

Classic Poetry Series

Edasseri Govindan Nair
- poems -

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Edasseri Govindan Nair(23 December 1906 - 16 October 1974)

Edasseri Govindan Nair was a prominent Indian poet from Kerala who wrote in his native Malayalam tongue. His works include 19 books and over 300 poems in 10 anthologies, 6 books of plays and a collection of essays.

Born in a village, Kuttippuram, in Kerala (India) on December 23, 1906. Father was P. Krishna Kurup and mother Edasseri Kalathil Kunjukutty Amma. The child was named "Govindan", a very common name meaning "Lord Krishna".

"Edasseri Kalathil" is the name of Tharavad or ancestral home. Being "Nair" by caste Govindan was subjected to the matriarchal custom which was prevalent amongst Nairs. The custom placed mother's eldest brother as head of family or "Karanavar" and in a position of economic power and decision making in the family. The Karanavar was expected to manage the property and meet the needs of the sister and her children. But the system had degenerated and neglect of the nephews by the Karanavars had become rampant. Edasseri Tharavad had fallen to hard days on account of poverty. Govindan received hardly any support from the Tharavad and the sad demise of his father in 1921 brought Govindan's education to an abrupt end at primary level itself. His mother ardently wished to admit him to the High School, but she did not have the means.

Faced with the harshness of poverty the son thought only how to take up a paying job so that he could earn sufficient income to save his mother from the pangs of hunger. With this aim in mind he went to the town of Alappuza with his cousin called Sankarettan to get trained himself as a vakil's clerk. There was to be no pay during apprenticeship, just a dole to keep body and soul together!

At Alappuza, he managed to give tuition and could save Rs.2/- when an acquaintance from the home village, Kuttippuram, happened to visit Alappuza. Edasseri entrusted the princely amount of Rs.2/- to him for buying a blanket for his mother. But, as fate would have it, the mother was not lucky to receive the amount, for she was by then stricken with small pox and breathed her last on the day previous to the day the man arrived at Kuttippuram. Edasseri never recovered from this sense of unredeemed debt. His inconsolable sadness later found expression in the poem "Bimbisarante Edayan (Shepherd of King Bimbisara)".

After working as a clerical apprentice under Sankarettan for ten months, Edasseri

joined Vakil M. Krishna Menon as a resident assistant clerk. During this period he came in contact with Manjoor Parameswaran Pillai, another vakil clerk by profession in Alappuza and a highly erudite person. Thus far Edaseri's literary world was confined to a few works of Ezhuthachan (considered as father of Malayalam poetry- Adhyatma Ramayanam being his masterpiece), Cherusseri, Kunjan Nambiyar, Venmani poets, Naduvam and Vallathol. Association with Manjoor greatly enlarged Edasseri's capacity to appreciate good literature. The duo was in fact madly in love with literature paying more attention to literary discussions and reading to the neglect of their office work. This trait obviously did not make them any dearer to the vakils under whom they were working. Once the friends went up to the Pier of Alappuza to receive a copy of "Malayala Manorama" in which the celebrated poem "Kochu Seetha (The Little Seetha)" was being published in serial. So much was their eagerness to read the poem that they altogether forgot about the clients waiting for them in their offices! The employers did not take to their love of poetry kindly which according to them was nothing more than an "obsession with titillation"! Edasseri did not dispute his employer, but had to remain humble. As a result he had to be secretive about his literary activities and ensure that it did not in any way interfere with the long hours of office work. At the end of seven years when he decided to return to Kuttippuram, Edasseri was not very confident professionally. As for Manjoor, he never overcame poverty so much so that in the later years when on occasions he visited Edasseri, despite his own unenviable finances the latter would secretly place some cash in his friend's pocket without the knowledge even of his wife.

During 1929-30 Edasseri worked as clerk under vakil Thalasseri Kunhirama Menon in Kozhikode, a town 65 k.m north of Kuttippuram. Those days it was very common amongst the youth to seek employment in Malaysia and Singapore. Edasseri also decided to go to Singapore and arranged with a person who was to shortly arrive from Singapore to take him. He left his job in Kozhikode and returned to Kuttippuram. But unfortunately for Edasseri, the person did not leave the shore of Singapore, but died in that alien land. Unemployed and no prospect of migrating overseas, Edasseri tried his hand as an informal advocate in Panchayat courts, but found that being a vakil's clerk was far better and settled for that in a small town Ponani 15 k.m west of Kuttippuram. By 1934 he had accepted being a vakil's clerk as his formal vocation and worked under vakil K.V. Rama Menon. It is important to note that those days literary activities did not pay in financial terms. We thus find Edasseri always torn between the vakil's office which was his livelihood and literary activities which was indeed his life's mission. His close association with the common folks in the course of his profession did help deep understanding of man and brought realism and variety to his writings. This association with people of Ponani made him dear to the people who loved and respected him as Govindan Nair, the person -not the poet-

who was always there by their side to solve their problems.

Edasseri married Edakkandi Janaki Amma in mid-January, 1938. The grooms were already known to each other as Mr. Raghavan Nair, a lover of literature and maternal uncle of Janaki Amma used to lovingly invite Edasseri to his residence where the two had met. In Edasseri's words: "This bride must have been created by Brahma -the creator- specially for me, a girl simple and madly in love with verses, so much so that she did not find it odd to copy in the same note book the Keertans of Sankaracharya (the metaphysical) and also the translation of verses that I had scribbled from "Pushpabana Vilasam" (a work of sensual romance); only because both were in verse!" This simple girl remained the eternal inspiration to Edasseri in poetry and a source of immense confidence.

Edasseri started writing poems at the early age of twelve although it is inconceivable that there existed a congenial environment in the Tharavad to nurture this talent. Nevertheless, his mother used to recite Ramayana daily and his sister used to tell mythological stories to him and these two indeed stroked the poetic talent in him. Yet another influence was Sankunni Menon the Malayalam teacher in the Primary school who used to recite poetry in great style and in melodious tune.

Edasseri had his formal education till eighth class and it was with his own efforts he learned both English and Sanscrit. In this endeavour both Nalappat Narayana Menon (a well known poet of the time, reverently referred to as Nalappadan) and Kuttikrishna Marar (a scholar and literary critic) helped Edasseri.

Personal Beliefs

Although believer of God, Edasseri did not evince interest in visiting temples. He was not a Sakteya (follower of Sakti cult) as many believed him to be. Several of his poems like "Ambadiyilekku Veendum (Revisiting Ambadi)", "Varadanam (A Boon Bestowed)", "Kasavu Poothu (Kasavu has Blossomed)", "Gopika Govindam (Union of Krishna with Gopikas)", "Puthumula (New Sprout)", "Trivikramannu Munnil (In front of Lord Trivikrama (Vishnu)", "Palkadal Kadayumbol (As the milky ocean churned)" etc. shows imprint of Vaishnava thoughts. In fact Edasseri had intense desire to complete a long poem reposing his self to Sri Krishna, but he could not make it. Ironically, the poet who echoed celebrations of temple festivities and folklore in his famous poems "Poothapattu (A song on Pootham)" and "Kavilepattu (Song in the Divine Grove)" did not relish festivals and particularly in the later part of his life the poet did not evince interest in temple festivals. The poet articulates his position by showing his preference to limit personal faith to individual rituals.

Possibly the poet had a vision of a secular India where development of scientific temper and social justice were the issues that should be engaging the attention of youth with the role of temples and organised religion retracting to the backdrop and certainly not a priority in the agenda of nation building.

Edasseri was in the forefront of India's freedom struggle along with other nationalists being an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He was involved in distribution of "Swatantra Bharatam (Free India)" an underground news paper of the freedom fighters. Edasseri was a source of inspiration in Ponani during Guruvayoor Satyagraha and Quit India Movement. He considered another ardent follower of Gandhiji, Kelappan, as his leader. But for Kelappan, Edasseri was dear friend. It was at the initiative of Edasseri, "Krishnapanikkar Smaraka Vayanasala (A reading room to commemorate Krishna Panikkar) was established at Ponani in the memory of Krishna Panikkar, a freedom fighter, who lost his life suffering torture in the British jail. The Reading Room soon turned into the intellectual and political nerve centre of Ponani. It was a regular meeting place of intellectuals like V.T. Bhattathiripad, Kuttikrishna Marar, Edasseri, P.C. Kuttikrishnan (Uroob), E. Narayanan, Kadavanad Kuttikrishnan and Akkitham.

Edasseri was disappointed by the post-independence political climate. His conscience did not allow him to be actively supporting any political party. The poet's philosophy is aptly reflected in the following verse:

" Adorable is an idea -
As long as it spreads light, but-
If it darkens and pours misery
Throw it out to make space for the new!"

Let us listen to what Edasseri has said about himself, with his characteristic humour, about his attitude towards theism and politics.

"I believe in God. But, on moments when I have to touch upon hunger and lovelessness - the facts of life which had eternally nagged me - I find that godly humility and respect towards philosophical doctrines leave me in a jiffy. In the poems of the author who swears by Gandhiji, there lie scattered ideas which challenge Gandhism and belief in God. Although I have been a follower of Gandhiji and not studied Marxian doctrine, the poems which were only reflecting the objective social reality were adopted by the communists as a part of their propaganda. One more reason for failure in life: I am red in the eyes of the Congress and a Gandhian in the Communists' reckoning! But I should be grateful that this position of benign neglect by the political parties really helped the life to

be free from various botheration hindering creativity."

Recognition in search of poet.

Edasseri believes that it was his drama "Koottukrishi (Co-operative Farming)" which actually introduced him and his poetry to the sensitive readers.

"Koottukrishi", the drama, and "Puthankalavum Arivalum (The New Earthen Cooking Pot and Sickle)", an anthology of poems were chosen for the award from Madras Government. Further, Edasseri was sanctioned an annual grant of Rs.600 by the Government of India which was a boon to the poverty stricken poet.

"Oru Pidi Nellikka (A handful of Gooseberries)" was selected for Kerala Sahitya Academy Award in 1969 And "Kavile Pattu (Song in the Divine Grove)" the Sahitya Academy Award in 1970.

Edasseri earned considerable popularity, respect and love of people around him. In fact so informal were his ways that his fellow villagers had not realised that their lovable Govindan Nair, the vakil's clerk, was a great poet before the entire literary world formally recognised the fact with various awards!

Edasseri never pardoned himself and never doted on his own children excessively. But this apparent strictness verging on harshness did not stand in the way of forgiving others for their faults. In fact he was at times ready to own up other's mistake to save situations. Thus there was the incident of his friend misappropriating public money because of severe family problems and about to be arrested and sent to jail. Edasseri owned up the moral responsibility, arranged money by mortgaging the house to save his friend from being sent to jail. There is also a story of Edasseri on his way to his office being followed without his knowledge by a lady teacher on her way to school being afraid of wayside Romeos passing lewd comments, as she felt confident that the youth never could misbehave when Edasseri was around. Edasseri was bold and never minced words when confronted with the wealthy people showing disinclination to public activities. There were also occasions when the poet on his way to buy medicine for his own ailing son, donating the money to a poor man who did not have money to buy rice for his family to cook for the day.

Edasseri remained active till end of his life. He was indisposed for a couple of days before his death but did not allow it to come in the way of his duties. The spell of indisposition put an abrupt end to his life when on October 16, 1974 he suffered a massive heart attack at his breakfast table. His wife and young daughter were with him when the end came.

Awards

Government of Madras Award for the play Koottukrishi

Government of Madras Award for the collection of poems called Puthan Kalavum Arivalum

Kerala Sahithya Academy Award for the collection of poems Oru Pidi Nellikka - 1969

Sahitya Academy Award (New Delhi) for the collection of poems Kavile Pattu - 1970

Kumaran Asan Prize (posthumously given) for the collection of poems Anthithiri - 1979.

A Letter

No debt bothers me now
No balance left for
Tomorrow's shopping either
The thief will sneer at me
More so will do the rich
I wish both see me the same way
Till I dissolve into the elements.

Edasseri Govindan Nair

Flower In Worship

No place for weeping in the flow of Time,
It is not for weeping over, you gave us riches.

Light, Water, Air, Heaven and Hade,
Countless solar systems-all thy playthings
The enchanting life that throbs around
Rich and green - (even that thy gift!)
Thy gifts in a variety of forms - unseen gods,
Blades of grass, worms, butterflies, men,
With gratitude I think of these - yet
Had you to give us this cursed Love?

But now, a tender life did adorn my lap,
My heart was filled with comfort and hope.
A light for my eyes, a wise of cool breeze
To caress my being, to fill my veins with joy!

You bade me lift him from the dell below
And raise him to the vast expanse above.
Well, had you to bind us with this chain
Of affection just to cause us pain?

To see him was to be in the morning state,
An embrace was like sandal paste.
The world was a grand festive field for me,
What a realm of bliss where I chanced to be!

Alas, mango blossom! I did not see
The dark clouds of what was sure to be.
A lovely wick aflame did I place
To face a storm that was gaining pace.
A fool, I built my heaven on sands,
A hopeless hell I made with my own hands.

To weep now; but a question comes up oft,
Who will an answer give?
What was my fault?

Poverty used to wet my eyes,

My hands would rise to wipe the tears.
Humiliations subdue me, but then,
I stroke my beard and raise my face.
Obstacles untold block my way.
When hurts and wounds my body cover
I cling to the cool comfort you did shower.
Never washed I with eye's salty tears
My body soiled with sweat
Is that the crime?

Like crescent at dawn, cold and still,
Lay there my life, I see him still.
The day broke in.
Though pale, as the night had sucked all blood,
A tender smile lit up his lips.
Darling, is it to give me a little relief
That you lit up a sparkler
With your life that was drying up?

When dusk grew dark, Cruelty?
You snatched from me
The tender sprout of life yourself had given.
Like a creeper struck with lightning
Lay the mother at my feet swooning.
I stood and watched with heart turned steel,
Justice felt its eyes too, dull.

You filled with fire those lovely eyes
Golden dawns were wont gently to praise.
You forced fierce storms across that breast,
Liquid fire along those veins.

O Cruelty!
You,
You alone are the Eternal Truth!
With gratitude I throw at you this name:
'Hey, The Merciful', this address like a
Flower offered in worship
May thy feet accept, that'll be a favor.

[Translated from Malayalam 'Poojapushpam' by well-known poet Madhavan Ayyapath.]

Edasseri Govindan Nair

The Cooking Pot And The Sickle

I.

Who in the last season had sown
The Aryan¹ seeds in this field with love?
When the hot sun of March burned
Rain - fire above, red embers below,
With his bullock waving its dewlap
Drawing the plough deep, unwearied;
Not with the sheen of oil glowed
His body, but with sweat;
Until the earth turned into fine dust,
Until Vishu² decked the Konna³ with blossoms,
Koman had ploughed the field up and down;
Koman had sown the Aryan seeds.
When the clouds moved on leaving their print
On the field where fresh seeds sprouted,
Were there more golden shoots in the field
Or on the breast of Koman in rapture?
He had no rest either day or night,
What care he took to keep the watch!
The weeds too came up and grew thick
And the breeze thus blew to make music.
In the blue expanse all along
Swam and danced the water-waves,
Till the women flowed in like swans
To pluck and pick the weeds.

II.

The field was infested with weeds this year,
How hard for the farmer it was!
Gone is what was kept as seed corn;
Gone too what was meant for food!
Gone again the price of the bullock, sold,
Unmindful of the work after harvest!
Aromal Chekavar⁴ won the joust,
Yet the weeds yielded not a span!
The bangles pleaded and flirted,
Yet the weeds yielded not a span!
Koman didn't pay his son's school fees,
Nor did he pay up his instalments,

And he didn't buy the prescription
For the fever his child caught from the new rains,
Gazing at her hands with the mylanchi⁵ mark
Made long before the new year's eve,
The weed-picker girl started to cry;
What a wild game of the season's mischief!

III.

At the heel of the burning summer came
The all-upsetting thundershowers,
And as the rice seedlings overcome by thirst
Opened their sheaths to drink the rain water,
Koman too took the same clean drink;
That's of course what a father does.
And as the field grew dark and dense
With the spread of vacant spots,
When the dark rain had its orgy
Never stopping either night or day,
Till the ears of corn were seen
That brought sheer joy to the eye.
Koman was seen on the dyke
Like an oracle dancing his role.
When the first few torrential rains
In the last month of the year had ended,
There were the red-lipped ears of corn,
All along the level fields
With a heart given to ecstasy
Koman embraced his whole family.
What excitement in that house now,
To husk the paddy, to get fresh rice!
Father was fondling his little daughter

IV.

Seated on his knees; he coaxed her;
'A new skirt for my kitten
For the Onam⁶ flower-festival.'
Mother looked at the elder daughter,
Who seemed to pull a long face.
And father said, 'If the yield is gold,
We'll spend it on a wedding locket.'
'I didn't mean anything like that,'
The girl wearing glass bangles blushed.
'Three months' fees remain to be paid',

A hum arose somewhere in the group.
To each according to his desire;
The master of the house apportioned it.
Mother too had her private need;
'We must have pot to cook the new rice,'
The soul of that family fluttered around
Like a dragonfly in that golden field;
And the ears grew heavy for a good harvest
Like a display of fireworks.
Are the dancers tired of the performance?
The rice plants lay down in full embrace.
As if to reap the moonlight of Onam
The golden sickle was rising.
People who passed by were heard to say;
'Koman has grown gold in this field.'

V.

Who was it that reaped this year
The golden grain that Koman grew?
Neither Koman nor his men - but
A court officer and his henchmen!
The morning they had fixed for the harvest
Gently opened her painted eyes.
The start of the celestial arbor
Tossed about by the wild storm
Were slowly blossoming to grace
In the cluster of tumpa flowers.
Koman came crossing the main dyke;
Behind him came his helpers.
Already the field was crowded;
The court officer got the harvest done.
Koman had just one glance of it;
All his desire was utterly lost;
As if he saw dogs barking
In the rice that was meant for a meal,
Koman had just one glance of it,
The power wielded by the court,
The revenge of the January crop
That withered for want of water from the sky,
This affront of attachment and harvest
For the rental arrears, the landlord's due?

VI.

The wrath of the reapers raised its hood
And began to blow and hiss.
Neeli, the Pulaya girl, fell on the ground
Beating her breast very hard.
'No one else shall reap this crop,'
Cheru Koman stepped down into the field.
Warming up to the fight and snarling
Like a leopard came forth Chathappan.
The hired harvesters cast away the sheaves
And quickly climbed the dykes.
Koman raged as if possessed,
Like an elephant chained to the post.
And that way came Koman's elder daughter,
A lovely little creeper,
Swinging and happy with the new pot
Bought to cook the new rice.
In her father's mind
Exploded a huge shell of fire,
She seemed like butter floating again
On the fire of his wrath.
In a few moments this treasure-land
Might turn into something strange.
On the dyke a voice arose to say
'Here are the orders; don't play with them!'
Waving a piece of paper
There stood the court officer
Laying the land all barren
Like a rising cactus head!

VII.

Let the man who sowed see it;
The feudal order reaped the crop,
Sticking to the shade of the power;
A handful of robbers have kept all for themselves.
The sickles lined up around the new pot
Which was no longer there,
The sickles useless for the harvest
Until sharpened against power. Pity!
The law leads the attack
On the land where the farmer grows the crop.
The results of that attack
Arise from the dyke,

The new pots and the sickles
Join and thunder on the dyke;
'First we must reap power;
And after that the Aryan crop!'
Their throats began to spread
This mantra in the heavens;
'First we must reap power;
And after that the Aryan crop!'

[Translated by the well-known poet
Dr. Ayyappa Panikkar.]

[Notes:-

1. Aryan is a variety of rice.

a celebration, usually on the day the summer solstice starts.

3. Konna A tree with bunches of yellow flowers, blossom around March, April.

I Chekar was a hero of North Malabar in Kerala, whose adventurous duels were sung in eulogy by farm workers in Malabar.

5. Mylanchi. A floral decoration applied to the palm using the crushed leaves of Henna plant.

6. Onam. the harvest festival of Kerala lasting 10 days, when the courtyards are decorated with flowers.]

Edasseri Govindan Nair

The Shepherd Of King Bimbisaran

I too had a mother
When a King bought me, a slave,
She was given a price, a few coins
She tied them to my apron-strings
And left bare-handed
I bought a blanket, later
To protect her from cold
Alas! When I came with the gift at last
She had gone for eternal rest
Under the cover of a thick earthen blanket.

Edasseri Govindan Nair

Wedding Gift

Obscure lies the green pond
Slime coated dark.
Like a place in ruin tragic
Under the moss of sad neglect.

You, dear child, have begun to shiver
Even in its soft breeze.
I, your sister, shall seat you there
wrapped well in my upper robe
The deep darkness, dear, is slowly leaving
The first glimmerings of light come;
Will you weep, as in these waters dark
I sink down and disappear?

Pointing your lovely little finger,
Petal soft as the rays of the early sun
Haven't you morning after morning,
Sketched the pattern of flowers on this pool?
One of them, long-stemmed, dear brother,
I shall pick and give you today.

The wedding yesterday was solemnised
Of my younger sister, the one elder to you,
To that couple, newly wedded, present
This flower, as though an ambrosial bloom.
Till this day I felt needless fear
To plunge into the irretrievable;
Only today I've gained strength
To slip down alone beyond my depth
As we started a while ago,
Lighted wick in hand,
Didn't mother say, 'Can't this girl
have her holy immersion after dawn? '
'Too much of anything, remember
Will come to nothing', she added.
Each moment of her daughter breeds
Callous suspicion in the mother's mind.
Bathing early denotes harlot's ways,
Lying late is but false pretence.

Visit the temple or visit it not,
our mother meets misinterpretation.
Life to the mother, a prolonged heart-burn,
To the poor daughter a crown of thorns.

The gleam and the bubbly sound, dear
Show that the fish are waking afar;
Sorry, I forgot to warn you, dear
But why fear such trifles, I say
The wedding yesterday was solemnised
Of my younger sister, the one elder to you.
A sigh of relief mother must have heaved
That daughter at least will not go astray!

Even the distant relative had said adieu,
And quite early mother had gone to bed,
By happy festive toil tired,
You too on your mat curled up.
The maid, hoarse from extolling the bride-chamber,
Lay down in deep slumber,
I alone lay awake, mind musing
Over the offer of this gift.

Before agitated by the golden rays,
It is with pollen gilded,
Before the blessed bride and groom arrive
To dip and bathe;
Before the sun rises in his glory,
Your sister must move in and cull the flower.

The deep darkness, dear, is slowly leaving,
The first glimmerings of light come.
What aroused fear stands unmasked
Casting a bright smile.
Will you weep, as in these waters dark
I sink down and disappear?
Up to the neck, in shuddering cold,
I shall move and look back,
My darling, you sit on this step
Without fear, smiling, smiling
Your sister can hope for a smile
From no lips, but thine.

If my hand cannot reach the stem,
I shall slide slowly and pluck it,
A spot beyond my level, dangerously deep,
And for sure, my heart, tremulous with joy.

If late, who all will not come seeking,
Are not quarrels, cruel words, their way of life?
'Has not that wretched girl bathed and moved up?
Mother can speak only in such a tone.
'She's been pampered too much', such will be
The judgment, most certain, of your sister young.
When thus the elders' anger strikes flame,
Careful you be not to contradict.
These thighs, soft as petal, never again
Should bear the welts of flogging.
Possibly come your dear brother-in-law
The newly won relative of yours.

If so, your sister will only lie here
Among the lotus-stems her dress close entangled.
If I come up, I may have to face him,
My clothes all wet and clinging.
Even as a girl I've only stood before him
Bathed, my forehead daintily marked,
Dressed in sari and ornaments,
Well groomed and beautiful.
At noon, on the banks of this lotus-pond,
As he sat in the green shade,
To graze the goat, or for a while
To gloat over the beauty of the blooms,
I've never come, unless elegantly dressed,
My heart throbbing in the fullness of joy.
After we had grown up in a love
That even the death could not cut asunder;
As we parted, bidding farewell
In cheerful heart-deep friendliness,
I stood grandly dressed,
A smile lighting my face
I wish those eyes should never
See me in any other form.
As others stand engaged in discussion,

The gentleman will question you,
With a loving kiss your sister pleads,
Remember only to say this:
'In truth, saying she wanted to give
A gift to the newly weds,
My sister slid into the pond
to pluck a lotus lovely'
Darkness has left my mind
Now aflame with your smile.

Will you weep as in these waters dark
I sink down and disappear?

Edasseri Govindan Nair

When Philosophies Sleep

'Everything is fate'
That was father's faith;
He had nothing to do but wait.

'History alone is real
Its developments, all'
The son had his credo;

The hope of the house, the daughter
Remained single, withering,
A plantain one ceased to water,

Daddy had her horoscope read
That's it!
She must wait to wed,
What has been ordained one cannot amend
Even by a dot, try till the days do end.

To substantiate his stand
He could quote Ramayana
From A to Z.

To this axiom of belief
The son put an axe
He can recite Marx
Like nursery rhymes.
The decadent bourgeois order,
Entitled joint-family
To hell, let it go!
A girl is no commodity
To be peddled in market place.
If domestic felicity
Be historic necessity
She can come to agreement
Regarding such arrangements.

She heard them all
But understood none.
When her clothes were torn

The daughter darned the lot.

She got up one day,
That is, before
The third quarter of night
And lit the little oil lamp.
She spread the mat, and placed a bowl of water
Her father needs them every morn for his prayer,
A cup of tea she kept
Near her brother's bed
He must have it to be himself.

To the hall she came
And touched the door
A flash of lightning reached her core
Through the doors that gently came apart
The wide world saluted her resolute heart;
Stretching its cool soft hand;
It placed a wreath of thrill
Upon her head.

Once, she turned to bid a silent farewell
To her home, its presiding deity
To her brother and sire,
To the loose end of her dhoti
A coil she tied -
A token offering to the
Lord of Guruvayur.
With a fluttering heart, with steps faltering
She paced down to the yard,
She paused a while.
Years back, her mother, then a bride,
Walked in through the same
Sand-strewn yard

Facing an auspicious lamp.
In darkness the daughter
Crossed the very yard
Her eyes in floods, toes striking stones.

[Translated from the original Malayalam
'Thathwasastrangal Urangumbol']

by Madhavan Ayyappath.]

Edasseri Govindan Nair

Wind And Light

'O Weakness!

When Thou attains motherhood
Even the arch enemies are there
Not to kill, but to swing the cradle
Of the darling babe;
Thy word is the Order,
The order of the universe
No, not I, to be surprised
If the Ocean Waves
Mount up as strong walls
For a mother to deliver
Her baby in the seas
And, the leaping flames
Become fairy nurses
To protect suckling babies
In the wilderness.

[A few lines from the poem 'Kattum Velichavum' translated by Dr. M. Leelavathi.]

Edasseri Govindan Nair