



Decline and Recovery

Kohila Mahendran

Translated by :
Savithiri Umamaheswaran

Solaikkuyil Avaikkattu Kalam

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Introduction

Carefully crafted literary work is a beautiful art, but translating it is a complex and multifaceted endeavour because effective literary translation captures not only the literary meaning expressed by the original writer but also should reflect the subtle nuances, styles and emotional undertones without spoiling the original literary values. That is why literary translation is called a beautiful and delicate dance between languages and cultures. Thus, the successful translators around the world who make literary masterpieces accessible to global audience are respected for their attempts of fostering cross-cultural understanding that enriches the beauty of the literary world.

I consider my endeavour here as writing an introduction to this beautiful tapestry an unforgettable experience because of the original writer Mrs. Kokila Mahendrarajah whom I always admire not only for her beautiful creative work but also as a powerful personality that stands upright as a pinnacle of eminence among Jaffna women. My personal opinion about Kokila's short stories is that they are literary masterpieces that delve into the profound insights of human life with a mischievous undercurrent of mockery. Her skilful style maintains an admirable balance of mocking with light-hearted fun, the absurdities in the contemporary society and also delving deep into serious matters like psychology and advanced science. She has the potentiality of keeping the reader intellectually stimulated and amused simultaneously. As an admirer of the above interplay which is the true brilliance of her writing, I was cautious before writing this introduction and wanted to make sure that the delicacies that I admire in Kokila's writing have been correctly captured in the

translation. After reading through the first seven scripts sent to me, my fear eradicated, my curiosity increased and I was able to identify Mrs. Savithri Umamaheswaran as an efficient literary translator who can resonate capturing the essence of the original text, its tone, style and intended theme. I would like to congratulate Savithri for her skillful translation that successfully attempts to capture the profound depth and nuances of Kokila Mahendran.

My experience in the field of languages taught me that words have the power of transcending linguistic boundaries and carrying with them the weight of tradition, history, culture and all other experiences of human life. Appropriate choice of words allows hearts to speak to hearts across linguistic boundaries. Thus, a translator should ensure the audience clear communication and appropriate engagement through his or her choice of words to pour life into his work.

Savithri proved herself as a successful translator through her selection of words. Kokila's unique short story titles which usually stands out as reflections of her thoughts and emotions have been carefully handled by Savithri in her translation. 'Sacrificial Goat' for *Paliyaadu* is a simple example where we can appreciate the phrase selection 'Sacrificial Goat' instead of 'Goat sacrifice' as people usually use in our midst. Sacrificial goat effectively encapsulates the original story that is a story about the goat that is to be sacrificed and not the story about sacrifice itself. A good literary translator's scrutinizing eyes never miss even such minute aspects. Another interesting title is 'Dharsan of a corpse' for *Pinaththin tharisanam*. Both the original and the translation captures ambiguity as the paramount nuance to bring satire or mockery. The entire display of actions in the

funeral makes us to think whether the meaning of the title denotes people visiting the corpse or the corpse witnessing the entire melodrama- a dharsan in front of it? The second one is more suitable as a literary title and thus Savithri uses the word 'dharsan' instead of a pure English word in order to capture the mockery of Kokila. It is inevitable that I must point out the short story Chunnakam>Sydney>Chunnakam for the effect of style change in both the original and the translation. The language style that vividly suits the description of the typical Jaffna mini bus conductor attitude (*alapparai* in terms of modern Tamil colloquial use) with very short and fast utterances, suddenly changes when describing the scenario in a public bus in Australia where the writer undergoes a nostalgic embrace even though everything in the bus seems peaceful. The style change in the original is carefully followed in the translation also, so that the beauty of storytelling in the original is made to be retained.

Another inspiring aspect I admire in Savithri's translation is that she understands the fact that translation is not merely changing the words meaningfully from one language to the other. The true brilliance of translation depends on appropriate change as well as keeping the original unchanged wherever necessary. The address forms used in the Jaffna society such as *amma*, *annai* and *acca* and the socio-cultural and religious words like *pariyaariyaar*, *sanni*, *sunnam*, *vaduvaan* etc. are allowed to be in the translation independently or in a code-mixed position to preserve the rich socio-cultural background of the original work of art. I personally consider the story 'leg signature' (*Kaal oppam*) as one of the master pieces of Kokila, which is loaded with multi-elements beyond description, has been

carefully handled by Savithri in order to retain the original effect.

'Decline and recovery' is the title of this beautiful book of translation and also it is the translated title of Kokila's story *Viluthalum Eluthalum*. What clicked in my mind when I saw this title is that this juxtaposition can be considered a miniature representative of Jaffna peninsula itself which underwent drastic changes- declines and recoveries several times in its socio-cultural, economic, political and educational endeavours. The short story 'Decline and Recovery' speaks about the struggle and hardship a Jaffna woman encountered in a pharmacy where she was trying to buy a prescribed medicine for her husband who is a heart patient. The protagonist and the hardship she underwent during the time of emergency in Jaffna become a symbol depicting the courageous Jaffna women for whom the decline and recovery is not new. Therefore, the title suggests a promising note that after every decline there will be recovery and this book itself is a promising addition to the existing world of literary translation as it is a milestone work of art by Savithri Umamahesaran, a Jaffna woman translator translating Kokila Mahendran a popular Jaffna woman writer.

I highly recommend this work to anyone interested in general, and particularly to the students of literary translation with a fervent hope that more works of this nature will flourish among us in future

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Translator's note

I was brought up during the colonial regime ,when children were taught in the English medium. Their mother tongue was neglected. Hence my comprehension via English was better than via Tamil.

Kohila Mahendran is a famous woman writer in Srilanka. Her literary career spans more than five decades. She has won many awards for her writings including National level awards for her two short story collections "Pirasavankal" in 1986 and "Valvu oru Valaippanthaddam" in 1997.

K.S.Sivakumaran, a well known critic of this country has stated , "Her statement and craft are so polished that one finds it refreshing to read her depiction of Jaffna society-particularly the relationship between people of different generations" in his criticism about her short story collection "Muranpadukalin Aruvadai"(Harvest of conflicts) in 1984 and concluded "Her stories are thought provoking and are also appealing because of the psychological realism in them". This appreciation is about her early writings. Her works later are more deep and more bent towards scientific and psychological realism .

I knew that Kohila's works mirrored the calamities of the life of Srilankan Tamils and I thought my comprehension will be better if her works were in English. Hence my attempt at this translation.

English happens to be a global language to reflect our plight on the world arena. The children of the Srilankan Tamil migrants living abroad "who are born and bred there" and generally the public all over the world will get a clear grasp of the situation when they read some of her works through this translations.

It is my pleasant duty to thank Kohila for supporting and motivating me in this work .I am grateful to Dr. (Mrs.) Karuna Sivaji who knows Kohila very well for her valuable introduction and "Sopa" who helped in the translation of some difficult words and I am indebted to Amma Achakam for printing .

A special word of thanks to Solaikkuyil Avaikkattukkalam for undertaking the publication and Nayanu for her Cover design.

Vizliciddy .
Tellippalaai.

Savithiri Umamaheswaran

01. Idols denied Incantation	01
02. Faces and Masks	08
03. Dharsan of a Corpse	19
04. Chunnakam<Sydney<Chunnakam	25
05. Capturing millipedes!	34
06. Jacaranda	43
07. This, that and the other mind	49
08. Decline and Recovery	60
09. Apocalypse	70
10. Is she Inanimate?	80
11. Testimony of a virus	87
12. Sacrificial goats	96
13. Leg Signature	102

Idols denied Incantation

"Those who have music ,literature and the like as their hobbies are very sensitive. They can't tolerate even minor flaws. They are easily upset. Though proud ,they are soft natured."

These lines she read long ago in an article called, "what is your hobby ?" now unfolded in her mind.

When Gobi stood up excitedly as though waking up from a different world—as he noticed the teacher looking at his exercise book-Raji could clearly see his fingers and feet trembling. Not showing she noticed it, she asked , "Have you finished drawing and labelling the seeds I gave you ?"

It was fifteen minutes since the work was given. The other students had finished drawing and labelling. In Gobi's exercise book the lines of this poem---she relished those lines again.

"In sweet slumber like a beetle, *Kundumani
Your birdie sister has come to carry you away.
As on her beak, you travel Kundumani,
You will be envy of *Nayuruvi"

- Gobi Krishna-

* Kundumani and Nayuruvi - Seeds.



This abbreviation Gobi Krishna of the full name Gobinathan Krishnarasa, she intently noticed—was most becoming of a poet. But she was infuriated momentarily because he was the only one who had ignored her instructions as a teacher.

"I gave you these seeds of crab's eye and stick tight to draw diagrams to show how they are adapted to dispersal. But you ---"She didn't finish—but her keen look brought tears to his eyes and he remained silent.

That situation—yes! She also stood like that one day. In front of her husband --!

Thoughts of those days when she was young leaped beyond the roof of the sky. It was only a few months after her marriage. At the onset of December, the best of months, a joy naturally settles in her heart usually. Thirty different "Kolums " for thirty days—flour design one day, flower design on the other day and scraped coconut design on yet another day—as these unfold in her imagination, her courtyard blossoms in a smile. Specially this year, would be her husband's enchantment over her designs. This imagination made her plan and enjoy drawing so many new designs in her mind.

That morning as early as 5am, she suddenly woke up as if somebody had roused her. She jumped up, finished her bath, swept and polished the courtyard and as she sat down with colour dyes and scraped coconut, the 5.45 siren sounded at the K.K.S cement factory. Her husband hadn't got up.



"When he wakes up, I would finish this"

Within a few minutes, with deft fingers—she was so absorbed in the art—she didn't hear the 6'0 clock siren. When she straightened after deftly making a multicoloured design—the music that precedes news was heard over the radio.

"Oh! 6.30 already, he would have got up. Let him come and see."

When she moved with great joy blossoming on her face—he came in front. Like a baby about to breast feed looking eagerly at its mother's face, she expectantly looked at his face. But there was no response.

"What is this Raji? Like a great artist you are seated here for hours at a stretch—work is at a stand still in the kitchen."

He did not even look well at her design. As he stepped on the courtyard throwing the towel on his shoulder and walked to the well-side, he stepped on the design erasing a part of it.

Stopping the tears with great effort, she controlled herself.

On the next day also she put a design with only four lines on it. When there is no one to appreciate, when there is no one to respect the spirituality,—does it matter if it is four lines or forty lines?



"Before 8.30am, she has to finish both breakfast and packed lunch for her husband and herself, and leave for work. It will be 4 or 4.30 in the evening when she returns. She gets one or two free periods at school but she spends them in correcting exercise books or preparing the lab for the next science lesson. As soon as she returns home she makes tea, fills the flasks and as there is fire in the hearth, finishes cooking dinner only by 7.30 and closes the kitchen. Dinner and bed time is around 9.pm. The one and a half hours in between is her leisure time. This is the time when imaginary flights-new ideas—that give mental peace—are born.

In the one and a half years after marriage, did he notice how she spent these one and a half hours in her world of literature ? Perhaps he did, but didn't speak about it. She didn't know.

If she enters her room and sits at her table at 7.30pm, the next one and a half hours passes like one and a half minute. When her creations are broadcast over the radio ,or published in newspapers or magazines she does not make a fuss. It is not her habit.

When her husband doesn't come forward by himself with any comments about her creations, she doesn't ask him anything. She did not ask until that day.

That particular evening when she saw the magazine she couldn't believe herself. That news attracted her eyes. In the all Ceylon poetry competition conducted by the Ministry of Cultural affairs, Raji has won the first prize of 1000Rs. Is it a dream or real ? She rubbed her eyes and



pinched herself to check. When after making sure it was real, she came out with the magazine in hand, her mind in a daze of joy. Her husband was seated in an easy chair in the court yard reading a news paper.

"Did you see this ?Did you see who won the first prize 1000Rs in this poetry competition?"

With her face bright like a lotus flower that blossomed the very day, she handed the paper to him.

"Yes .Yes. I saw. Now how many years have you spent two or three hours daily on story and poetry writing—only now you gave got 1000Rs.Had you spent this time on Science tuition, you could have earned 5000 or 6000Rs per year. Without lifting his hand from the news paper ,absent minded, he gave the answer and again buried his head in the Newspaper.

Then for a moment,

Now like this student standing in front of her ,she stood silent with tears flowing from her eyes—only for a moment. The tears that sprouted did not stream down. She checked and swallowed down the sorrow that (boiled over within her heart)overwhelmed her. She is easily touched by feelings.—so why didn't she cry then ?Why didn't she fall on the bed and burst into sobs and tears—to this day she doesn't know. Perhaps she thought, no use crying for the view of those who judge stories, poems and literature by the rupees they earn!



Next evening a relative of her husband came. He is out spoken -doesn't hide his feelings ,or thoughts.

"Who gave you the first prize ?You have chosen the much debated-age old-cast issue.—that also in the very old style of four lines and eight lines structure. How good it would have been had you written a love story in blank verse! How is this —without even a punch of salt-I don't like it .I wouldn't have given the first prize to this —"

He rendered an opinion to this effect .A smile without her lips parting was her only answer. Such discouraged criticism didn't let her write again. Once —only once —did she win first prize in All Ceylon literary contest. That was her first and the last. Checking her unsung, not grown, unconsidered, unrecognized, not praised , not nurtured talents within herself —how many years had she lived like a machine ,filling her role as a lifeless teacher and house wife.

Living such an internally not nurtured life, she was about to fade away as a not blossomed flower.

But this student !

Perhaps his home background and society would crush him also. All the forty students in her science class wouldn't for sure become great scientists. She can't expect that. Amidst these students great poets, artists and writers could be hidden. Very easily they could be nipped in the bud. If so nipped, they would roam the streets like lifeless bodies. Puzzled by the teacher's preoccupation and a little scared, he blurted out—



"Teacher—teacher—I will finish the diagram soon teacher."

She patted him on the back.

"Gopi, this poem of yours is really good. I am dazed how you could—at such a tender age, write a poem as good as this. Here let's see, write another poem about these chaste tree seeds and "Oddoddi" seeds.!"

Immersed in the overflow of her love, his eyes withdrew the tears that welled in his eyes and smiled in wonder and joy. Looking at him, she lost herself in joy. The picture of Gobi—who in later years becomes a famous poet, and with tears of joy welling in his eyes thinks of her with gratitude, unfolds in her mind. She sinks into a chair nearby overwhelmed by her feelings.

(Broad cast in Srilankan Broadcasting Co-operation
Tamil service I-on 05.01.1983)

Faces and Masks

When he entered the village yesterday morning ,the whole village was engaged in filling the place with festoons ,mango leaves, banana trees, and coconut saplings in honour of the dead Mannar Commander.

Raghu,Ravi and Kumaran were absorbed in placing the photo in the junction and lighting incense sticks .He felt an overwhelming inner satisfaction.

"People have begun honouring us". He wanted to tell them not to waste banana and coconut saplings but thought better of it for his wisdom ought not interfere with their sentimental actions!

Ignoring the drizzle , he sat on the sand hill. Next to it was such a big Banyan tree. In earlier days , he used to see this Banyan tree every day .
It was such a peace!

It would be good if someone would come on a bike through the very narrow by lane and talk to him for a while. How long ago did he talk like that ?

He peeped. Nobody came. Raghu , Ravi, Kumaran- none came. Although he had asked them to come to the temple side in the morning, they haven't come. Why ?



Seated on the roots of this Banyan tree, Ravi would sing this song.

"A Tamil Lion Little Brother—"

How exhilarating is that song!

At the junction of the temple street and the very narrow by lane, two goats were grazing on the fresh green grass that sprouted with the November rains. Like him they also were ignoring the rains because of the tasty grass--!

He has risen higher than Raghu ,Ravi and Kumaran. Has this height ruined their intimacy between them and him? They are all sitting the A/L exam this time. He is not sitting but he has risen higher than them. His excellence in sports won him popular success in something that all four wished. Those who didn't win?

It's very early morning when darkness hasn't gone completely. The whistling sea breeze cools the bare body and leaves. He smiled without lips parting. The feelings that rose in his heart –are they happiness or sadness? He didn't know. The festoons that were hung yesterday to honour the Mannar Commander looked rather faded. They didn't even know the Commander in person.

Every body knew him. During the college days Indran master always teased him. Made fun of him, but in the teasing there was a dear affection. When he gave wrong answers to his Science questions , he would say, "Your answers deserve a banana peel garland and an empty soda bottle to drink from—" and laugh.



Yesterday evening, on his way, he accidentally met him. He went past him with a small smile. He felt it would have been better had he stayed a while to tease him.

Three years ago on a dawn like this armoured vehicles roared along. Ranjan was caught then. After his days in Boosa, his father tried hard to send him to England. But suddenly on an early morning, he went where he wished to go.

Bells chimed at the temple side. Is it *Thiruvempavai' bells? It was raining. The sound of bells mingling with the rain was strangely pleasant. This time 'Thiruvempavai' also has come in November.

"Even the Tamil who had clung to Ahimsa and Ahimsa persistently for so many years has changed. Why shouldn't I?" 'Thiruvempavai' that usually comes in December has come in November this time.

He got up and walked to the bell tower. Who rang the bell ? Not the priest ! Mad Nesammah. Her son was burnt alive in 1958. This event has made her psychotic.

"Do you know me Nesammah ? I am Subramanya master's son Senthil.—"

"Curry leaves Subramanya master ? I know —I know—" began Nesammah and continued "A B --C- D—Old man's beard----Aeroplane is coming—It's bombing—" with such disconnected talk, she sat on the sand and started to draw a mango.

* Thiruvempavai - collection of spiritual song and festival



He came back and sat on the sand.

At the junction of the street that parted from the western side of the temple ,he could dimly see a new statue that was erected in honour of a Moothoor militant who had died bravely.

"A gift from Singapore Chellaiyah"

These words were written below in big letters.

A figure appeared at the entrance of the big lane. Could it be Kanchana? He looked keenly!

In this village ,she was more agreeable to him. He was very fond of her anklet clad feet. He had come so far in the desire of being able to see her once. But he couldn't meet her.

Only when he came close, he could discern his father going to the market with a basket. House hold burden was too much for his father. It could be this too much responsibility that made him jump angrily at everybody all the time. If mother had been there, perhaps would things have been different?

The thought of Amma's last moments in hospital-- Her words, embracing him—"grow up to be useful to society—"—so many winters have passed since she uttered them—were still very fresh in his memory.

Can't say he hadn't lived up to his mother's expectations. Father might not understand now that how useful is he to the society .But truth will not ever hide anywhere.



Father went past him and the sand hill quietly. He knew there was terrible heat in his quietness.

In the silence of calm, the rays of the sun spread reflected light among the cirrus clouds.

Father didn't like him joining "this". Appa wanted him to become a doctor. Father was deceived in his impossible expectations. But he was in no way responsible for it.

Anton who is always first in class got 4S last year . He comes 10th-15th (rank) in class. Yet his father wanted him to be a doctor.

On the parapet walls of the temple many posters mourning the dead were stuck by the community centre. Father is the president of the community centre!

Appa is selfish. He and his family should do well with a new house T.V ,Deck, Honda , Three in one, Antenna , Mixer , Grinder ,Ice cream set etc. Thoughts beyond these are difficult for Appa.

Although the older generation try their best to hide their white hair amidst their black hair, the white hair shoot out somehow. Appa who lived with the pressure of suppressed inefficiencies, burst out and shouted yesterday. Appa had brought brinjal and edible leaves from the market. Akka looking at it said "When I wash the brinjal is oily and it smells--may be it is oiled with insecticides—Do I cook it or not?"



It was then that he came and stood in the front yard. He expected a welcome but didn't get it. Appa's face showed a little surprise. Not being able to stand out as a stranger, he went to his sister's side and said, "The applied oil shows on Keerai. Don't cook it—Terrible poison."

"He who went to save the country should get lost. Why come back and—interfere in family matters?" screamed Appa. At that moment he realised this—Hating some one—even though he is your son is very easy.

Hasn't he done anything for this house? Until he left—it was he who did the shopping! He had even done the cooking with his sister. Even the place where he had his vegetable plot has gone barren now. Has Appa forgotten all these?

At that moment all the joy within him melted away. He underwent a strange mental stress—He didn't want to speak to anyone in the house—at the same time he wanted to talk to every one—including his father—for one last time before he left.

Only his younger sister, who was shooting toy soldiers with a toy pistol and playing came running to him with laughter.

"Brother, what have you brought for me?" she asked. Then he felt he could have bought at least a Kandos for her.

He wasn't ever up to any mischief. He was a quite boy. He expected his sudden departure would have been a rude shock not only to his father or sisters but also to the



whole village. But – returning after three years as a fully trained militant—and then going away would be like showing peace and joy to all and taking away would be a nice experience—he believed that way. He was wrong.

People have changed. All say –No! Many like Appa remain basically unchanged. The snake doesn't purify itself by shedding its skin. Even if the older generation doesn't understand—at least Acca? Only after Appa raised his voice and shouted at him –Acca was weeping.

The expectations of a normal Acca— 'My younger brother should go to Kuwait--earn lacks and lacks of rupees—build me a new house – buy for me a new husband—be a good uncle for my children and without getting married until forty—provide my children all what they want—"

She has to cry. The bitter thought that nobody at home was proper rose in his mind. His mind was so bitter that he couldn't appreciate the jasmine smell from the temple garden, brought by the morning breeze.

A bike that came fast pressed the brake by his side. 'Hello Senthil—How are you? When did you come?—It's we who were on sentry duty at the beach last night."

"Did anything happen? Noises were heard "

"Oh—as usual they tried to come out—We hit the helicopter with fifty calibre. Two or three would have fallen down. They retreated—"

"I see—"

Don't know from where the sudden flow of such enthusiasm and happiness sprouted from. He didn't sleep



last night. He had made a bunker in the back garden. Appa, Acca and younger sister all three could take shelter there. The work that he started in the evening was over only by 10 pm. After that he wished to see again and again every part of the house and village he had lived in. The whole night was spent thus.

Perhaps he would die this month in the fierce three fold attack planned by the oppositions. He did not live to die. But perhaps he would die to live forever. Before that he wanted to see everybody and everything once again. These desires filled his heart like sea foam.

There was perfect silence outside. There was another smell overwhelming the smell of jasmine entered his nose.

"What is it *Machchan?"

"Somebody is spraying Enrex."

They turned and looked to the North. They could see "Bear Suppar" spraying insecticide to Brinjal plants. Looking at him he was reminded of the old woman Ponnu. Taking Kannan along with him he hurried to the old woman's house. On the way he asked "How is it Kannan? What are the people talking in the area?"

"Generally there is good will towards us. There are many matters. Most important-they all praise the situation where the army cannot come out."

* Machchan - word to call a friend.



"They are ready to praise when others do it. Their children should become doctors."

There was irritation in his voice. Old woman Ponnu was digging her nose as usual. There was always dried phlegm in the old woman's nose and she would be digging it out. Can't say when this habit started. She had large bright eyes. It looked as though these eyes have her 80 years life experience secured in them. Also- -these eyes had a longing look. When she saw his shadow she inquired, "Who--Who --Who is this? Is it our Senthil? When did you come child? Won't you go away again?"

It was raining heavily. On the day before he left also, it rained heavily like this. That was also a winter!

When he was feeling many petals had withered away from the flower of love his household has shown him-the old woman's love was a surprise and solace. If his mother had been living -she would have lovingly inquired like this. He had thought of everyone and come to see them. This old woman had given him a feeling of fulfilment of his purpose.

He went and sat beside the old woman. He liked the mixed smell of her sweat and the old saree very much. "So child, what and what did they train you to do? Did they train you to shoot planes also?"

He laughed. His laughter could have meant anything and everything. He had a feeling that even the unsoft atmosphere around that seemed to laugh at him had softened.



"They trained me in everything". The old woman got up, came near and felt all over him. Near his tummy, below the sarong there was something bulging.

"What is this at your waist?"

"Palm leaf purse Grandma"

Big laughter!

Then he took it out and showed it." This is a small gun. It's called a pistol—for self protection." Grandma got it and looked at it carefully. Old woman's son Suppar came with a sack full of brinjals.

"Brother, why so much of brinjals?"

"I am going to take it to the market."

He was shocked.

"But just now you sprayed insecticide?"

"If plucked soon after spraying insecticide, they won't wither away. Brokers prefer it. Will fetch a good price."

"No, It's wrong to do so. It's food problem for many humans. You mustn't take it as it is and sell—"

"What is it Senthil? You come from nowhere and try to interfere in our household affairs?"

The old woman's voice is a little raised now.

"This insecticide will not disintegrate even after entering the body. It will be the cause of many new diseases. Ask Indran Master"

He tried his best to make them understand, but failed.

*Sarong - Male dress



"Did they train you to shoot the military or to put your hands on our family income?"

Suppar asked very angrily.

"Winning the goal is no big problem. There are many problems after that. The most important problem is pollution of the atmosphere. I will never allow you to take these brinjals to the market."

So saying determinedly, he took the sack with the brinjals. All of a sudden the old woman's face underwent a sudden change.

"Looser! You will never do well. You have ruined our livelihood. In the end you will be shot by the army and destroyed."

As he walked away, he could hear from behind these bitter words full of hatred. Strange are the hearts of men!

"If I am killed tomorrow in an attack—I have met and talked to all the people who are going to honour me with Garlands—mourn my death and put up a statue. Now I am going to leave. I must be there this evening." So saying to Kannan, he walks fast. A smile appears at the corner of his lips and disappears. A pathetic weariness shows in his eyes.

Who are you to him?—An intimate friend? Even then it wouldn't be possible for him to express his feelings to you.

(Won the 1st Prize in the short story competition
conducted by Norway Tamil Union.)
1986



03

Dharsan of a Corpse

The usual singers of the area, seated in a row, were singing *"Thiruvasham". Nadarajar who entered just then, ran to his cycle, rummaged in the torn leaf bag hanging on it — pulled out a "Thiruvasham" badly damaged by silverfish-joined the row, opened the spectacle cover and put on his specs, dirty at the joints. What then? All wild cries like donkeys braying!

Not able to put up with the mourning words of daughter-in-law Pooranam and others, old man Thambimuthu had asked for the recital of "Thiruvasham", but the sour recital failed to give him mental peace. It made him feel like a compulsion to run and run around the house. Tear sprouted outside of his eyes as an outward expression of his inner pressure due to a large number of mental stress factors. He wiped it with his shawl.

With his well built body and blooming face, her husband looked as though alive and sleeping for Pooranam. She hugged and kissed his white tag covered lips like one mad.

"My God --!My king--!You have left me and gone.!Now who will look to for a living? My pet--,what am I going to do ?—You have left me crying like this —"

* Thiruvasham - Colletion of spiritual songs



At times crying aloud in despair for neighbours to hear—at times in silent contemplation—At times silently mourning and weeping, all of a sudden—looking at Pooranam spending time with such behaviour, even hardened hearts would melt.

Loosing a man at forty-when life should be blooming-to a fever called Meningitis that attacked for no reason-it is enough painfully to hurt any heart.

In a corner of the living room where some women were squatting in a circle and rumours were discussed.

"Is it true—why such a fever—killing people within two days of onset,—I never heard the like of it"—Green nylex saree seated next is secretly answering the query raised by yellow Indian voile saree." He was moving around in the hospital shaking his hands and legs in jerks it seems. Who knows? Could have taken some poison"—The blue boarder sitting on the eastern end joined in. "Always problems in the family—as to who is greater—his party or the wife's party—always several issues—even if it is a suicide, they won't let it out—They will cover it up."

By the speed with which they kept adding on to the story—it seemed they'd soon prove it was a suicide.

"Danku—Dukkudu—Dukkudu-Dukkudu, Danku—Danku—"As the blare of the drums started, Nadarasar voiced loudly from his seat, "Tell them to stop the drums. We aren't done with singing *"Thevarams".

* Thevaram - collection of spiritual songs



"Who is it ordering the drums to stop? Its I who hired them. I tell them to play. Who is that poking to intervene—"This is the voice of old man Thampipillai's eldest son Muttaiya. Nadarasar though angry at heart is biding his time. Those coming from Colombo by Yarl Devi will come by 3 pm. Until then the funeral won't be a good show.

Tired people at the funeral gossiping village rumours in corners became alert at the sound of horn of the car from the station. Before Thampipillai's youngest son Sivaraja could take a step from the car , old man Thambipillai ran and hugged him.

"I am a sinner, who couldn't show you your brother alive. I didn't even inform you he was sick. Who thought this would happen?—that he would die at this age ? No soothsayer had forecast this" Such mourning words of his father uttered while beating his chest violently hurt Sivaraja to the core. Looking at his son shedding copious tears Thambipillai rolled on ground and cried.

"Alas, I gave birth to you to cremate me. Now you make me cremate you. No. I can't. I will not"

Lifting old man Thambipillai and hugging him to his heart Ramu *Pariyariar said, "What is the use of crying now ? Had you sent for me instead of trusting English treatment I 'd have saved him. This is *"Sanni" disease. English treatment won't cure it .Hym—past is past. No use discussing it now. Concentrate on future." On the pretence

* Pariyariyar - old traditional word in Tamil for Doctor

* Sanni - a disease - pneumonia



of placating the old man, Ramu Pariyariyar asserted the merits of his native treatment in the correct place.

After settling his affairs and drinking half a bottle of *'black', soothsayer Nadesu came to the funeral and said, "Last year when I had a look at Thambipillai's horoscope, I said he was in for a big loss and should placate the statue of planet Saturn by applying oil, had he believed me, this wouldn't have happened. At least in future they will take me seriously." He was boasting to someone there.

They took the body behind the house to give it a bath. The cold war waging all this while burst forth now. How to decorate the body was the issue.

"He came to this house like a bridegroom clad in Silk Versty and shawl and head gear. He should be sent to the cemetery in the same way." This was the view of Pooranam's elder brother Nadaraja. Sivarajah didn't agree to this. The old man observed the clash of views and hurried hence. But before that Nadaraja took a new shawl and fixed the head gear. If his word was allowed to be law in this assembly, then he(the old man) would be nobody in that house-so thinking the old man said," He had lost his head gear and hue here-so why a head gear for him now? " So saying he removed and threw away the head gear." This is your heritage-the way of your caste-creating trouble in any assembly"

As soon as these words of Nadarajar fell in his ears, the old man said, " Who is that *'vaduvan "talking about my

* black - alcohol

*Vaduvan - Term using to denote a caste



caste? Shall I announce your wife's caste in this assembly?" With these words the old man took the pestle that was brought there for "Sunnam" grinding in his hand.

Unable to bear the insult of being called 'Vaduvan' by the old man, Nadarajar took in hand the knife kept for breaking coconuts.

Blue boarder, peeping from behind, told red Nylex "See Acca what I told was right.—Long term problem as to who belongs to a higher caste—Now they won't take the body in the near future.—I am going."

"Wait .Let's see what happens before we go. They could cut each other"Red Nylex didn't want to miss any news. She kept peeping anticipating a fight.

"What do you have got to talk with the bad caste—"so saying Nadaraja's wife pulled his hand." Let go my hand. I have to see what they are up to —"roaring that way he struggled to free himself from his wife's clutches.

Some who seemed to be Nadarajar's relatives, broke the posts of the shed. Scared by this action ,women ran helter-skelter, some one crushed Blue boarder ,she fell to the ground and got up .Children burst into screams, and there arose a situation where no one knows what was happening. Now relatives friends and neighbours left saying, "It will be dark before they come to a settlement and take the body. Let's leave—"There was a big crowd in the front yard a while ago, but now only a few were left. It seemed the worries that were clear from the morning till now, had disappeared without knowing in what direction they left.

*Sunnam grinding - A part of Hindu funeral rites



"No body should touch my child. I alone could carry and cremate him. All the dogs get out—"The old man Thambipillai's anger crossed the limits, words spurt forth without control as he roared like a lion.

The corpse lay there uncared for witnessing dirty events that proved the following truths.-None had come for the funeral to show grief for his untimely death, but they had come to exhibit their skills and to prove the superiority of their caste in this assembly. They have such selfish motives to manipulate the crowd.!

(Won prize in short story competition conducted by Tamil cultural union of Irrigation department.-1980.Reprinted in Eeelanadu-Paris weekly, Feb-1992, Appeared in the short story collection of Srilanka-1982)

Chunnakam<Sydney<Chunnakam

2005-Chunnkam

"Getting down at Temple Entrance halt"

"Those who are getting down at temple entrance halt, get up and come soon—don't dilly dally. All are going to work—It's getting late—Grandma—you know you are getting down here, why did you go behind--?You could have stood here next to me —come soon—you are getting old, but can't stay at home—you want to go about—Push your way here—Anna get down a little, you can get in again".

"Acca ,get in—There is space get in—At near by Thurai street, many are getting down—get in—other acca—are you waiting for CTB ?" "He won't come now—wait till your leg breaks"

"Acca—go back a little—What sort of people are you? —you have no conscience—It's enough if you only go—Don't others go to work ,or hospital? There—there is a lot of space there —Amma look in the direction of bus travel—Get back—what are you going to do by hugging me at the entrance ?I am asking you —Hi—Hi"

"Child get in here behind the driver. Oh, Anna climb up. If you stand at the footboard, there will be a



problem for me with the police. Put in your foot some how and climb up—"

"Ah—no one is getting down at Thurai street. Right—"

(In a soft voice)"Anna go soon. He is chasing us."

"Those who are getting down at Kondavil, come soon. Once you get in , you sit as though you are never going to get down. Is it?"

You go and settle at the back. Come soon. Stand on the foot board. Faster—faster —mm—mm-faster. Those who are going to work are all tensed up —you are moving slowly —Come on —here. If you fall, I will catch you. Get down soon—right—"

"All of you who want to get in—get in —Can give you seats. Get in ! Some one !Give a seat to this acca with a child. What ?Are you ladies? You are not kind at all "When we get up ,where do we stand?" Is that your question? Come this way. Here I am standing with half a foot on the foot board. You speak of equality. Come and stand with me, let me see!"

Acca, get up —Three can't sit on that seat. Get up I say. If you put your leg like that how can one stand there?Putting your leg like that you are the space of ten people. You are sick ,you say. But you are going for treatment. So you will be o.k. Now stand up—"



"Amma stop talking and go back. Tomorrow if fighting starts and he uses the multibarrel, only bullets will fall into your open mouth. Women are always chat boxes. It is not enough to talk about jewels, sarees and house hold. You are to talk of hospital also. You can talk later when you get down, now look well for space and get back, why are you clutching on to the steel pole? You leave it. It won't fall."

"What is this —He drives as though the whole road belongs to him. Narrow escape isn't it?"

"Bus has to be fast. If you want to be slow, you could travel by bullock cart. What nonsense ? Sudden brakes may jerk you backwards and forwards. But definitely you won't fall on this crowd. No fear !Leave your hold—"

(In secret) "Faster Anna he has come closer"—"Who is grumbling? Sister, what is the problem? In a bus travel, other peoples' hand and feet may touch you. If you are a chaste queen, you ought to travel by private car. Don't complain. No body can do anything to you in public. I am here you know—don't be afraid."

"What now ? Thavady has come. In one breath we will reach Jaffna. Move and move a little more closer. Are we going to leave behind Thavadi people !—Poor folk, Amma get in—I will find you space. Get in soon. Why do you want to travel with all this bag and baggage? The baggage will take five people's place —Anna in front! Have this baggage in your lap—Two tickets for baggage



you have to pay. Hospital things or funeral things—baggage is baggage, is it not?"

"Kulappiddy people get up and come. Amma move a little out of the way. You are blocking the way. Let the people pass by. You are very thin(in a teasing voice)why not stand between those seats? It's only other people's feet that stepped on your feet. So why do you scream? What will you do if you step on a land mine and lose your foot?"

"Those getting down come to the footboard soon—soon—I have to pull you by the hand. Don't you have a mouth? Why can't you say you are getting down as you come—You are happy when you are getting in—Later you are reluctant to get down.—Anna stop the music. They are listening to it—and not getting down. Take your change. Do I have a bank to change all your money? Look into your *"Koddapeddi" and find coins. Acca, I don't have change to pay your balance. If I have why should I take your money?—Get down—Get down—Just for a five rupee balance you are putting on a fight. You look as though you haven't ever seen money—when will these people see light? I don't know."

"Get in—Get in—No bus on this road in the near future. So how can we leave you behind.? Don't we have a conscience! You get in Acca—I mean you Acca—Are you waiting for CTB? You are going to stop our bus tomorrow. We will see then—"

"Annai Right"

* Koddapeddi - a small purse made of palmyrah leaves.



"Acca, don't sit on that engine box. It is hot. You will get urine trouble. I am addressing you. Stand up. Turn in the direction of the bus.—"

"No. Anna don't go to the front seat. Three people can't sit there. Can't change gear then. Please stand—It's only a short distance. Are you feeling giddy —Don't be afraid. You won't fall".

"No one is getting down. Right —"

Those getting down at the next halt, come with your change. Only now you will open your "Koddapeddi". Can't you bring the change when you get into the bus ?

"Sister! Don't lean on the glass. it will break and hurt your hand "

"Those getting down at Kokkuvil school come soon. Child, six rupees child, you look old enough to get married ,but you are asking for a half ticket .Take out the money you've reserved to buy juice—take it out."

"Grandma, I will give you the box. What ? Am I going to take it away with me ? Annai, Please get that box—not that one —the other one—take it —take it—quick—it's getting late for the school children."

"Get in --get in—Thamby—push your way back—Who is that ?Feel like vomiting? Put your head out of the window child —Oh—you should be on the look out for a vehicle before you put your head out. Narrow escape—your head would have gone flying now."



"Ah—getting down--?Grandma get down soon. Ah-- Ah why did you fall? You will get well soon. Get up—get up—right!"

(In a low tone)"Let him overtake after Thaddar street. Not much crowd beyond that"

"Annai, where about is Thurkka going—Ah Ah—not bad"

"Getting down at Sivalinkappuliaddy?—Don't murmur from behind. Come out. Why do you travel with a hundred rupee note? To show you are rich-- ?Bring it .No two rupee change. Take it. They give hundred rupee note and fight for two rupee change."

"Ladies are loud mouths."

"Right—right—have come to the town. Slowly come one by one—with your money—Let's see .Why in a hurry--?Why are you all in a hurry when you see the town? Wait—wait—Now what—Has some one died ?Come one by one—Acca, don't be in such a hurry. What if you are a little bit late one day ?Will you lose your job ?In the hospital they give medicine until evening. Amma wait a little—Where did you get in ?Chunnakam ?I will see the men first. Wait child—now at school you will be doing P.T—Wait I will come"

"Oh—well—what a hell I have with these people"

"Annai, why are you seated? Not getting off the bus?"



"Thambi ,I am a doctor. I come from Australia. My native place is Jaffna.I went there recently. I came to help those psychologically affected by the trauma due to war etc. I planned to build a home for the mentally affected people. Now after travelling in this private minibus, I think I could help you first."

"To me—Good—Will you then buy me a new minibus of my own—I will run it."

2010-Sydney

It was early in the morning when the yellow rays of the sun that covering the world starts to burn our skin. It is a happy sunny day of February summer. I am standing – no -- sitting and waiting for the bus number 483 at Liverpool road in Strathfield at 9.25.I am alone at the seat in the bus halt. The yellow box nearby shows that the next bus is due at 9.27.School rush and office rush over and the road is a little peaceful.

Sharp at 9.28 the bus comes. Slowly I get up and put my hand out to stop it. The bus draws near conveniently and the door under the driver's control opens. I get in and am looking at the one man playing the triple role of the driver, conductor and ticket checker.

"Good morning, how are you ?"He says .I reply that I am well and ask how he is .White Australian! Clean shaven smiling face. He is not asking where I am going. I put out my card "My bus one". The cost of my travel is less than two dollars. But he isn't bothered—he believes I know it. He put my card in the Green machine. Day and time is printed.



I take a look. Where to sit ?I can sit anywhere. I take a seat close to the button I had to press to get down. After making sure I am seated, he locks the door steadily and takes the bus.

I take a look at the bus. Blue and red seats with lovely cushion covers. There are six seats facing each other reserved for those with health defects and walking difficulties. Instruction for the operation of wheel chairs—how to stop it —how to put on brakes—are all clearly written.

Nobody can smoke or eat in the bus. No drink except water. This is also written. An exit in case of an emergency is marked. It is also said , "Break the glass in case of an emergency."

There is a separate ,high, enclosed area for baggage. Bus fares are clearly written.

There is a picture to explain that youngsters should give their seats to any elders who travel standing.

Well paved roads. Bus slides smoothly. The driver is careful in his work. Green ,red and yellow light guide him. They control all the vehicles. He need not say anything. No need to sound the horn even.

There should arise a music in our hearts, there should be a poetry appearing in the mind—such a peaceful journey. A gift of joy should embrace all over our body and gladden us.



When our senses are exhausted, our heart should be soaked in positive feelings. In the blooming trees outside, the embracing breeze is shown by the movement in leaves. That moist cool breeze should press on our face and pass—but can't see it!

Oh—This is an "Air con" bus. Outside air can't get in!

What is the problem ? Why can't I see the happiness I expected? Who else are in the bus ? I make a complete turn once and search. In the corner of the last row, there is a lady. A mobile in her hand—and wires connected to her ears. Very often she is kissing the mobile. Talking to her lover ? She doesn't seem to be speaking either, who to ask? She is perhaps not in this world. Even if she is here , is it possible to ask ? Apart from that--?

Oh—there is no one apart from that. All around me are empty seats. People are in their individual cars, outside.

"In this bus only fifteen passengers can travel standing" This instruction laughs at me.

"Annai ,go back—Acca—what are you doing there—" The heart tries to find happiness in hearing these Tamil words as an imagination.

The sight of birds struggling between the sky and the sea meets my eye through the glass window.

(Jeevanathy-Australia
special issue-May-2012)

Capturing millipedes!

"When I step on it, why do I feel I have stepped on something I should not have stepped on? It is beyond my cognition."

She bent and looked if there was a red stain on her sole. There wasn't. Her first thought on waking up in the morning is how many millipedes will be in the house today-particularly in the kitchen.

That beautiful house was in the embrace of the Mango orchard. Now it is partially a brick house. Above the not plastered brick walls of the kitchen was a Cadjan roof. It is thirty one years after the exodus. Yet couldn't construct a house as beautiful as the former one.! Can't be done.

With the special label, "Female headed family"-when rushing to work in the morning, if trampled by a millipede?

If it is a sea cucumber, it is an effort for a lively hood. But this is red spine millipede! Anoplodesmus! Time flies in the morning. Anyway can't cook or eat anything. Nauseating and filthy.



At a glance in the kitchen you could make out nine or eight red spine millipedes plus eleven Anoplodesmus. A frown appeared and vanished. It is very important that she –The Central Bank of the family–goes to work on time. Even though she is a cape blue water lily who stood a strong storm, must continue to bloom in the mud. She can't fade away because the children must study.

It rained cats and dogs all night. There was only an old cotton saree to use as bed sheet, she jerked it to make sure it was free of millipedes.

Do you fear millipedes? Or is it nauseating? Or loathing?"Fear" need not be a fear itself! This is not fear for she could toss it to the door, and kick it away forcibly like a goal in football. If she feared it she wouldn't go near it.

Since a few weeks ago, she would take two pieces of paper, one big –one small, toss the millipedes to the big sheet with the small sheet, throw it away, wash her hands and start making tea. A paper is enough to do away with millipedes.

One day it so happened that in the base of the little finger in her left hand, the skin turned red and it itched. What could it be? Skin disease? For small matters like a small finger, you can't take leave to go to the doctor. Factory administration will not permit it.

Factory means? A factory that produces paper bags! That's all. But can ask Buvana in the working place. She reads a lot. She likes to read even scientific and medical matters with a proper understanding.



"Look here Buvana, look at my finger -What could it be ?"

"Did you catch millipedes today also ?"

"I catch everyday. Why ?What has that to do with this ?"

She had shared her millipede catching experience with Buvana before.

"In the toxins the millipedes secretes, there are substances like hydrochloric acid. It burns the skin and changes it's colour. It will take long to regain the original colour.—"

"So it's not true that millipedes are harmless and passive."

"Who said that innocent looking people are all harmless ?"

After this conversation, she determined to be careful not to let them touch her limbs when catching millipedes. Now she moves the millipedes to a coconut shell with the help of a twig and throws it away- shell and all .

On another day Buvana happened to remark, "Millipede is a slow moving Arthropod."

"M—Hymm----"



If you put a millipede into a coconut shell and try to put a second one, the former one tries to come out and bite her hand. If you throw away one by one, many coconut shells would be needed. Coconut shells are good fuel. At a time when gas cylinders are very expensive and burst sometimes, can't waste a coconut shell.

Work would be a little easy, if all millipedes are on the floor. Some are on the floor, some are inside the basin near the water tap, some climbing walls, some coming down, very few running in a hurry,--others on the roof. He is the person in the proper place. Can't touch him unless he chooses to come down.

She is cooking with an eye on the roof for fear that the black and red ones or the black ones with yellow dots that dwell on the roof, might drop into the cooking pot. Must have an eye always on the ones above. But there wasn't an accident ever. It's the roof. No less. It's moving very carefully and very slowly. It's moving for the most part. To where? She doesn't know. As far as the millipede is concerned, is it in search of food? Or is it trying to escape from being eaten as food?

In the surrounding compound she has a vegetable garden. Who nurtures it? Her sweet and active children. Eldest Babu would water, put manure, weed etc without being told. As it is rainy season, no need to water. The younger one Sinthu would gladly help in harvesting.

'Why do the millipedes come in? Is the space outside not enough?' She asked Buvana when she met her next.



"Heavy rains and low temperature is a bother to anyone. More food outside, true. But to escape from the predators and for security purposes they come inside. Perhaps they believe that you built the house for them also" Buvana laughed.

"I always like your personality humorous and knowledgeable".

Ever since you asked about millipedes, I searched for and read books on them. The toxin they secrete is allergic to some people. It is lucky that you were not affected thus.

"To those who are highly allergic ,Corona Vaccine is a danger—Isn't it?"

"We may talk about it in detail one day .Must ask a doctor—"

"Having one like you in the work place is a blessing—"

It would be 5.30-6.00 p.m when she returns from work. On that day Babu was with a mobile at a zoom class. He is good in studies ! He will get through.

Sinthu is sitting for the scholarship examination this year. They say the exam is in January. Depends on what "Omicron " does! Sinthu takes after her father in Physical appearance. As usual she came running and embraced her mother when she returned from work. Can't talk about



"Social distance" to her. Today as soon as she saw her mother, she asked, "How many feet does a millipede have?"

"Why?"

"Teacher asked in class. I said 'thousand.' She said 'My answer is incorrect.'"

"In English it is called Millipede. The prefix 'milli' is associated with thousand. But really it doesn't have thousand feet. So— so what is the correct answer for the teacher?"

"Must say many—she says—"

With that Sinthu finished that conversation, freed herself (from her mother's embrace) and ran away to continue her play.

She washed her hands, changed her clothes, washed them, put away her hand bag somewhere and entered the kitchen to prepare evening tea and dinner. On the way there was one doing hunger strike. She wanted to break a coconut but there was one on it too in a still position. She took the wire mesh or steel wool to wash the vessels, but there was one within it and peeping its head. It turned its head here and there unable to decide in which direction to move. It was baffled. Why? Only way to find out—Ask Bhuvana!

Next day she asked.



"Could be lethargy, depression. Being idle—unable to make a decision." She laughed again.

"Every thing is a joke to you .I am dead serious."

"Some curl themselves at touch, it curls into a circular shape. Some others can withstand. Individual difference.—sorry—individuality differences in millipedes."

Now Buvana's face was full of concern.!

"Why does it curl ?"

"When it curls up the tender part of it's body is not exposed. The hard exoskeleton is only exposed. It is safety mechanism"

"How many legs a millipede have? My daughter asked me yesterday. I didn't know. Parents must have a sound education. Must be able to clear children's doubt. What to do ? Female headed family. At least now if I could study --?but no time—" she complained.

"There are more than a hundred species of millipedes in our country. Most of them are endemic to our country. So the number of legs could vary. However the biggest species could have about seven hundred. The red spine one that you mention could have forty or fifty-I think. When the millipedes walk the movement of it's legs is very beautiful like the movement of waves. The other species that frequents our house is Anoplodesmus. Black in colour with yellow spots, it's still smaller. So the number of legs would be still less."



That day as she walked home ,she was happily anticipating to count the legs of millipedes. That thought was interesting rather than nauseating. !But how to count legs ?

"Seize every one, send them abroad ,isolate one, turn him upside down, hold him still with a stick and count!"

"No. No. Poor millipede! It lives on plant waste. It can't voice it's right. It invaded the earth long, long ago. He is an ancient settler who came before us. It exists in all the continents. Am I a politician to bother it so?"

"Will ask daughter."

This piece of conversation took place in her mind. Daughter said thus, "We will take a photo of millipede with Anna's e-phone, enlarge it and then count."

"Well said!" open answer outwardly. "The knowledge of technology of the new generation is great" said inwardly to herself.

She went in at once ,snatched Babu's phone and came out. He followed her, "Why mom?"

"Sinthu wants to count the legs of millipede."

She shifted her desire to Sinthu. All three approached a red spine millipede.

"Sinthu ,watch the legs as it walks. A sound wave moves like this" She was happy about her knowledge.



They isolated one, covered it with a tin, removed all the other millipedes in the surrounding with the help of a broom stick, then uncovered the one, took photos, enlarged them and started counting.

"I keep counting ,but it goes wrong" she said. "The legs on the other side are not seen in the photo—"

She explained her failure.

"They are not legs. They are appendages. In a single segment of it's body, there are two appendages. "Babu as an O/L student corrected her. The question was Sinthu's ,but she didn't count. She didn't even try.

She had cared for her and brought her up minute by minute –specially because she was a girl child. Finally Sinthu came out with a comment.

"If Dad was here he would have counted correctly as it walked—"

She had Endoskeleton!

But suddenly she curled up. Nights flew into mornings. Mornings passed and nights came, millipedes were on the increase!.

(Jeevanathy-
Jan2022

Jacaranda

In the tap root of the road side Jacaranda tree, that stood stone like without any noise after loosing the wind also there was a thorn like sorrow and bitter despair—It was so in my heart too!

To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people, to earn the appreciation of honest critics, to endure the betrayal of false friends, to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others, to leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden pitch or a redeemed social condition ,to know that at least one life has breathed easier because you lived—is a successful life.

This is what I heard as a definition for successful life.

"Why am I still living here?"

Nowadays I don't talk to anyone because, words might spoil the gentleness of my silent cry against the injustices and evils persistent in families, work places, society and in the whole world.—

What is the aim ,ambition or goal of my life ?As I was expecting and waiting for an echo, I could hear another voice that sparked the anger in another poet's heart.



"In search of money is a goal here"

"Crossing the sea is also a goal"

"Binding the breeze that blows and making a business out of it is another goal"

"Another great goal of Tamils is going in search of every country where the point of a needle could enter—and leading a life there."

I wasn't a pray for the poet's angry teeth. My thoughts of crossing the sea was the mistake. Crossing the sea and having to think of making money even at this age –

O.K .Let it be . Will my education answer the question in my mind ?

John.G.Hibber who was head of Princeton University said once," Education is the ability to meet the demands of life. "What are the demands of present day life? Somehow I get food, water and oxygen. Many a man in this land is getting to hide in corners - others with dripping mouths are at the end of the tether - the need of all is mental peace.

As we look for it, it rushes away. As we chase it and chase it, it retreats further and further. Darkness melted away slowly.

As long as we could see, Eucalyptus trees and Cacti that remind us of our land were knitted together. Among



these were some widow like dead trees. They had died last winter and failed to sprout up. To give solace to the dead trees come the birdies' greetings. I don't know the name of these new birds in this country. They seem to say 'greetings' to me when they laugh, so I call them thus. Who else would whole heartedly and lovingly inquire about my well being? Next door Nallama is not here nor is there front door Ponnama.

Whose well being are the birds asking after ?They seem to be asking after the dead trees and Cacti. Not about me !

My imagination runs riot. They seem to address me thus," Why should we inquire about you ?-the humans -the selfish you-you who always act with bad intentions ?"

A weighty question!

A wrenching pain bubbles in my mind. What are the needs of birds ?What are the needs of humans ?Why doesn't the birds speech differ from their thoughts ?

I rushed inside—took a psychology book and opened it. The need of man—but not of the bird is this—a feeling of self importance or self esteem. Now the birds seem to chirp, "Is it important? Is it important? "This appears to be the main problem abroad. Thus thinking, I went far along the straight time line. Are only four and eight bad numbers? Man considers money and things purchased by money as important. Not so the bird.



Horses run in the race course. One horse comes first. The other horses aren't jealous of it. They don't search and search if the winner has used drugs. The horse that could come first doesn't ever think that it should come first at least by using drugs. It doesn't indulge in vain pride that there is no one like him or her.

The travails of a man who bets on a horse. It is this feeling-the feeling that he should be important in some way-that feeling is behind the growth of civilization. It is because of such feeling that scientific inventions took place. It is because of such a feeling that a not much educated, poverty stricken clerk went in search of law books. He learnt them and earned world fame as Abraham Lincon. So we can't say no good would result from such a feeling. But when this feeling exceeds the limit--?And results in the arrogance that "only he ought to be important?"

Dark clouds spied here and there. As it was the tail end of the year, it started the drizzle.

Last November when I came here first, I was enchanted by the external beauty of the madly flowering Jacaranda tree.

Darkness started to cover again the little light on the land. The land covered by Jacaranda flowers was like a purple carpet. The thought that purple denotes tragedy in Greek theatre arose and circled unnecessarily in my mind and went away.



This Jacaranda belonging to Cuba, Central America and South America was exiled to Australia. In the family Bignoniaceae, the genus has forty nine species. The Genus name is Jacaranda. It is famous for the purple colour it spreads. It has great medical uses also. It's height varies from two to thirty meters. Great is the beauty it spreads by the road side with it's compound leaves and flowers with five petals. Fruits are flat and oval .Inside the fruits are many soft seeds.

The soft thoughts in me are awakening. The answer to the question in my mind is not yet clear. How will religion answer my question? It will answer very easily.

"Do your duty. Don't expect any results." Gita makes it very easy. "Reaching Him" is your goal-thus goes the saying. The goal of books is charity, wealth, happiness and reaching Him. Words are beautiful in this and in saying the Purpose of Birth(or attaining the body) is to worship Him and to reach Him.!

"Consider yourself as a tool in the hands of God. He knows how to make use of you. You remain inactive. It is enough." This is what stressfully told.

The Christian hymn is sung,
"Thou art the potter, I am the clay
Mould me and make me ,as to thy will
While I am waiting ,yielded and still"

It's message is also to be inactive. But remaining inactive is no easy task. The rain stops and yellow rays of



sunlight filters out. Gently peeped the Jacaranda. I got up and came to the road.

Enchanted by the beauty of the bed of Jacaranda flowers, I stepped on it. I wouldn't have taken even two steps. I slipped and fell on the ground with a "thud".

That the soft petals of the tree with eighteen chromosomes became slippery when soaked by the rain was lost to me. Is my leg broken ?-Don't know-but the pain was severe.

"Turn the pages of your life. You will for sure see many days you have lived for yourself, but how many days you have devoted for others ?Can you count and answer?"

An inner voice!

I could see a sudden ray of light in the empty world that hadn't mattered that is lifeless and which has lost it's beauty.

I got up and continued my painful walk !

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This, that and the other mind

The lecturer is trying to bring a very small flash smile to his lips. The sketch of a man drawn in black on the white board and the circles round it are clearly visible.

"45 cm around you is intimate zone. Only your family members will be in it. Next to it that extends up to 1200cm is called Personal zone or the zone of friends. Generally one would have only their friends, relatives or their favourites within this distance. They feel comfortable this way. Next comes the social zone. This extends up to 3.6m. Beyond that is the public space and we can't prevent anyone from coming and going in this zone."

The lecturer's voice mellowed and there was silence. In that minute the following thought flashed in his mind.—" Beyond that is Universe. No one can do anything even if Aliens enter into it. But the one in the centre is alone anyway."

The resource person continues, "During Covid 19 time anyone entering into the intimate zone or personal zone would be dangerous. Even if he is a member of the family, if he goes out often, keeping him in the social zone is safe."



"When a child sees it's parents approaching at a distance, it runs to them. Without embracing it, if you say, "Wait a bit. I am coming from work. I am bringing virus from outside", won't the child's heart be broken into pieces? So what is the purpose of learning and teaching about need for love?"

His mind is arguing.

"Which mind is speaking this? Which mind is awake and when—Can I identify this? Many can't identify even their feelings and emotions, they say,--I am--mm"

This is also He.

"Desire to do charity" One of *Ouvai's first sayings. At the tender age of three when he couldn't understand anything, he learnt it by heart and recited. He got a prize.

As a youth he started reading many books which are like "milk". All the books which are said to be good speak of love, grace, charity and virtue, as great qualities.

"For the long term continued existence of human species, values are a must. The worth of the values does not change with the calendar."

Oh! Is this the lecturer's voice? He is still teaching.

"Gracious Human Nature is very close to Godliness, it is always said. It is so in all languages, countries and cultures.—"

* Ouvai - A female Tamil poet



*Jeyakanathan wrote a short Novel called , "Not because of Mercy "Would the lecturer have read it ?No. He is not a literary type. He would consider this unscientific—"

Hello !Which mind is this ?Guessing!

*"Love and Godliness are two different things ,says the ignorant—"

What is the next line ?—What is the next line -? How many times did I insistently tell you to learn it by heart. It didn't fall on your ears !If I tell it with a cane it will fall .With today's caning you will be able to memorize it tomorrow—see—come this way.—"

When the red eyes, bristling moustache, and the long cane of the Gr6 religion teacher, flash on his mental screen , he experiences fear and panic.

"This is Amygdala! Is Amygdala a part of the brain or part of the mind ?"For those who foster all other lives, there is no fear at all for their life"

What is this man blabbering? Won't you have trauma if you are gracious ?Won't Corona touch you ?

"The goal of developing countries is to become a developed country. It ought to be so. Developed in what aspect? Economy! !Am I right children ?"

"Hey, wake up boy-Economics teacher has come."

* Jeyakanthan - a famous Tamil writer

* Love and..... Spiritual saying



He rubbed his eyes. Day dreaming? Or memory?

"If you see a man who doesn't want to be comparatively richer or more powerful than others, will you show him to me?"

*"Those who have seen has not exposed! And those who have talked have not seen "

"I have seen"

"He is a type. People talk of him as brain affected or mentally ill"

He travelled in a Trishaw one day.

"According to the hygienic restrictions of the Covid 19 period, three can't travel in an auto! Is he going to file a case? Don't know if we are going to be fined."

A few days back, the auto driver looked back.

"Why don't you tell this truth in Sinhala—he is a kidney patient—Can't walk. Two men are needed to help him to get down—that's why three are travelling—"

"Telling the truth without giving fifty or hundred as bribe didn't work."

"Will those who know the truth respect you Maya?"—*Barathi!

*Those - ...spiritual saying of Hinduism

* Barathi - a Tamil poet.



"Barathi is a fool . That's why he was starving. —"

"One will have the satisfaction of speaking the truth. Guilty conscience will never crop up —"

"Oh! Hasn't the psychology lecturer finished yet ?"
Good ! What witness other than * "Harischandra" is needed to show a truth speaking life is really hard --?"

* "My son you died away. Sinner that I am—you don't want me my son?" Singing this in a drama is beautiful, but in reality--?"

"Even in a drama he call himself a sinner—"

"Did the sword that fell on the neck change into a garland ?"

It's absurd theatre! What else ?

"It is true that tension increases if you always speak the truth in life."

I is He!

"To face stress mixed with tension, you have to do a deep breathing exercise. This truth is corroborated not only by Yoga, but also by psychology."

* Haris Chandra is an Epic character for telling the truth

* A famous song in " Harischandra" Traditional Play



The lecturer hasn't left yet ! Alright! Wait Sir!

"His neighbour uses drugs to deal with stress. He has many stooges who would be at his beck and call—because Laxmy—the Goddess of wealth—has sought his refuge! Can't bear his atrocities .Great noise all night.!If we say,"Noise pollution"he says, "You aren't the only educated ones. We also learnt it .Then the voice of truth is broken"

"Must speak assertively."

Is it the lecturer? Alright!

"If we speak assertively, he will use bad words and win. After that it will be peace park.!"

"Survival of the fittest!" Darwin's theory!

"If so, teach this —Down with Justice and honesty"

Animals compete for basic needs and fight. The winner survives. But they don't bear the grudge for ten generations! They don't learn by watching Cinema!

At a time ,the Royal Education meant "learning to win a war". Was that suitable ?Martial Art,—Archery, sword fight, mounting a horse ,--No—No—Art of making projectiles fired by artillery,atomic bomb blasts, training for piloting planes, operating sub marines, and mainly making high class weapons like biological and toxin weapons— "Why do these density, tightness, compulsion and a feeling of the presence of a lump—come to my mind?"



"Wait a little! Apart from animals ,qualities of man who is advanced in evolution ought to be developed. Is it not so ?Knowledge, progressive thoughts, art, imagination, positive mental pictures—aren't these needed?"

"Needed. Needed. Need to teach about solving problems"

"Is it so? Education is supposed to be good in developed countries. Well educated people are destroying nature fast. The tribal people who are laughed at as barbarians ,are living well adjusted with Nature."

"The temperature of the earth is rising fast. At the speed that glaciers are melting, many hundreds of viruses like Covid 19virus are waiting to come out. Human race is on the verge of extinction—on the knife edge—almost! The only way to prevent it is Education! Real beauty is the beauty of Education."

"Must teach about living with nature. It is wrong to think that development should be achieved at the cost of destroying nature fast--.-that forest must be burnt purposefully."

"Pyromania!"

"That you see this—"

Coming and going!

If you destroy Nature, diseases and viruses would multiply—



"Don't you know—our medical field is highly developed. Medical experts are equal to God. They won't let people die—"

"Yes Yes .Everything and anything can be done. It would be a little expensive. That's all—they say,—then expenses keep on coming—funeral expenses too would follow!"

"To become a doctor, education is important. Education, Education---"

"No. No. Tuition is more important. Tuition—Tuition—"

"If you don't go to him for tuition, you can't become a doctor"

"There is free Education in our country. Education for all—"

"Children in which year was a stamp issued to honour *Kannankara--?"

Social science teacher has arrived.

"By then—"

"By the way why should you become a doctor?"

"To save many billions of lives—to make billions of money—make money and save—save and make money"

* Kannankara - father of free Education in Sri Lanka.



"You save and make money—after that?"

"Go to developed countries—"

"Go there and then?"

"Buy a house buy a car for each and then?"

"Why a house?"

"To own a car!"

*"Why cow?"

"For cow dung!"

"Why cow dung?"

"To polish house!"

"Wrong—wrong—that is a vicious circle"

"Oh! After you buy a house?"

"Save black money!"

"After you save--?"

The soil levels after you walk and walk. Humans are impressed by others. They follow their foot steps.!

"O. K. After that?"

"Live comfortably in an Elder's home there—"

"Live and then—"

"Get scolded by the nurses who work there"

"After that --?"

"Die off—"

*Why cow?.... A Tamil nursery rhyme in the form of question and answer.



Money will come with you like an ugly matter.
They might realize this philosophy a little before death. If
they have dementia—don't know if they would understand
even at the last moment!

"Then--?"

"Man can become Godly! When he gives
generously he becomes a Philanthropist"

So said *Kannathasan.(poet)

"What do you become when you swindle
money—Didn't he write that?"

"Then what to do ?"

Flames are shooting high!

"One Mathiew Ricard is living in the outskirts of
Himalayas. Neurologists have proved that he is the
happiest man in the world today."

"Oh! The psychologist's lecture is still
lengthening."

If you go near him and meditate flowers will smile a
new.

"You need money to go to Himalayas"

"I saw him in the U-tube, clad in brown and yellow,
he is seated amidst cushions.

*Kannathasan - a Tamil poet.



"Then you need money to buy cushions."

Cyclone is whirling.

"You can't fish in a muddled up pool. You can collect only mud."

"Lecturer Sir, you are still here?"

"Must study about super conscience, transcending conscious, universal consciousness, nonphysical dimension of consciousness, beyond consciousness, and The absolute!"

Then the confusion clears --?

Will understand—will be clear for him too---!

(Jeevanathy, Kohila
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08

Decline and Recovery

When she came and got down from the three wheeler in front of the pharmacy only a single door was open. It brought a ray of light to her darkened heart. Somebody had told her that yesterday when for the first time, curfew was relaxed ,many pharmacies had to close down because they were unable to manage the crowd.

That ray of light-the flash-a lightening was only for a moment! The way one young man stood blocking the door with his hand and the crowd that waited for the hand to leave so that they could burst in –such sights met her eye and penetrated to the visual cortex of her brain and made her doubt if the crowd would let her enter. This doubt put an end to the ray of light !

It was the same yesterday morning at Manipay .She had been squeezed in the crowd for two and a half hours and in the end had to go without medicine. The three wheeler driver felt a great sympathy for her. Not sure of catching a bus ,the curfew relaxed only for a few hours-she had hired the auto for eight hundred rupees! The driver understood her plight. Any way this was town life, what fails in the villages, meets with success in turn-is a general belief. Before she got down from the three wheeler, the



driver had got down and gone near the pharmacy. He talked to someone in the back of the crowd and came back.

"They are allowing only ten at a time. It's only 96 clock now. You try to get in! You could buy. They might permit ladies—"

As the three wheeler driver was a young male, he might meet with failure in the struggle. It seemed as though this fear made him urge her. What ever he said ,the need was hers. He was just a driver. So she has to go---

Went—

In a crowd of roughly two hundred, was she the only female ? She could just make out ,in the west, another lady in a green saree. She is definitely younger than that lady. That lady is confident. So why couldn't she ?

Stands---

Leaving the rest, must get this "warferin" somehow today. There was only one tablet at home.

"Could have bought it last week. Who could foresee that A9 road would close down and fighting would intensify suddenly ."

"As usual I thought I could buy when the stock is over. It was foolish—"



"The overseeing group is here. Monitoring group foreigners are here. Things won't deteriorate"—This was the common belief of the people.

"It's the worst problem this time."

Thought waves obsessed and intercepted her brain. Disturbing thoughts haunted her—

"If I don't get this medicine today, no medicine for him tomorrow. If I don't give him medicine—"

Not wanting to continue this thought, her brain "intercepted and cut". With the motivation of this cut she tried to pass two customers and tried to enter in.

"Brother will you please let me pass. He is a heart patient. Without medicine he will be in trouble—"

Who could worry about someone's heart attack in this country? Who has a heart? Many hundreds of hearts are lost everyday in this land of greatness.

Nobody minded her soft voice. They were all trying very hard to enter in!

Somehow she has come to a spot where she was freely crushed and pushed around from all sides. Elbowing, pressing the back, foot stepping—Any one could be hurt by anyone. Permission granted for all these in this blessed country.



After half an hour's breathless struggle to breath, when those hands relented—she entered into the shop. Did she enter or did she fall in pushed by those from behind and fell down ?If there is a doubt debate in this topic, the judge would find it difficult to give a verdict. To say that she fell would be a great mistake—for how can she fall down in such a tightly packed crowd where even a grain can't drop down. She stood—she leaned—she was squeezed.

"Hurrah, at least I have made an entry—now, could buy some how —"

Not losing hope is life.

Hot sun out side. Total darkness inside. No electricity for two days!

How could light come through the single open door which was blocked by the crowd completely?

Eyes used to light, found it very difficult to adopt to darkness.

Eyes could see only thousands of backs and backs of heads. It could not discern faces.

"Where on earth? I told you to send for Dharsini. Who is to cater to such a crowd."

"Dharsini is on her way. No bus. She is coming on foot. She will be here soon."



"Rajan, why did you permit all these people to enter. I said to let in ten by ten.?"

"I didn't permit them. They pushed my hand and entered!"

"Don't let any one anymore—"

"Yes—Yes—"

Voices come to her ear as if from the bottom of a well .Who is speaking ?Where is the bill clerk ?Who is dispensing medicine ? Her head swam .Has all the oxygen in the world dried up ? But the papers didn't say so. Who said the papers will announce all the murders ?Who said the papers report the truth of what happened? Who told you to believe all that the papers say ?What ?

All is confusion.

Thousands of hands germinated and stretched forth above her head..

"A card of Panadol"

"Ventolin for me —"

"Brother please take this prescription."

"Thamby—have you got this medicine?"



"Don't push—I say—"

"I came at eight o' clock. You —who came just now—and you are in a hurry—"

It seemed, they were billing about five feet away from the entrance. Inch by inch she tried to move to the spot. At that moment, it was the sole aim of her life. Did she move?

Ruined, squeezed—she crawled.

Memory of the exodus to Chavakacheri, when all crawled on the street in 95, flickered heavily in mind and then disappeared. It took about half an hour to go from the young hand at the door to the old hand at the billing centre. But who said bill will be written to all those who reach the billing centre. Or who announced medicine is given only to those who reached the spot? Even some of those who stood out of the hand at the door, bought medicine and went. A sales boy who had gone to the single open door, was catering to the interests of those who had entered just then. Who were they? How was it possible for them? Perhaps because they were his relatives? Perhaps because they were males like the sales boy? Friends? Acquaintances? How could the pharmacy people become her relatives or friends now?

She is also known to them as a customer. She buys the heart failure protection medicines monthly here. Today why doesn't any of them recognise her?



This is a country where answers can't be found for questions-answers are jailed ?-stilled ?

In the end she sought the help of a girl who was running around amidst three or four sales boys. Female gender!

"Sister, I am tired .Please give this medicine!"

"Wait Amma,I am coming" Sister was very busy running around and catering to the interests of males. Attraction of opposite sex ? Or fear of physical strength? She might be the Dharsini who came on foot.

"Child, you have attended all those who came after me. How long I have been waiting here-jolted by the crowd !"

A strong pleasing in her voice! People don't like to answer honest questions. Her voice was crushed like her body.

Raising her hand in the dark, she succeeded in finding the time. Ten thirty. Dense atmosphere and the sweat bare smell of many males made her feel like vomiting. Could she go out to vomit ? In case she vomits- the plight of the man in front ?He has to put up with it for pushing past her!

"Even Devils have a soft corner for women. Which mad cap said this ?"Watching some men who succeeded by raising their voice she tried to do the same. She looked at the old man who was writing bills.



"What a sin are you doing Annai? I came into this rush at nine-Urgent medicine! Panadol can be dispensed later also—"

"Amma ,don't make a noise. Panadol is also important for fever. For you that medicine is important".

"Wait a little. What can we do ?"

"You could let in the people in the order they come in a line."

"What ? Are we the police ?People themselves could have come in a line"

That attempt also failed. There was a debate alright-but she didn't get the medicine.

Order! How can there be an order in a society to which every thing is denied! Order is connected to the aesthetic need. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs this comes above. In a society where the need of food is not met ,in a society where safety need is there like a monster, how can you expect order ?

Suddenly --!There was a big blast that scared the life out of one.

Is it a shell ? Or a claymore ?Who died ?Who were injured ?Who was hit ?Round up somewhere ?



Her heart forgot to beat for some moments and then again remembered.

Amidst the rush inside ,there was another wave of dense rush. But nobody left the shop.

"I brought a list of seven or eight medicines. Don't want anything now. Just give this one medicine 'warfarin'- to see that the heart doesn't stop—and I will go.--!"

Her lead didn't help. No use raising the voice. Let see what happens to assertiveness or firm expression.

What is this feeling that rises in heart? Is it a fear that she might not get the medicine ?Is it anger against the injustice ?Is it sorrow for being pushed into such a life? Is it a frustration of the thought "what a life is this ?"A loathing by being pushed around thus? For these past twenty years what have we seen in this land ? —such a sorrow ?A mixture of all these feelings ?Then what is the prime feeling in the mixture ?

"Must get this medicine some how today." 'This strong thought that pervades all other feelings- and it is the life instinct.

"Sister, may I go in ?"

The sight of some ,coming with medicines from the inner room, met her eyes only at eleven.

Her hand, stretched out with the list of medicines at about nine, remains out stretched even at eleven ten. Will they write it on the Guinness record ?



If she is not out by at least eleven thirty can't reach home before twelve. Curfew will be clamped down at twelve noon. The Yarl FM announced it many times in the morning.

"Curfew relaxed at 8am will be strictly reinforced again at twelve noon." If seen on the road after twelve, she could die with the medicine. If on the other hand, she returns empty handed, her life will be saved.

"Annai, I will worship your feet. It took six lakhs to take this patient to Colombo and do the surgery. It will be dangerous if this medicine is not given. Please oblige first." Final attempt!

"Child Tharsini, this Amma is shouting for a long time for warfarin. See if it is there—"

"There was only one card. It was given to the doctor who called around ten! We don't have that medicine. Amma sorry ,it's over!"

It was eleven forty when this answer reached her external ear membrane.

To leave from the hands of the billing old man, pass the strong hand at the door, and to safely reach the trishaw, it took her only a second.

She did not know from where she got that strength.!

(Mallikai 2007)

Apocalypse

She can sense the gentle breeze entering her body through the hair roots.

At the very thought that there is a fresh cool sensation like "gum", Sehar is watering the rose plants in the court yard.

Oh!Ma—how the water curls and rushes! This water is like her; Going to work in a hurry-cracking jokes-laughing—shy and retiring—what a beauty!

These rose plants, with leaves and thorns—stems branches and roots—may live for many years. Who notices them?

But if it buds ,grows and flower blooms you can look at it all day long!.

For the past eight years she is yearning she would flower like that. When you come down eight years and look, there is life like a poetry.

The masculine beauty of Sehar which was a great attraction, his flawless speech that falls like the blowing of a sword, one day their marriage, cooling their hearts like a



rain ,the first night that made her sweat—each event was like a poetry.

But after that for the last eight years—

Each and every month she expected to flower. At the end of the month her uterus bleeds, weeps and finally rests. When is she going to win in the shadow war between her and the uterus ?

Waiting—whatever it is for is very tiresome.

If all of a sudden, she can bear flowers in bunches—no not in bunches—just a single flower—how nice it would be ?

In the evenings ,when Sehar goes out to while away his time chatting with his friends—how long can she get peace, sitting at the well side stone and talking to

*"Kanakambara" flowers ?

At such times, if there could be a toddler running to her toddling on the ground with tender feet----

Won't her heart tumble with full of joy noisily and dance? Won't it bubble with happiness and overflow? Amma also did a "waiting" like this for seventeen long years. In the end she won by giving birth to her.

When Amma got married she was only seventeen. She waited with the assistance of Prayers and hope for

*Kanakambaram - Cassandra



another seventeen years and then flowered at the age of thirty four. It was a wonder at that time she survived because it was a rare Caesarean success for the rural area.

By the time she studied ,got a job, fell in love and got married with difficulty she was already twenty eight. Like Amma if she waits for seventeen years, she would be forty five. What then ?It would be menopause age. Will life be fresh after hair gray?

Even in the calendar she selected this year ,there is a picture of a toddler, pointing his finger and laughing .the red and white stripes in his T-shirt, his curly hair, the blue sky, coconut leaves and a sparrow in the back ground—if all these intoxicate her—

At intervals when nobody is looking, she takes the calendar and hugs it to her heart. If anybody sees her at this moment they would take her for a mad person and send her to *Manthikai.

Even if she gets down the courtyard and walks, the pebbly sand hurt her bare feet.

When they felt the waves of wind, burning their soul, she and Sehar went to a Gynaecologist.

"The number of those who want children is more than those who seek family planning advise nowadays" the specialist laughed.

*Manthikai - a place where there is a Hospital for mentally ill.



"Tension is the reason. We don't know how to enjoy life or we couldn't. Science has given us all the facilities needed in life, but we say, "We don't have time ", "We are tired". He stopped his soliloquy and asked some routine questions.

Name ,age, married for how long, are periods regular,--so on and so forth—

Then some tests---

After a few weeks ,when all the tests were complete, he said—"I guessed right ,both of you have no physical deficiencies. You are perfectly alright. Worry that you don't have children, tension—these things should not pervade your mind. Relax—Pray to God—Be hopeful ,this is all I could say. Now is the time for test tube babies—but not so far in Srilanka. What else can I do ?"

She fasted, practised Yoga and relaxation exercises. She fought with Sehar and got him to do some of them.

At crepuscules, when there is beautiful moon light, the black lamb in her house, climbs to her lap and sleeps.
"Little one!"—"

"Bha—"

"Do you want *Murunga leaves my dear pet ?"

"Bha-"

* Musuddai and Murunga are leaves used for food.



"Don't want Murunga leaves —then what do you want --? *Musuddai--?"

"Bha—"

"Now in Jaffna, when there is shortage of food, you want Musuddai? If we have it ,we can make *Sothy or we can stir-fry. No pet , no Musuddai for you—"

"Bha—"

Clouds that are on the look out for news wander about disturbed and lost—

Cold dark days followed one another. After many winters passed, one evening, in the western sky a star twinkled. She tossed next door Manvili in the air and caught her back.

"Áuntie—let me go—"

26t of next month-Saturday.

Saturday to Saturday eight, three Saturdays twenty two, fourth Saturday twenty nine, Sunday thirty—today is Monday.—*Somavaram-thirty one days.

"Correctly on the twenty sixth day it comes regularly, but this time—"

* Somavaram - Monday, a day of Hindu worship

* Sothy is a dish in liquid form that is eaten with String
hoppers.



Oh—a flower has bloomed in the rose.!

"Look here dear, today is Somavaram—Could we go to Sivan temple?"

"What? What is special about today? Usually when you return from work, you say you are tired and go to lie down. Today you want to go to the temple—"

She went close to Sehar.

"This time there is a delay of four or five days. We will go and pray to God!"

Sehar laughed .Blooming laughter!

They walked to temple.

"I can't sit on your bike. You will jerk me a lot."

Step after step she gently walked.

"Careful child! Don't do anything that pains your muscles. Don't do any pounding or grinding —"Amma's advise was heard obsessively in her mind.

"After forty days we will consult a doctor—o.k.?"
Sekar was hopeful.

Whenever mother-in-law saw her, she spread her hands in space and cracked her knuckles.



Some scratching sensation at the base of the abdomen. Something like nausea!

Will symptoms of morning sickness appear so soon? Even so it should appear in the mornings ,no ?

Next week also, returning from the temple only she ate a little. She had a sensation of enlarged tummy. Why couldn't she eat her full as usual ?

Stomach and womb are different. Right? She looked at herself in the mirror. Belly had grown a little bigger, she could sense. There was a shine in her face.

The colour and coolness was like that of an watermelon split into two. Must alter the blouses. Have to buy new underskirts. Bra-can adjust.

As usual ,the day dawned that day. As days move by, there is a fresh joy!

Of the hundred and eighty days ,forty five days have passed. Two hundred and thirty five days more. Oh God!

"What is it ,no tea today ?"

"I can't get up today. You start the fire and boil water
—I feel giddy."

Sehar with his usual smile, put the fire wood and kindled the fire. She drank the tea he gave and as never before applied turmeric on her face and bathed.



"Hi, can we buy Saffron anywhere?"

"Child you eat Saffron in the tenth month only.
Can't afford to buy from now onwards"

Amma who had taken a wash at the well side and was halfway through applying holy ash, replied to her daughter. A joy in her heart, like that of a cool breeze—dashed against her for a moment.

She laughed looking at the calendar boy.

"Oh, look! Truly, I am going to buy a T-shirt, like the one you are wearing."

She told the lamp that came jumping to her, "Your small black hair should not fall on my lap. Stand apart—"

All of a sudden a---

"What is it?"

She sharpened her ears.

"Bomber is coming—wait we'll see where he is heading—"

Fear, like a ball whirled in her tummy.

"Oh, he is diving—you run—run to the temple side"



So saying Sehar ran to the west. She also ran. Looking back as she ran she saw something like a black spot descending over their house.

"Oh, hell—he has dropped it."

The pregnant plane has given birth to a black egg.

She ran faster and faster as fast as she could—she would have run seventy five meters.

A blinding flash—deafening noise—a feeling like her heart has stopped. The window panes of fifty or sixty houses in the vicinity clung like anklet bells and crashed due to vibration.

After bombing severely, the bomber left. The front of the house was damaged. The wasp Veddaivali's nest in the ceiling of the front veranda, was not to be seen. Next door Malarvili's house was fully damaged. Her heart felt heavy, sorrow broke it and tears filled her eyes. She wanted to go to the bathroom. She went and came back.

"Amma, I got my periods"

"What?" shock showed in Sehar's word.

Frustration, cheated sensation, grief, or sorrow!

One of these or a mixture of all these!

Burning sunlight—as if a memory face laughed at them.



Burning Mind--!

Sun on fire !

Mind on fire !

Burning on fire—

On fire—burning—

Burning---burning—

Oh—should burn, should burn every one!

(Mallikai - Dec1991)



10

Is she Inanimate?

Even though it was five p.m., the sun was scorching.

The March sun burnt the body with a “sully” feeling.

Like throwing a food parcel in front of a pack of hungry dogs that had starved for ten days.

This appeared to her as a suitable simile to the sight of people jumping into the minibus.

‘What’ll happen and when? when could there be a sudden break down of all transport?’ such was the panic that caused them to jump. Can’t blame them!

But she didn’t become a dog.

She knew that even if stood patiently like *Kirisampal the minibus mini boy wouldn’t leave her and go. Avoiding getting crushed in the crowd, she stood apart solitarily. She was given a royal welcome by the minibus boy.

*Kirisambal - a character in Tamil literature for patience.



'Acca! Come. There is space. Many are getting down at this next halt. You will get a seat .Come on!"She would have got in any how, even if the minibus boy hadn't pressed her. Leaving this as crowded and waiting for the next one is of no use. The next one also would be so, or even worse.

Above, in the blue sky, white clouds were rushing head long.

"Acca please climb in. You'll fall if you stand there, get in" She got in and turned to see seven people hanging on with one foot on the foot board.

It appeared her spectacles would break in which ever direction she turned her face. She blamed within herself for not putting it in her hand bag as she left the bank- for her forgetfulness. A booted foot stepped forcefully on her foot. She frowned in pain and then smiled at the thought she was a representative of the crushed community.

"Annai take your foot – my leg is crushed into dust".

"O, I see I am sorry – I didn't know".

The old man in front- graying at the temples begged her pardon with a grin that showed all his teeth.

The heated smell of men's sweat raged all around her. She had a nauseating feeling that worms were crawling all over her. "A working woman should have the facility of owning a car. Or the work place should be at a walking



distance. If she doesn't have these two facilities, she shouldn't go to work".

Looking at that typist Sathya -younger than her and with less salary – going to the “bank” with perfumes and make up – a pang of jealousy rose in her heart. To buy a car you need lacks and lacks of rupees swindled by your Dad and Grand dad. “mm.....” Before a big sigh ended up as a deep exhalation-- a “cooling glass” from behind leaned over her heavily with his whole body, under the excuse that the minibus broke suddenly.

She easily got to know that the leaning had been a planned move-- not an unexpected one. But the situation is that she can't do anything instantly. She spat and the saliva that was secreted with a bitter taste within the mouth. It should have fallen on him, but it fell on the road side.

She could not find out his inner motive when this well built person of six feet height, for the second time passed against her so that his hand touched her waist.

'Brother, you know we are married people with children'. Bending close to his ear, she said in a cool and calm voice.

Can't say for sure if others sitting near by could have heard it. That he heard it was clear by the way his eyes bulged as he jumped down quickly shouting ,

“Getting down, Getting down”.

Now it appeared to her that even before marriage, she could have spoken thus in a calm manner to such people. But she couldn't do so then.



An old woman had sat next to her from Ampanai to Masiyappiddy. At Masiyappiddy junction she took her *"Kadakam." and got down. She had her doubts when 'a square face' from behind jumped at the opportunity, came and sat down beside her.

This person has come for a dubious purpose. She suspected he could be a pick pocket and placed her hand bag on the other side away from him very carefully. As he pressed closer and closer to her, she kept moving away and away and when she could move no further he had his arms crossed against his chest. He stretched his arms to touch her breast—At that particular instant.....

Not considering the situation, environment or the repercussions, she got up all of a sudden and fiercely slapped his cheeks hard many times.

That incident---

*'Saniyan—dark pest'

She couldn't be balanced then. Look at him running away with bulging eyes now. It was like this one, he also made a dash, ran fast and got down quickly at the next halt. It was only then that sweat poured out of her. The others in the bus asked,

'What is child ? What is the problem? What happened ?'

* Kadakam - a palmyrah leaf basket without handles.

* Sanyan—Saturn-used to curse people



' What a Question? A young girl hitting at a boy...
Need you ask what happened? How can she speak out?...'

They spoke in her favor. She continued to remain silent.

These memories still linger fresh in her mind.

An isolated incident?

Pricking with a needle one day. Another one--
another day-- a slash with a blade.

Mom says, "Your stupid pride will put you in a
serious trouble one day."

How many days can be tided thus?

"Their eve teasing is not only because I am bright
and pretty like a golden statue. Not only because when I
walk it gives the appearance of two flowers toddling. That
is not the only reason! I don't have a wed lock round my
neck. That may also be a reason." The days when she
realized this she who had dodged on talks of marriages at
home until then, said "yes" to marriage.

Seven more days! six, five, four, three, two....!

Days flow by! Now there was a wed lock around
her neck.

Getting into the bus with a *"Kodi" was a solace.
She breathed a sigh of relief "No longer there be these
monkey tricks in the bus, True!"



As she had expected-- for a few months, there was no eve teasing. Even if there was a vacant seat next to her, the standing *"Sarongs," Verties" and Trousers preferred to keep standing and reluctant to take the seat.

Every month going for work on these particular three days is a punishment imposed for females. She couldn't even walk! Her whole body ached! Lazy to work to the main bus stand she waited at the bank side bus stop.

The street was deserted.

Now a days who would come to the street unnecessarily? She took the "Readers digest" from the hand bag and started to read.

It appeared as if two people travelled on bikes. She didn't notice them. What is this?...as though a millipede was crawling in her neck--- when she came out of the concentration with the book, the two in freshly laundered white sarongs were fleeing far away!

"Oh, my Thalikkodi! Thief! Thief!" As she was screaming loudly fortunately the bank Manager's car came that way—they were caught and "Thalikodi' retrieved.

Next day her husband himself told her, 'keep that Kodi at home and wear a garland---this glittering Kodi is a danger to your life.'

*Kodi - Tamil word for wedock

*Sarongs, Verties - traditional male dress.



Kodi is a danger to her life. True. But being without a Kodi is a danger to her honor and self esteem.
How to say this to him?

The burden of past bitter experiences. What does he know about it?.

Like a sack -soaked in water – her heart felt heavy.

Again her maiden appearance, and again problems.

Today, the bitter experience with the 'cooling glass' brought tears to her eyes. To hide it she took out a journal from her hand bag.

They write silly nonsense in papers and journals.
Must write about such feminine problems in the 'people's voice' Forum!

She went to sleep with such thoughts. Next day while getting ready for work, she put in her hand bag 'stinging nettle' branch along with a needle and blade.
Let the eve teaser keep on teasing with stinging nettle!

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Testimony of a virus

I am the first life in Evolution. Forgive me—after breaking their heads for many an year, if I have a life or not, they have come to a conclusion—I am not an organism. I am rejected! I am a cosmic dance!

They are the children of arrogance that sprouted after the last rainfall. They believe that there is no one greater than them. Whom do you think I am talking about? I mean humans—who else? That is why they are wandering and loafing around like this.

Is this earth a part of the Cosmos? It is said to have been formed four and a half billion years ago. It is they who say so—they are great inventors you see. We came here about three and a half billion years ago. They discovered us only in 1935 -because we are so small in size, our reign was invisible to them. I have a little brother. He is only 20 nanometres in diameter. Only after electron microscope was invented, they got to know many of us.

They are not clear as to how we came into being in this world. Genes could have split. Could have lost some parts in bacteria. Could have been Aliens.

They raise a hue and cry for every simple matter and have different individual polices and fake research



results. No body gets to know the truth, but they have Ego problems!

One thing is certain. We are the ancient inhabitants of this world. Nowhere do they allow us (ancient inhabitants)to live in peace. You know it. Coming late and claiming rights –unreasonable atrocity and bullying. Then proving that everything belongs to them. It is their way. Sometimes they offer half hearted excuses. Within that time, they change every one to their ways of life. They are great tricksters. We know them. They would try to convert us to their religion. They have no clarity about their religion, they are keen on converting others.

Organisms first appeared in water-slowly moved to land-developed from Marchantia to flowering plants and were supplying enough oxygen to the environment-where as on the other hand Hydras to Mammals were living peacefully by themselves-the humans came last, naming themselves stylishly –"Homo sapiens" 'in English. They have given me too a modern name "SARS-COV-2".They agree they came into being only 300,000 years ago. Then why did they pick a quarrel with ancestral inhabitants? Intoxicated by drinking the poison of desire, they are crowned themselves as the highest in the evolutionary ladder.

Of course there are many types of life on this earth. Each organism in the biodiversity is fighting for survival. But no other organism is so foolishly selfish as to want to destroy every one else and survive alone. Other lives don't fight with nature. Humans are the first traitors who are



trying to destroy the whole lot of nature and make the world artificial. They went about boasting and gloating about their Nervous system and their developed brain, but today they are unable to cope with me-an organism with not a single cell even. They are baffled. Their ways of fighting will not work with me. If I am left alone outside, I can't do anything. But if I enter a cell of theirs as a parasite ,I can play many a trick.

Let them make a film *"Divine play 2"if they want. These fools who can't lock their doors as hosts against me, are confronting me.

You see I have a hundred billion brothers. We come ten to one .I will be like the war in *Mahabaratham. Where ever there is life we are found there." Neither, Hither or Thither, but shining every where. Let them make music and sing. About God they say, *"He is in a pillar and he is in a twig too". Perhaps they take us for God !Who knows ?

We are in the deep sea, we are in Antarctica. We live in land and water. But they don't call us Amphibia because we are not supposed to have lives.

Only now they are discussing that Corona Virus is spread by wind. I feel like laughing.

In 1918-1920,during the first world war, an elder brother of mine held the world in his grip and finished the

*Divine play is a famous cinema in Tamil.

* Mahabaratham - a great Epic

★He is a spiritual saying in Tamil



story of nearly forty million people. Perhaps because the war was going on, they didn't know the actual number of those killed. They give bogus statistics. They bluff and dodge when they write. They have mastered language you see—so it is easy to distort while speaking. Their tongue is also very flexible-not firm. In those days they didn't even know the word "Vaccine". When talking of world war, I am reminded of one thing. Although we do not do anything, they are number one in fighting among themselves which results in total annihilation. It starts as a fight for power—then they get blinded and make it a world war. Forty million were sent to the grave-yard in the first world war—we are not sure even about that—not learning a lesson from that experience they started the second world war in which seventy five million were buried - Don't ask if they were buried or burnt—still not satisfied, now they are ready for a third world war secretly working for it. Outwardly they name it "cold war". They are inventing big weapons and playing hide and seek with each other.

No other species of lives fight among themselves and die in millions -you see. I have told you earlier that they have no brain. Other organisms although compete for their basic needs like food, living space, air and reproduction, don't die in millions. Death occurs in fives and tens or fifties and hundreds. Natural disaster kills in plenty, but that is a different story. These people get stuck amidst the baffling words like skin colour, religion, language, country and get annihilated.

Suddenly one person gets a strange idea and wants to capture all the countries. When asked what they do after



capturing, their answer is "live in peace". You see they don't understand that they will have more peace if they don't capture. Big brains ? No, retarded!

So—I have stopped the story half way. Organisms like us come out from time to time only to destroy their ego. In 1346-53AD they named a problem named "Plague". He is our next door neighbour—yes—yes ,bacteria. In schools they teach well. It is called —"Domain-bacteria". Humans were in his clutches and two hundred million were dead and gone. In 1928-Alexander Flemming guided them to control bacteria. After that they went about with raised collars and were certain that there won't be any more deaths.

An elder sister of mine, smallpox by name had them in their grip for many a century. Our people said it was Goddess Amman's disease—hung Margosa leaves around and lay down. They couldn't do anything else. They knew it was beyond their scope. After intermittent attacks from 4th to 20th centuries, in 1980 only she let them announce , "No more small pox in the world." She freed them in the spirit, "Poor people—it is a long time—let them go free". At least then their ego should have been suppressed—but no! It wasn't. In the thousand eight hundreds, my elder sister small pox sent four hundred thousand annually to "Yama" the God of Death. In the last hundred years ,five hundred thousand people faced near death. Those who escaped from her, lost their eye sight and went about groping. If I say she made them blind I will be attacked. They will hang on to the words "visually handicapped", "differently able" and insist I use them, but they are atrocious in action.



After one Edward Jenner, they got hold of "Vaccine". "Nobody can be like us. We are developed." They babbled and let go their values.

In the beginning of their Evolution, they were Apes and lived without clothes in caves. Then they said they have reached the height of civilization, wore clothes to cover their whole body, practised monogamy and led a disciplined life. Open mouthed we gaped at them. Our mouth watered at their good life. Not knowing how they could improve further on their civilization, slowly they resorted to "permissiveness" and let go the proper way of life. They did whatever they wanted giving into their sensual desires. No discipline!

The million dollar worth word "liberate" is on their lips. Any one can sleep with anybody they say—Nothing wrong in it. They are going back to animal life. Near nakedness is high fashion.

After exhausting all the resources of the world, they give up social life and want to be alone." Family structure is not necessary. It's O.K for one to own four cars, (one runs in electricity) three helicopters and flit around." they said.

For Birthday celebrations they write their names on the sky with helicopters, for wedding the bridegroom comes in a small plane. Their desires were beyond limits. They are not even a little conscious of the harassment they are causing to the other lives. They say sorry for slightest reason but irritate mother earth at every turn. Living in a different country each day is highest fashion, hoarding



money is the only goal in life—There is no limit to their fantasies!

Unable to witness all these, my cousin HIV aimed his arrow," All those who can't lead decent lives get lost." In his curse, vaccines, medications, pills-nothing worked. They were flabber gusted. Between 2005 and 2012,thirtysix million found their way to heaven. Let them fly heavenly planes there. They have no ideas to change. "Reform yourself -the world will reform" They shout themselves, hoarse on platforms, but they don't practise it.

It's they who wrote the film song," Man was born from the Ape that jumps from bough to bough". Ape is a herbivore. Their body structure is also like that. They lack sharp claws and well developed canine teeth. Stomach, small intestine-their size and length-also resemble that of a herbivore. Nature created them so ,but they give into greed. They started to eat meat –first chicken and mutton, then cats and dogs,-snakes and lizards-frogs and rats-bats and ducks. They run commercial institutions that deal with blood and flesh, muscle and lymph .Now they are shouting that bats have brought Covid 19!

It is they who wrote,*"It is better not to kill and eat than to make a thousand sacrifices" ,"It is good not to eat flesh to grow our own flesh. Now they are trapped in my net.

"After all what is this small virus ?If they come with RNA strand like Rabies virus or with DNA strand like small pox virus, we could cope." This was their stand. They

*Sayings in Tamil



arrogantly said that they know the way for single stranded virus or double stranded virus, but now they are perplexed. Even RNA and DNA vaccines are a question mark. In one and three fourth years forty six lacks were out.

"Vaccines ready!" -their proclamation. "Mutations ready" - our declaration. Confronting mentally clad in war uniforms is no longer of use. They should sign an all country pact where they agree on these and many such laws.

1. Will not destroy forests
2. Will not steadily exploit natural resources to make weapons.
3. Will not pollute the environment.
4. Will not allow global temperature to rise.
5. Should not let out green house gases in any way they like in the name of industrial development.

We will sign the agreement by our "Capsid". Again they would fight as to who should sign on behalf of "Humans". They would try to select on the basis of money and power-but later the selected person won't take responsibility.

What is the use of my blabbering on too much? In short they should accept the fact that they are also mammals and live simply like other organisms co-operating with Nature.

You see they haven't found a proper vaccine yet. If one discovers something others refute it. If one claims his vaccine is best-the other plans to make money out of it. When they are thus engaged in fighting, we will advance in



evolution within that gap. Then let them say –Alpha spreads, beta spreads, delta spreads, mu spreads and nu spreads—learning by heart Greek Alphabets. There is a limit for anything you see!

There is a boundary for pitying and giving in for humans. Let them come with four legs and a tail.

They know very well that we are the main agents in Evolution. Evolution always moves along with Nature. Those who mourn "this is the end of the world" and cry that,

*"It is the period of Saturn" may continue their work.

One of their poets *Bharathi addressed Nature thus—"We seek your Grace for Justice and Order to prevail" Now let them address me and seek my Grace. If the verse is good, we will give them reward.(Bundle of Gold)

It is said of them, 'Even if it is the end of the world, they won't budge!'

Now it is going to be the end of the world.! Some are getting ready to go to other planets.! We could be there before they arrive !

Shall meet there!

(Sep-Dec2021-Sirithiran)

*It is..... Saying in Tamil

*Bharathi - A Tamil poet.

Sacrificial goats

It's Saturday when it dawns.

The last Saturday for the month of May. Stars twinkled competitively in the clear sky. It's around 8p.m in the early night!

The street that is usually quiet at such a time as this was unusually noisy and busy. The environment was being peculiar, different from usual practise.

The clinking of the bicycle bells-the shouts of the running children-foot steps and conversations of the pedestrians who walk competitively slowly.

"This time Kandasamy's "He goat" comes first. Nobody can beat that— isn't it?"

Did you see it's height ?Those long ears—hairs that stick out at the back of his head—it hops and jumps stylishly in the grounds—will fetch 3500Rs.Isn't it so *Machchan? I bet it will fetch 4000Rs.

"People say Sellathurai's "He goat "would not be a looser. Must watch them side by side. Only then we could judge --?"

*Machchan - a way of calling a friend



Oh! Only now I see! When it dawns it is sacrifice at the *"Kaderi Vairavar" temple. The crowd going to view Kandasamy's fine "He goat" throng the streets making it thus noisy and busy!

It was all celebration that night at Kandasamy's place. If his is the best "He goat" coming to the temple, what better, happier, brighter news is there in the world! What can you do, but celebrate it—say? What a good story!

The goat shed was decorated with multicoloured florescent bulbs. The white goat stood smartly in the red, green, blue and yellow cool lights - in this *"Yuga" even man wouldn't get such honours—won't it be proud then?

A sweet smelling Jasmine garland decorated it's neck. The garland kissed the ground. Can't remember if Kandasamy wore such a big garland even when he graced the stage as a bridegroom.

"Have you given it's drink?" Only after thus reminded by Suntharam did Kandasamy hurry into the hut and fetched a' *'Black". Vallipuram thrust his hand into the jaws of the struggling goat and Kandasamy forcibly gave a drink of "Black". Only if at least half a bottle is given, will he stand smartly in the morning. Otherwise it 'd slump due to too much of vigour.

The goat with five senses feels bad not to have learnt the bad habits of man with six.

*Kaderi Vairavar - a village Devada

*Yuga - a very long period of time

*Black - alcohol prepared unlawfully



Senses. So, it couldn't even stand properly because of the forcibly given drink.!

Outside the hut, on the temporary stage arranged with tables – **"Harischandra"* drama has started. Many who has come to see the goats ,sat before the stage watching the drama.

"Your goat will be the winner this time also. Isn't it so ?"when Sivasampu,who came just then, said this—Kandasamy couldn't help but feel proud. With a silly smile, he bent his body, turned his head and said," I did take a vow. I wanted to cut the best goat for the vow."

"Oh! A vow? What for?—"

"Don't you know ?I was seriously ill last year, I went from hospital to hospital, spent a lot of money ,but the English educated doctors-useless doctors-gave up. In the end it is Vairavar who saved me."

"So you got cured only after taking a vow ?"

"What else am I saying ? Only after vowing to cut the best goat in next year **Velvi*, did I get cured."

Agreeing that Vairavar had accepted "bribes" from him, Kandasamy kept on telling this tale to every one as tale and tale! He never tired or bored to tell ,how on Vairavar's request he had spent heaps of money buying this special species of goat and feeding it on rich diet like Murunga leaves, black gram and liquid rice.

**Harschandra* - a famous traditional play.

**velvi* - sacrificial function



Harischandra drama dragged on till 2am.

A tractor decorated with balloons and crepe paper stood ready to take the goat.

The procession started as early as 2am. Kandasamy believed he would be blessed by Vairavar if he kept his vow. Led by this belief, he walked in front and the procession crawled along the village streets accompanied by four sets of *Nadaswaram players and drummers.

Even at this time in the midnight, when the midnight cocks crow, people got up from their beds and came to the gate not to miss the show. It was 4am when the procession reached the temple. Many goats and hens that came walking, had already reached the temple. Sellathurai's goat which had already grown well enough to compete with Kandasamy's was just then coming along the Southern street of the temple.

Even Arumugasamy Iyer, who wakes up five paces before sunrise heeding *Navalar's injunctions for morning ablutions had put aside yesterday's Hindu paper he had been reading and had come to the gate to watch the procession. He had been actually reading an article in Hindu written by a Hindu Priest that condemns sacrifice of lives in front of God.

Kandasamy who was with the procession addressed Arugasamy Iyer thus, "see if anyone could beat my goat."

* Nadaswaram - a double reed cultural wind instrument

*Navalar - Srilanka Shaivate Tamil language scholar.



"Alright-can't beat-but isn't sacrifice improper in temples? See what is written in this paper"

Kandasamy peeped at Iyer's paper. He couldn't read-even if he could—

He bought the kid for seventy five rupees only and it is going to reach much more than 3000Rs today. Now the name of Kandasamy is in the tongue of all the villagers. He is not mad enough to give up the profit and fame his goat fetched and listen to this Iyer.

Like Beauties lining up for a Beauty Queen contest ,the garlanded goats lined up on the set stage. It was a feast for the eyes.

The temple chief hoisted up the cooking pot and placed in on fire. It's the chief's job to choose the best goat of the lot and sacrifice it first. When no one was looking, Sellathurai put a 50 Rs note in the chief's hand. The chief who got it ,betrayed Kandasamy at the proper time. Where as every one was expecting Kandasamy's goat to win, the chief was leading Sellathurai's goat.

Kandasamy's mind boiled like hot oil at this.

He jumped and jumped in anger.

"They think that we don't know they accepted bribes to betray us."

Kandasamy hitched his *Versti and advanced. The chief's eyes which were already red ,reddened even more at



these words of Kandasamy which attacked him like an arrow. Before the chief could open his mouth Sellathurai said with a teasing smile, "The chief's words are final. Your prattling is of no use. I am the winner". Unable to bear the jest of Sellathurai, Kandasamy struck him forcibly on his cheek.

Before anybody could stop him, Sellthurai jumped and ran to pick the sharp knife that was kept there to cut the goats and hens. He stabbed Kandasamy by the weapon kept for sacrifice. A car was rushing to General Hospital with Kandasamy who had fainted due to excess bleeding in his hands.

Was Kandasamy pondering why Vairavar, who had accepted his bribe was punishing him even before accepting his sacrifice or is he ignorant like the sacrificial goats?

Don't know!

(09.09.1979-Eelanadu,
reprinted in the e-paper 'Theempunal'
2023)

Leg Signature

Can't bear any longer. Today I am going to commit suicide somehow. "If a thought of suicide comes to your mind come and tell me before you do it". I have heard my Amma saying this to her clients. That is why I am thinking of telling you first, before I do it.

A cyclone is raging outside!

How am I going to do it - you ponder? I don't have hands to pluck Oleander seeds and grind. There is a simple way!

When the "Field Bike Group" passes through the lane, I will jump across. Death is perfectly sure. Sometimes they too could tumble. In that case I will go to dogs heaven after death. That'd be good!

What hell of a life is this! I am suffering from severe depression. Now I understand how lonely people get depressed. It is ten months that Appa and Amma left. I wondered if they would come at least today. Already the sun has set. Curfew is also enforced. No chance of their return now. That is why I came to this decision after crying a lot.

Amma's aunty brings me food. But is food and water life? There should be people to talk, chat and play.



This is high wind!

Even when Amma Appa were here, I used to feel lonely when they go to work. But it is all fun when they return from work.

The wind that blows now is called Gentle Breeze.

I play with all the visitors to our house. When new people are at the gate, the smell will be different, and I bark once. When they come in and sit in the portico, it means they're either Amma's or Appa's folk. No? Slowly I approach their legs and get their smell. Then I will not forget the smell life long. If the smell is okay, slowly I put my paw in the lap. Some people take it gladly, talk and play with me. Others don't take it so well. May be they feel superior to me. Even then they squirm, but permit me. There are some others who put my paw off a bit angrily. They may be considering themselves very clean. But I don't give up. I put my paw again. If you give them your love again and again, how can they reject it? Many of you don't know this theory—isn't it?

When Amma serves them biscuits, they put down a piece for me. I eat it and again put my paw.

At such time Appa scolds me often, Then Amma will call me, "Frank, come in... you will be given my biscuits." Amma always keeps her word. She never cheats. If I go in she gives a whole lot- and closes the door. I'll be caught inside.

What wind blows now? Westerly!

"Never mind" - so saying I go in and play with cockroaches or grass-hoppers which ever is seen there.



I love to play with grasshopper. When I see it, I place my foot on it with a style.-- I smell it.... then again, I wag my tail and place my foot. Sometimes my paw nails touch it. Before I play thus for five minutes the cursed one would die. It does not know how to play with me.

After the visitors leave, Amma would come in. I clutch her house coat with my teeth and move forward and backward. Of my forty two teeth, the canine make holes in her house coat. This game as her pet is also to show my anger for locking me in. She never hits me. She'd say, "Puppy Frank, leave my dress. I'll give you rice. Eat in your plate."

By the way, I am a vegetarian. Because Amma is a vegetarian, I got used to it from my early stage. What you say is right! My family name is Canidae, order- Carnivora. That means we are beings that eat meat. Wolf and fox belong to my family and you know what sort of people they are. But I don't have their habits. You see... much depends on the environment. Nowadays even if I catch a rat or squirrel by my old nature, I don't eat them.

If Amma or Appa or both are inside the house - if I am sure of that scent, I lie down coolly on the step outside. I stretch my front paws, place my head in it and doze off. I don't go into deep sleep. If I hear a small noise, I run around the house, look around and search. I can hear the frequencies that they can't hear.

Now it looks like a steady breeze is blowing.

One day, at such a time, Amma was seated on the step writing something and Appa was in the easy chair



reading a paper. I was by my Amma's side with my head touching her dress. I heard a noise in the Jak tree in the courtyard. The scent too was different. I jumped and looked around. A big animal was coming down slowly around the tree. I saw it and howled incessantly.

"Frank is barking - see what the matter is" Appa switched on the gate light and came.

"It is afraid for no reason - it seems" he said.

"No! It won't be afraid for no reason. It is barking at the tree. Look carefully" so saying, she got up and came. She won't let anyone speak ill of me. On the rebound, she ran away shouting.... "My God... snake..". Then the front door folk came and killed the poisonous snake."

Are we used to guard the house only yesterday and today? We have been your friends for the past twelve thousand years. We help in hunting, protect your sheep and we are always friendly, faithful and affectionate.

These are the innate qualities found in our thirty nine pairs of chromosomes. We are like this from birth and that is why Ancient Egypt called as celestial - holy sails.

Pleasing Breeze!

Appa would keep the medicinal packet in the shrine room. After dinner he sits on the chair in the Viranda. It is I who fetch the medicinal packet, place it at his feet and lie down looking at him. His pressure rises if he doesn't take his medicine.. I breath with my tongue out and look at his face.



Amma takes bath in a hurry to go to work in the mornings, she leaves the soap at the bath tub. I fetch it with my mouth, play with it for a while and put it in her room. Being immersed in the thought of these Golden days is a pleasure.

In Europe, as early as in the Bronze age, people had begun to draw our figures on the walls. Our statues were put at the cemeteries. In how many *"Vairavar" temples are we constructed as statues and drawn as figures as a symbol to carry the Lord?

I forgot to tell you how I got my name "Frank". Yes. I am telling the story in bits and pieces. How can you expect a proper narration from me when I'm contemplating death.

Then Amma had gone for a seminar in Italy.

As Appa was alone, he got me as a two months puppy with twenty eight teeth. There is a tuition shed- an old one- in their place. There is a law clay wall around it. He put me here and covered the entrance with a tin sheet. He would have thought that I would not jump over it. I was very small, no? But one day I poked with my nose through the tin sheet and came out. Then Appa arranged cement bricks at the entrance.

Amma came after five weeks. I am a new person living at home. The name of a doctor who had given her lectures in Italy was Frank it seems. She gave me that name. She must have taken to me at first sight. Caressing my forehead, she carried me around the compound.

* Vairavar - a village Devada



This is a breeze from the pond

Then she made milk for me. I got a cup and a plate for my own. She took me out of the tuition shed and let me out.

"It will run away" said Appa.

"He won't run away from us"

But now Amma has run away from me. To the last I have been their Frank and am still frank with them.

Telling and telling old stories make me cry and cry.
Change of Breeze!

North Easterly wind!

Earlier also sometimes they leave me at home and go to Colombo. Once they went because Appa was sick. Then one day I did a risky behaviour and jumped over the gate. I escaped from the house and from injuries. You are asking me why! To search for them.

Later, one day Aunty gave me food and locked me up in the back Veranda. I wanted to go to the toilet. How to do it within the house? I pranced at the wire mesh at the window and kicked up a big row. After this incident, she used to let me out. But that had become a mistake. Now, I'm scared of cracker blasts but unable to go in and sleep.

Earlier, even if they go to Colombo, they would be back in a month at the most. But this time they have done this. Why are they vexed with me? What do they say?



Oh, I had behaved well. I won't go out of the house easily. I urinate on the parapet walls around the house, I rub my scent on the ground and mark my territory. I don't enter into other people's territory. If there is such a discipline why should there be a fight? We have more than four hundred breeds, but we won't kill each other! We know *Canis familiaris* means that we can reproduce among ourselves!

What the hell one these humans?

Brain less creatures!

They are killing themselves!

Advent of a storm!

11th of August!

Bang! Bang! Big noise. Never heard the like of it before in my lifetime. Even if there is thunder, I get scared and lie down beside Amma. Now blasts are above my head! It seems as though heart would stop. Appa is a heart patient. I don't know how he is putting up with this. The noises continue. Amma and Appa didn't go out anywhere during the past two or three days. They are switching on and on the radio and listening to something. There is no one on the roads and lanes. Only green uniforms are about.

My subconscious mind is afraid. I can sense that there is something strange. Earlier I go to the vicinity of Pararajasekara Pillaiyar temple by the backside sometimes, and that is also only when my girlfriend calls.



Even if I go, I'd be back in ten minutes. If I go when Amma begins her meal, I would be at her feet by the time she finishes her meal and washes her plate. Now I don't leave the house. I curl my tail and lie down, under Amma's chair.

I have heard Amma teaching, "Big noises pollute the environment" to children. They say it is in the Science syllabus. Now all go to school and learn. So who is doing this? I think, people who played truant to school when the lesson "Pollution of the environment" was taught must be doing this.

A violent hurricane is raging!

The air is full of blood smell. The sound of ladies weeping at funerals could be heard all the time. Funeral band has become a daily event. My inner soul could hear the cry of the tortured.

Fear.... Fear..... Fear.....!

Now they slowly go to work. But there is no smile on anybody's face. There are no visitors in the evenings. Even if they do come they stand as they talk and rush off. Amma doesn't serve biscuits to anyone.

Earlier, Amma used to give me noodles in the morning. Now she gives old white raw rice. One day I peeped to see what she eats. She didn't eat anything- went to work with tea, Why so? Amma can't be living without money. Appa is a Principal. He'd have got his salary.

They don't switch on the lights at night. They light the lamps and sit on the steps. Who are they saving for?



They don't have a girl child. Not only they. All are saving. There is no light in any house in Inuvil.

Seated on the steps, what are they talking? To see, I listened. Card, Co operative store, queue, kerosine oil.... they have shot--- they've caught... there are the words they seem to be learning by heart. I know not if they have forgotten these words learnt when young.

When Amma's auto comes to Thurai lane, I know the sound. I run to the gate, put my foot on it, and stand ready to welcome her. Only after calling me "Frank" and caressing my fore head, will she go in. That day she just sped in.. She didn't even look at me. "We have to roam around like dogs to buy medicine" She says angrily to Appa. But I didn't roam around anywhere! I couldn't understand anything.

After that for a month, she brings in some papers, fill them, take them.... comes in-- go out...!. Going means roaming around from morning to evening! By the evening when she comes, she is dead tired, What? Does Amma go out to cut firewood? I don't understand anything!

Now at nights they are learning by heart some more words like checking, round up, and Chikungunya.

One evening Appa was lying in the easy chair. I wanted to lick his feet and I touched it with my tongue. Oh, what! It was burning like fire.

I went near Amma and licked her foot. "I don't know what to do Frank" She said.



Next day, at dawn, carrying a bag - both of them got into an auto. Time - early - bag- big! I could sense something strange. "I'll go and come Frank" said Amma. She'll do so as she says. She didn't say, "I will go." So all these days I believed she'd come. But as days pass,, my hope diminishes.

Ghost like hurricane whirls outside!.

I want to cry all the time. Future holds nothing. It is empty. No use of my existence anymore. Did I not look after Amma and Appa properly? Have I erred? I suffer from a guilty conscience. I am not interested in anything. I don't even go to my girl friend. I don't move at any noise. I simply lie down. I feel exhausted. I can't sleep. Even if I do sleep, I have terrible dreams. No hunger. If aunty calls me ten times, for God's sake I eat a mouthful! Field bike group passes by the lane many times, I don't bark.

See, what a life is this? Food and fear.... Fear and food only! Black out.. there is no one to light lamps at nights. Darkness inside and darkness outside.

Only here, in a country where brainless people live do we roam around uncared for. In European countries breeding dogs is a multi billion dollar business.

I had so many goals and ambitions. I'd ask Amma for special training and be a guide to visually handicapped and retarded people. All is lost now! Go!

Our people are doing great many jobs. Photos of eighty six of us are published in Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Some of us give protection to flock of sheep and goats. If humans are like sheep, we are unable to sleep in peace.

Some others help the police to catch thieves. Some even help patients in hospital to revive. Our love goes a long way to add to the enthusiasm of human -that is why!

Finding bombs ,finding lost peoples- even such work is done by our folk. At least for this sake, these wicked folk could treat us well. But they don't. Finding out poison and drugs, digging the ground....

I who could thus do all this--is now contemplating death.

Oh!.. it's true. After telling all this, I feel relieved a bit. See... I have poured out everything in my mind. Amma also says suicide is not healthy. What can I do then?

Oh..! Look... What you say in right. Those who make head blasting noise... we'll ask them to stop it. We will ask them to live in peace and let us live in peace also. In that case Amma and Appa will come back. I don't know how to write. Will you write it for me? I'll put my leg signature!

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Santhanach Chitharalkal (scattering the sandal), the short story collections Pirasavankal (Births), Valvu oru valaippanthaddam (Life is a Net ball game) the non fiction volumes, Thirumanithar valvu (Life of cherished humans), Ner konda Pavai (Woman with directness), and Kudumpam oru Kathampam (Family is a variety of flowers). Her style of writing is folk with psychological realism. She has won a number of awards including National awards for her writings.

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