"Look above his eyes there is a mark like a false eye". That too is added to its beauty. Even when it sleeps for a slightest noise it will get up. It has a very powerful hearing and could detect things quickly. Such a brilliant dog it is. "After my wife finished I came to the subject." Thamby dog is very serious now. We can go by a trishaw and show the dog to a vet. That is why I came to meet you. I didn't want to tell the balance and waited anxiously to see as to what he would tell for my suggestion. But he said, "I do not think the dog will survive. To do all these I have no time today. I have some jobs outside also. I must go to see them..... I am not telling lies."

He turned his face the other way. Now how could I force him? When my wife heard this she was desperate. "Anyhow, thank you for coming when I called you." Took Gunam up to the gate and sent him off. And came back again and kept my foot over the step of the entrance, she stood there and asked "what are you going to do now?" N.P. Arulanantham do not know what to do. I went towards the dog pulled a chair and sat there. My wife also went and sat thinking very deeply about the dog. She was with a long face. Now between both of us there was fright and sorrow. There was nothing but a pin drop silence.

For a moment I thought about the past of Joe Joe. Why are we so attached to this dog? Like the dogs coming in films and stories this dog did not achieve anything great. Even during any dangers it did not come to save us. Even then why our hearts are melting for this dog? will there be any other reason for us to show so much of love for this dog. I kept digging my mind to know the exact truth about the dog. But I could not come into a proper conclusion. But one thought was cropping up above all others may be this is the reason why I show so much of love for this dog.



Other than both of us, we do not have anyone else to call as our own. The third life Joe Joe only lives as our relation. That is why we had so much of affection for it. Now within moments it is also going to leave us. This thought really pains me. In a very sympathetic way I looked at Joe. Joe Joe also looked at me straight. Joe Joe's deep sorrowful Joe appearance really melted my heart. I was so affected by it's looks. My feelings started flowing like mercury. My grandmother's face comes to my memory. When my grandmother was about to die, I was the only person by the side of her bed and reading 'Sivapuranam'. That day Aachi could not speak a word. She was anxious to utter something but her words won't come. When I was reading Sivapuranam she kept on looking at me. I could not understand the language in her sight. Tears also were pouring from her eyes. I do not know the language of the tears also. By reading Sivapuranam tears were flowing from my eyes also and wetting the book. Three days ago Aachi said, that she would die. That was also a reason for me to cry over Aachi so much.

Three days ago Aachi said. .... "Son next Wednesday is a good day. That day if I die the doors in the Heaven will be opened. .... they will come and take me in the 'Pushpake' aero plane. "Aachi was anxious to die on a day like that. She might have kept on thinking about it and dreamt. When I was small I lost my parents. It was Aachi who looked after me very affectionately. Aachi is my only relation. Now I am going to lose her also. First I lost my mother and then my father and today I am going to lose my Aachi. I stopped reading Sivapuranam and looked at Aachi's eyes. Those eyes were towards me. There was an unknown secret. A careful look towards her created a new blow to me. I could not understand what was behind that silent look. The light found in Aachi's eyes were getting blurred. Darkness that spreads over a person's last

breath is spreading over Aachi also. My unbearable sorrow is now blocking my throat. From the past thoughts now I am gradually getting released. Even then now the old thoughts suffocate me when Joe Joe is about to die. Sin for Aachi. .... sin for our dog also. .... my compassion about my Aachi and our dog are very strange. I don't know why I compare like that. My mind was sobbing and shedding tears of sorrow. At that time it was raining outside. It was not an easy rain. It was a heavy one. Due to this there was a sudden flood in the compound. A sever breeze followed and the rain vanished. Because of the breeze the house doors and windows are banging and creating a noise. Without closing the windows and doors my wife was just seated. She may not be in a proper mood to concentrate on any work. Again I looked at Joe Joe. It is a groaning noise, very clearly heard. Now I lost hope, that Joe Joe will survive. Joe Joe let out the last breath. I knew that Joe Joe has died. To break the news to my wife I looked at her excitingly. She also understood my exciting look and came towards the body of Joe Joe. House was in darkness due to the rain. I switched on the light. There were flies over the body of Joe Joe. My wife saw this went to a corner and started sobbing. Breeze also ceased. I came out of the house. Took the mamoty and went towards the left side of the compound. After the rain now there is a slight cold breeze. From morning I did not eat anything, and my body is weak. Though I do not have the strength to hold the mamoty and work after the rains the change of colour in the sand gave me the will power to work.

Like a grave digger I was standing and started the job. I have dug a sizeable pit to bury Joe Joe. Taped the mamoty over a rubble stone and got rid of the sand pasted on the mamoty and over the heaped sand placed the mamoty. Now I must carry and bring Joe Joe towards



the pit. I went towards the verandah and saw a new towel was put to cover the body of Joe Joe. She has covered Joe Joe with that new towel. Carried the body of Joe Joe and came towards the pit. My wife also followed me. We both remain quiet and buried Joe Joe. The noise of the dogs in the neighbourhood disturbed the silent moment. I filled the pit with the sand and tightened it with the mamoty and looked at my wife's face. Two drops of tears like diamonds went slipping over her cheeks.

Don't know for how long it will take for her to overcome her sadness. But after I buried Joe Joe I am not worried now. I wanted to tell certain truths about death and console her. I was frightened as to how she would feel due to the frustration at that time. So I put a padlock to my mouth and remained silent.

(2005)

## Fortunate letter

After the arrival of the sun the red lotus flowers in the pond have bloomed in large measures. That was a delight to the sight. But the lotus that had robbed his heart has not yet come towards the pond to bathe. He was standing on the bund of the pond and kept on watching. And asked himself 'whether she would come today?'. Kanthan without bathing he was waiting for her arrival. Every Saturdays, Thamarai comes to the pond to bathe. They both got used to each other at the pond. "Bathe on every Saturdays" It was an old saying and now Kanthan also started to live by this saying. This 'Kulathoor village' is neither an uncivilized village nor a city. It was between both. There were necessary comforts and the place is filled with natural beauty and resources. This pond gives an extra beauty to the village. Below the pond as far as we could see there were gardens, paddy fields, ridges and canals. Anyone who looks at it the first time will know the whole area is full of greenery. From the water of the pond below itself there were 'Marudai' trees growing, from the bottom of the trees there were branches spreading out. This sight was somewhat like a virgin standing in the pond with her disheveled hair. All these he would have admired if she was there. But today she also did not come, and also the boy who comes with her. He waited too long but decided now to have a crow bath and go home.

Kanthan, Pushparani's only son. Though she was a widow she provided everything for the son and cared for him very lovingly. Since he had no father whenever he wanted she gave him ample money. Son also did not know the value of money spent lavishly and enjoyed. Since the husband worked in the government service she gets a pension. Apart from that the





husband left behind a palatial house. In addition to that very fertile paddy fields also were there. As there was not enough of man power to cultivate the paddy field with her, for the seasons

she gives the paddy field on lease. And also in the house some rooms are given on rent. And there too she earns some money. Collects all these incomes and spends on the education of the son to make him a man. That was Pushparani's goal. But is the son focusing attention on education?

Thamarai is a relation of the person living on rent at Pushparani's house. At the pond Thamarai told Kanthan the person living as a tenant in their house is her uncle. She said that she came to spend a few days here. Other than that she never told anything more than that to Kanthan about her coming to this village. From the time he saw her he was suffering from love fever. He lost interest in his education and kept on watching her through the windows. Sometimes he sees only her feet. Mentally he was even prepared to make a foot worship. After she started coming to the pond only the desire for her became more and more stronger. One Saturday she came to the pond with the boy for her safety. At that time Kanthan was in the water, only his head was visible. She came in her bathing kit, got into the water, waited for some time and without wetting her head and got out from the pond to apply soap. At that time she appeared to him as one of the Greek statues. He felt as if the sun in its many shapes. At that time the soap that was in her

hand fell into the water. She poked her hand here and there and was looking for the soap. A middle aged woman wiping herself after the bath asked "thangachi, what have you dropped?" "akka, I have dropped the soap". The boy who came with her also asked her in a loud voice "to which side did it fall?" Kanthan heard this came swimming like a shark. Through the disturbed water he swam under up to the anicut in search of the soap. Like the 'kellity' fish he rolled through the mud. He found the cake of soap



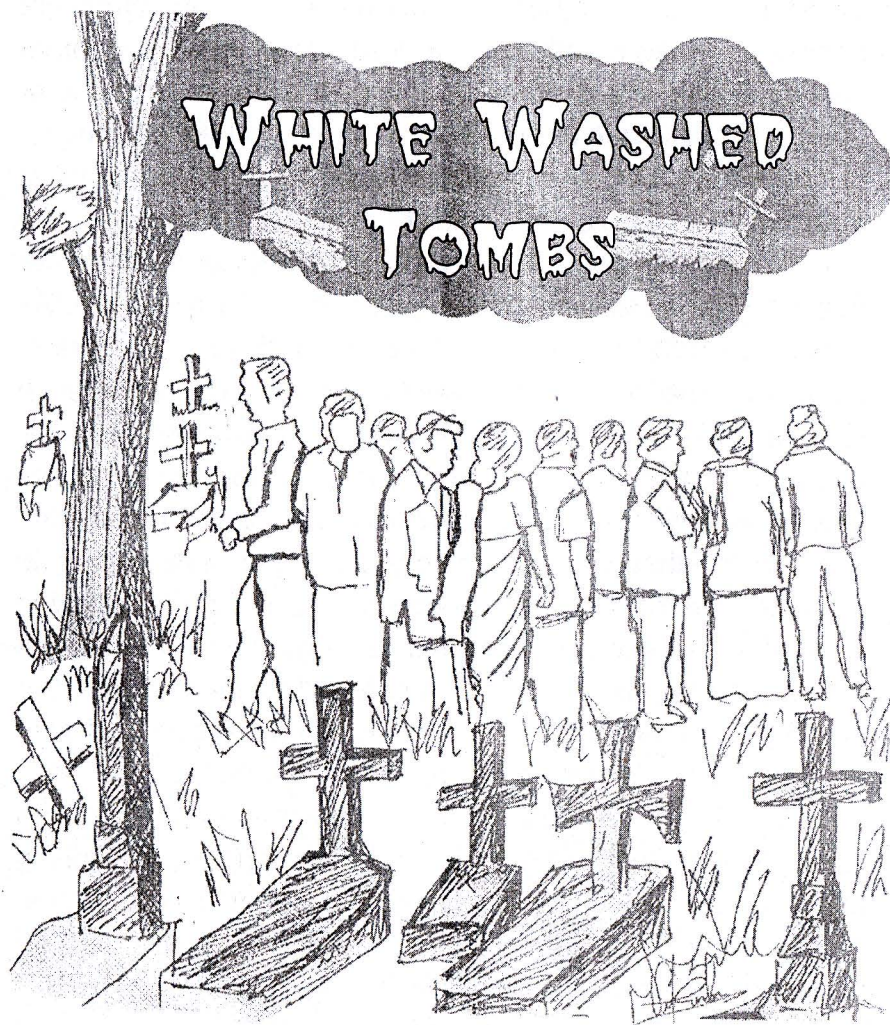
and handed over. "Thanks" she said and spoke through her eyes also. "mama I want that flower also" the boy asked him. She said "just wait thamby, it is at a depth" He was prepared to pluck even the most precious flower for her. He swam right around the pond and plucked flowers. The people who came to bathe cursed him. Because he was disturbing the water, making it mud and not allowing the people to bath peacefully. People murmured. He did not care for all that. With long stems he brought them with buds and flowers. She thanked him for that also. She must speak to him that was his desire. He made a garland out of the flowers and put it on the boy. He appreciated it and happily laughed. Every Saturdays bathing at the pond use to finish like this. The small boy who comes with her also won't leave him. One day he asked him for some small fish. He also caught them for him. "Are they big fish?" the boy asked. "In the sea only you get big fish. Here you get only small fish" he explained to the boy. After this, conversations between him and her continued.

That night he wanted to write a letter to her the first time. He was anxious to let her know his strong love for her. He was wrecking his brain. Papers were torn and put into the dustbin. Mother saw this and thought his son is very serious in his studies. Till dawn that was his job. He finished one letter. Saw her sweeping the front compound of the garden. Pretending as if he was going out showed sign for her to pick the letter from the place where the sweepings were collected. Dropped the letter there and went. She was busy with her work and did not notice the letter. But the uncle who has eagle eyes saw the letter squeezed and dropped. When he opened the letter mama and aunty were highly disturbed. Who would have written this? There was no name at the bottom of the letter. They were blinking.

When questioned Thamarai also blinked. Other than Thamarai's uncle's family some others also were occupying certain other section of the house. So his suspicion was towards the other youngsters also due to this situation. It did not take too long for Kanthan to know that his target failed. When he thought that Thamarai was not a shrewd and sharp person he felt angry with her. However, he thought I could find out about the letter from her this Saturday. He was counting the days to meet her. As expected on Saturday Thamarai came to the pond to bathe. But as he expected her face was not found pale or withered. It was like a fully bloomed lotus. "Thamarai.... that letter" Thamarai was anxious to tell the balance "that is what I wanted to tell you. I was in a hurry to tell you. I do not know who dropped that letter. But Kanthan that was something good for me". When she told this some sort of sorrow captured Kanthan's mind. Swallowed all what he came to say and asked her "why?" "Kanthan you are like a good friend to me. So why should I hide this secret to you? I loved a person in my village. But my home people did not like him. So to separate me from him, they sent me here. They try to break our love affair. Now with this letter problem mama says that he cannot be a guardian to me any longer and planning to send me back to my village. If I go there I can meet my lover. This letter has done something good for me. Tomorrow I will go back to my village. That is why I am telling you all these things. I will make a move Kanthan. "Bye".

(2001)





It was a pandol to many people to sit under. On one side, chairs were stacked and kept to be taken whenever it is necessary. He is at one corner of the house. Funeral is taking place in the home of his own sister. There were no relations to keep company with him. Weeping noises heard from inside. From the voice he knew that it was his sister. At the center of the pandol many are

around the beetle tray. All are known people. But nobody was interested in talking to him. Within a short period they have organized themselves well, their business was kerosene oil and petrol. After coming here he heard about it. After the war started many have become paupers. He also comes under the list of poor. John now comes out from the inner rooms. He looked at his brother from where he was standing. After that he came and stood near him. "Anna, come in. If you just stand there, how can things take place?" "What is left there anything big for me to attend", Thamby I will just remain here. "John did not leave him". "For the obituary notice over the radio they are writing the names of all the close relations. And also they are planning to announce over the loud speaker also." "At the funeral house also advertisements have a big place. They want to boast about Germany, England, Canada and Swiss. He does not have any children abroad. To bring the children from Vanni to Vavuniya for the funeral he did not have money. "As they like let them write anything they want". And he asked John his brother, "are people organized to dig the pit?" Yes Anna for that job everything is organized. But unlike those days we cannot freely go into the cemetery as we like. "Why Thamby? he asked John." "For all that now you will have to get permission from the army. To bury the corpse we have to approach the army. They will ask various questions, for everything answers should be given. Thereafter specific forms to be filled and only if the army officer signed pit can be dug and permission will be granted to bury the corpse. This problem arose because the cemetery is within their security zone." All at the cemetery should take place within the time prescribed. "To whom can we go and tell all these?" John made a very long sigh. "What is this? when you live also there is problem. And after a person is dead also there is some sort of agony. What is this miserable life?" He felt so upset and asked John, "to dig the pit the same old people still come?" "Now it is very difficult to organize any one for such labour jobs. Now they have studied and doing good jobs. So who would come now to attend



to these works? But still there are certain ones out of them they demand at a time like this big wages to dig the pit." John was furious. "Thamby, if these are not there, how difficult it will be to get the pit dug? All must improve and why should we feel jealous about them? who went to show the correct place at the cemetery to dig the pit." John said, "sisters' son who is the eldest to the youngest, he exactly knows where to dig the pit and would show the correct spot." After Thamby mentioned everything in detail he became silent. At the funeral house people understand that our lives are not permanent. The weeping and crying must emphasize the actual position of human life. Expired Amma's thoughts came very often and crushed his heart. How Amma try to come and stay with me at Vanni. But she could not succeed. What a lot of dangers were created when Amma was alive I didn't fulfill my duties towards her. Due to the grief his eyes became a pond of tears. He raises his head and looks at the entrance of the pandol, tears roll through his face and fall on the ground. Gradually the time was moving. Inside the room now they are praying. Now various once stand by the side of the coffin and weep. He also goes and stands near the coffin. He looks at his mother's face. With that the coffin was closed and from that place the coffin is now being carried. In the streets one boy who had worn a traditional dress was walking with a cross. People allowed him to walk at the center and they follow him in two columns. When the procession came near the entrance of the church the priest came prayed and blessed the corpse. Thereafter again the funeral procession started and went to the cemetery.

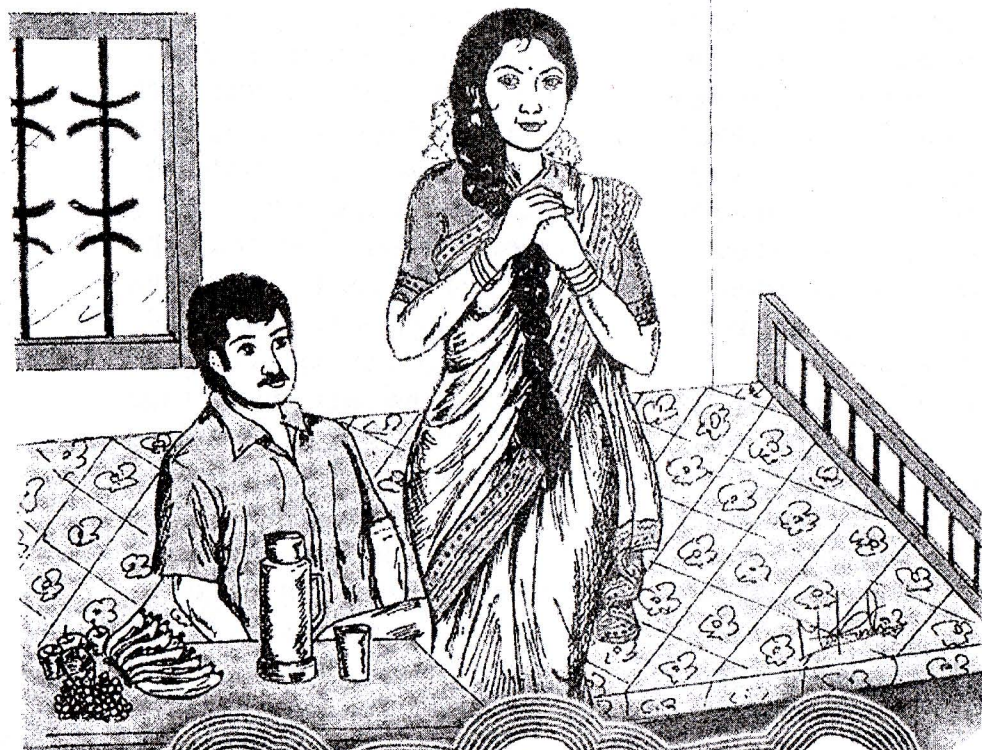
They passed the entrance and went into the cemetery. Those wooden crosses in the cemetery have got decayed. When people watch those crosses and went forward one person among the crowd created a severe problem. "Who told to dig the pit here?" that was his question. I sent that miserable fellow to show the correct spot to dig the pit. John too was furious and shouting. As if he was standing over fiery sparks. "That place where the pit is dug is an

isolated place in the cemetery. This place is reserved for low caste people. Somebody had purposely dug the pit here to antagonize us." All the relations detested the place and told this and that which came to their mouths. He got so wild. Now there is no a way to dig a pit anywhere. If we die we all go to this sand. Why are we then making class distinction and caste distinctions? people with these animalistic qualities will never change. He gave everybody who was murmuring over the pit tight. All remained silent. Though there was a problem over the pit, the burial is over now. After a weeks time all souls day came. After the morning mass the people were allowed to go to the cemetery by army. With flower bouquets and candles people were standing there remembering their dead relatives. That day the cemetery was cleared and was looking like a flower garden. He was also standing near the grave of his mother. The candle in his hand was burning like his mind. By the side of him there was 'Sevathi' she was also standing with bougainvillea flowers because her mother also was buried there some time ago. On this all souls day his sister did not turn up to the cemetery. His brother John also did not come. The relations who came to the cemetery did not want to even look at him. He very well knows that they would never reform or change. All the ones who were standing there appeared to him and Sevathi like white washed tombs.

When he came out of the cemetery he came with a determination, he told one thing to Sevathi. "At the next all souls day let both of us get together and make a monument there. In that we can mention your mother's name and my mother's name equally."

(2002)





## Nature of Tortoise

It was a very bright moonlight night. Ramanan imagined that everything is for him and waited in the room for the arrival of Mandagini. Ramanan has mostly seen Tamil films and was fully absorbed by the events in the Tamil films. The incidents that take place in those unreal stories Ramanan believed would take place in his real life also, and for a long he was living with those imaginations. In accordance with these thoughts he expected things to take place at the first night of his wedding today. Ramanan knew

that most of the things adopted by the films in India are not followed here. Flower decorations, in the room, flowers spread over the mattress, milk and fruits served, bride falling at the feet of the husband all these traditions he knew will not be here. Though these short comings worried him, like in the Tamil films all the other things should be available for him. So he determined to prepare himself to enjoy the first night. Normally he never brushes his teeth before going to bed in the night. But today at least for ten minutes he brushed his teeth and thoroughly washed his mouth. That night he did not want to go out of the room and to show his face to anyone. He finishes all his matters inside the room, applied perfume all over his body and waited for the arrival of Mandagini.

Youngsters who came for the wedding are still busy with their songs, dances and jokes. Many of Ramanan's friends from abroad have come for the wedding. We are shipmen. No place in the world where our feet did not touch. They started telling these in Tamil language, and thereafter spoke in broken English. They kept some of the villagers and jabbered. Another two youngsters claimed that they are Canadian citizens. Spoke English in a stylish way and stopped other youngsters speaking. They were asking for the balance whisky and searching for it. Little later one person who was there started singing a Tamil song. Since there was no background music it was a flop. One chap who was highly intoxicated said, don't want that... sing one of the old songs by Sounderajan, we will listen.

In the outside verandah old men had spread palmyrah mats and were sleeping. One who was on the mat told the one who was lying next to him... "they will not allow us to sleep. May be during the whole night they might dance and joke." His sleep got disturbed by the behavior of the youngsters. He now sat on the mat. Took one of the cigarettes what he preserved and started smoking.

Old ladies some of them were in another room and they too were jabbering. They were talking about their income and expenses.



When today's children go abroad and work all what they earn come into the hands of the mothers. From the hands of the mothers only thereafter money goes to the fathers, that is also done after taking many things in to account.

For the young girls another room was preserved. They were talking many things. They were interested in inquiring about the youngsters abroad. Certain ones knew the details about some of the youngsters and they were telling others all what they knew about them. After these talks are over they were without giving any rest for their mouths jabbered about films and clothing. Among them there was an argument about the bride groom and bride. When the time passed one by one thought about their own wedding dreams and went to sleep.

Alarm from the clock shows 10:30. Then only Mandagini crept into the honeymoon room like a spotted deer and locked the door without any noise. Why so late? Ramanan asked Mandagini. She looked at him with the corner of her eyes and smiled. "What is in the falsk?" "It is tea, I hear that you drink tea very often." "During day time only that habit, not in the night, Ramanan said." "Okay. What is Okay?" "if you are not drinking let it remain." "No... No... No... I will drink because you brought. I drink all this. You pour it with your hands, I am very anxious to drink when you pour." "Don't tell lies." No... it is true. Why should I hide anything? "Not only this I will not hide anything about my past. I will tell you everything because you are my wife." She heard that and laughed. By her laughter she was revealing to her husband her happy feelings. "Why are you laughing?" He is very anxious to listen to everything from her mouth. No, I am thinking what you would tell now? There are so many things, Ramanan said. "Since this is a proposed marriage now only I have the opportunity to tell everything to you. Come and sit here..." he held her hands. She had a peculiar feeling passing through her body. He made her sit almost pasted to him. She held the breath inside, looked at him, she was shy. He was also shocked

by her look. But he avoided all that and was enthused in telling her all what he had to tell... "Earlier, I loved a certain one. She too loved me. That is what I must tell you very importantly." "What happened after that?" Nothing happened, anything like that as you think. We loved each other. But in her home her parents did not agree. So she listened to her parents married to the person whom the parents arranged... "She should not have done like that." "No! it is not the way you think. I will not find any fault with her. I did not take anything very seriously. We both only had a slight desire, but it did not come right. I was not at all affected by it. I presume that it was the same with her also." "So how did you agree for this wedding? she asked..." "I saw your photo. When I saw your photo I liked and said yes. At this time Ramanan pulled her further to his side and embraced her. She felt so comfortable and felt a warmth feeling. Naturally at the first night many types of feelings develop within the new couples. Their feelings too went up to the climax. But he somehow controlled it and said, "Mandagini you too have the freedom. If you have anything like that please tell..." "What to tell?" she asked, without getting excited. "Like myself in the past you too might have incidents in the past, if you wish you can tell... In my case I am not bothered about the past life. I am not a fool to think of all that and ruin my life... hereafter I am only interested in the life that we are going to live. I am happy that I have told about my past. I do not have anything to hide Okay. I am an open hearted person." "I am also like you. Your policy is mine also, honestly I like you very much," she said. She slowly got rid of his grip and courageously looked at his face and said... My home people were interested in giving me in marriage for the last four years. Now I am married in a good place, and there are no shortcomings for me. Though Mandagini spoke like this when she was young she was very serious about a love affair at that time. Like Ramanan she did not want to give into her feelings and jabber like him. She was vigilant about it. So she controlled herself. Men might tell something like this. Even if there are spots and stains they will somehow manage to overcome and appear like innocent guys. But in the case



of women it is different. Just as the husband if she also comes out about her past, things can take a different shape. How can she tell about her past life courageously when there are problems like this with men? can you trust any man? Though she is married her husband is also a man. Definitely he too would have the quality of men. Just like him if she reveals her love story, the whole night he might tease her and giggle. So many nights we are to continue like this. But after the period of lust, for 30 days is over, he might come out with his natural tendencies. She thought about all these wisely and she did not want to keep her mind as an open 'pettagam' box. Scrutinized everything and kept everything closed up in her mind. Like the turtle buries the eggs without bringing the facts out of her mind she buried them.

The silence between both of them continued in that room. He does not want to waste anymore time. The night was simply getting wasted also. He switched off all the lights in the room and embraced her. Moonlight was gradually going down. Only one youth intoxicated just kept his eyes closed at the wedding home and thinking without sleeping.

The cinema song... 'there is one eye that does not sleep. There is one mind restless' In that cold night he was singing that song. The pure breeze in the night carried the song of that youth to all four corners. He sang aloud, the song was nice, but there was not anyone up at that time to enjoy that song. At the wedding all were fast asleep. No one knew he was aiming at whom and singing that song. He was seated on a chair kept his eyes opened and repeatedly sang the same song and enjoyed it all alone.

(2003)



Nowaday's children they do not know the drummer by the name 'Vinasi'. Now too he is standing before us beating the drums. For your livelihood is it anything wrong to beat the drums? Once upon a time I enjoyed listening to the playing of the drums with other instruments and when Vinasi played I really enjoyed. To any funeral he is the one who plays the drum and would show his colours. Those days were not like today... When there is a funeral in the neighbourhood no one would set fire in their homes to cook their meals. Only after the corpse is taken out to the cemetery in the neighboring homes cooking will take place. All the people lived those days with neighbour love. During such days my youthful life



was very enjoyable. Such happiness and consolation what I derived those days still shoots up within myself. I started going to funerals in the neighbourhood from my young age. Even if you do not attend weddings you must without fail go for funerals, the elderly once say that. So like certain once I use to visit the funeral homes from my young age. In the funeral homes weeping and crying are heard. But the sound of Vinasi's drum would enable me to come out of the worries. The beat of the drum gives some sort of consolation. Like me so many others also feel the same. That might have been one of the reasons why those days beating of the drums at the funerals was made compulsory... I used to think

Vinasi is very dark in complexion like the aborigines. He had a very fine physic. He wears usually pale coloured sarongs. There used to be broad belt tied on his loins, his lips will be very reddish always because of beetle chewing. When he is asked to come to perform his services he would hang his drums on his left shoulder and comes to the homes in time with his assistant drummer. Before the sunlight spreads, with the weeping at the funerals he will beat the drums and wake up the entire village. Vinasi is the one who gives first hand information to everyone in the village when there is a funeral. Not only that, any proposed implementation to be carried out by the government for the village too will be done by him as a service to the government. From the issue of the new coupon to the payment of taxes will be announced by him in the streets by beating his drum. He trained his son to play the side drums for him. When you watch the playing of the side drum by the assistant you might feel that there are no changes in the beat... Taca... Taca... Taca... that was the same sound comes from the side drum. At the tip of the assistant's drum a bangle like piece will be fixed. He will use the drum sticks and continue beating the drum tirelessly.

In the case of Vinasi from his big drum he would bring various sounds. There will be various sound modulations from his

drum. While beating the drum his stomach movements also will vary like dancing. Those days when Vinasi comes with the drum for occasions green coconut palm leaves will be cut and put on the ground. Plenty of beetle, cigar and box of matches will be given to his hands. The funeral house people would do all these very generously when Vinasi comes. All these things provided for him in a funeral home were like the comforts one could get from a wedding house. Alcoholic beverages, money for his satisfaction would come to him. For his home people that will be a grand day. Always when I go for a funeral I choose to sit under the pandol where I could watch the performance of Vinasi comfortably. His drum beat sound should fall into my ear drums very sharply, it was my great desire. Slowly I will call Vinasi, if I shake my head once he would smile. From my gestures he would know that he should play well. He would look at me and shake his head. He should get intoxicated, then his drum would bring out musical melodies appropriate for the occasion. Always during the funeral procession he is the one who goes first beating the drums. At every junction he would beat the drum louder and make the occasion very colourful. Vinasi! here a ten rupee one person would throw it in front of him. The beat of the drum would become louder. For competition another one would throw a twenty rupee note and tell him to beat the drum accordingly. He would come out with his talents and abilities and beat the drum louder and louder. In this way the funeral house people will be relieved from their sadness. Certain once who had come for the funeral enjoy the rhythm of the drum beat of Vinasi.

While proceeding to the cemetery with Vinasi's drum beat I will go and stand by the side of 'Kattu Amanakku' plants. For all the occasions pertaining to death Vinasi beats the drum. His hands never get tired. With the setting of fire to the corpse his job finishes. He is a very good artist. For all temple activities also Vinasi will be there to beat the drums. When the plantain tree cutting ceremony, Vinasi will be there to help the priest by beating his drum. All these are the stories when Vinasi was in the land of the living. The traditions that were there those days are not found today. The development of science has changed all that. The society also



changed accordingly. However those thoughts are fresh in my mind. I intend making those thoughts real and would wish to see them with my eyes. I am very anxious about it.

When I went back to my village my desirable heart took me to different sides. From the time gap I presumed that Vinasi might have died. I believed that he might have passed away. But one day I saw his son in the bazaar. The olden days prosperity was not there in him. He looked as if he is caught very badly in the clutches of poverty, and was looking exhausted. When he saw me his eyes filled with tears. He said my father died. I felt very very sorry for him. So what are you doing now? – drums, drums. I squeezed the last word and asked him. After father died what can I do alone? I gave up beating the drums. I am going for some labour works. If I had only learned a suitable job I could have lived without any difficulties. Now I am running like a street dog. Father did not think of my future. I also did not think seriously about my future. We considered beating of the drum as a job carried out for generations and we did it... Now I have difficulties to find money to fill my stomach. He told all these things to me and went. He heaped on me his sorrows and left. After he left the olden days thoughts became very strong in my mind. I felt as if I am hearing the sound of Vinasi's drums.

(2004)

## Rat hunt

Aunty with the opened eyes told “for your life no partner is found and you have become a lonely child now” What aunty sympathised over her situation and told created hatred within herself. After aunty left she thought about all the reasons as to why she did not want to get involved in married life. Must think about everything very carefully she reasoned this way and dodged all the marriage proposals came to her. These thoughts for a moment frustrated her. N.P. Arulanantham Heart beat was sounding more than usual and the whole body vibrated and shocked. She felt her breath was choking. She started breathing through her mouth, tremendous fatigue spread all over hands and legs. She could not stand anymore. She went and sat on the sofa close by. Her face was full of sadness and again the old thoughts started forming. She stared at the white wall biting her lips. A mind revealed the past like pictures they appeared for her.

Those days several times in loud voice she told her mother “why do I need marriage? don't want. Hereafter don't talk about marriage”. All what she told regarding a marriage now started ringing in her ears just as the noises made by birds. Will the mother just keep quite after listening to all what she said? she felt a big burden to her chest. “what do you mean by telling like this always?” Though she summoned all her courage and asked this question from her daughter she knew what sort of reply would come from her daughter. This caused a little bit of fear also within herself.



"You are talking without knowing your position. You brought forth only myself and did not save any money, if I get married and to get to one side who is there to look after you both. The salary what I am drawing from this teaching also will be grabbed by the person who marries me. After that what can I give you both from my hands?" Though she analytically spoke there was not anything new. But the whole body of the mother shivered. However without getting discouraged again she told "Child, we both can exist with what we are receiving from god. But you must marry during the age suitable for marriage, without marrying if you waste your time you might face problems later". Very affectionately that mother told these things to reach her heart. But the affectionate thoughts of the mother though reached the heart she was contemplating on her thoughts very strongly. "amma, why are you talking the same things over and over again and destroying and spoiling my peace?" "please stop these talks hereafter. I would tell you one thing. Think about it seriously. Think about the difficulties that may come your way. Do you think that Appa is a strong person like those days? He is now touched with heart problems, with weakness only he is now attending to his work. When he holds the instruments his hands are shivering, can he continue with his carpentry work? Due to these please think a little, after thinking at least leave me alone without dragging me" She gave a very wide explanation to the mother. But for the mother all what she told was just words without any sense. In order for the daughter to understand her position though she spoke many times, daughter because of stubbornness always rejected her ideas. For the daughter to cheat herself

and pass her days nothing good will come other than full of sorrow in her life.

To come out of this sorrow she started working whole heartedly. At the start she grew flower plants and enjoyed watching the beauty of them. But just to postpone her worries, even, they did not help her. When she watched the beauty of them, she felt there is something forcing herself to achieve something. One day she said "No! I don't want them." Within that day itself she got rid of all the flower plants in the front compound of the garden and made a clear open space. Now when she watches the open ground she felt the open ground is like her, buried with shyness and self-pity. Other than this the open ground could not benefit her to obtain a peaceful mind "so to achieve peace of mind, what can I do?". She thought about it very deeply.





In this blue sky definitely there should be light to destroy sadness. If I keep watching that light my heart that is filled with sorrow will bloom again with happiness. Turn my face towards the sun when the beauty touches my eyes all the worries filled in my heart can disappear and again I will enjoy happiness. She tried this method also. When she watches the light of the sun her eyes started tearing. With open eyes though she watches, sadness from her mind didn't go from her. That tremendous light also could not give her a consolation. Some sought of hunger was ruling her and making her a slave. What a cruelty it is for me to continue like this with these thoughts everyday with my eyes opened. Don't know for how long I may have to experience it. Will not a light come into my life which is filled with darkness? With these comforting thoughts she got out from the house to go to the church. She was walking quietly along the road. Those days there were so many eyes to watch her. Because of her beauty, she felt that so many were struck down. She had seen many men of that nature. But now though she leaves her shyness to aside and focus her eyes towards anyone they look at her with hatred like watching a cockroach and also sympathetically, this creates a kind of frustration for her, she feels that they paint an un-lively atmosphere for her. With all these frustration she feels like a tree lost its roots. With these thoughts she came near the front entrance of the church, there she saw Julian getting down from his bicycle. Even though she saw him after so many years she was surprised that he is still looking handsome. With his denim jeans and smart shoulders he still appears like a person not lost his youthfulness. Those days when she sees

Julian, kind of lightening travels from her forehead up to her feet. But today all those feelings are gone. Like a tail of the lizard chopped to pieces her feelings also were shivering here and there.

She turned her attention to another side and wanted to climb the church step. And said to herself emotionally "in vain I could not reach for him".

"Margrette" She climbed one step her feet were steady she looked behind to see who called her. She very well knew it was Julian who called her. He was holding one side of the bicycle handle with his hand and was looking at her with a smile on his lips, that sight she could not believe she never expected. Quickly she got down from the step what she climbed. She could easily hear her heart beat with the past thoughts in her mind she looked at his face. Now she has the courage to look at the face of a man also. At once she could not smile. Her lips are withered for the summer season. "Margrette" again he is calling her by her name. Her heart filled with happiness "Julian how are you?" she also spoke as if she has reconciled with him. Julian asked "Have you come to the church?" "I am now standing at the entrance of the church, so why is this question?" she thought to herself. She said "yes". At least that word yes should come from her heart with youthful sweetness. That was her desire. "The days what I spent abroad just disappeared. Now I have come back, I wanted to come towards the church that is why I came". His standing there was an attraction for her. He asked "Are you not married yet?" "No" "why are you stubborn still?" "With these stubborn ideas for how long can you continue?" When he asked this way,



it was embracing her. She felt shy and twisted. For a few second it was like cold river water refreshing her. But the sun light at that time came to burn her along with the words uttered by him. She also felt as if there were some snakes crossing her way. A monotonous feeling ran through her body. His question was like taking revenge from her. But now what could she say to get peace of mind. "At the moment I have no idea of getting married. And I don't feel hurt when I think of the past". "Are you sure?" Otherwise why must I tell lies. "Okay, why do you now ask all these?" "Those days I could not speak all these things with you". "So now from where you got this courage?" "Alright you think that way, at one time I had a liking for you. Why now also I have a desire for you". He spoke very openly without hiding anything. She looked at him hard. When they reach an age they talk like this for fun. Are these talks used by him as a ladder to come upto me? His talks were like a joke for her. Yes, she thought I can also freely talk and tell everything in my mind. She also felt nothing could hereafter put her into any problems. The words of Julian were like Julian when he was young tightened her towards the wall and kissed her she imagined. "Oh! then Julian was thinking about me like this continuously" In vain I did not know that earlier. It was a feeling that was crushing her mind. Only for one or two minutes she was in that position. She did not give into those feelings. In this same way David who studied with me also one day asked. He was also interested in me at one time it seems. Now also he is interested he says. What do you think about these stories? All the men are like this. They are all like Gemini Ganeshan anxious to get married. She thought all these

and said to herself and frustratingly started thinking. "Margrett, I am not the way you think. At one time genuinely I was interested in you". His words were like rousing her thoughts. Margrette's heart melted by his words. Her mind was like Titanic ship, broken into pieces, it was an instant sadness. "Julian, my life is surrounded by lies. Up to now I am thinking like this. When you said that you were interested in me earlier, it really shocked me. I felt that my mind has got freezed. If someone has told this I would have gone away without listening to them. But when you told that you were interested in me earlier it brought lot of sadness to me. Julian truly were you interested in me earlier? tell me the truth." She asked with eyes filled with tears. "Do you think I am telling lies? I was so much interested in you in my heart". Very quietly and carefully he told. "But why did not you tell this to me at that time" she asked, her voice was breaking. When Julian saw the feelings on her face it was really like reading an interesting novel. "Earlier I wanted to tell you my ideas, but I could not." "That is why I am asking why did not you tell me earlier." "What to do I was unable to tell you. When he told like this, she felt as if he burnt her alive. Margrette looked at him and a kind of sorrow entered her mind. "Those days I was also roaming without taking notice of anyone with a pride" Julian said. In the past Margrette also closed all the roads in her life. Now she felt the consequences sadly.

She was feeling little uncomfortable to stand there with the high heels. But for Julian all what he spoke with Margrette was just an ordinary chat. He felt that he poured an acid rain over her because of the pride she had those days. He felt happy.



"Now only I understand that in the people who associated with me there was love and affection. But now what is the point in thinking about all that. Will anything good come? It is all my fate. Margrette thought that way and told Julian "Juian, I will see you". Margrette now climb the steps with new thoughts. Her earlier thoughts now completely changed. Julian watched her climbing the steps for awhile and got on to his bicycle and left. While he was cycling he visualized in his mind the attraction of Margrette's body when she was young. When he was riding with these thoughts suddenly he remembered that his wife told him to bring some 'Vade' from the hotel for the evening. At once he changed his thoughts about Margrette and went fast towards a hotel to buy what his wife wanted.

(2010)



When I was a youth walking along this pond was my hobby. But after that there were crisis in the country, there was a great panic about army and police. And I could not come this way for a long time due to fright.

Now the situation has changed. And since a peaceful situation is prevailing I came to this place for a stroll. There is an exhausted cow walking in front of me on the bund of the pond. Just as this cow, the appearance of the pond too was looking in a disgraceful state to me. Those days for the severe breeze in the month of July it was so difficult to walk along the bund, at times I got thrown out of the bund, ran down and embraced the 'iluppay' tree,"breeze was so severe and it was pushing me down amma". I shout and explain these things to my mother. My mother very often used to bring me to this pond for a bath, when the water is full in the pond. She dashes the clothes on the rock,



and after washing I would collect them and spread them over the bushes and dry them. Sometimes like sending a kite I stand on the bund and allow the clothes to fly. I have seen certain ones who come to bathe and have scarcity for clothes, pick them dry them immediately and wear.

In this pond people do fishing also. They go to the center of the pond and use nets to catch fish I have seen. Out of the fresh water fish I was very fond of 'viral' fish curry. If I was not served with the centre part of the fish I won't eat rice and fight with my mother. In this pond you get plenty of Japanese fish also. Though like others I do not come on fish hunt here. Even then just to watch the water spilling over the anicut, I come here. Certain ones bring long knives spot the fishes and cut them, when they jump up it was an entertainment for me to watch. Those days you cannot notice any water in the pond. Because the lotus leaves, flowers and buds fill the pond. But what about today? Garbage plastic items, shopping bags are found here and they are getting soaked in water. But very rarely you notice a piece of paper. Within myself there was a doubt, whether the pond is now drying. Now I focus my attention to the other side. In those lands now new houses have come up. Those days it was a jungle, 'vilathi' jungle. Now even for medicine a tree was not found. My eyes due to disappointment became weak. But beautiful lotus flowers in the pond again encouraged me, and I became a flower of happiness.

I walked a short distance now. In front of me there was a woman returning after bathing. She squeezed with both hands the cloth tied over her long hair and dusted. Water flashed like a drizzle and came towards me also.

I was walking on the other side, towards the side where men are bathing. There was an old man seated on a rock and smoking a cigar. May be he wants to heat his body before bathing. With his front teeth bites the wasted part of the cigar

and spits, after that very carefully keeps the balance cigar on the rock and with his loin cloth gets in to the water. Now he dips his body in the water and started bathing. After watching all these I walked a little further noticed a small boy fishing in clear water. I am very fond of fishing like that. For me to go towards that boy there were no steps to get down from the bund. Will it slip when I get down with my shoes? I am used to this area from small age. But now I am different. I did not take anything seriously and I got down from the bund. "Thambi, shall I catch some for you?" The boy with the fishing rod looks at me from top to bottom. My clothes and speech were a surprise to him. Without talking anything he handed over the rod to me. It was a short stick. For is age it was okay, but not suiting me. Even then I tried. The fishing line fell in to the water. I slowly kept tossing the line and later pulled it at once. "Not that way to do it. Toss it up and pull" the boy told. When I did that way next time a fish was caught it came twisting and fell on the ground. He removed the fish from the hook and put it into a shopping bag. Opened the tin took a worm and fixed it properly to the hook. I threw the line again to the water and watch the floating bar carefully and spoke to the boy. "Will you make white gravy?" "No we make hot gravy" the boy said. Again I pull the line there was another small fish. He put the fish into the bag and fixed the worm to the hook. Always when I threw the line, there was a fish, may be my hands are fortunate and got some fish. Sun was very severe it was like going to blast our heads. From my trouser pocket I pulled and gave that boy a 20 Rupee note. He took it and laughed.

Now when I started walking again on the bund of the pond I saw the old man who was bathing earlier, going along the bund. He looks at me. I felt that he wished to speak to me. I told him "this pond is drying up. How will it be if the pond is cleared and raised the bund by putting some earth?" "Must not do that way. If you raise the bund of the pond all those houses over the other side will go under water". When he told I looked at that side, what he said was correct. He continued speaking.

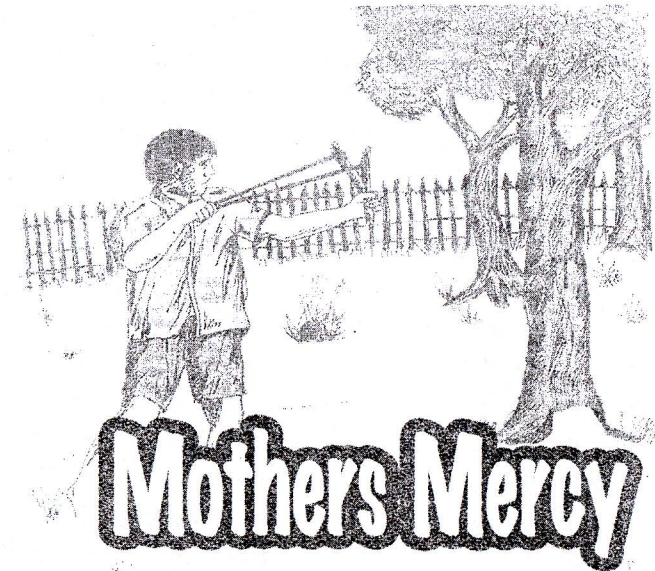


they opened the water for this season's cultivation water is very less. For people like us who do not have conveniences and comforts it is very difficult to bathe. He kept walking slowly. I left him and walked fast. Towards the end of the pond there were boys singing, dancing and swimming. Each one was having two plastic bottles tied with ropes on both sides and with the help of them, they were learning swimming. The air in the plastic bottles were helping them to float without getting drowned. It is a world of plastics. Very sadly I remembered the past and got down from the bund. I walked through the street on the right side. Paddy fields were very beautiful. All the beauty what I enjoyed from the paddy fields brought a cool breezy feeling. So to pass all the paddy fields and come home it took a lot of time.

After dinner I told Anna all what I saw when I went for a stroll towards the pond. I recollected everything tastefully as if I have read a book titled 'Scene what I enjoyed'. My brother also was listening happily. When the talk came about the houses along the pond, he said "If anyone is willing to sell their land we must buy them." I think something but his thoughts were different. I stopped talking. Now he is the one who started talking.

From his hardware business buying scrap iron and the income what he derives is his sole aim in life. His talk was now getting spread towards that. He has got fully melted from the taste of iron business. I could not enter into his world of iron and was suffering at that time. I very well knew that he cannot understand my position. But I pretended as if I was listening to him and fell into a small nap.

(2002)



My mother has very good health. She also has a very good general knowledge. There was a divine beauty in her. She had very sharp features on her face. Apart from that she was very capable, very seldom you can find a capable person like my mother anywhere. My mother feels sorry even for an ant and a sparrow. When Amma husks the rice for the noise the sparrows come flying and fill the front compound of the house. When Amma throws the broken rice they come jumping and pick them. When the sparrows build a nest at the roof top in front Amma use to say that the family would flourish. So when such birds come and take shelter in our homes we should not disturb or irritate them. I can remember how Amma advices me. I would listen to all that, I will be blinking like a cat and remain like an innocent person. My eyes would go towards the place where the catapult is. And my whole attention will be there. At the back garden in one of the manioc plants the catapult will be hanging. My worry is that the catapult should be protected always.



I am a hero in using the catapult. All the boys in the village very well knew about it. After school during holidays I hide behind the fence without the knowledge of the home people I use the catapult and killed many birds. Those tiny small birds come flying and sit on the trees around the fence. Without making any noise I would hold my breath wait under the bushes covered by creepers and use the catapult at the birds. Stone goes flying from the catapult and would attack the birds. Like Arjuna's aim my aim also would never miss. All the village boys get surprised the way I aim at birds and kill them. I count the number of birds that I killed by using my catapult while I go to sleep. I think of it as a great achievement. Most of my dreams will be about birds. Sometimes in the dreams I feel that all the birds get together and persecute me. When I hide behind the fence to attack, mostly I see very small birds like Indian Robin, Humming bird, Dorango, BulBul, Sky lark, Oriole, Billed Babbler and Tailor birds. In the fence there are varieties of trees. Birds come and rest on these trees because of the sun. At that time I see them, use the catapult and shoot at them. Sometimes my aim misses and stone would fall at the roof of our neighbour. Neighbours would scold and say 'If we catch the fellow using the catapult and shooting stones we will break his hands and put them into fire'. Oh! That was a very big threat. When my mother hears the next door person's shouting in support of her my mother also would come to the front compound of the house and would scold and say 'If I also get hold of the fellow who is shooting at the birds then only he will know who I am?' why are these boys doing these sinful things". When Amma scold, like this, my heart beats very fast. Immediately I drop the catapult into the holes of one of the trees. Slowly, walk along the fence, like a good child and go and sit on the entrance of the house.

Towards the west side of the house when you walk along the street you find the cadjan hut of an old woman by the name 'Kali'. And if you walk a little further the temple of Vairavar is there, a few yards from there you would notice two big banyan trees.

Human movement is very less in this area. Big birds come in clusters and eat fruits. Some days my friend and I come like a battalion there. Crows would swallow the banyan fruits fully. Likewise there will be parrots, pigeons of different varieties, paradise fly catcher etc. will be there. Some birds would peck one another and start playing. When we shoot at them, the birds that have got attacked fall on the ground.

How did I come out of this wicked game, where I have tortured and killed the innocent birds. When I think of that it is really surprising. Definitely I can say it is because I noticed the good example of my mother I changed. Our house is a very large one. Towards the left side of the house there was a shed. That was used to stock the entire paddy what we get from our paddy fields. The roof of the shed was out of cadjan. During the hot summer days during day time we sit in this shed and spend our time. During hot sunny days that cadjan shed provide us a very cooling effect. Some days the sparrows build their nests in the shed. They come in pairs and at the corners of the shed they make nests and lay eggs, and when the small ones grow they take the little ones and move from there. With all her works my mother always used to have an eye on these birds also.

Once there was a very fine incident. From which I knew that my mother was highly interested in them. During one season some commotion in April and there was a severe rain. There was a severe breeze also. Some of the cadjan over the roof of the shed also started moving. The rain ceased after making holes here and there in the roof. All the paddy bundles got wet for the rain. Due to this there was coming a bad smell from the paddy. My father wanted to purchase some new cadjan in a hurry and attend to the roof of the shed. He was worried that all paddy in the bags may get destroyed. There was not a place to dry the paddy, all the jootsing sheets also were wet. If the rain continues the balance paddy also would get wet and start germinating. Father was highly worried. Amma was



also equally interested in the nests built by the sparrows. 'Sin for those birds, if we start working on the roof and remove the old cadjans the nests will get smashed. Baby birds also would fall on the ground and they will die. The ones who come to attend to the roof will not care for the birds... due to this let us postpone the roof work for some time. After the birds leave the place with their young ones we will think about the roofing work. Until then let us stack these entire paddy bags in our master bed room. In the nights we could even sweep the outside verandah spread the mats and sleep. Amma felt very sorry for the birds and spoke to my father. If Amma says anything that is Gospel truth for my father. Appa listened to Amma and according to her wish he got everything done.

This incident actually created a very big change in my mind. I was surprised that my mother was even prepared to lose all the paddy for the sake of these birds. We get rice out of the paddy and use the rice for our annual consumption. But my Amma feels that those birds are more valuable than the paddy. Now when I think of the cruelty I did for those birds those days those thoughts were pricking my mind like thorns. With that pain I ran and got the catapult hidden in the holes of one of the trees and I wanted to set fire to that and destroy it. I was in a hurry to do it. I gathered all the dry leaves found under the trees, heaped them and set fire. The killing weapon that I carried with me all these days was put into the fire. When the catapult fell into the fire the rubber sent out a bad stench and the catapult burned fully and turned into ashes. Only after I saw the ashes with my eyes, my heart that was heavier like a wet gunny bag became soft and gave me peace of mind.

(2004)

## Seasonal Breeze

Kanagamachi had severe phlegm problem. And all these days she was on bed. And this morning she passed away. Gunam was residing next door and as a duty he also had to be there to break rest in the night. Before 8 O'clock in the night all the men in the neighbourhood have already come and gathered under the funeral pandol. About 5 or 6 of them sat on a colour painted palmyrah mat to play cards. Postman Rathnam saw Gunam and called him at least for one game of cards. Gunam thought it is a problem and wanted to dodge. So he said... "Annan, you all play. I will sit here and watch". He wanted to somehow escape playing cards with them. Usually he does not like playing cards at all. "Come only for one game. "Let all of us play together," the village headman also called him. "I am not feeling well, I have a stomach upset. And also there is a slight pain." Gunam had to tell a lie also to escape from them. Village headman laughed and said... "Is it indigestion? or what is the reason for the pain? or is the pain for the confinement?" and nagged him. These sarcastic words are common in his profession. Gunam controlled his feelings and said, "No I am not coming to play. You all play." And he went away. After that they gathered persons among themselves, shuffled the cards and started playing. Gunam while watching the men playing cards he sat in a place where all could see





him. But he was not at all interested in the game of cards. All his thoughts were about the past. Mainly about his childhood. Devi, like a goddess appears like in a vision. The beautiful face of Devi and the old incidents repeatedly reminded him of Devi. Though there were one or two people crying at the funeral his thoughts were different. His thoughts were flying in the sky of love. Even the ones who carry the coffin to the cemetery too will be absorbed by their day to day life and worried. Even when the body is being buried in the cemetery certain once will think of jumping over the fences for various reasons. Who thinks deeply about death even at a place like this? Who thinks deeply that man will have to die one day? In this world, all selfishly want to be careful about their comforts in life. Gunam is definite that somehow Devi would come for the funeral. From the small boy at Kanagamachi's house he had found out in time that she has not yet come from Colombo. That boy is Kanagamachi's sister's grandson. The boy was seen running up and down inside the pandol. Gunam called him very kindly kept him standing in front of him and tactfully asked "whether Auntie Devi has not come yet to the house..." "Auntie Devi would come only in the night, early morning when auntie Punidam was talking over the phone I overheard." He told this and ran after the boy who was running in front. Yes to come from Colombo it will take time, while Gunam was thinking like this, Devi has now opened the gate and come. She was strictly telling her two girls walking in front of her to go quickly and she walks behind them. Even after 12 years Devi still looks very fresh and beautiful, no change has taken place. Former youthfulness is still there in her. Gunam admired and looked at her when she was walking through the front compound, she also raised her eyes and looked at Gunam for a few seconds.

Village headman with a paper in his hand had come to know that Devi has come. "Achi's granddaughter only has come, may be the husband may not come". While looking at the paper in his hand he whispered this message to everybody. When Devi passed the pandol and entered the house, there were so many crying voices

heard, as if she is being welcomed. Gunam knew that she also would join them and cry. He was very anxious to hear her voice. So he kept his ears sharp. Out of the voices he somehow managed to hear her voice which was like the voice of a koel. Devi is the granddaughter of Kanagamachi. Kanagamachi gave her daughter in marriage to a good for nothing fellow. And she had untold problems. He sold all the jewellery, drank with that money, became a drunkard and made Kanagamachi's daughter Kamalam a sick person and disappeared from the village. He never sighted the area thereafter and never came even when Kamalam was on death bed. When he left Kamalam at lurch, Devi was an infant. So now who is going to look after the sick daughter and the grandchild? Kanagamachi is highly worried now over the daughter and her granddaughter. She did know what to do for the existence. At last she decided to make hoppers and go through life. When she was managing like this, one day Devi's mother passed away. At the funeral Kanagamachi shouted and said... "Have you entrusted this little girl to me and vanished so quickly. Before my life passes away I must bring up this child, bring her to a good position." She was determined to live by that idea and continued making hoppers and did business. Hopper business was flourishing for Kanagamachi, but the income what she derives is very little. Everyone was fond of eating Kanagamachi's milk hopper. Kanagamachi's heart also was like the hopper cup. She never had any wickedness in her heart. Due to this, she only expected a small income and supplied very quality hoppers to the neighbourhood. When children came to her house she would listen to their pet stories and gives them to eat hot hoppers without expecting anything in return.

Can Kanagamachi put a barrier over the growth of Devi? A girl's growth will be like a healthy creeper. In the case of Devi also it was true. Because of her height the entire short skirts what she wears were looking very short for her. To buy all the necessary clothes to Devi according to her need her grandmother did not have the means to provide. So when Kanagamachi thought of her hand to mouth life she was worried.



Gunam's home was also in the same position. They were also living a hand to mouth life. After the 4 sisters Gunam was born and he was the youngest. All the family responsibilities put on the eldest girl who was working as a typist in the Kachcheri, as the family was without the father, the whole family depends on her salary. Since Gunam was always mingling with his sisters and chatting with them he mostly felt love and sympathy for girls. He felt affection for the next door Devi also due to this. Time to time, she also would come to Gunam's home only. It was a hobby for Devi to play 'Thayam' with Gunam and his sisters. Every evening they all would sit to play Thayam. At a time 4 would play and the other two will wait for their turn. When the turn comes the other two will play. The game of Thayam finishes this way. When Devi sits to play conscientiously she keeps on adjusting her half skirt to cover her thighs. When she adjusts her skirt it was like a bird with its beak pecking and adjusting the feathers.



Between Gunam and Devi there was not a big age gap. Gunam is elder to her only by three years. When sisters are busy with their other household works Gunam and Devi sit and play Thayam. When she sits to play Thayam with Gunam she would sit slanting herself to one side with one hand pressing towards the floor and with the other hand rolls the disc. When she does not get the expected amount she curses the disc and she will be in high tension. Sometimes Gunam gets very favourable amounts. When Gunam continuously play without losing her face would change. She will be almost crying. But when she gets very favourable points like Gunam she used to be very happy and laughing. While schooling this is how between Gunam and Devi an intimacy grew. Devi could not pass a day without talking to Gunam and seeing him. Same situation with Gunam also, always when he comes after school Gunam will be very impatient until he sees her. The game of Thayam gives him an opportunity to sit by the side of her, soon after she comes he will ask 'Devi, shall we play Thayam?' Devi will see the anxiety in the eyes of Gunam and say Okay 'Let us play'. When Devi smiles there will be curves forming in both her cheeks which gives an additional attraction to her face. It is like a flower blooming. Gunam enjoys watching her face. Now Devi does not wear short skirts. All the skirts what Gunam's sisters discard will be worn by Devi. Now she has many frocks and skirts to wear. When the sisters say that Devi is also now up to our height and our clothes are fitting her very well, Gunam heard it and smiled. After his sisters spoke like this he too was surprised about the growth of Devi when he sees her. So now when he looks at her, he was getting a funny feeling.

The Deepavali festival also will come in that month. Before the festival Devi came to Gunam's home and enjoyed short eats prepared for the festival. After these for about two days Devi never sighted Gunam's home. Gunam was upset because she didn't come home. Why Devi did not come? What happened to her? These questions were penetrating his mind. Will she stop coming here



hereafter? Gunam was so sorry, he felt like crying. Two days later he came from school and was very impatient. He was looking up and down. He was seated on the verandah floor and looked staringly at the Thayam board.

Towards the rear side of the house there was a 'Naval' tree with full of ripe fruits and plenty of them were found all over the ground. There was a cooling effect under the tree. He went under the tree and watched through the fence pretending as if he was picking the fruits. Bends slightly looked towards Kanagam Achi's house. Kept on looking, and got tired. There was a severe breeze at that time and it caused a terrible noise since the cadjan tied over the fence started moving. That noise caused a pain in his heart because he could not see her. It was two days after full moon. The stars in the sky were glistening. Natures' unnumbered noises which cannot be explained were like music for that cold night.

'Thamby, come to play Thayam' eldest sister called Gunam. Gunam wanted to escape by saying that he has a lot to study... 'What is, something new cropped up in Thamby? For two days he didn't play at all. Thamby always now want to study. What is the reason' "Akka told like that and laughed as if she has understood the secret. The crookish heart of Gunam started beating fast... 'No Akka, come let us play one game' Gunam shaped it. Eldest sister told the sister who is just elder to Gunam, patiently wait until the game is over.

Later all these sisters sat on three corners and Gunam also sat in one corner. He was worried that Devi did not come. All got involved in the game by moving the pieces." I remember our girl Devi grew up. The first water they have poured. She used to hang on the saree of the hopper achi, now she has become a big woman, it is good, achi also was worried about her. Now the old woman might be very happy. Eldest sister told this with a real happy face and laughed. And other sisters also joined her and laughed.

They did not involve Thamby into this talk. As if the talk was only for women. Eldest sister made a sigh and said, girl has grown up, sin for her, she does not have anyone, she might stay all alone in one corner. Eldest sister carries the burden of this family entirely. She has experienced the profit and loss of the family, now thinks of Devi also and worried. When she was talking like this, the Thayam game got slightly disturbed. Now it is the time for Gunam to roll the disc. But he did not roll the piece thinking that it might disturb Akka's talk. He lowered his head down and was thinking. Will she come back to this house again? Even if she comes will she talk to me as in those days? He was saddened by these thoughts. After this he was not interested in this game. But anyhow he just managed to play and finished the game.

It is nearly one month since she came toward our home. He counted the days and when the time came he left to school. Advance level examination is also close by. He is worried about that also. He came after school in the evening with the list what Akka gave to purchase things he went in the bicycle to the bazaar. He bought everything from one boutique and tied them in the carrier and came home in time. He parked the bike carried the bag and entered the house. There in the verandah Devi was standing in a stylish way. She looks so beautiful. Gunam looked at her very hard, Devi felt very shy. Shyness mixed with happiness. So immediately she laughed. Is she the old Devi? Gunam was surprised. He admired her figure from her toe upwards. Within these days what a lot of wonderful things have taken place? How did her face become like a red rose flower now? There was not a way to express his ideas, but within him those ideas created a poem. She looked at Gunam with a new relationship and smiles. It is a smile with happiness and shyness. He looked at her smile and stood like a statue. She held her plait of hair and went running. When she went running Gunam felt a fragrance smell of a flower. Gunam went to bed that night thinking whether she would come again? Like a baby embracing



the milk bottle Gunam held the Thayam pieces tight in his hand and went to sleep. But that night, sleep was far away from him.

The following day Devi came to his house late in the evening. Eldest sister held something in her hand came towards her and said, 'Now you are a big woman. Here is a present for you. "Devi's eyes wide opened and she asked..." Akka, why are you giving me a present, with an anxiety of a child she asked very happily." Wear this, it would look very nice on you. If I have money I would have made a set of bangles for you. What to do? Akka told like that and gave the present to her hand. Gunam felt that she really appreciated the present and thanked Akka. Gunam and Devi are helpless. And they could not express their feeling to each other. Years have passed very quickly. Gunam had sufficient education and was looking for employment. The marriages of their sisters were killing him day by day. Devi was thinking of Gunam and building castles in her mind. Always when she closes her eyes, she imagines that Gunam and she are at their wedding. In this world true love is the only pleasure. She buried herself with these thoughts and felt happy.

Kanagamachi's hands are now shivering badly. Her eye sight too had become blurred. Many times the hopper pot also slipped and fell from her hand several times. Kanagamachi lost hope over making hoppers in the future. Relations were pressing Kanagamachi to give Devi in marriage. Out of the proposals came one proposal seem to be okay. Kanagamachi thought about her current situation and one day took a sudden decision. For Devi's marriage now a date is also fixed. When Devi heard about all these arrangements she shivered. Her personal appearance looked very dull. She felt, that she is being forced into an unpleasant environment.

Gunams' sisters were praising her and saying that you are a very fortunate person. When they spoke like this Devi felt like a bird pierced by an arrow. She was about to cry. She could not bear all what they said. At once she ran from there and went home. But Gunam's sister said that she felt shy and ran from there. Devi

thought about her future, with tears in her eyes fell on the bed. Like a pot of water spilled and wet the pillow her tears soaked the pillow. She was so sorry that her love did not materialize. She is a girl who did not know what sorrow is. But now all her thoughts are getting, eroded like the attack of the termites.

As usual that year also the 'Naval' tree was bearing well. The ripe fruits have fallen under the tree. So many birds come and enjoy the fruits. But one Koel was all alone and looking for her partner. Gunam was also standing under the shade of the tree. This time very courageously Devi came to meet him. When she was walking towards the tree the legs were twisting, a kind of weakness felt. She bore the pain in her heart and went and stood in front of him like a crafted wooden doll. "Devi" with anxiety and sorrow he called her. Other than crying she did not tell anything. Like a piece of paper fell into the water her cheeks were fully soaked by her tears. When Gunam saw her cheeks he could not believe there was so much of tears in her eyes. His body vibrated. His eyes too filled with tears. Her body looked blurred to his eyes... "My marriage is already decided and the date is also fixed. Devi said." "So... So... it is good for you." Gunam said. Gunam while saying he swallowed spit along with sorrow. "What is good... I am of course not at all happy. "All my wishes are burned into ashes." She said. All my four sisters are depending on me. For me to become a man I don't know how long it might take. "Gunam stood at the edge of the sorrow and said. He stood as if his dreams and imaginations have gone with the wind." I know your position well. But I do not know what to do Gunam. I am not at all happy. I do not know how to live. I am confused. But one thing I tell you, I cannot forget you, Gunam I won't forget you. This is a promise." She told and bit her lips tight and stood. Again tears started flowing heavily. One or two drops fell on the ground. She could not stand any longer there. So she walked along the road with thorns and stones. She did not feel anything. Gunam watched her going. She felt that her whole body is full of sorrow and pain.



After that Devi's wedding took place. Thereafter she went with her husband to Colombo. Now it is a past story. He stood at the funeral and was reviewing the entire past in his mind. Then suddenly he felt somebody tapped at his shoulder. He turned to see who tapped? It was the voice of the village headman. He spoke with a cigar tightened in his mouth, "the petromax lamp might go off. Can you pump some air?" Anywhere he comes and disturbs the peace... a miserable man. Gunam thought like this got the air pumped to the petromax and hanged it.

Funeral also was over. All the relations stood there and said, come home for the expenses. On the third day a few people were coming and going. Gunam also was with them and stood there. When the gate was opened the old thoughts came to his mind again. He watched the trees, with beautiful flowers. Devi who came towards the entrance at that time saw Gunam standing. At once she went to the place where Gunam was, she was so happy that she saw him after a long time. "Gunam Anna, how are you keeping?" she asked. He said, "I am keeping fine," and looked at her face. He found that she does not look the same. He felt that her complexion also has changed. She looks a full grown mother now. "Devi how about you all? are all keeping fine? He included her husband also and asked. "Yes Anna, because of business responsibilities he could not come for the funeral. She felt slightly sad to tell that. Okay, where are your children? Yes. you did not see them properly and called for the children... Sugirda, Bama come here. Children



came running. She said to them, "he is Gunam Mamaa." "Amma you never told about this Mamaa all these days." Children looked at Gunam with surprise and asked this question from their mother. Devi got upset. "He is like my own brother and for you all he is your uncle." Tears filled her eyes when she said this. Now Gunam remembered how she came and spoke to him and went just before her marriage. The children kept on calling him, Mamaa Mamaa and held his hands tight. Devi's eldest girl is looking like Devi when she was young. Those rosy thoughts came back again to his mind. "If you all are happy I am satisfied. I only need that." He looked at Devi and told in a very soft voice. Now the old thoughts were like shadows getting drifted from his mind. "I heard that both sisters are married. So you can now think of getting married is it?" "very anxiously Devi asked this question with a feeble voice she asked and her throat was getting choked." Yes, I can get married. But like in the game of Thayam in my life also I have got the zero point. The light that was there to make my life happy has diminished. Why should we now speak about the old things. I am going Devi. "With a sorrowful sigh he said and walked towards the gate, opened the gate and went. The words that he mentioned really made Devi very sad. With tears in her eyes she kept on watching Gunam leaving. When she thought about Gunam's position the old thoughts came to her mind and remained very steadily." Amma what is zero point? "the eldest girl stood by the mother and asked. Since she did not know anything about the game of Thayam, she was interested in knowing about zero point. Devi did not want to show her face to the daughter. Quickly she wiped her tears from her eyes and gave an explanation to the daughter this way." When you say zero point in the game of Thayam it is just a piece of wood without any points. "While telling tears fell from her eyes." She did not let out the feelings and controlled the sorrow fully. I am confused, now I am a mother of two children, why am I getting excited with unnecessary things? She immediately got rid of those thoughts and caught the youngest girl standing by the side of her and embraced her.



## Gnam's Pushcart

In Vavuniya, all the shop owners very well knew push carter Gnamam. All families living over there also knew him very well. Gnamam never looked sad. Always he was found with a smiling face. And also without joining anyone he used to be alone. He is a married person. But nothing was heard about his family. He was well over 50 years. He is just an ordinary hard worker. Very commonly such ones can be seen. For the sake of his job he will be standing in some corner of the bazaar. If someone hires him and tells him to load the things and unload them at a particular address he would very obligingly undertake the responsibility and do it very accurately. Everybody knew that he was a sincere person and never robbed or lied. So when goods are loaded into his cart no one should go after the cart on guard. People trust him and hand over their belongings for transport. Due to this in the bazaar he was considered to be the only trustworthy push carter who does his job for the entire satisfaction of the ones who hires him. All speak very well about him. Most of the time his push cart will be parked in front of the Mosque and he will be standing there. He would watch the people passing up and down in that junction. Whenever it is possible he will speak to them and while away the time. Time to time he would grin within himself.

But there will not be any difference in that grin. At times like people reading a book he will use certain new words in different tones of voices. Suppose if some thoughts disturb his mind very silently bow down and laugh. That type of laugh would make others to take notice of him. Is he interested in watching the crowd passing up and down? No. That is not the case also. Like others he is also just an ordinary person minding his own business. But certain ones felt that according to his name Gnamam that there was some sort of wisdom within himself. Certain ones speak about him that way also.

Out of such ones who were thinking about Gnamam there was one person who was involved in meditation and Yogi exercises, felt that some sort of power is embedded in Gnamam. He thought about it several times. Gnamam's face looks pointed towards some sort of connection with some divine power. When he laughed to himself he feels that the whole world is like an item under his control. He never laughs without a cause. No one is able to understand the things behind his laughter. That person who was imagining about Gnamam went his way. But for his thoughts about Gnamam there was no end.

One day it was raining very heavily. It rained after a very long time. When the first rain falls on the dry land the colour of the Earth and the smell get mixed and the area was flooded. Now this man was walking along the Pillayar Kovil street with an umbrella in his hand. At the corner of the street under the well grown 'Kuma' tree there was a push cart. He looked at it from far and walked towards it. When he got closer he was able to notice a person looking upwards and floating in water. It was Gnamam. Gnamam appeared to be observing the sky very attentively. He was standing with the umbrella and looked at Gnamam with an honourable smile on his face.

He felt as if Gnamam has made the rain as a mild sunlight and lying there. He felt the philosophy about the disappearance of life, was reflecting out of Gnamam's face. He got closer and looked at Gnamam's eyes. It was like 1000 suns reflecting through his eyes. He got frightened and got back. When Gnamam was alive he moved about as he wanted. There was not anyone to show love and mercy to him. Though his mind was like a burial ground he never cursed the ones who were up to all unrighteous ways.



One day a very surprising thing happened. From that incident everyone knew and spoke and said that Gnanam is the only decent person. One day when Gnanam was pushing his cart down the bazaar he noticed a paper parcel on the ground. When he opened the parcel there were bundles of currency notes. Immediately without any delay he went and handed over the money to the police. Will this happen in any part of the world when the whole world is up to robbery and burglary these days? Will there be a man like him? Due to this all praised him. Gnanam's push cart wheels were rolling with his wheels of life. He only obtained a small hire for his job and existed. That day he pushed the cart worked so hard, with the exhaustion he left the push cart under 'Kuma' tree and lied down in the rain water. The beginning of the rain was very light. But gradually it increased. The smell of the Earth was fragrant to his breath. It rained heavily and the area was flooded. He did not move from his position. He enjoyed the rain drops falling on him and remained silent. Rain did not cease fully. He was like a hermit found in the rain water. Flood waters were dashing against him and flowing.

Following day dawned. Sunlight was so bright. Ganam was found at the same place without any movement. His eyes that were not meant for tears found closed now. Even after death his face was like the face of a child. Everyone who came to see him understood that he is dead.

All the ones who exist by working on push carts heard about the news and came rushing to the 'Kuma' tree, abandoning their daily work. When they saw the way Gnanam was lying all their eyes filled with tears. Each one contributed according to their wishes and out of that money they purchased a coffin to take Gnanam's body to the cemetery. To dress Gnanam's body they bought a shirt and sarong dressed him and in

his same push cart they kept his coffin and took it to the cemetery. All the workers who were fond of him kept lamenting and walked. They got the grave dug by themselves and lowered the body of Gnanam into the grave with eyes pouring down with tears.

At last the only possession left behind of Gnanam was his push cart. All are now thinking what to do with the push cart. The property of Gnanam should go to him though he is dead. That was the decision later taken by them. In remembrance of the dead person we must erect a monument. So let us sell his push cart and make one for him, that was a suggestion by a worker. Immediately all agreed to his suggestion. At that place itself the push cart was auctioned. One person bought it at the auction and it was said that money should be given to the leader of the workers. After that all left the cemetery. With that the story of Gnanam was over. The man who bought the push cart pushed it and went to the 'Vavuniyarambai' pond to wash it. Because there can be a bad omen since a corpse was transported by that push cart.

(2008)



## Darkness won't you depart hereafter

The single flower what she anxiously expected to see was not there. There were thorns on the stem where the flower was. And the leaves also were very fresh. But the beautiful rose has disappeared. May be due to the severe breeze in the morning the petals of the colourful rose have fallen on the ground. When she looked down she noticed it. This is how my happiness also vanished from me. She thought like that.

The first job in the home of her mother in law was to sweep and clean the compound of the house soon after she gets up. Next is cooking. She will be in the kitchen and while attending to cooking there may be certain other jobs also to be attended to. Without feeling lazy she would put all those jobs also on her head. In the home of her husband from morning till evening she would have jobs up to her neck. Though she works like a bull in this house, for her mother in law's irritations and scolding there is no end. They were not ordinary scoldings. Everything what the mother in law said prick her like a poisonous thorn. Silently, she would listen to her mother in law's talks and with great pain of mind she would attend to all the household works.

When the mother in law orders 'Itly' for tomorrow immediately she would soak the black gram and in the afternoon she would get it ground and keep it in a pot. The following morning when she took the **itly** from the hot **itly** trays, mother in law came and stood near the door and said, "yesterday the Itly what you boiled was not baked well. It was not tastier at all. The black gram smell was very prominent, was it Itly or a stone?" she dipped her hand burnt to that hot **Itly** tray in water to cool. But the heat comes from mother in law's tongue is horrible. Her mind

was suffering like the water getting heated in the **Itly** pot and also like the pigeons saw the vultures in the sky, her heart beats very fast when the mother in law comes towards the kitchen side. When her mother in law dictate terms to her about the household work there will be fire burning in the eyes of her mother in law and her sarcastic laugh thereafter appears like a snake.

Up to today she could not understand about the things that were happening around her. She was born in an agricultural family in the village called 'Pambaimadu'. Now she is attached to this family in the 'Puttur' village in the Jaffna peninsula. .... for what reason? Not only during certain times very often she keeps on thinking about her present situation with this family. She could not forget how her father was placed in the coffin and nailed..... she could not forget that. When the father died they could not even purchase an ordinary coffin. .... the poverty which stuck her family is a real curse. For a good cultivator why should that difficulty arise? All the ones in the village were telling like this and were worried. One month after the funeral was over they brought meals and showed hospitality. The people in the village are very good, and they are not jealous. Her father's life span was short because of his DNA, some of the ones of his age group in 'Pambaimadu' village are still existing well with good teeth also. When things are like this why did her father faced a sudden death at his middle age?



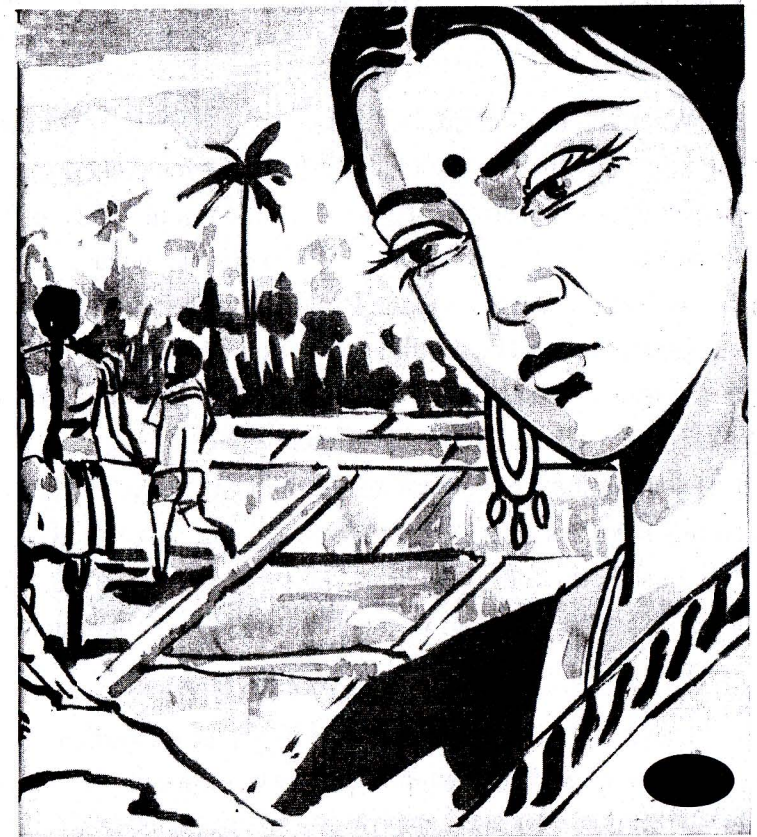


Once, while cultivating chilies and onions he grew the money plantation tobacco also. During that season from his chili plants, there were plenty of puffed up red pods due to the healthy seeds inside. The whole plants were covered with chilies. His onion cultivation also gave him a very good yield. The onion flowers bloomed well and he transported the onion leaves to Colombo by lorry sold them in the fair and earned lots of money. All the plants what he grew systematically during that season did not let him down..... they brought lots of money for him. He gave a very comfortable life for his family. His daughter and wife were decked with jewellery. Likewise he generally helped the villagers also. He helped the ones who are not very successful in their cultivation. He did not fail to give such ones money also to overcome their difficulties. In this way that year ended for them in happiness. Now a new year started for them. He was very anxious to cultivate in all his lands. This is a reasonable anxiety in the hearts of all the cultivators. So it is not a surprising thing. There is nothing wrong if you work hard, sweat and make your money. You cannot call it greediness. If food is produced living beings will exist and it is a blessing.

That year when time arrived for cultivation he pawned all his jewellery and invested all the money he had on the paddy field, vegetable garden and was looking up at the sky. But her daughter did not know all these difficulties because she never grew up with difficulties. She joins only her little brother and roamed all over the garden very independently. She enjoyed life that way. She would go along the onion garden and listen to the musical sound of the palmyra leaves when they move hither and thither for the breeze. To cut young palmyra fruits her father employed people. She and her brother enjoyed the palmyra fruits to the full – they will finish enjoying one bunch. Apart from that the happiness what she

derived was by reading the story books at home, will she ever get that happiness again?

Her father was interested in planting coconut and mango in the garden. He did not keep this desire only in his mind. But implemented it. Due to this the whole garden was filled with fruit trees also. How happy she was to listen to the various noises of different birds who come to these fruit trees while she is reading the books. She watches bunches of fruits from those fruit trees. She admires them keeps on looking at them. Yes, as a teenager she enjoyed the beauty of the nature in her father's garden and the life was very sweet for her.





But that day in the night her father was resting in the easy chair and told her mother certain things with a sad heart. Then only she understood the difficulties taking place in her home. He told..... "No rains, no water in the well..... plants are drying up..... can we expect anything from the garden?" When she heard this she dropped herself at once from her joyful position. Sorrow struck her and her mind was fully affected. At that time she heard the noise of a night bird flying. And from somewhere far away a dog was howling. Now she went to the bedroom, it was like a grave covered with darkness. In the bedroom like a blind fly she banged herself to this and that, went to a corner, spread the mat and slept. When she thought about the problem of her father she felt like crying.

When she was a child she used to enjoy the smell of the onions coming from her father's body and fall asleep. She remembers that. She remembered the comfort, closed her eyes and fell into a deep sleep. Now a dream, she felt what she saw was actually taking place. She sees dried paddy lands..... she is walking all alone, a soft cloud passes slowly over the paddy field and there was a shade. Something pricks her tender feet so she now walks along the dried ridges. But she is now surprised that in some places of dried ridges her feet were getting pressed. In the paddy field now she sees her mother standing. She tucked up her saree and cutting the grass grown above her hip..... instead of paddy, grass. She got a shock and got up at once she stood up on the mat, drank water from the clay water jar. Went near the window looked at the sky there were no rain clouds.

The stars in the sky were shining as if they are washed and cleaned by applying soap. She got disappointed she went to the mat and rested again. But she could not sleep she was just rolling on the mat.

For every farmer in that village the prominent talk was there is no rain, there is no rain, there is no rain! If there is one rain, the paddy that looks almost dead will come up quickly. When the plants were drying up daily the farmers kept on telling the same thing and were worried. One day a few drops of rain fell from the sky and disappeared. He was also going daily to the paddy field stand there look at the sky and was worried about the rain. His worries and anxieties over the rain affected his whole chest. Within a few days his face was covered with beard and completely changed his appearance. Day by day the heat of the sun burnt all his plants. Termites spread all over the land. The snake gourd, pandolls dropped to the ground. He kept on thinking as to what to do? Opened the fence he brought the cattle and allowed them to graze. They were very happily grazing in the garden. He saw this wept over the bad situation of his cultivation and came home. With that he got a chest pain. The whole night he kept on coughing and suffered a lot. The following day his face was looking very awful. A chill developed he went to the bed covered the whole body and slept. After that there was not any body movements. And he passed away on the bed itself.

The sorrow of the father's death swallowed her fully. She kept her eyes wide opened and looked at her father's corpse. She felt that her whole life is now surrounded only with sadness. On one side her brother also was standing and crying, her mother also was in another corner and lamenting. The women who came to lament calling relationship and crying in a very loud voice. With the beat of the drums and with the sound of musical instruments meant for funeral her father's body was taken to the cemetery. After the father's death the grain store room in the house became empty. Their life was moving very slowly. The whole house suffered due to poverty. It was during then the proposal came to her. They said the bridegroom is from England. "As dowry..... we don't want even a cent." Bridegroom's people were very pleased with the



appearance and the beauty of her. Wedding day was fixed. All food items and drinks, were organized. She too was happy with the marriage arrangements. Bridegroom's people took bride's people also to India and in Tamil Nadu the wedding was solemnized. Still the bridegroom has not got his permanent residentship in England. It is only after he gets it, he will take the wife there. So she had to just feel the edge of family life and come back. It is after that this imprisonment. She wanted to enjoy married life. But it did not fulfill. "You stay at my mother's home". That was the order of the husband and she had to obey him. All the freedom what she had in her birthplace vanished. She came as the wife of their son. But she is today a servant for them. She does not have even a drop of happiness. There was not anyone to worry over the detestable situation. This thought kept on worrying her daily.

Like the daily household duties she finishes the other works also. Now the time is 10:00 O' clock in the night. Now the machine should rest. She has lost all her energy that day by working so hard. She felt so tired and went to sleep on the bed. She covered herself fully with the blanket, thought about her husband and started crying. In the next room she heard the father in law and mother in law having a hearty chat and laughing. They were like a new couple going to start a new life. Now it is dawn. She got up and again the same household works. The dirty linen basket was full of clothes. She washes them and went to put them over the line outside. When she was busy with the work, at the opposite of the house through the grills of the window he was watching her. She felt as if he was watching her through thousand eyes. What a sight it was? So many times she lowered her sight but she could not lower her sight any longer. Her sight now went towards his side. Immediately she controlled her feelings. She wanted to leave the place immediately to escape from that sight. But there were another two more washed sarees to be spread on the line. She dusted them and went to spread them over the line.

Mother in law also came and stood at the front compound. The normal fear what she experiences when she sees her mother in law started working again in her mind. She knew that her mother in law would not just go without the mortuary examination. She does not know what is in the mind of her mother in law now. Every minute her staying there was like an era for her. The person stood by the side of the window, like a thief slowly vanished from there. Her mother in law said. .... "For you to wash only about four pieces of clothes and spread them over this line you want four hours you forgot the rice on fire?" Those words of her mother in law pricked her so much. She felt as if she was being smashed by some green palmyra stems. She put the last saree also to dry and went with the empty bucket to the kitchen.

Opened the lid of the rice pot. Rice is well boiled. She removed the fire sparks away. She heard the voice of her mother in law coming from the other room. For all of mother in law's talk father in law's job is saying 'yes' always. Mother in law was telling. .... "hereafter we must attend to the fence and make it well. If any disgrace takes place it will be for this family". Mother in law's talk was not over. She continued without an end. At last she suggested "instead of the cadjan fence we must erect a wall". Yes for the sake of her, a parapet wall is going to be built. When she thought about that, she felt shy. She was about to visualize a devilish parapet wall in front of her.

Inside her head she felt the noise of a wasted old wheel turning.

(2005)



## The Wheel Turns

Like those days now Akka does not eat regularly. Does not go to the temples, even for occasions or festivals. She does not cook a good meal. For all these the sorrow what is in her heart is torturing her. Due to this I don't do anything to hurt the feelings of my sister. In this house I am the only person that she could call as her own. Other than me there is no one to give consolation to her.

"Come 'Thamby', come and have your food in time" I just got into the house after watering the onions in the garden. Soon after Akka called I washed myself and sat to have my food. When I opened the pot the fragrant smell of the curry penetrated my nose. I swallowed spit, after a long time Akka had cooked mutton curry..... I looked at her face "Sangarapillai Anna slaughtered a male goat and while going through our lane asked whether I would also need a share, you also did not eat mutton curry for a long time that is why I thought of you and bought a share". On my plate she served par boiled red rice and the mutton curry, along with this she had cooked brinjal added pepper and prepared a nice white curry. Everything was very fine, tasty food after a long time. Akka you also come to eat. I called her. "I am not hungry now, I will eat quietly. She said you work very hard in the garden. You must eat well. With this onion cultivation you tire yourself too much and you have become very lean. You are attached to me very much for the last four years and I could not take proper care of you....." Akka's eyes filled with tears.

"Why do you worry yourself and cry. You provide everything for me. I do not feel any shortage. When I see you crying I also feel very sorry, wipe your tears and have your meals at time". Very lovingly I told

her..... "Karathacolamban" mangoes what you plucked are kept in the straw box, are well ripened now. I have cut a few of them and kept in the outside table on a covered plate. Take them also and eat". After Athan left she became very gloomy. After four years now only she feels little better and okay. After eating washed my hand took a piece of the mango and went towards the cattle shed outside to enjoy a good breeze. "After my Athan died everything in this house has become barren..... What a lot of cattle stay in this shed..... No need to tell Athan's name, when you say 'Avarankal Savarikaran' it is enough everyone would tell his name".

I lost my parents when I was very small. My only brother, he lives with his wife's people. I could not tolerate living there. That is why I came to live with my sister. I do not know why Akka did not have children. So Athan cared for me as his own child and petted me. Wherever Athan goes I would go after him. Studied up to O Level, I join him and go with him to attain to all his works. Athan is mad over cattle race. I also got the taste of it, I was even prepared to forego my meals because of cattle race. After this I would also go to the places without fail where cattle races take place. To various areas Athan will go, select and purchase the best cattle. Fix them on to the carts, train them and sell thereafter for a good price. When he goes I would also join him from 'Puthukudirippu Mullaitheevu'. There is a road known as the water source. Along this road if you travel about 7 miles you will come across a village called 'Koppupalam'. It is here that we purchase cattle.

In any business if you know the trade secrets and work accordingly the business will not be at a loss. Where cattle business is concerned Athan knew all the trade secrets and was very clever at the business. "Thamby Selvam, come here". He would call me very lovingly



and politely. And tells me many things about cattle only for me to hear. "That cattle as a knot like a handcuff on his back if you take them and tie in the house we may have to go to prisons. Over the neck if there is a knot it is a kingly knot, it is good for the house." We do not buy cows. We purchase only the bulls. As owners of cattle normally we talk about the cattle by mentioning their colours..... 'Notchchi flower grey', 'Sandalwood neck white', 'Deep dark neck white', 'Eagle' this is how we mostly mention the colours of the cattle when we have business dealings. Cattle business is not an ordinary business, money comes in thousands. The most difficult task is to bring them to the shed. The whole body sweats, continuously for three or four days we may have to walk at a stretch. I will experience joint pains and back ache. But my Athan is like a camel travels in the desert. Tirelessly he would shout 'Enthaajeeth - Jhithentaa' and chase them. People in the village to fix the nose rope come to Athan. Even if others are rearing cattle to compete with him he doesn't care a hoot and feel jealous over them. He will look to auspicious days and get the nose rope fixed for the cattle of others. And the wound also will heal within 3 days. After the cattle are brought from 'Vanni', Athan and I should separate them individually, threaten them and train them to walk. After that we will tie them on to the yoke of the cart and drive them to the town. "You drive them on your own and bring them and let see whether you could to it." Athan will tell like this to me and wait at a spot.

I will also very obediently do it. Now he will choose the correct cattle for the races... Athan says when cattle walk more than the front leg they must keep the rear one wider, from its walk you will be able to judge whether it could run faster. Athan only taught me all these. Another thing what Athan told was a cattle should run to the speed of a bicycle. Mostly cattle snore which is called grazing snore that is good. But they

should not sleep and snore. That is not good. For all the cattle according to what Athan says I will soak the raw rice add bran and feed them. In the shed there will be straw always, keep fresh water to drink and give little green grass also.

The day before the cart race we give the cattle very little to eat. And on the day of the race we neither give them food nor water. For the ones who come to help Athan that day a grand party will be thrown by slaughtering a male goat. In the cart races conducted in Jaffna Athan won so many gold medals. In the cart race competitions conducted in 'Neervelitharavai', 'Pinnakaitharavai', 'Maanpaynthaveli', 'Mullaitharavi' continuously Athan got the first prize. He kept all these awards in a glass box and in the evening and morning he used to admire them. Still the cart race that was conducted 'Neervelitharavai' is firmly fixed in my heart. The person Ponnuthurai is a famous cart rider in Jaffna. To participate he brought his cart bulls. When he saw our cattle he asked "whether they were brought to tie around the trees?" in a sarcastic way. Athan very politely said, "after they are sent in the race you will know for what purpose they are brought". But Ponnuthurai kept on twisting his mustache and said in a very proud manner..... "Very able kings lost to me in competitions. Now he has come to defeat me." His talk was like pricking with a needle, not only to Athan, his sarcastic words caused a pain to me also. But I politely bore it. At that time from the loud speakers the sound was piercing our ears. Our cattle were very smart and steady. They made the on lookers believe that they could pass any distance very easily. With the signal Athan drove the cattle, without tiring themselves they went ahead of all the other cattle and reached the boundary line very easily. Likewise in the final race also our cattle ran and won. But Ponnuthurai's cattle ran across and banged on to a car that was parked



at the edge of the road. In that Athan got a gold medal and cash price. Because Ponnuthurai lost he was bent into two. For fun I asked him “I do not know whether you noticed our carts were flying?” “may be your wheels were small”. He spoke like that and shaped it.

There were so many incidents even if you speak till dawn the story will not be over. But my Athan’s life ended now. When the Sivan Temple festival comes from our side and Athan’s side relations would come. And the whole house will be full. When they are leaving Athan used to give them basket full of onions and chilies. Like ‘Karnan’ he provided things for others. But when I think what happened to this Holy person my heart pains.

On the same day in the morning sound of shell attacks made everyone to rise up. It is an usual thing that take place every day. But that day the people became more frightened. So many times the army has come up to Achuveli and gone back. But that day the situation was becoming worse. Unlike the other days shell attacks were spreading towards the residential areas also. Athan got up early morning and went towards the garden. Suddenly this problem started and now how can I find Athan, I only shivered. From morning I have not even drunk a drop of water.

“Akka....Athan will somehow find us and join us”. All the people are running from their homes. Come let us also go. “I was in a desperate situation. I hanged the packed two bags which are kept always for an emergency on to my bicycle handle and called Akka. Hesitatingly Akka closed the doors came and sat on the luggage carrier of the bicycle. I quickly rode the bicycle and passed ‘Puthur’. After that little relaxingly we went up to ‘Neerveli Pillayar Temple’, and in the temple we rested

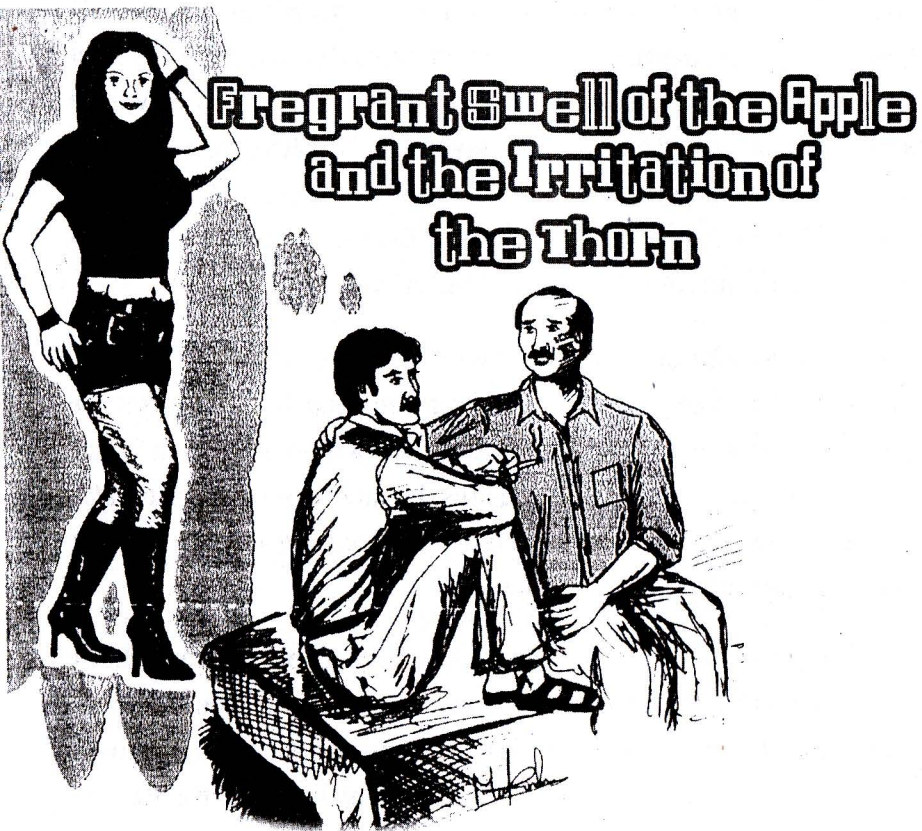
for awhile. I could not console my sister. The people of ‘Avarankal’ when they saw us they also told certain things and increased our tension a little more.... One person said” “your husband will not listen. We try to bar him from going and told him severe shell attacks are going on.” But he said “I will un-tie the cattle chase them and come, otherwise they will die and was going towards the house.” Even if I die no harm I will go there find him and come”, Akka said and cried.

Days and, months passed there was no any news about Athan. Day by day our faith gradually lost. Everything had become empty for us. After the demise of Athan, the responsibility to look after Akka fell up on me. I do not have any selfish desires. I want to look after my Akka see that she does not shed tears and fall into a deep sorrow. I am actually now working very hard for that purpose.

But because of Athan, one desire cropped up within myself. In this cattle shed bulls meant for races should be there. This should become a place to collect cattle dung and not for the dust to spread. Like Athan I must also earn a name ‘Cart racer’. When I think like this I feel that the past will come back again. In the midst of all the crisis and problems, this is the only thought brings me consolation. Akka is now interested in finding a bride for me.

(2002)





Akka brought the cup of coffee for both of us. And almost like scolding she said... No respect between uncle and nephew, both are like intimate friends and moving keeping the hands on the shoulder of one another... nephew heard it and laughed.

When Akka spoke like that I felt shy. What to do? My nephew also has grown over my shoulders... so I must treat him like a friend.

And also he has gone abroad and come. He learnt also the civilization of the western world. And he is teaching them to me like a teacher. Can I then just treat him only as my nephew and keep him under my control any longer? When he came from abroad sowing work in my paddy field was over. And my daily job is loafing all over the village with him. All the uncivilized fellows in this village keep me in the position of a man from the city. And treat me accordingly, to show that I am a different person from others, I dress differently and speak differently. And very conscientiously doing all these for others to admire me as a different person.

Now my Akka's son has come. He too will behave to fulfill my wishes. And I am happy to call him my nephew. I asked him "when are you hoping to go back to Canada?" "It might take two years..." he mentioned a long period of time. Two years when he said I was very happy. So for some time I will be able to spend my time very happily. It was a sweet news to me. He said that he came with another three friends also. We say Kanada according to the Tamil pronunciation. But he says in American style as Canada... It was nice to hear.

"Maama the three friends who have come from Canada also would visit us. I will introduce them to you. They are very good boys Maama..." he winked his eyes and said so. When my nephew came he brought some bottles of Whisky, high quality cigarettes, shirts, trousers and perfumes. He gave me a shirt and a pair of trousers. But to drink the whisky he took me to a friend's home. He gave a good drink to the friend after that without any indifference we both were like friends seated opposite to one another and drank to satisfaction. Again to his friend he poured a full glass of whisky. After that both shared the balance.



My nephew looked intoxicated. The nerves on his neck were looking swollen... when he gets intoxicated it happens. He started eating some bites that were kept there and told... "Maama please sing a song." I am interested in singing when I am drunk. I used to sing the old sad cinema songs. And I have the capability to make the drunkards cry. These are my old experiences in the toddy booth those days. Soon after he said... I started singing an old sad song. I was sure that my nephew holds his nose and cry. So touch his heart I sang a very sad number. The friend in the house brought a clay pot and started tapping it like a drum. His playing gave a good hand for my song... finished. As I guessed my nephew started crying .victory for me. But from the time he heard the song he kept on pressing his chest. He could not bear the sorrow any longer. He said... "Maama let us go from here."

Pleasure departed me. I was wondering whether I made him sad. He held my hand tight and walked along the street. From the way he held I felt that is ligaments and nerves were getting twisted together. When we came to the roundabout junction he told me... to sit over the culvert there. When I sat he too sat just by the side of me, his eyes has become reddish in colour... "Maama Canada is a very good country. I only did not know how to live there. They approved us as refugees and gave us lots of money. After we saw the money we forgot everything, we forgot about our families and our entire purpose changed. The worst part is that we became addicted to drugs," he was telling his bad experience and stopped for awhile. When he was talking I bowed my head looked at the earth and was listening carefully. When he suddenly stopped his talk I raised my head and looked at his face. Normally my imaginary power is more... when he said about drugs I curiously looked at his face. His face was like a poppy flower garden. May be he might

have got addicted to drugs. When I was imagining like this, he continued with his story... "At the start I did not know English Maama. Myself and the three friends who have come, when we get the money for refugees, first we went to a Disco club. Canadians are Canadians Maama. On the exact date they will send our money without fail"... "After that?"... I asked him and I had to keep my mouth open to listen to him for the balance story. He took a cigarette lit it tighten the cigarette with his lips and sucked the smoke. All what he did appeared to me as a new fashion. All his actions were very interesting and I enjoyed. He kept his eyes now towards the sky, as if he was counting the stars..... "I married a Canadian girl. Yes a white girl"..... He said. I got a shock. 'Scoundrel..... All these days he hid it from his home here', but I did not let out my feelings, control them and asked "how did all these things take place?" I asked lowering my voice..... "I went to the Disco and caught her. We drank heavily and in our drunken fit, started singing. She was enjoying Coca-Cola and particularly looking hard at me". Out of the four of us, she was looking at me and told me, to come closer to her.... She was appearing like the rose petals". When he described about her like this, I too started imagining as to how she would have been. He put his hand into his trouser pocket and pulled out a photograph..... Again I told to myself 'scoundrel.... you have schemed everything and come here..... I looked at the photograph what he gave. He said "White girls are not beautiful. They look like the shark fish..... We look at the few who come here and evaluate them.

Only When I saw her I thought 'how foolish we are?' 'She looks so beautiful Maama. Her features were like that of the attractive film star Marlyn Manroe. No one would hesitate to say that she is beautiful". I was very anxious to know the inner secret between him and the white girl..... "So what happened thereafter?" ..... I asked him.



“Maama, do you know the world’s international language?” ..... I blinked. He said “It is the sign language.” At that time I did not know English. So at the beginning, I picked up the sign system. That is also one of the reasons why she loved me so much. We met after that very constantly at the Disco and because of her I also managed to learn a little English..... Now I was wrecking my brain to find money. I need money to meet our expenses. For a person like me to keep a white girl like her, I needed lots of money. And also I must do body building and keep my body strong..... but mostly I was worried about money..... Now I got some idea to earn money through my friends..... Heroine business. First I worked for salary and passed drugs. Later when money was coming to my hand I did business on my own in large scale. Before the stuff is sent to the market I taste them first. I heat it, keep my nose fully opened and smell..... Maama, the feeling that I derived at that time is as if the Heaven has come down to this Earth. More than this I cannot explain about the pleasure you derive from drugs. With these thoughts he is now looking for the packet of cigarettes while seated on the culverts. I understood his problem and helped him to get it. He took a cigarette out of it and smoked and for some time he did not talk, he was deeply thinking. I was looking at the tree opposite to us. It has some dried fruits, clashing against one another for the breeze and making a noise..... my mind is also now disturbed..... heard some birds making a noise from far. I felt as if tears fell from my Akka’s eyes and dropped on my feet. His story was a real shock to me. Now he turned, looked at me and said, “Maama listen” and started telling the balance also..... “We think that we are the ones have restrictions and the white people do not have all that. It is wrong Maama..... I was interested in getting married to her, but she said we must tell my parents and relations, get permission and get married. Now

I have money and also two cars. One day she invited me for dinner to her place. I went in my car to her place. Her home people looked at me and said..... “He came as a refugee, now he has gold chains in his hand and in neck they were hanging like dog chain, he might be smuggling Heroin and doing business, just leave him alone” her home people said. “Why was she not aware of the business that you were doing?” I asked him a cross question..... “No Maama, I never told her about it..... but she is a good person Maama. Stubbornly she told her people that she must marry me.” Thereafter they also agreed. I also got married to her without informing my home people here. After that a nice baby boy was born. But I am now addicted to heroin, due to that I could not do anything. My business and my goods came to a standstill in some places. Little by little crisis arose for money. All what I earned vanished. She was not willing to stay with me. She found a separate home and lived separately. After that we both did not have a good relationship. “Any time you could come and see the child.....” for everything I am to be blamed..... there was not anything wrong with her”..... without tiring himself he told everything to me. But to some extent I was able to feel the sorrow, pain and mental agony he is experiencing now. I felt very sorry for him, whatever it may be, he is my nephew, to console him, I tapped on his shoulder. He looked a little better now. But when he spoke about the child, I felt very well that his conscience was pricking him a lot..... “What is the position of the child? Where is the child now?” I asked him to get more information about the child. He said “Maama everything was a failure. And my whole life is a failure”..... sighed very deeply. Little by little his voice was getting drowned..... suddenly he said “Maamaa.....” his voice was like calling from a deep well. I asked him “What?” ..... “My child..... my child.....” he shouted. For me it was like a goat entangled



to a bush and struggling. Like Sivaji Ganeshan, cleaned his nose with a big noise in the film 'Puthiya Paravai' and told..... "One day I was terribly drunk. In my car I went to see her." "Why did you go did you go that day to fight with her?" I asked him. "No Maama," "Then what did you do? ....." "I told her give me the child. I will take him for a ride and bring him back". "You are fully drunk now. Come on another day and quietly take him" she told very humbly.

"I did not listen to her, leave my child alone. I was adamant. After that she did not know what to do. She brought the child and put him inside the car. Put the safety belt for the child; she said "Let the child be free and enjoyed the ride, I told her and immediately took the car from there. I was heavily under the influence of heroine. At a terrific speed I drove the car..... No it was flying like a plane..... child was laughing, laughing and enjoying the ride and observing the things passing around. But it did not take so long..... high speed..... I lost control..... the vehicle toppled..... vehicle went rolling..... child also was inside the car. After that I did not know what happened. I woke up in the hospital. Now he turned his face away from me. I was not interested to know whether he was crying or not. I was only worried that the child died. After that cruel accident the child's body might have torn into pieces..... that dreadful sight was in my mind. I did not want to ask what happened thereafter. For all the disaster, drugs were the main cause. I detested the drugs. He told thereafter that he had been taking drugs without any control. Once he was caught with 100 gms. of heroine to police he said. He sold his wealth and defended himself in the court of law. But everything was in vain. He was sentenced to 8 years of imprisonment. But due to his good conduct he was released after 3 years for the reason that he should exist and form a new life. So many restrictions imposed on him" he said.

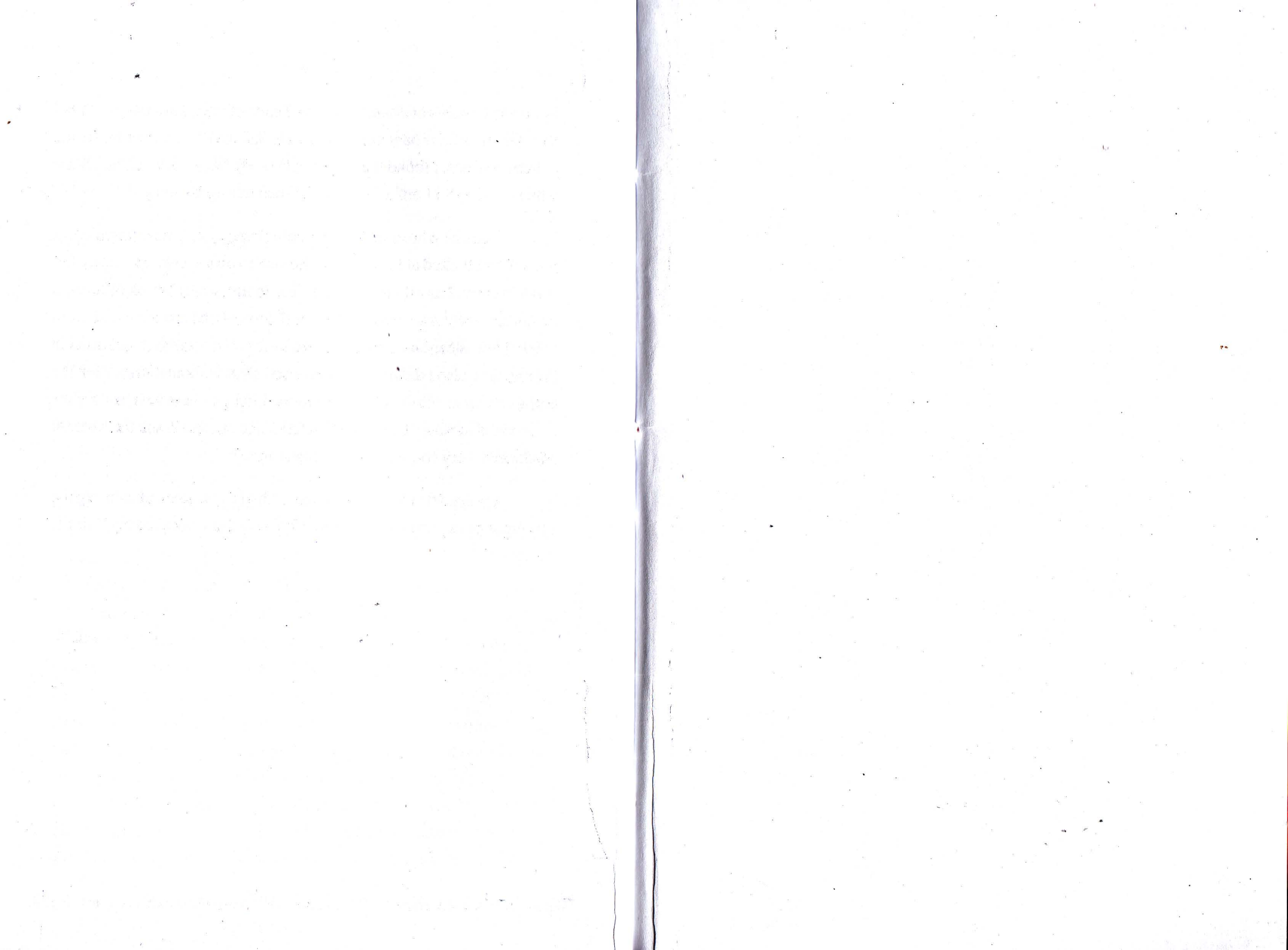
For a day I could consume only 1 or 2 cans of beer. I am not permitted to enter any liquor bars and Discos. He said this was the order by the police and cried. I found that I cannot live any longer in Canada. That is why I came to Sri Lanka. Now he finished telling his story.

The one who enjoyed a peaceful happy life is now fallen into a pit. When I looked at him the way he seated on the culvert I really felt sorry for him. Now there is a great fear in me, when I think of foreign countries. I told my nephew that I will come in the morning and went home. I fell asleep and got up in the morning. Usual coffee that I drink in the morning also I did not have because I slept without dinner. I felt the emptiness of my stomach. I went to the kitchen, there was last night's rice soaked in water. I squeezed took the rice out and drank the water. It produced a very cooling effect to my stomach.

I prayed that I should not have a bad experience like this again. I thought of my profession, worshiped God and went straight to the paddy field.

(2004)













His social thoughts have enriched the content value of the stories.

Descriptions of persons and events were often faithful to reality and so easy to identify.

He developed his characters and situations along distinctively moral lines.

It is very easy to find his social perception and cognition.

Social contradictions were reflected in conflicting characters in real situation.

The stories reflect tension between tradition and modernity in the Tamilian environment.

The First hand experiences of social life provided him with resource for his creative life.

His message grown out from the structure of human experience, subjectivity and eclecticism.

Prof. SabaJayarajah.



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