

Classic Poetry Series

**Koyamparambath
Satchidanandan
- poems -**

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Koyamparambath Satchidanandan(28 May 1946 -)

K. Satchidanandan is a major Indian poet and critic, writing in Malayalam, and English. Satchidanandan has established himself as an academician, editor, translator and playwright.

Born in central Kerala, he was a Professor of English and Editor of Indian Literature, the journal of the Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Literature) and the executive head of the Sahitya Akademi for a decade (1996–2006) He has to his credit 23 collections of poetry besides many selections, 16 collections of translations of poetry and 21 collections of essays on literature, language and society-three of them in English- besides four plays and three travel narratives. He has 25 collections of his poetry in translation in 17 languages including Tamil, Hindi, Bengali, English, Arabic, French, German and Italian. He has introduced several poets like Garcia Lorca, Alexander Block, Voznesensky, Pablo Neruda, Cesar Vallejo, Bertolt Brecht, Paul Celan, Zbigniew Herbert, Eugenio Montale, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Mahmoud Darwish and Yehuda Amichai to Malayalam readers through translations and studies besides a lot of Black, Latin American and Indian poetry. He has also travelled widely, writing and lecturing.

K. Satchidanandan was one of the pioneers of modern poetry in Malayalam and is well known for the subtle and nuanced articulations of socio-political contexts in his poetry. Critics have noted narrativity, irony and philosophical contemplation on the contradictions of existence as decisive elements in his poetry. Commenting on his first collection of translations in English, the poet Jayanta Mahapatra said; "in Summer rain" we find a depth of meaning that cries out aloud to be known and read far and wide. These are poems of great strength and power, a moving tribute to the generation in which we live." According to Carlo Savini, the Italian critic, finds him to be a poet "who resists all kinds of mass ideas and conditioning", one who "celebrates his inner freedom even while respecting the real values of man and his soul". Antonio Mennitti Ippolito speaks of his "many-stringed lyre"; and says he brings all these voices together in his best, dialogic, poems. Satchidanandan has received sixteen literary awards besides many honours like the Knighthood of the Order of Merit from the Government of Italy and the Medallion of Friendship from the Government of Poland.

Life and Career

Koyamparambath Satchidanandan was born in 1946 in Pulloot, a village in

Kodungallur in the Thrissur district of Kerala. After his early education in the village schools, he studied biology at Christ College, Irinjalakuda and had his Masters in English from Maharajas College, Ernakulam. He obtained his Ph.D in Post-structuralism poetics from the University of Calicut. He joined as a lecturer in English at K.K.T.M. College, Pulloot in 1968, and moved to Christ College in 1970 where he became a Professor of English. He voluntarily retired from this post in 1992 to take up the editorship of Indian Literature, the English journal of the Indian National Academy in Delhi. In 1996 he was nominated Secretary, the Chief Executive, of the Academy, a post from which he retired in 2006. Later he served as a Consultant to the Indian Government's Department of Higher Education and to the National Translation Mission. He currently edits Beyond Borders, a journal of South Asian literature and ideas. Satchidanandan is married, with two daughters.

Satchidanandan's early poems were highly experimental and the publication of his first collection, Anchusooryan (Five Suns, 1971) was an important even in Malayalam literature. The same year he launched Jwala (Flame), an avant-garde journal dedicated to experimental writing. He had earlier published a collection of essays on modern Malayalam poetry (Kurukshetram, 1970). He was also translating poetry from across the world for Kerala Kavita and other poetry journals, and writing critical articles on modern literature, arts and culture. By the mid-seventies, he had aligned himself broadly with the political left in Kerala, and was close to the New Left movement and active in its cultural wing, Janakeeya Samskarikavedi (The Forum for People's Culture). He was also associated with other liberal political and secular forums like Desabhimani Study Circle and Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad, an organisation to promote scientific outlook. He wrote many poems protesting against the Emergency in India (1975-77); many of his poems were censored and he was also interrogated by the Crime Branch. In 1978, he launched a small publishing house called Prasakthi Library that brought out anthologies of poems and short stories as well as political tracts. A collection of his poems, written between 1965 to 1982 was published in 1983. He was invited to participate in the Valmiki International Poetry Festival in New Delhi and to represent India at the Sarajevo Poetry Days in former Yugoslavia in 1985. In 1988 he visited the U.S.S.R. as part of a poets' team to take part in the Festival of India there. By this time, his poems and collections had begun to appear in other languages and his books were becoming text books in colleges.

His life in Delhi, after he took up the editorship of Indian Literature, influenced his poetry in many ways: his concerns became broader, resulting in a series of poems on Kerala made possible by his physical distance from the district, and another series on the saint and Sufi poets of India as a part of recovering the

secular heritage in the Indian tradition that he felt was getting lost in the sectarian communalism of right wing politics. In 1993 he visited Ayodhya as a part of a team of writers to protest against the destruction of Babri Masjid by the Hindu right wing. He led the writers' team to China during the Festival of India in China in 1994. As Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi (1996–2006) he launched several new platforms for the emerging writers, especially the young, women, dalits, and tribals besides making the Akademi contemporary in the true sense.

At the same time he kept on writing, translating and editing; a good part of his literary output at this time was in English, as he was addressing a national readership, but he wrote poetry only in his mother tongue, most of which he, along with others, translated into English. He took part in the Ivry Poetry Festival in France in 1997, led a team of writers to Sweden and visited the U.S.A. as a writer the same year. He led a group of writers to Italy in 1999, revisited China in 2000 and again in 2010. In 2002 he was invited to the World Poetry Academy in Verona, Italy, and was active in the campaign against the genocide in Gujarat committed by the Hindu communalists there. His collection of poems in French was published in Paris in 2002. In 2003 he visited France again for readings in five cities as part of the poetry festival, Prentemps des Poetes. In 2004, he visited Syria, New York in the United States and Pakistan as part of the Indian writers' delegations to those countries; his collection in Italian was published in Rome the same year. He was the Indian invitee to the Berlin Literary Festival in 2005, and read at the Frankfurt Book Fair. He was also an invitee to the Leipzig Book Fair and the Abu Dhabi Book Fair in 2006. He again visited Germany in 2006, after his retirement from the Academy when his German collection was released during the Frankfurt Book fair. The same year saw the publication of his Collected Poems (1965–2005) in three volumes. The first volume of his Collected Translations of poetry came out in 2007. In 2007, he again visited Italy, had a reading tour in the Gulf countries and was invited to the Jaipur International Literary Festival in 2008. Since then he has been part of this Festival, taking part in readings and discussions (2009–2011) He represented India at the London Book Fair, 2009 and the Moscow Book fair (2009). His collection of poems in Arabic translation was published in 2009 from Abu Dhabi. A documentary film on him, Summer Rain was released in 2007. He was made a Fellow of the Sahitya Akademi, Kerala in 2010. He was part of the Wales-India poetry Exchange in Wales in 2011 and took part in the Blue Metropolis Literary Festival in Montreal in 2011, followed by readings in Ottawa and Regina. He took part in the U. N. Symposium in New York on 'The Role of Literature in Unlearning Intolerance' in the same year. He was also part of the Hay Festival in Kerala in 2010 and 2011. He was also nominated for the 2011 Nobel Prize in literature .

Awards and Honours

1. Kerala Sahitya Akademi C.B. Kumar Award for Essays, Kerala, 1984.
2. The Best Public Observer Prize, Indian Youth Association, Kerala, 1986.
3. Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for Poetry, Kerala, 1989.
4. Sreekant Verma Fellowship for Poetry Translation, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh, 1990
5. Oman Cultural Centre Award for Total Literary Contribution, Oman U.A.E., 1993.
6. Mahakavi Ulloor Award for Poetry, Kerala, 1996.
7. Mahakavi P. Kunhiraman Nair Award for Poetry, Kerala, 1997.
8. Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad Samvatsar Award for Poetry, Kolkata, 1998.
9. Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for Drama, Kerala, 1999
10. Senior Fellowship from Department of Culture, Govt. of India, 1999
11. Ganakrishti Puraskar for Poetry, Kolkata, 2000
12. Kumaran Asan Award for Poetry, Chennai, 2000
13. Odakkuzhal Award for Poetry, Kerala, 2001
14. Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for Travelogue, Kerala, 2001
15. Manaveeyam Cultural Mission (Govt. of Kerala) memento for 'Service to Humanity through Literature', 2001.
16. Bahrain Keraleeya Samajam Award for Total Literary Contribution, Kingdom Of Bahrain, 2002
17. Gangadhar Meher National Award for Poetry, Sambalpur University, Orissa, 2002
18. Pandalam Kerala Verma Award for Poetry, Kerala, 2005
19. Bappureddy National Award for Literature, Hyderabad, A.P. 2005
20. Vayalar Award for Poetry, Kerala, 2005
21. Friendship Medal, Govt. of Poland, 2005
22. Sahityasree, Hindi Sammelan, Delhi, 2006
23. Knighthood of the Order of Merit, Govt. of Italy, 2006
24. Sree Kerala Varma Sahitya Puraskaram, 2006
25. K. Kuttikrishnan Memorial Award for Poetry, Kerala, 2007
26. Subrahmanya Shenoi Memorial Award for Total Literary Contribution, 2008
27. Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan Memorial Award from Bahrain, 2009
28. Patmaprabha Puraskaram, 2009
29. Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for Translation, 2009
30. Kerala Sahitya Akademi Fellow, 2010
31. Kusumagraj National Award, 2011

Cactus

Thorns are my language.
I announce my existence
with a bleeding touch.

Once these thorns were flowers.
I loathe lovers who betray.
Poets have abandoned the deserts
to go back to the gardens.
Only camels remain here, and merchants,
who trample my blooms to dust.

One thorn for each rare dropp of water.
I don't tempt butterflies,
no bird sings my praise.
I don't yield to droughts.

I create another beauty
beyond the moonlight,
this side of dreams,
a sharp, piercing,
parallel language.

(Translated from the Malayalam by the poet)

Koyamparambath Satchidanandan

Cool, Hot

In Delhi's cold
I recall my mother,
the first warmth
that had enveloped me.

I could not take mother to Kasi,
not even her lullaby.
That remorse keeps a compartment
in every train that shuttles
between Delhi and Benares.

Standing on the banks
of the Ganga with my companion
I thought: I could have brought
mother's ashes for Ganga.

There was no shortage of ashes,
nor of dead bodies there;
but mother had lived
and died in Malayalam.
'Ram nam sach hei' would have
turned her an alien.

Yet the Lord knew her
with her coolness.
Didn't she hide in that
unoiled matted hair?*

Here, she flows in front of me
Let me wash my feet in her
It may not expiate my sins
But it is cool like affection, soiled.

Reaching home in Delhi
I open the tap:
Here comes Ganga, purified.
How did mother manage
to pass through this pipe?

"O, I took a magic potion: Death.

Now I can take any shape,
can go anywhere."

I scooped her up in my hands:
And was cooled,
In Delhi's heat.

(Translated from the Malayalam by the poet)

*Remember Siva hiding Ganga in his tangled hair.

Koyampambath Satchidanandan

Daughter

(To Sabitha, suffering from Multiple Sclerosis)

I see my thirty-year old daughter
again as a six-month old.
I bathe her, wash away
the dust and muck
of thirty years.

Now she glistens like
a short Amichai poem
in the liquid glow of Heaven.
The little towel
gets wet with Time.

Beethoven raises his
more than human hands
turning the window-bars
into piano-keys.

My daughter
emerges out of a symphony
to hug me with
her rose-soft hands.

Outside, rain's bihag :
Kishori Amonkar.

(Translated from the Malayalam by the poet)

Koyamparambath Satchidanandan

Days Of The Week

Sunday comes
flying like lightning
opening the golden doors of heaven
on the wings of sunbeams.

*

Monday rises
from hell's kitchen
with the pungent odour of
the smoke from charred pot of milk

*

Tuesday crawls in
bleeding, from its
dark hole on earth,
its hood beaten and crushed

*

Wednesday swims in
from the coral reefs of
the ocean bed, with its
long tail, sharp teeth and black scales

*

Thursday walks in,
silence frozen on its hairs,
with the quiet steps of the snowman
from the icy cave in the mountains

*

Friday staggers in,
a shivering hunchback,
his beard grey and hair matted,
carrying a knapsack of failed revolutions

*

Saturday arrives
riding a coffin, raising
her head and screaming
in a witch's dark mantle

*

Sunday retreats, closing behind him
the heaven's door, to retire
to his dim disheveled little room
to write a poem

on the days of the week.

2012

(Translated from Malayalam by the poet)

Koyamparambath Satchidanandan

Disquiet: Autobiography: Canto One

I came bursting open a proverb's belly
one afternoon of impending rain,
gasping like the salt that leaves the sea
fighting my exile from the dark eternity
of the dead and of gods
screaming against being hurled into
the loveless light of the living.

It was a difficult delivery,
recalls my mother, the labour was long.
How would she know
I had been hiding in my watery chamber
scared, without letting go of the umbilical cord?

I was a blood-soaked riddle, say the neighbours,
and still had only a single head.
Father says I was damp like a swamp,
with that marshy smell.
And sister tells me I was lean
having squirmed out of a folktale.

A huge question fell loose from the roof
suggesting an inauspicious birth.

2

The vayamp [1] was tasty.
It was only when mother applied the chenninayakam [2]
to her nipples to stop me suckling
that I gathered there were tastier things on earth.
The kanjiram tree [3] east of our house
was yet to bear fruit.

Lying in the rosewood cradle
smelling of the fear of generations
my ear learnt to distinguish between
a lullaby and God's voice,
my eye, between mother's hair and the night,
my nose, between the boiling paddy's aroma

and that of my sister's arrival,
my tongue , between the word
and the sour taste of tamarind,
my skin, between father's touch
and the roughness of a blanket.
Mother feared I would turn into a toad
if the neighbours kissed me.
I yearned to go back to water.

3

Father was a cloud
whose dark back I rode;
mother, a warm white brook
that oozed milk and song.

The parrots knew my hunger;
they told the woods about it.
The woods offered me fruits.
The fish knew my thirst,
they told the rivers.
The rivers flowed into my cradle
and rain fell into my bedroom.

The yakshis [4] came with breasts
that would never dry up.
I wasn't there.
There was only hunger. And thirst.

In sleep I rode to my previous births.
I spread like grass and became
a psalm for the colour green.
I flowered like laburnum and became
a lexicon of yellow.
I knew the ecstasy of water
throbbing on peacock feathers and fish fins,
I turned into a leopard
and learnt the grammar of instinct.

4

One day I decided to stand up.

And with me stood up the world.
I turned around to answer my name.
The world also turned around.
A child beckoned from the mirror.
Behind him was a shadow.
That shadow grew up with me.
He ate what I ate.
When I slept he kept awake
and peeped into my dreams.
When I first looked into the well
I saw him in its open mouth.
He was there with me in all my births.

I was a letter that had fallen off from a word.
It is still looking for its word.
It tries sitting in each word,
and comes away knowing
no word as its own:
In the dictionary, alone, scared.

5

Serpents, lead me to the daylight
of the rubies in your burrows.
Jackals, carry me
to the nights of your howls.
Let me enter the world of the dead
on the wings of an owl,
let me touch an angel's wings
riding a rainbow,
let me take off from the back of a swan
and, passing through a lotus stalk
reach the other side of the earth,
let me become a bat, a palai flower,
a well-spring, a conch, a ripe mango.

Just don't force me to be myself. I am content to be others
I can't bear the burden of identity
I can't carry the weight of forms
Enough that I am
the sweetness in the sugarcane,
the breeze that turns

the pipal boughs into clouds,
the raindrops that turn into bells
under the earth.
Enough that I am the birdsong
and the will-o'-the-wisp,
enough that I am
fire, fire, fire.

6

Then I began walking
crawling out of the damp darkness of rooms
towards the razor's edge of the courtyard,
rising again to the sunshine's gold
playing hide-and-seek,
to the rainbows of the butterflies.

Every leaf invited me into its vein,
every flower into its fragrance and honey.
Grass caressed me with its tiny green fingers,
stones told me of the pains in store,
the first rain baptised me
into nature's religion.

I walked from sweetness to hotness;
salt taught the tongue to spell out words.

Did words come first,
or objects, I can't recall.
Was it the word 'light' that became light?
I went up and down
the winding stairs of language,
chanted new words like mantras
to tame the world.
From the magic lanterns of words
came djinns who could conjure up anything.
With words they created
mountains, oceans, forests,
deserts, palaces and gardens.
Words were my stallions

to roam the world.
From words rose the sun, the moon,
planets, stars, the roc bird,
talking statues [5], speaking beasts.
Scared of the Sultan's sword,
words told a new tale each day,
earned a new name and shape in each birth
and became bodhisattvas.
Words became mirrors
to reveal the insides,
became keys to open magic caves.

One day a little index finger rode
the camel of a big hand
and wound its way along the sand
in praise of Vighneswara[6].
Along those crooked lines, later,
came suns, horses, flags, prophets.

Which was the real world?
Which is?

7

I saw fear
in the stagnant pond wrapped in weeds
in the leaf trembling in the moonlight
in the sand receding from the feet
planted in the sea at night,
in the single footprint on the courtyard.

A boy all skin and bones lay raving
at the height of his pneumonia,
a charm around his neck,
between dreams and the monsoon rains.
His mind roamed other worlds,
leaving the flesh to fever.
It was on that day
that it rained blood for the first time
and the four-o'clock flowers grew fangs.

I returned from death

and heard my mother's voice choke
while reciting the Ramayana's aranyakanda.[7]
I heard father,back from the shop
denied the day's ration, speak of war.
Saw a leper with his fingerless hand
reaching for a shoe flower
to offer a dumb goddess.
Heard an old woman, soaked in rain,
pray to the coral tree
to grow more foliage.
Saw the bluish corpse of my playmate
moving its lips to tell me something.

My infancy had come to an end.
A tree with red leaves and black flowers,
heavy with tempting fruits
shone in the sky with a million eyes.
A horned beast with hooves and a trunk
and seven crowns on its seven heads
rose, soaked in slime,
from the deluge in the paddy fields.

(Translated from the Malayalam by the poet)

[1] A bitter herbal preparation administered to new-borns.

[2] A more bitter potion to stop infant's suckling.

[3] Nux vomica tree.

[4] Heavenly maidens

[5] the salabhanjikas of the Vikramaditya tales.

[6] The Lord who removes obstacles. The reference is to the Kerala ritual of initiation into the alphabet, the child's finger writing a verse in praise of Lord Ganesha on the sand strewn on the floor, guided by the teacher's hand.

[7] The canto in the epic dealing with the life of the prince Rama in exile in the woods.

Koyamparambath Satchidanandan

Gandhi And Poetry

One day a lean poem
reached Gandhi's ashram
to have a glimpse of the man.
Gandhi spinning away
his thread towards Ram
took no notice of the poem
waiting at his door
ashamed as he was no bhajan.

The poem cleared his throat
and Gandhi looked at him sideways
through those glasses
that had seen Hell.
'Have you ever spun thread? ', he asked,
'Ever pulled a scavenger's cart?
Ever stood the smoke
of an early morning kitchen?
Have you ever starved? '

The poem said: 'I was born
in the woods, in a hunter's mouth.
A fisherman brought me up in his hamlet.
Yet, I know no work, I only sing.
First I sang in the courts:
then I was plump and handsome;
but am on the streets now,
half-starved.'

'That's better,' Gandhi said
with a sly smile, 'but you must
give up this habit
of speaking in Sanskrit at times.
Go to the fields, listen to
the peasants' speech.'

The poem turned into a grain
and lay waiting in the fields
for the tiller to come
and upturn the virgin soil

moist with the new rain.

(Translated from the Malayalam by the poet)

Koyampambath Satchidanandan

Granny

My granny was insane.
As her madness ripened into death,
my uncle, a miser,
kept her in our store room
wrapped in straw.

My granny dried up, burst;
her seeds flew out of the window.
The sun came, and the rain,
one seedling grew up into a tree,
whose lusts bore me.

Can I help writing poems
About monkeys with teeth of gold?

Koyampambath Satchidanandan

How To Go To The Tao Temple

Don't lock the door.
Go lightly like the leaf in the breeze
along the dawn's valley.
If you are too fair,
cover yourself with ash.
If too clever, go half-asleep.
That which is fast
will tire fast:
be slow, slow as stillness.

Be formless like water.
Lie low, don't even try to go up.
Don't go round the deity:
nothingness has no directions,
no front nor back.
Don't call it by name,
its name has no name.
No offerings: empty pots
are easier to carry than full ones.
No prayers too: desires
have no place here.

Speak silently, if speak you must:
like the rock speaking to the trees
and leaves to flowers.
Silence is the sweetest of voices
and Nothingness has
the fairest of colours.
Let none see you coming
and none, going.
Cross the threshold shrunken
like one crossing a river in winter.
You have only a moment here
like the melting snow.

No pride: you are not even formed.
No anger: not even dust
is at your command.
No sorrow: it doesn't alter anything.

Renounce greatness:
there is no other way to be great.
Don't ever use your hands:
They are contempalting
not love,but vilolence.
Let the fish lie in its water
and the fruit, on its bough.
The soft one shall survive the hard,
like the tongue that survives teeth.
Only the one who does nothing
can do everything.

Go, the unmade idol
awaits you.

(Translated from the Malayalam by the poet)

Koyamparambath Satchidanandan

Invisible

I have never seen you;
may be I never will.
Still I know you are there,
like some unseen stars,
like the first wonder-filled flap
of the just-created bird,
like some half-formed words
on the frontiers of language,
like some planets,
fuming fluid yet.

2

Your crystal-voice
quickens my heartbeat,
like coffee, like pepper,
like jazz, like drugs.

3

You are a dripping tunnel
with light at the end.
I long to get wet
passing through you
listening to the songs
of the forest-birds
that thrill the wind.

4

The scent of how many flowers
from your body shining far-away
Is igniting my senses?

5

Let those hands keep moving,
their bangles laughing,
shaping the fragile idols of love.

6

Who said life is a tree
that blossoms just once

and then dries up?
This is that moment,
unrepeatable, of blossoming.

7

I am a grain of sand
and you, the endless sea.
Let me multiply and be the earth
to contain all of you?

8

I tremble all over like
the tallest building
in a quake-hit city.
You are the oldest of its roads.
Split open so that I may
tumble down to be
devoured by your womb
and open my fresh eyes
into the light of a city
yet to be born.

2012

(Translated from Malayalam by the poet)

Koyampambath Satchidanandan

Misplaced Objects

In a flash I recall all the
misplaced objects of my life:
the ten lambent marbles
forgotten under the dry leaves
beneath the mango tree,
the umbrella left behind in Apu's saloon
the day rain failed to turn up,
the pen that dived from the pocket
while climbing the cashewnut tree
on the way back from the village school,
the sky-blue shirt remaining
in a hotel wardrobe in Riga,
the long list of books lent, never returned,
some unredeemed debts, a few unrequited loves.

Forgetfulness alone never forgot me.
As I fell in love I began misplacing my heart,
metaphors as I began to scribble poetry.
Later, looking at the hills, I began to feel
the sky had misplaced them and
the clouds had misplaced the rainbow.

I have recently begun to suspect
this very earth with us on it
has been misplaced by God.
In the order He recalls, He claims back:
woods, rivers, us.

2006

(Translated from the Malayalam by the poet)

Koyampambath Satchidanandan

Old Women

Old women do not fly on magic wands
or make obscure prophecies
from ominous forests.

They just sit on vacant park benches
in the quiet evenings
calling doves by their names
charming them with grains of maize.

Or, trembling like waves
they stand in endless queues in
government hospitals
or settle like sterile clouds
in post offices awaiting mail
from their sons abroad,
long ago dead.

They whisper like a drizzle
as they roam the streets
with a lost gaze as though
something they had thrown up
had never returned to earth.

They shiver like December nights
in their dreamless sleep
on shop verandahs.

There are swings still
in their half-blind eyes,
lilies and Christmases
in their failing memory.
There is one folktale
for each wrinkle on their skin.
Their drooping breasts
yet have milk enough to feed
three generations
who would never care for it.

All dawns pass
leaving them in the dark.

They do not fear death,
they died long ago.

Old women once
were continents.
They had deep woods in them,
lakes, mountains, volcanoes even,
even raging gulfs.
When the earth was in heat
they melted, shrank,
leaving only their maps.
You can fold them
and keep them handy :
who knows, they might help you find
your way home.

2007

(Translated from the Malayalam by the poet)

Koyamparambath Satchidanandan

On Wet Grass

That footprint on the wet grass
needs not be death's;
may be a folksong has gone by.

The butterfly quivering on your palm
has something to tell you.

How the falling mangoes and jasmines
look for your cupped hands
To stop them midway!

Don't you hear the sea whisper
not to pay back your debts?

Even your dark little room
has a piece of sky.

Everything is blessed:
fish, crickets, sedges,
sunlight, lips, words.

Koyampambath Satchidanandan

Poetry Will Come

We need rice, salt,
chilly, firewood;
we can do without poetry.
Yet poetry will come back
like rice,
the seed of the earth,
boiled and cleaned of husk and bran,
overflowing every measure
every granary and godown;
like salt,
the memory of the sea,
watering our mouths,
burning us with pain
in order to heal our wounds,
nourishing our roots;
like chilly,
the lust of the clay,
turning hot our lips, tongues,
breasts, waists, veins and nerves;
like the firewood,
the bones of the forest,
their marrow melting sizzling
burning slow with tiny flames,
chanting, in a single breath,
rice salt chilly firewood poetry.

(Translated from Malayalam by the poet)

Koyampambath Satchidanandan

Stammer

Stammer is no handicap.
It is a mode of speech.

Stammer is the silence that falls
between the word and its meaning,
just as lameness is the
silence that falls between
the word and the deed.

Did stammer precede language
or succeed it?
Is it only a dialect or
a language itself?
These questions make
the linguists stammer.

Each time we stammer
we are offering a sacrifice
to the God of meanings.

When a whole people stammer
stammer becomes their mother-tongue:
just as it is with us now.

God too must have stammered
when He created man.
That is why all the words of man
carry different meanings.
That is why everything he utters
from his prayers to his commands
stammers,
like poetry.

Koyampambath Satchidanandan

The Last Goal

I, Zinedine Zidane,
the stranger you feel like stabbing
as the French sun dazzles you (1) ,
one with a different face and a different build
still hoping in vain to be
one among you,
one who drank molten steel to
cultivate his muscles so that
you might love him
one who ran along sharp-pointed nails
to grow nimble of foot,
sharpened his Algerian gaze
looking for stars yet to rise (2)
and his brain by grinding it
on French's whet-stone and
rasping it with Arabic's file.

I was shown the red card long ago:
during my disgraceful childhood in that
squalid suburb of Marseille (3)
and my rebellious adolescence.

Pardon me if for eight seconds
the raging blood of my wounded race
hunted down from New York to Gujarat
rushed into my head I bow only for namaz
Pardon me if the tears of my
acid-soaked motherland rose like a
tidal wave to engulf the venomous
heart of my public abuser
Pardon, for having infused for eight seconds
the illusion of the playground with
the bitterness of reality,
for having subverted the soft rule of
the game with the harsh rule of life.

There were no spectators before me,
no cameras: only the wrinkled face
of my mother, all mothers, in exile;

only the last chance history gave me
to avenge every disgraced being on earth
by a single bloodless gesture.

That, pardon me children,
Was Zinedine Zidane's final header,
his last goal.

Notes:

- (1) Remember Albert Camus's *The Outsider*.
- (2) Zidane was born to Algerian immigrants.
- (3) He grew up in La Castellane, a suburb of marseille in Southern France.

Koyamparambath Satchidanandan

The Mad

The mad have no caste
nor transcend
gender, live outside
ideologies. We do not deserve
their innocence.

Their language is not of dreams
but of another love
is moonlight. It overflows
on the full moon day.

Looking up they see
gods we have never heard are
shaking their wings when
we fancy they are
shrugging their hold
even flies have souls
and the green god of grasshoppers
leaps up on thin legs.

At times they see trees bleed, hear
lions roaring from the times
they watch Heaven gleaming
in a kitten's eyes, just as
we do. But they alone can hear
ants sing in a chorus.

While patting the air
they are taming a cyclone
over the
their heavy tread, they stop
a volcano from erupting.

They have another measure
of century is
their y seconds,
and they reach Christ; six more,
they are with the Buddha.
In a single day, they reach

the big bang at the beginning.

They go on walkng restless for,
their earth is boiling still.

The mad are not
mad like us.

(Translated from the Malayalam by the poet)

Koyamparambath Satchidanandan

The Unwritten Poem

I am the poem
no one has written yet.
I traveled up to
the fingertips of many poets
but retreated to the dream
like unexpressed love
as I was without script.
I am not afraid of language
as long as it has a future tense.
One day I will find my words:
a wonder-struck child
will see a sail
unfold and rise slowly
on a vacant page
under a new star.

(Translated from Malayalam by the poet)

Koyamparambath Satchidanandan

Those Who Go

Let them go who want to;
turn your eyes towards
those who remain.
Look into the mirror:
An angel looks at you
from within, whispering to you
in your own voice:
Don't give up, live.

Listen to silence:
It is an uproar, a cascade
like your beloved
bursting into laughter
stroking her hair backward,
the dance of leaves,
the wind's anklet,
the song of survivors
from beyond the river,
the new year arriving
with a round of applause,
flowers dangling from her ears.

There is no yesterday,
nor tomorrow; only the doors
of today opening to the sky.
And smells: of wet hay, boiling paddy,
rain-washed earth, elanji flowers,
arecanuts in bloom, cardamom,
serpent's eggs, the mysterious
secretions of trees and men.

I will not sleep tonight,
nor will I let you.

Koyampambath Satchidanandan

Who Said

Who said that waiting is
a railway station in North Malabar?
That a morning in uniform will
arrive there in a coffin?

Who said memory is
a fragrant window opening on
ripe corn fields? That
our bodies grow cold
as the sun grows dim there?

Who said trees have
ceased to follow
wind's language? That
we must conceal from lilies and rabbits
the news of the death of love?

Who said now moons
will be heavy like
a drunkard's head? That
evenings will have sick hearts
like a desperate lover's whispered songs?

Who said we are
running barefoot over red-hot iron
with a fistful of childhood rain? That
we will, at the end, hand over
our keys to the same rain?

Who said men, once dead,
grow younger entering another Time? That
all the birds that vanished at the sunrise
will return when the world ends?

Who said we would
understand everything without anyone
telling us anything? That still
we would not share anything with anyone?

POSTED BY SATCHIDANANDAN AT 7:27 AM 2 COMMENTS:

THREE POEMS OF HOPE

idanandan

On Wet Grass

That footprint on the wet grass
needs not be death's;
may be a folksong has gone by.

The butterfly quivering on your palm
has something to tell you.

How the falling mangoes and jasmines
look for your cupped hands
To stop them midway!

Don't you hear the sea whisper
not to pay back your debts?

Even your dark little room
has a piece of sky.
Everything is blessed:
fish, crickets, sedges,
sunlight, lips, words.

At Times

At times it is good to laugh:
even before you take your life, for,
the sun survives you,
fishermen set their tiny boats once more
on the raging sea,
the drowned man's clothes learn
to fly about the riverbank,
a man and a woman
blossom into heaven
from a bed of misery,
a boy riding the noon
dreams of caparisoned elephants,
a girl turns into a breeze
inhaling the scent of orange blossoms,
a home-bound bird deposits

four blue eggs and
a star in the twilight,
Sehgal trembles like the moon in a river 1
on the lips of a happy drunk,
a poem slips past a banyan tree
hiding its face behind an umbrella,
a raindropp turning into emerald
on a colocasia leaf remembers
the poet Kunhiraman Nair. 2

(Translated from Malayalam by the poet)

Notes:

1. A legendary Hindustani singer.
2. A Malayalam poet with an intense nostalgia for Kerala's vanishing landscapes.

Koyamparambath Satchidanandan