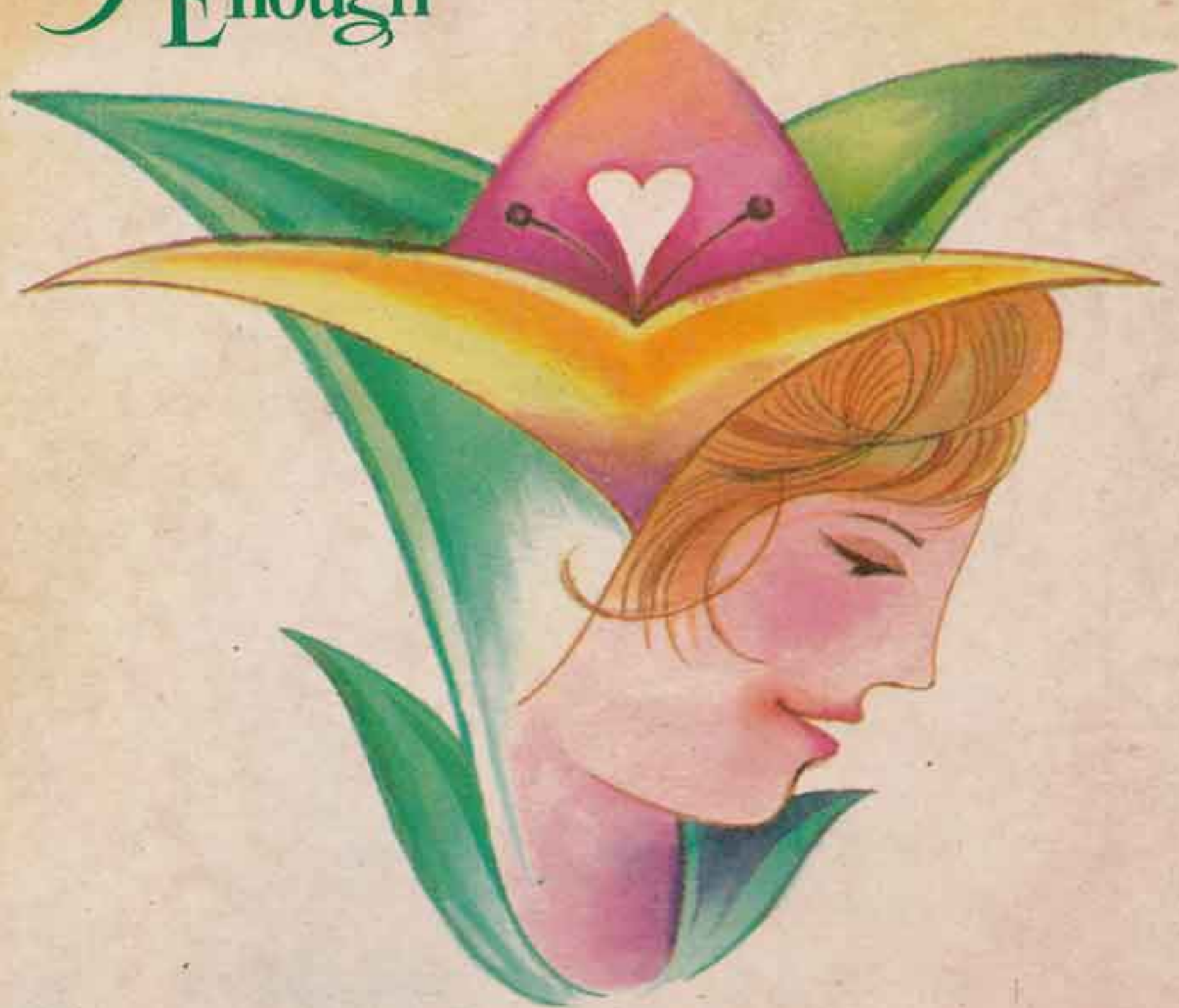


Earth is  
*Paradise*  
Enough



Poems by

*Kulothungan*



The poems in this collection have been selected and translated from three published volumes of Prof. Kulandai Swamy's poetry in Tamil. The originals deal with themes that reflect the gamut of human experience. The topics selected for translation by the author himself and included in this volume mainly deal with human progress and the all-pervasive impact of human effort.

The author explains in his *Preface* that the aim of literature is not only to act as a mirror of the present, but to envision a 'future' that man is constantly striving to create. "Literature must lead to action. . . The future is not a matter of irrevocable evolution; but one that can be visualised, designed and constructed". This confidence as well as conviction characterises most of the poems that Kulothungan (Prof. Kulandai Swamy) now presents in translation to his readers.

"What characterises the poetry of Prof. Kulandai Swamy is its ethical imagination. It persuades, but it doesn't declaim. It is meditative but not rhetorical. Its linguistic structure is not elusively suggestive; but it is made up of perfect statements. Yet these statements are not abstract philosophy, but poetry. . . 'Being' for such a poet is never static; it is forever 'Becoming'. Prof. Kulandai Swamy, a man of science and technology in his 'forever becoming' is Kulothungan, the creator of these memorable, meditative poems.

—From the *Foreword* by Prof.  
U.R. Anantha Murthy

**பாக்டர் வா.செ. குழந்தைசாமி [குலோத்துங்கன்]**

**Ph.D., D. Litt. (h.c.), D.Sc. (h.c.), F.N.A.E., F.N.A.Sc., F. I.E.**

**41 எம். ஜி. ஆர். சாலை, பெசன்ட் நகர், சென்னை 600 090**

**Dr. V. C. Kulandaiswamy [Kulothungan]**

**Ph.D., D. Litt. (h.c.), D.Sc. (h.c.), F.N.A.E., F.N.A.Sc., F. I.E.**

**41 M.G.R. Road, Besant Nagar, Chennai 600 090**





**Prof. V.C. Kulandai Swamy** (Kulothungan) is an eminent scientist and a man of letters known for his contributions in hydrology, education and literature.

Born in a remote village, Vangalampalayam in Tamil Nadu, he took his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, USA. Beginning as a member of the faculty in Technical Education, he has been a teacher and a researcher of international standing in Hydrology and has made significant contributions to Rainfall-Runoff studies. A model developed by him, known as *Kulandai Swamy Model*, is widely quoted in hydrologic literature.

He was a UNESCO expert and has also been a member of the UNESCO Planning Group for preparing the Second Six Year Plan (1981-86) of the International Hydrological Programme (IHP).

Later he moved to positions in academic administration as Vice-Chancellor, Madurai Kamaraj University (1978-79), Anna University (1981-90) and Indira Gandhi National Open University (1990- ). He has been Chairman/member of a large number of international and national committees on higher education, technical education and vocational education. Mention may be made of such national bodies as the University Grants Commission, All India Council for Technical Education and Joint Council of Vocational Education.

He is a Fellow of the Institution of Engineers, the Indian National Academy of Sciences and the Indian National Academy of Engineering.

Prof. Swamy is a well-known writer and poet in Tamil. The University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, conferred on him D. Litt. (Honoris Causa) and the citation states that "Dr. Kulandai Swamy belongs to the rare band of scientists who are able to synthesize the scientific and the literary cultures. Consequently his scientific pursuits are permeated with a deep sense of humanism and his literary pursuits are characterized by a highly sober and critical judgement based on rigorous scientific methods".

He is a recipient of the Ministry of Irrigation Gold Medal; the Indira Gandhi National Integration Award; the Central Board of Irrigation and Power Diamond Jubilee Award for 1991; and was honoured as one of the "Eminent Engineering Personalities of India, 1991".

Prof. Swamy was the recipient of the prestigious *Sahitya Akademi Award* for 1988. He was conferred the national honour of *Padma Shri* by the President of India in 1992.



# EARTH IS PARADISE ENOUGH

KULOTHUNGAN

Poems in Tamil  
Translated by the Author



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3-5-1114/1 Kachiguda Cross Road, Hyderabad 500027

60 Bajaj Nagar, Central Bazar Road, Nagpur 440010

16A Ashok Marg, Patiala House, Lucknow 226001

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## FOREWORD

I knew Prof. Kulandai Swamy as a visionary in the field of education, but I did not know that he was a poet as well. A surprise awaited me when I was in Oslo for a literary conference. A Norwegian poet who looked delicate and sensitive was also participating in the conference. She talked about her preferences in poetry which crosses national and cultural boundaries. As an example, she read aloud two poems of Prof. Kulandai Swamy. I had great admiration for Prof. Kulandai Swamy as an educationist, but the Norwegian poet added a new dimension to my admiration.

As a student of poetry, I had always thought that it was almost impossible to translate poems. But this incident was an eye-opener to me. There are some poems which can be translated and such poems have a profound thought content. Prof. Kulandai Swamy's poems belong to this category. And he has a hoary tradition behind him. In his own language, Tamil, he has Subramania Bharati and Thiruvalluvar to inspire him. And also, in Sanskrit, the Bhartrihari of the *Nitishatakas*. Even Alexander Pope belongs to this tradition. The untranslatable poems are the great lyricists like Keats, Blake and Shelley.

What characterises the poetry of Prof. Kulandai Swamy is its ethical imagination. It persuades, but it doesn't declaim. It is meditative but not rhetorical. Its linguistic structure is not elusively suggestive; but it is made up of perfect statements. Yet these statements are not abstract philosophy but poetry, because what the poet states becomes memorable speech. In other words, it is not didactic teaching from the pedestal of a master which our ancients called *Prabhu samhita*; it is gently persuasive — *Kantha samhita* — like the woman whispering affectionately to her lover.

Poetry of profound ethical imagination is out of fashion now in Europe. But it plays a crucial role in our country still. I have a feeling that these poems in English translation must be central to the great tradition of Tamil poetry. I have enjoyed reading these poems which bridge the gulf between scientific spirit and poetic dream. There is another kind of poetry as well, where the poet wrestles with the irrational and the Other in his own self, and seeks thereby the unity of being. The best poetry of Blake and Yeats aspire to such a mystical unity. Prof. Kulandai Swamy, who is a rationalist doesn't have this mystical, lyrical yearning for the ineffable. He wishes to

transcend the limited self and submit himself to a humanist ideal. His poetry is eminently that of a citizen whose creative imagination works for a stable and integrated civilization. It does not have the arrogance of a technocrat who wants to conquer nature. Prof. Kulandai Swamy's true *sthayi bhava* (the basic note) can be found in the poem 'She Keeps Chiselling Me':

She keeps chiselling me further and further,  
strives to shape me to a form ever higher  
The crude ore that she mined from the depth,  
seeking to purify, cast in the hearth.

Every cut her chisel does make  
serves to refine the form I take.  
Out of the blaze of pain and sorrow.  
my soul does emerge chaste and ripe.

The tears that swell and flow down my eyes,  
serve to cleanse my entire self:  
I have come out after a bath in fire  
Shall the heat of a hot day hurt me ever?  
She keeps chiselling me further and further. . .

"Being" for such a poet is never static; it is forever "Becoming". Prof. Kulandai Swamy, a man of science and technology in his "forever becoming" is Kulothungan, the creator of these memorable, meditative poems.

Prof. U.R. ANANTHA MURTHY  
President  
Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi



## PREFACE

The poems in this collection have been selected and translated from three volumes of my poems published in Tamil under the pen name KULOTHUNGAN over a period of four decades. The original publications deal with varied themes like human endeavour, human progress, language, religion, poverty, labour, nature, womanhood, love and environment. The topics selected for translation and inclusion in this volume mainly deal with human progress and the all pervasive impact of human effort.

I am an engineer by education and training; teacher, researcher and later an educational administrator by profession. Language and literature have always had an attraction for me and my interest and inclinations have been, since my youth, in that direction. I happened to opt for engineering because of a prevailing environment in which it was held as axiomatic that a student of science with good academic record will go for engineering or medicine or other professional courses. Secondly, such a course of choice assured economic security and also appeared more meaningful in a developing country like India at the time I was to enter the university and make my choice.

Economic compulsions played a major role in my choice of science and technology for a career. I resorted to writing prose and poetry to keep my interest in language and literature alive. My education in science and technology has been of immense help to look at the ancient Tamil literature from a new angle and view the issues of Indian languages more as problems of development than of preservation and protection as the language scholars, at least many of them, tend to do.

Somehow, from my school days, I developed a deep interest in the problems of society, particularly in social reform and social justice. My desire has been not to be a spectator of the transformation that must take place but be an active participant; not a member of the audience, but a player on the stage; not a bystander, but a marcher in the expedition. There were occasions – and they occurred with increasing frequency as days passed on – when I fretted and fumed; sobbed and wept; resented and rebelled against the inequities and injustices prevalent, the parasitic predilection of the privileged and the betrayal of the gullible masses by the fraudulent ones in political life. Poems provided an



outlet for my emotions; perhaps a safe outlet at that, for a government employee, because of the freedom that a poet enjoys even at present. Some of the poems are an attempt at releasing the oppressive effects of persisting indignation, discontent and sorrow. Some of the thoughts and feelings conveyed in my poems in the three volumes if expressed in prose would have attracted many provisions of government servant's conduct rules. The poems translated for this volume stay above controversial issues. In the main, a creative effort has its own delight and I turned to this diversion whenever I could.

The aim of literature is not entertainment; not a mere reflection of society as it is; it must picture the world of the present and envision the one in the future that we seek to create. Literature must lead to action: must lead to a thousand deeds. The future is not a matter of irrevocable evolution; but one that can be visualised, designed and constructed. This confidence as well as conviction is reflected in most of my poems. Certain thoughts might appear to have been expressed repetitively. It has been done with the faith that these ideas bear repetition and may be reiterated in as many ways as possible.

This volume is essentially a "*Hymn to Humanity*". It emphasises the known fact that whatever it is that goes to make culture, civilisation or for that matter any refinement in human life, it is the contribution of man. Whether it be scriptures or religions founded on them or faiths based on religion, they are his creations. Art and music, rituals and traditions, language and literature are his contributions. Angels and gods are his conceptions. God himself is seen to have chosen mainly the human form either to take an *avatar* or to send a messiah or to depute an offspring of his. It is this crown and glory of the humans that this volume seeks to sing.

Whatever be the society and whichever the age, the quality of life is dependent on the quality of men and women. Development of a society or a nation is synonymous with the development of human resources. A society for its progress depends on the leadership it has. It is necessary for an enlightened society to create conditions that are conducive to the emergence of competent leaders in every walk of life. Leaders are as much made as they are born. Nothing that is worthwhile happens by accident. For talent to flourish and blossom, it must be identified, recognised and if necessary, rewarded. Indian society is very weak in this regard. The second line of competent leadership is the desideratum in this society. The

general strain is "after me the deluge". Thiruvalluvar says that one's greatness should be judged by what one leaves behind. The leaders of political organisations or social, educational institutions or departments of the government or industrial undertakings must be judged not only by what they themselves have achieved during their tenure but also, perhaps more so, by what they leave behind, and among the things they may leave behind, the most important is the leadership to succeed them. Some of the poems represent an attempt to give shape to this thought.

Looking at an individual, it might appear that human life is cyclic—the many events from birth to death repeating in everybody's life. Humanity, as such, is on an onward march: it is continuous, open-ended and always on the ascent, though we do not know and we may never know where the peak is or what the destination is. We may only look back; but we cannot step back even by an inch. Striving for and stretching one's hand to perfection is an effort enjoyable in itself and we keep alive this spirit and continue the mission. We accept as an axiom that in totality, the human world today is better than yesterday and it will be still better tomorrow.

Human society and poverty seem inseparable. From the dawn of civilisation, history has recorded deprivation as a problem of mankind. One would normally think that the progress from agricultural economy to industrial economy and from industrial economy to high technology economy would have liberated us from such primitive needs as food, shelter and clothing. Art and culture, science and technology, freedom and liberty will have no great significance to the starving souls and their number is large—very large indeed. In the past there were rich and poor people in every country and between two nations the difference in economic status was marginal. But today we have not just rich and poor people, but also rich and poor nations clearly identified. The emergence of the latter phenomenon into prominence is now shooting up newer problems and newer divisions. While Science and Technology has helped the world to break many natural barriers and convert the world into a global village, we have raised many artificial walls and the world today is as divided as before; the violence of the information age is no less barbaric than that of the primitives. Man is but a combination of the mind and the muscle; one wonders whether we have developed the might of the muscle far ahead of the wisdom of the mind to be able to use the might for positive purposes.

Twentieth century has many remarkable achievements to its



credit. From the splitting of the atom to the invention of stored programme computers, from the adventure in space to the breakthroughs in biosciences, from the developments in materials to revolution in electronics, there have been numerous landmarks in the course of this century; but above all of them stands one single development, namely the emergence of knowledge as a major resource. The consequences that follow from this development are far reaching and numerous and they have started unfolding themselves in the form of many manifestations. Poetry in Indian languages has not so far grasped the spirit of the information age and made it part of its flora and fauna. It has been my endeavour to present these aspects in Tamil, not in free verse, but in classical form wherein lies the appeal of Tamil poetry.

Like spiritual, philosophic and scientific truths, there is such a thing as poetic truth. Consequently, poetry as part of literature has an enduring role to play. Scientific truth by itself has no economic value; it acquires economic value only if it can be used to develop an innovation – may be the development of a process or a tool as the case may be. Similarly poetic truth has value only if it has relevance to enrich human living. To be relevant, one has to keep pace with the age. Poetry is no exception.

Science and Technology has become today a part of our social, cultural and economic life. There is no aspect of our living that has not been influenced and transformed by Science and Technology. It has enriched life, reduced pain and contributed to prosperity; it has also created many problems. While these aspects find expression in essays, novels and stories in our languages, poetry seems to stand at the fringe and does not fully reflect the spirit of the age. In my poems in Tamil, I have endeavoured to breathe in the most important contribution of science namely the scientific approach and scientific temper.

When it comes to languages, our emphasis customarily is on preservation and protection. Our accent is on ancient glory. What we need today is development and modernisation which means change. Scholars in languages tend to resist change; men and women in other disciplines do not show much of an interest in the the modernisation and development of our languages and politicians often exploit the sentiments of the people to their advantage. Consequently it so happens that Indian languages have not progressed very far as vehicles of modern thought and



knowledge. Since the pace of progress of our languages is far slower than the pace of progress of knowledge, Indian languages, contrary to what many may believe and claim, are poorer today than yesterday and will be poorer tomorrow than today in comparison with the explosion of new knowledge. This is happening inexorably, but unnoticed and unrealised. My writings in prose discuss these issues in detail. A few of the poems also deal with this subject.

Poetry is still the queen of literary forms. It has to play a more aggressive and purposive role without losing the character of poetry. It is necessary and possible.

In conclusion I may add a note. This is Tamil poetry rendered into English. It will obviously differ from English poetry in content and context. Cultural differences apart, there are other contributing factors. The advanced countries have long liberated themselves from such basic needs as food, shelter and clothing: their concern now is mainly the quality of life. We still face hunger and deprivation in all their harshness and attendant consequences. We desperately try for job creation for sustenance while they deliberate on job design for job satisfaction. Science and Technology has been to them a tool for development for nearly two centuries and now a device to preserve, protect and further the gains already made and for exploration into the unknown as part of the endless human pursuit. We are very much in the earlier stage of using it to meet the basic needs. The relevance and role of science and technology in a developing country, thus, are bound to differ vastly from those of the advanced ones; so will be our outlook on and approach to science, though we realise that the universal impact of science is on the increase. Literature reflects the anguish, aspiration and the vision of a society. Tamil poetry in English and English poetry, though contemporary in time, may not be contemporary in content and context. This is obvious but a reiteration may not be redundant.

I am thankful to Prof. U.R. Anantha Murthy for his spontaneous acceptance to write the Foreword. I have included two poems translated by Dr.(Mrs.) Prema Nandakumar. She and Prof. K. Chellappan, Bharathidasan University, read through the translation and offered suggestions. I must acknowledge with thanks their consistent interest and contribution.

V.C. KULANDAI SWAMY



## NOTE

The poems in this book have been selected from three of the four volumes of poetry published by the author. The titles of the books and the poems selected from each of them are given below:

### I. **Vaayil Thirakkattum** (*Let the Gates Open*)

1. We Bow Before Those Who Strive
2. Let the Gates of Your Abode Open
3. A Few Shall Be Enough
4. Earth Itself is Paradise
5. If Your Steps Slacken . . . .
6. I Sing in Praise Of Dreams
7. No Heaven To Gain: No Hell To Fear
8. If There Be God . . . .
9. Weary, But Not Defeated
10. A Bridge To Relive The Past
11. Wants Never Make Us Cowards
12. Whither Your Journey?
13. Nourish the Man, Nourish the World
14. The Dawn of an Era
15. Confusion: A Sign of Growth?
16. A Million Arts We Prattle On
17. Tears
18. A Poet's Eye Sees Art in All

### II. **Vinn Samaippov Varuha** (*Welcome to those who could Create a Heaven*)

1. Let's Forge a New World
2. Everest is Not the Only Peak
3. Even the Mad Ones, We Need
4. To Those Who Excel Me
5. Distant Relatives
6. The Singer and the Song
7. The Gate
8. Mind and Muscle



9. A Moment Can Make a Golden Age
10. A Storm Should Burst
11. The Base Remains Unshaken
12. Religion, Language, Motherland
13. Dizzy Heights to Lanes and Streets
14. How Long
15. Full Moon is No Daily Phenomenon
16. Sustenance from Mother's Breast
17. A New Vessel: A New Captain
18. We the Leaders
19. Moon's Love Affair

### **III. Kathavuhai Kaappathillai (*No Fortress for Protection*)**

1. A Prayer
2. She Keeps Chiselling Me
3. Not Lesser Burden: But Broader Shoulders
4. A Demand
5. No Fortress For Protection
6. This is the Law My Child
7. We Halted for a Second
8. Even Poverty is Sweet
9. Might Ahead Of The Mind
10. My Writer Friend
11. Jewels Turn into Leeches

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## A PRAYER

A pair of shoulders to bear  
the heaviest of the heavy  
A heart that seeks  
the rarest of the rare

A mind that strives for the  
beauty and bliss of perfection  
A dignified life, noble and cultured  
with the majesty of a tusker walking  
or a mountain in motion  
An ambition to raise higher  
all that the world has given us

The capacity to create all that we long for  
The strength to design destiny itself -  
These my dear mother, grant me here.  
Does one ever reject the prayers of  
One's own?

## SHE KEEPS CHISELLING ME

She keeps chiselling me further and further,  
strives to shape me to a form ever higher,  
The crude ore that she mined from the depth,  
seeking to purify, cast in the hearth.

Every cut her chisel does make  
serves to refine the form I take.  
Out of the blaze of pain and sorrow,  
my soul does emerge chaste and ripe.

The tears that swell and flow down my eyes,  
serve to cleanse my entire self:  
I have come out after a bath in fire  
Shall the heat of a hot day hurt me ever?  
She keeps chiselling me further and further. . .

## NOT LESSER BURDEN BUT BROADER SHOULDERS

I have but one boon to ask,  
I bow before thee, mother nature!  
No confusion, no conflict;  
with a clear mind I speak—  
I have but one boon to ask.

I shall not pray for lesser burden:  
Grant me mother, broader shoulders !  
Let the Himalayan peaks grow still taller  
But strengthen my feet to take me further,  
I have but one boon to ask.

I shall not pray, you spare me sorrows;  
A bliss devoid of pain I shall not seek.  
Grant me this my dear mother :  
When in fatigue I falter,  
arouse a flame of undying wish—  
I have just one boon to ask.



## A DEMAND

I have raised a demand, and  
shall not rest till it is gained;  
Patience I have, even to count  
the sand grains on the beach:  
Neither delay, nor despair will  
make me retreat or abandon —  
I have raised a demand!

I have knocked at the doors of the gate  
and shall not rest till the heavens unfold;  
My desire it is to be the God in the shrine  
and I shall not rest till that state I gain —  
I have raised a demand!

To reach, that which seems unreachable,  
I shall be the ladder and the climber too;  
To open every gate that I seek to enter,  
a key shall I find by the penance I make —  
A demand have I raised!

## LET'S FORGE A NEW WORLD

I ask for nothing from those who  
gaze upwards for a paradise beyond;  
I come to welcome the architects  
with a mind to create a heaven on earth!

Welcome to those who quiver to see hunger,  
produce wealth and joyously share;  
Welcome to those who dare and declare:  
"a sorrowless and painless life  
is realisable here and now".

I have nothing to ask of those  
who love ease and indolence;  
Welcome to those who seek a new world  
and opt for a life of sweat and toil.

Customs, practices and traditions —  
bound to change and evolve with age:  
Hail crusaders for change and growth!

There is no bliss in enjoying what there is;  
It springs from creating what there is not!  
Welcome to those who would choose this path  
and join a march of continuous ascent;  
Welcome to those who would create a Heaven!

## EVEREST IS NOT THE ONLY PEAK

We are proud and feel so tall,  
Our virtues though be few and small  
Our nature it is that whatever we try  
we do with devotion deep and true.

Defeat we repel, courage our fort;  
Cringing on others we haven't done,  
To seek a gain we adore none:  
We are proud and feel so tall.

We deem it our duty and mission in life,  
to bless and praise the deserving ones;  
Never shall we fail in what we commit,  
Shall nourish the ones that nourish the world.

We are not proud of the position we  
hold; humble as we are,  
Our pride springs from the way we live.  
Ours is a path of dignity and honour,  
A life that knows no kneeling and bending.  
We are proud and feel so tall.

Everest is not the only peak,  
Every hillock has a summit to boast!  
The height you reach is not that we care;  
He, who does not stoop, is a king we adore.  
We bow before competence and merit;  
The ones that are true and stand on their own  
are really the ladder for the rise of man.  
Honour is a property, common to all:  
In dignity and pride no one need be poor.  
We are proud and feel so tall!



## EVEN THE MAD ONES, WE NEED

I have no interest in enjoying a  
thousand years at the  
foot of the mountain :  
Even it be for a moment - I should be  
at the peak ; foremost among all.  
So long I breathe, endless ascent  
shall be my effort.

To those who whisper, I am mad,  
I have but one thing to say:  
Madness you need to envision the great.  
A simple truth shall I state :  
It is the break that an odd one makes  
that brings the change from crawling to flying.

## TO THOSE WHO EXCEL ME

Let those who could excel me  
blossom in large numbers  
Let my land excel all others.  
I sing in praise of them  
who pave the way for the bloom  
of those that surpass them.

What we create is legion  
Above all, I sing in praise of them  
who welcome those that excel them  
and nourish their growth more than theirs.  
They really are the leaders of men and  
I shall sing in praise of them.

## WE BOW BEFORE THOSE WHO STRIVE

We are ashamed even to see those  
Who spend time in endless exercise  
on postulates and polemics.  
Of what use is it, if people  
who are lame in action  
dive deep into theories of origins?  
What will they, who could not grow  
even a blade of grass, achieve?  
We know the power of imagination  
We understand great dreams  
and philosophic enquiries :  
We understand the power of the word —  
the prose, the poem and the speech.  
Will not these be mere nothing,  
if unsupported by the muscle and might  
of performing shoulders?

They infuse soul into theories,  
Climb when they face a mountain,  
Walk through when it is a dense forest and  
Swim across if floods intervene;  
Odds never make them despair,  
nor would they ever give up.  
Action is what counts: art and literature  
must exhort us to a million deeds.  
Joy is the right of those who strive;  
We salute the feet that tirelessly ascend.



## DISTANT RELATIVES

My soul does not remain confined  
to the bounds of my physique alone.  
It is in communion with the earth,  
the mountains, the cool waters of the sea,  
the vast blue sky, the orbiting satellites  
and the numerous stars.

It pervades the entire universe  
and experiences its resonance too.  
Neither the sun, nor the moon  
nor the stars are strangers to me.  
They all belong to my habitat  
and are my distant relatives.

## THE SINGER AND THE SONG

Mighty sea ! You extend beyond  
limits that eyes can see ;  
you stretch your hands of surging waves  
to embrace the earth !  
The world is yet to see a poet  
who left your glory unsung.

Yesterday you were and  
You are there today;  
you will certainly endure tomorrow :  
yet in all these years, can you  
tell us a single tale  
of change and advancement in your state?

O ! the galaxy of twinkling stars !  
the pleasing moon, gliding like a boat  
along the dark sea of clouds !  
From time immemorial our poets  
never ever failed to sing your glory :  
But do you really merit all this compliment ?  
You have no claim to change and progress ;  
No story of endeavour to document :  
No achievement for one to emulate,  
No evidence of innovation to hail,  
Your only claim: you existed long and  
would exist for long.

Our race alone does change  
Every minute we evolve and grow  
Step by step we ascend and advance  
Who is there to sing our glory?  
We are ourselves the singer and the song.

## LET THE GATES OF YOUR ABODE OPEN

You ask me "Who is it that knocks at my door,  
destined to remain eternally closed?"

We, dear mother! are those who inhabit  
the planet earth;

We are those who have been for ever  
on a journey seeking the bliss  
of your radiant beauty;

We are those, who while the body  
is bound to the earth, possess a mind  
that transcends time and space;

We are the humans who swim across the blue  
firmament and beyond, set to reach that which  
lies unknown.

You ask me, "Who is it that crossed  
the fortress of my unreachable abode?"

The endless pilgrimage in search of  
your presence was not begun  
yesterday or today.

Along a path, full of obstacles  
and becoming longer and longer,  
we fumbled about, crawled and crept —  
we struggled through regions of  
impenetrable darkness;

We are those who rush to reach a state  
where we could create all that we want.

Mother nature! you had borne us and  
brought us into being —

Is it fair and just you conceal yourself?

How immense our efforts have been:

The one who took hemlock,

Those that were burnt alive,

The one who parted his loving wife



and tender child to go to the forest  
and undertake severe penance,  
Those who ended languishing in prison,  
The one who bore and suffered on the Cross —  
All of them, my divine mother! are members of my clan.

We created all the blossoms of knowledge,  
forgetting food and rest;  
We devised technology, the vehicle that breaks thro'  
all barriers and speed into the expanse;  
We are those who find immense pleasure  
in the frenzied effort to pierce through the veils  
that seem to come layer after layer  
and relentlessly keep our upward march:  
Divine mother! let the Gates of your abode open.

## A FEW SHALL BE ENOUGH

"What boon do you want?" – so did you  
ask, summoning me unto your presence.

I bow before you in solemn reverence;  
I have never known asking for things small,  
I now reveal an ambition cherished for long.

The world adores you Almighty  
I beseech you for an opportunity:  
Give me a chance to remould this earth  
and free it from all the ills that  
have crept in thy creation.

For millennia you had your way:  
but misery holds its unabated sway.  
I shall not err even by a trifle  
or go astray by a single step:  
the direction of my journey I know too well.  
The world I seek, I have in my mind  
designed and shaped, working night and day.

It is a society that humans, over the  
ages, long desired but never defined;  
It is an abode of happiness that  
far exceeds the grandest dreams of  
- those that renounced the world and through  
penance endeavoured to visualise;  
- those in happy married life, through righteous  
living sought to realise;  
- those men of knowledge who through  
logic and reasoning endeavoured  
to lay roads to reach;  
- those numerous faiths and beliefs that since  
ages have been hoping to attain

The world I see in my mind's eye is  
beyond comparison, above all that has been  
said and written: given a chance, I shall  
here and now create.

Obstacles I shall face and  
derive pleasure in the process.  
The truth is this: without knowledge,  
long preparation and the will to endure,  
one shall achieve nothing great;  
What we desire, will not on its own, knock at the door.  
I am blessed with a mind that will not bend  
even when a million sorrows come,  
Endless sufferings I have the strength to face.

I am well aware  
My journey is long, the path is hard.  
But the goal is clear:  
I shall not keep seeking companions;  
A few would be enough, I alone am enough.

For a sacred expedition in search of truth,  
there need be no crowd, no procession;  
no flags, no slogans;  
One shall design - but many may build;  
Greatest things are often achieved by the  
fewest of minds.  
But we shall invite the whole world, to share and enjoy  
what the rarest few leave for all.  
Praise be for the few, the benefits for the many.

## EARTH ITSELF IS PARADISE

For the mind, engrossed in the mission on hand  
Earth itself is Paradise enough:  
No Heaven can match that bliss.  
Immortality, I will strive and seek; but  
freedom from rebirth, I shall never ever ask:  
There is infinite joy in the wonders of the world,  
I sing in praise of the kingdom of man.  
My heart is lost in the dreams of the earth:  
Should salvation come to me on a platter,  
and abundance and bliss unfold ;  
Should the gates of Heaven open apart,  
I shall still be lost in the dreams of the earth.

I want to be born again and again  
Continue for ever my expedition here,  
Could anyone guess the delight I derive  
in making an epic of my journey on the earth?

I have nothing more to ask now  
The job I do is incomplete.  
I must accomplish the task on hand:  
For the mind engrossed in the task undertaken,  
Earth itself is Paradise enough.



## THE GATE

You invent things new in the laboratory  
and teach modern disciplines in the class;  
I bless: "may your contribution endure"-  
But a few questions I have to raise.

Theories you propound and themes you explain:  
do they touch the lives of the people?  
Are they in unison with the language  
of their hearts' throb? or understand  
the whisper of their warm breath?  
Have they the potential to meet their needs?  
If to these your answer is "Yes",  
I bless again: "May you live long".

Education is not in shelves of books,  
nor does it lie in discourse and notes;  
Not a paradise beyond the many,  
nor is the child of a test or review;  
Education is more and goes beyond all:  
The runway for flight, progress and growth.

## IF YOUR STEPS SLACKEN. . .

My dear heart: you keep rolling in dust and revelling  
in filth like a worm; do not seem to  
aspire for anything of value.

You do not aim to soar and swim in  
the sky and fly in space —  
You are cuddled in the  
prison-house of your flesh and blood:  
The one that moves on the stomach  
can never attain any great height.

I see no urge, no throbbing, no  
energised endeavour on your part:  
You do not seem to seek the  
light of learning, yearn for  
goals that transcend human bounds.  
You have no pride —  
Cannot shun the petty, nor  
Entertain any longing for a surging life and glory.  
You seem to be happy living in dizzy darkness.

The grass, the shrub, the worm  
and lifeless stone - all have a story of their own:  
To be born, to grow, to procreate, to wither with age  
and die, is common to every life:  
Endowed with a boundless mind, able to dream  
and imagine  
you are the peak of all creations.

You are the perennial spring of  
ambitions and emotions that break all  
chains and continue the onward march.  
Yours is the scripture that proclaims  
that the inaccessible and the impossible  
have no place in your faith.

You are like a poet who wanders singing in the sky  
and in space; who moves in the  
world of the moon and beyond.

You are as free and exuberant as  
the lark in a wooded forest.

You mix with the golden rays of the  
sun, enjoy the company of the clouds with  
the flash of lightning and  
there you sing your songs of  
liberty and liberation.

Yours is a mind that has the  
majesty of logic and reason;

What has so far been impossible for you,  
has not been found possible for any one else.

From the beginning of life, the journey that  
you undertook, you continue tirelessly.

You created many religions;

You are the creator of all the angels, gods and other  
heavenly beings that the world talks about;

You are also the father of the sciences  
that destroyed many myths.

We do not know till today,  
whether it is for good or bad,  
with a purpose or without one,  
why this world came into existence.

But from all that we know of,  
it is humanity that devised the means, the method  
and form for growth, and you  
continue to grow:

In the path of progress you  
used the tools of logic,  
inquiry, endeavour and courage as  
your companions.

You made conquest of nature but in harmony with it  
could make the forces of nature do your bid:  
Humanity today stands above everything that  
the world knows of and  
you are one among its heirs.  
If there be one that is omnipotent,  
who has seen any so far excepting your race?  
Your tradition and legacy are great:  
Great is the heritage that you have to  
sustain and transmit.  
Your fame and accomplishments have a  
long ancestry;  
Where pettiness, hatred and avarice do not belong.  
You are as great as your goals:  
With the majesty of a mountain,  
with a mind clear as the rays of the sun  
and calm as the pleasant moon,  
move ahead and keep moving ahead;  
smash all the obstacles, and never should you rest.  
My dear heart, if your steps move forward,  
the world moves forward: if your steps  
slacken the world will stagnate.



## I SING IN PRAISE OF DREAMS

The dreams of a poet create an epic :  
Those of the lovers shall enrich life itself;  
Our dreams on earth may herald an epoch.  
Dreams do ripen: praise be to the dreams.

In front of our eyes we see the bounds :  
We close our eye lids and all limits vanish;  
To all that we perceive time sets limits.  
Blessed be the dreams : they transcend time.

A dream today shall be real tomorrow ;  
We shall transform our ambitions to attainments ;  
Mind, like the *Vamana*\*, knows no bounds :  
Let our dreams grow and humanity blossom!

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\* *Vamana* is one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu in the Hindu mythology. He appeared dwarfish but grew in size to reach the skies.

## NO HEAVEN TO GAIN: NO HELL TO FEAR

We know no other light but knowledge and wisdom :  
The puzzles, that are beyond our grasp today,  
we shall find the way to solve one day.  
In search of truth we wander in all directions:  
Ours an open mind, an ever expanding philosophy.

Never shall we accept any law of life  
that fails to accept this simple rule :  
"Change is but a proof that we are alive".  
We seek and strive to create out of a particle of dust,  
wealth enough to sustain all that live and exist.

The twin missions in life we have:  
We contemplate and we create.  
Our aim is a world with justice for all !  
Posterity is our concern and for its health,  
we sweat and toil; forego food and sleep –  
in so doing we find infinite joy.  
This, the only happiness, we know; we care.  
Beyond this bliss,  
we have no heaven to gain and  
no hell to fear.

## IF THERE BE GOD. . .

I stand on the brink of the present  
and knock at the gates of the future.  
I shall not brook a moment's delay to enter therein;  
I have no time, no patience to keep company  
with those, looking backwards  
and praising the past.

It is not for me to enjoy grinding the tradition-mill,  
Nor shall I keep moving in a direction ordained:  
Too precious is this life to decay within curbs and bounds.  
I may rest, not on the slope, but at the peak;  
Omnipotence I seek, to create all that I will.

All that is to come, I must know;  
The secret of holding the heaven and  
earth in my palm, I must find;  
A system to break the chains that  
generations have forged, I must devise.

If there be God, I have but  
one boon to ask;  
"I shall be God myself".

## WEARY, BUT NOT DEFEATED

My dear heart, you feel exhausted; you are  
wearied of endlessly pondering and analysing.  
These are puzzles that remain unanswered  
since the dawn of mankind.

The enlightened of minds  
could see no light, no path :  
Is it wise for you to pursue the search?  
Can one ever see the ultimate truth?  
Don't you accept that there is  
a limit beyond which human  
perception may not reach?

The night has fallen, darkness envelops;  
mankind is in deep slumber: perfect  
peace everywhere.  
Sleep, the genteel lady; the finest of God's gifts;  
soft as the moving cloud, light  
as the floating foam; we enjoy her embrace,  
but never see her person:  
Source of succour, nature's balm,  
a blessing no penance can bring.

Sleep, thou sweet and dear; well-spring of  
rest; the bestower of new life, the unfailing  
companion of the toiling poor;  
we enjoy your touch; but never have  
the pleasure of your lovely sight.  
The unfortunate ones, who suffer from  
numerous pains; who sweat and toil  
and sink in misery, receive some comfort  
only when they rest on your bosom.  
You do not separate the rich from the poor  
or the enlightened from the ignorant.



The tender human crop gains new life and energy  
from you: like the rains on earth, you lavish your  
bounty on all;  
Dear damsel! may you live long.

The world around is fast asleep;  
it is past midnight;  
I hear no sound other than the tick  
of the clock:  
We could close our eyelids;  
we do not know of any lid to  
shut the brooding mind.

What precedes our birth and  
what remains after death:  
Should this remain a secret for ever?  
The glorious art and skill acquired, the  
magnificent dreams entertained and the  
great accomplishments of unending  
and relentless effort —  
do all these vanish into nothingness  
as the life on earth comes to an end?  
Cannot our mind transcend this screen?  
Will humanity accept  
this simple word, "limit" ?  
Acceptance of limit is acceptance of defeat.

We may crawl inch by inch: we  
may keep creeping till the end of time:  
We may have to cross dark woods  
and dry deserts, but this great journey in  
search of truth we shall never abandon.  
We are not lost;  
We feel wearied here and there;  
but never shall we feel  
Defeated.

## A BRIDGE TO RELIVE THE PAST

Endless waves surge in the pondering mind.  
There are limits before the eyes;  
but in the mind's vision  
boundaries do not exist.  
The feet may be earth bound,  
but the person does not belong there;  
It is like sound and music: the former  
mundane, the latter divine.

We talk of TIME:  
Will its bounds be visible to the eyes?  
Should the world move helplessly  
on the highway of time?  
Can we not choose to reverse the course?  
Can't we forge a bridge to reach  
and regain the days past?  
Could we not find a key to this gate:  
Will human endeavour ever suffer defeat?

## WANTS NEVER MAKE US COWARDS

We wander, not in search of pleasure;  
Our hearts yearn for greater heights.

We do not by choice court sufferings;  
But should we face them in our path,  
we shall not shrink and change our course.  
Wants can never make us cowards;  
Commands of love, we will not transgress,  
But the rule of the arrogant we totally reject.

We do not weep when wounded and hurt;  
Over things past, we never ever grieve :  
A cultured mind has no room for rancour,  
Divergent paths do not distance friends.

We shall not dither to own our faults;  
But will not live to suffer a charge.  
We are the monarchs of life on earth:  
The finest blossoms of human race.

## MIND AND MUSCLE

True that humanity does not live on its stomach;  
Truer still the stomach, we can never neglect:  
Devoid of action, thought is barren,  
Man is but the fusion of "mind and muscle".

True it is that strength is but  
the strength of mind;  
Truer still that without the frame,  
mind itself does never exist.  
Man is a marvel, above everything that  
one can measure and perceive;  
He alone measures, explores and perceives.  
Not out of pride, or ignorance we claim  
that we are the angels and gods on earth.  
If we focus our mind with true conviction,  
combine it with resolute action,  
divinity shall we surely gain.



## WHITHER YOUR JOURNEY. . .?

Where did you really start?  
Even today we do not know  
your earlier stage.

Yours is an unending penance, a continuous striving ;  
Ever an endeavour for increasing betterment.  
I do bless and wish you well :  
But do you know the ultimate state  
or the destination of your pilgrimage?  
You are busy running : have you time to ask,  
"...Where?"

## NOURISH THE MAN, NOURISH THE WORLD

Man transcends the scriptures and  
the religions founded on them and  
the codes prescribed by the faiths.  
He is like the *vamana*\* who grows  
taller than the tallest.  
He is the author of many a system.

We see the bright and blazing sun,  
the great satellites that orbit in space,  
the endless stars that twinkle  
and emit milky rays;  
we marvel at the vast boundless  
expanse of space.  
Vaster and a greater wonder than  
all these is the mind of man.

Those who nourish the man,  
nourish the world;  
Man is not just a single entity;  
He has in him the whole universe.  
He combines the quiet calm  
of a dew drop on a flower and  
the melting heat of the sun:  
He is at once a calm saint and an  
explosive mine of boundless energy.

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\* see footnote on p.21

## A MOMENT CAN MAKE A GOLDEN AGE

I bless you airplane: you came in  
yesterday, but rule over the skies and beyond.  
The poor bullock cart still struggles on earth;  
Being ancient is no great merit.

The wooden vehicle climbs mounds;  
comes down the pits, stumbles and slogs along.  
You swim in the air unobstructed:  
better today than yesterday and  
Better still, tomorrow: evolve upwards  
every day.

Stupid folks: you pride in being ancient  
and the earliest of peoples:  
Is becoming old the result of your effort ?  
Is it a crime if the young excel?  
Should we not rejoice if youth  
scale great heights?

Grey hair is no fountain of genius:  
Fleeting days do not  
feed you with wisdom.  
A moment can make a golden age;  
A century may pass with no impact.

## THE DAWN OF AN ERA

Happiness springs from creating  
what there is not;  
Swimming against the stream is  
often the path of progress.  
For sustaining *dharma*,  
you must fight against evil;  
It ill becomes the virtuous  
to endure the wicked.

Removal and replacement are  
but two sides of life's coin:  
Nothing can remain unchanged,  
Change is a prerequisite for life.  
There is an unchanging law in  
an ever changing world:  
That which does not change,  
does not evolve;  
That which does not evolve,  
does not survive.

✓  
✓  
Scholars without clarity and depth,  
leaders without vision and perception,  
men of learning who  
dare not convey what they think;  
a tradition that is hostile to reason,  
the affluent that are unconcerned about the masses —  
that country, where these abound,  
can neither prosper nor find  
a path for progress.



They alone can lead a nation who  
are endowed with:  
ears that can hear words not spoken,  
eyes that can see things not visible,  
a vision that pierces into the future and  
a heart that longs for the good of all.

Come all and behold:  
"The age of knowledge has dawned".  
Posterity shall face this edict:  
Prosperity is not for the ignorant.

## A STORM SHOULD BURST

A storm should burst and sweep through,  
uprooting all the deadwood:

A light should strike and lay bare  
the hypocrisy that rules the world.

An awakening shall dawn and  
shed its beams far and wide.

The might of humanity should  
explode in its full strength and  
cause a devastation devoid of violence:

Melt everything, mould and forge a new base for  
an edifice totally new.

## THE BASE REMAINS UNSHAKEN

You speak endlessly, behave as though  
you have achieved all your objectives;  
ignorant you are about the ABC of equity,  
but boast as though you have  
founded a world on equality and  
the high and the low cease to exist.

Do you really have an image of the  
egalitarian society?  
Have you even a glimpse of a stratumless world?  
Have you the will to forge a true revolution?  
A simple question: are you sincere in all you preach?

The world order exists in a hierarchical mode,  
The culture has been built on high and low:  
Is not this a fact beyond doubt?  
Have you even shaken this base?

Women are a half of humanity.  
Have they an equal say in any  
domain, anywhere in the world ?  
In a culture that has  
ordered two basic halves as high and low;  
when and how will come a state and acceptance  
that every one is as tall as the other.  
If mankind is to stand erect as equals  
and true socialism is to be the creed and faith,  
light then the furnace and melt all the unworthy,  
pour into a mould of new design and  
let us herald the emergence of a new epoch.

## RELIGION, LANGUAGE, MOTHERLAND

For what purpose a religion; a language;  
even the concept of a motherland?  
We devised all to help the  
growth of human race:  
should they divide and separate us  
or sow seeds of enmity,  
it is infinitely better, they be razed.

Those who create division and difference  
even among the children sucking  
at the mother's breast and  
call it religion, land or language;  
they are more demoniac than the  
demon of death.  
I shudder, even to look  
in the direction of their existence.

The enemies of human race  
sacrifice man, the creator, at the  
institutions he created.  
Whatever the goal, there is nothing  
worth achieving at the cost of  
as priceless a thing as human life.



## CONFUSION: A SIGN OF GROWTH?

Never shall I concede defeat and call it fate!  
My life is not in the hands of  
the planets in space —  
Firmly did I believe that  
those with wisdom, values and will  
are the lords of their lives.

Firmly did I believe that the  
righteous shall prosper and an  
occurrence to the contrary be dismissed as  
illusion !

I realise and concede that  
life abounds in unspeakable deceit,  
falsehood and puzzles —  
Be that as it may  
Firmly did I believe :  
The really great shall never descend low.

Not the God you worship, the prayer you recite;  
Not the doctrine you declare, the faith you preach;  
Your action, your living  
is the measure of greatness —  
Firmly did I believe in this and  
So did I live my life.

As time moves, the vision widens,  
the loving heart's domain expands,  
the enquiries deepen and experiences ripen,  
I find the basics change;  
Convictions are getting confused :  
Is confusion too a sign of growth ?

## DIZZY HEIGHTS TO LANES AND STREETS

From many parts of Europe and Russia,  
from the Himalayan heights in Tibet,  
from Siberia where winter reigns and  
from many parts of the world  
that shiver in cold,  
You come, dear birds to spend the  
winter in the embrace of Indian warmth.  
You really are the citizens of the world:  
You enjoy the right to go where you will.

You know not the passport we talk of, or  
the health documents we prescribe.  
You carry no baggage: face no customs.  
Your home is where you choose to be.  
I stand wondering at the  
quality of the freedom you enjoy.

I marvel at the height you soar  
and cross the Himalayas;  
Stand bewildered at the stretch  
you cover in one single flight:  
I bow before your exceptional feat.

We, humans, team with the worms in dirt;  
But also soar high as angels in the sky.  
Our pride is our culture: our shame  
is our predilection to pettiness and wickedness.  
As we introspect, it seems  
we still remain bound to the earth.  
We erect walls and create bounds.  
Though at times we wander in space and beyond,  
we return to the mud and mire of our streets.

## NO FORTRESS FOR PROTECTION

Day by day the rift is widening  
The crowd with a simmering heart  
keeps increasing every day  
As fissures in arid black soil plain,  
we witness cracks in the human clan.

The art and culture our ancestors developed  
over hundreds of generations,  
we see them melt and dissolve in air  
in front of our eyes as we stare.

The great edifices are tottering;  
The crown and the mantle are toppling.  
The flames of the hungering stomachs,  
burn our dreams and soaring hopes.

We seek to bridge the heaven and the earth,  
but divide our own kith and kin.  
The pettiness of my race, a great disgrace:  
I shiver in shame as I brood over this phase.

The sweep of the fire lengthens,  
The sphere of its scorching widens;  
There is no fortress for protection,  
Swelling human fury never suffers defeat!

## THIS IS THE LAW MY CHILD

You writhe in gripping hunger which  
blazes like fire in a cotton pile:  
You see those dining and throwing away the surplus,  
but even that is not for the poor:  
So decrees, my child! our social order.

Fireworks burst in thousand colours  
You hear echoes of feast and festivity;  
Bands and drums inside reverberate in space;  
We stand outside and dare not even peep in:  
So decrees, my child! our social order.

We stand drenched in rain and shiver,  
In front of us stand stately mansions —  
You feel tempted to seek a shelter;  
They are not meant for you my child!  
So decrees our social order.

We live in huts, worse than a heap of waste;  
As mass of flies we survive in filth.  
Whosoever may rule the land, my child!  
Our state of misery shall remain as ever —  
So decrees our social order.

Nature has blessed the earth with plenty ;  
All is meant for only a few!  
We sweat and slog to generate wealth:  
That shall not be ours my child!  
So decrees the social order.

You know no deceit : no cunning my dear!  
Nor can you feel the burdens we bear:  
You shall grow and discover  
indignities in exalted positions.  
So ordered is our society my child!



## HOW LONG

How long on earth can this go on;  
How long can this, the world endure?  
Gripping the empty stomach and  
groaning under pain of hunger,  
curled as strands of thread,  
many do faint and fall.  
How long on earth can this suffering go on?

A bony frame covered by wrinkled skin,  
A pair of legs that resemble the straw,  
A life fried in boiling pain and  
a body, the vessel of earth's sufferings.  
How long can this, the world endure?

My eyes become wounds that bleed,  
when they see children with frail frame,  
scorched by the flame of hunger in mother's womb,  
even before birth:  
How long on earth can this suffering go on?

Overflowing affluence on one side;  
piercing poverty and pain on the other.  
An endless crowd of empty stomachs and  
an echo of the few that revel and rejoice;  
How long can this, the world endure?

The feasting few, a vulgar sight:  
My eyes shy away in sheer disgust;  
Bodies on which disease and destitution prey,  
They wither and wilt, fall as leaves dry:  
How long oh God! can this, the world endure?

## A MILLION ARTS WE PRATTLE ON

Worms in the gutter, countless insects and  
toads in stones survive in this world:  
Not a crow that swims past the ocean of  
air in the sky does ever die in hunger;  
When golden fields and flowing streams  
offer in plenty all you need,  
Should humanity still suffer from  
deprivation and hunger?  
How could I ever convey or any one understand  
the simmering rage and fury of my soul?

The tender bird fondles the young ones  
in its nest on the lush green tree;  
Many a living creature finds cosy shelter in  
the caves, crevices and dens;  
The animal species are asleep in bushes  
of the woods.

When the rays of the scorching sun  
pierce through the skull and the  
biting cold chills the flesh and blood,  
should humans be fated to suffer for  
want of a humble roof?  
For what avail is it that you  
prattle on about your cultural growth and  
countless forms of art?

## WE HALTED FOR A SECOND

We halted for a second and were  
left behind a thousand miles ;  
In your desire for progress, fellow pilgrims,  
You have abandoned us and gone afar.

For long we kept travelling together :  
Shared among us the joys and sorrows,  
In ups and downs we stood united,  
We were the branches of one big trunk.

For thousands and thousands of years,  
we clasped hands and clung to each other:  
we are the authors of great works of art and  
living treasures of lore.

We might have differed now and then  
But marched as members of human clan:  
In spite of many a devastating war,  
we stood together in our path of progress.

Like the ants in a long row,  
we crawled, and toddled as a team ;  
The foot prints of our long journey  
have not yet disappeared;  
The many episodes of our expeditions  
have not yet faded from memory.

We were divided in races and tongues,  
Fissures did develop in day to day bond;  
As human clan we strove together,  
Above all enmity, remained a unity.

You found in science a vehicle with wings,  
Seeking gain and growth you flew;  
As rich and poor we stand apart  
Alas! an ancient clan is split.

The few of you few who left in haste,  
to seek and reach a better state!  
Are you not members of one big group?  
Is it just and fair in wealth  
you chose to separate on your own?



## EVEN POVERTY IS SWEET

The shade under the tree is his business house  
The wares he has of many a sort:  
They are arts of craft in wood and clay,  
paper and bran and synthetic stuff—  
He awaits calmly the arrival of buyers.

He spreads his wares every day,  
with the unfailing rigour of the morning sun ;  
Full of mirth, conversing, laughing:  
unmindful whether his wares sell or stagnate.  
This is not a matter of a month or year;  
It is full twenty years: he started his business  
and continues his humble vocation,  
unhindered and unaffected by adversities.

University degrees, he has none;  
Even the school, he has not known;  
In records he could sign his name.  
He stands firmly on his legs,  
believes in his own effort,  
and does not seek favours from any.  
Looking for patrons in exalted state  
and yearning for petty gains,  
is not the path for his life's journey.  
He would not think of agitations for gain;  
Cringing and crawling and beseeching,  
he has never ever known.

His wares are small; modest in price.  
His sales can yield no big profit;  
But a businessman he is, who will not  
stoop to deceit and cunning.

He is like gold among the metals!  
What if he is poor : in his dignified state  
even poverty is sweet.

## MIGHT AHEAD OF THE MIND

You split the atom and gained an  
insight into its potential:  
we acknowledge and admire your studies ;  
Having succeeded in harnessing the earth's resources,  
you have taken up expeditions to explore the space,  
You have transcended spatial barriers:  
We bow before your amazing achievements.

You have enhanced the power of the eyes to see  
and ears to hear.  
You have transformed the world into a  
federation of countries and  
a small habitat of Races.

You have overcome nature's boundaries:  
For us today, mountains are no barriers  
and the oceans are no blocks ;  
Rivers and forests are no longer a fortress.  
The power of knowledge is near supreme.  
We have evolved and advanced :  
Yesterday we moved from  
house to house,  
Today we move from country to country.

Having broken the barriers of nature,  
we have erected walls of our own;  
Pettiness of mind, violence in every land,  
Undeclared wars — a daily event;  
Every habitat a den of guns and bombs,  
Hearts brimming with hatred and dislike;  
Army of refugees all over the globe  
in search of an asylum;  
The sufferings of the second class citizens —  
The minorities in their own motherland,

The undignified pettiness of the majority groups;  
The sight of a few enjoying  
unlimited facilities and pleasures on one side and  
an increasing crowd with emptiness around,  
burning hunger within and poverty as unfailing companion;  
Life to them a great ordeal, endless struggle  
even for liquid gruel and leafed roof.  
The cruel fact of numerous countries  
accepting all these as routine and normal —  
These agonies grow; the sobs and wailing  
of the downtrodden grow louder and wider!

Are wonders of science for the advanced nations  
a matter of entertaining fireworks in space,  
ignoring the plight of the masses and the  
burdens of the world?

Science that was seen as a boon,  
a servant to serve humanity and  
a powerful companion in need :  
has that become a fiction and a dream ?

Have we in our progress, developed our might  
ahead of the mind failing to seek wisdom  
and believing that capacity to do things,  
in the external world is all virtue and wealth?  
Should the creator be killed, for the tools  
and by the tools he created, as  
flies in a swarm and birds in a flock ?  
Somewhere, somehow, may be a trifle  
unaware, unintended we have made a wrong turn.

## FULL MOON IS NO DAILY PHENOMENON

We cannot have full moon every day,  
Nor witness a waxing moon all the way:  
Achievements are not an uninterrupted chain,  
Ups and downs are part of a journey.

A real great dream is a  
vision of the possible:  
Unrelated to the probable,  
acrobatics in words, castles  
in air and heaven in a vacuum,  
mean no revolution, no real reform.

A dawn that does not have  
its dusk is utopian:  
A life without obstacles is only a wish;  
Novelty does not mean senseless fantasy,  
Imagination of worth must harmonise  
with the vision of the probable.

Poetry may soar high; but,  
it is not rootless.  
The world of the poets is not all dreams  
divorced from deeds:  
A poet may be a citizen of the world,  
but not a vagabond on earth.

Volcanoes, lightning and thunder in words  
make no revolutions in living world:  
Words that burst out from a heart,  
surging and boiling with righteous indignation and  
divine discontent are different from empty ones  
that come from an unfeeling pen.



Words do carry, flames that burn;  
explosives that can shatter a mountain.  
storms that can wipe out  
the trunk and the roots together:  
Words do carry springs from which  
joy and happiness swell in floods:  
— if they be words that make true poetry.

Wires carry messages;  
Steel pieces turn magnets, and  
Brass wire gets energised by the  
flowing current;  
Words are charged with the flame and  
purity of emotions.

## TEARS

You spring from my heart, linger in my eyelids and  
move out in drops and streaks ;  
You take away with you all the burdens  
that oppress my soul.

Of the purifying liquids the best are tears,  
You clean all that is within  
and without in this world.  
You dissolve the hardest stone and melt the  
strongest steel.

Infinitely more powerful than any  
weapon of war; Reduce mightier than the mountain;  
more potent than the words of the righteous;  
you rise up as a tornado of flames  
and scorch the tyranny of the wicked;  
May your sway be lasting and pervasive.

When the kith and kin and intimate friends,  
the learning that I acquired early in my life  
and the faith that I long cherished,  
fail to relieve the burdens of my heart;  
I have no prop to hold: no source of succour  
excepting you, my warm tears!

I wept when I was born: wept when my  
near and dear departed for ever;  
I wept over the ingratitude of those  
that I cared for, loved and nourished:  
I sobbed and wept whenever I saw  
the spectre of poverty and hunger.

I derive peace in weeping in solitude;  
happiness in silent meditation  
with tears down my cheek.  
I have cleansed all the sins  
accumulated by departure from *dharma*;  
The Ganges that emanates from  
my eyes has purified my soul.

## A POET'S EYE SEES ART IN ALL

The tiny bee that sits on the soft petal  
of the flower that gently sways in the breeze  
identifies with it, and enjoys the honey,  
without harming the flower;  
It expresses gratitude by carrying  
the pollen and spreading it amidst its species.

We drink deep nature's bounteous beauty,  
gather its sweetness, enhance it by our diction and  
present to the world —  
We are the bards, who by a flick of the tongue,  
can move the world.

For the sleepless one, the night gets longer;  
For the tired feet, the path seems endless;  
In the eyes of the one who soars high,  
the world as a whole is one big home —  
To the one with the strength of a detached mind,  
all sufferings fade and become a trifle.

A poet's heart is a pot that  
overflows with fresh foaming milk and  
transforms everything it touches into art.  
We give form to the living dreams of the many  
and thereby create a world anew :  
We champion those who create wealth  
and stand guard at the gates of their government.  
Their sweat shall be the theme of our epic.  
We fear none and submit before no one's command:  
The dictates of our own conscience,  
shall ever remain the God we worship.

## SUSTENANCE FROM MOTHER'S BREAST

The world of science is expanding fast;  
Its progress shows an increasing pace.  
Enchanting technologies emerge on the scene  
Novelty blossoms and inventions explode.

Foreign tongues march ahead and  
lead the progress of new disciplines.  
I long to see my language there:  
She lingers far behind and yearns.

Every day the gap grows wider,  
The world of knowledge races ahead,  
Education gives light and strength:  
Alas, we do not get sustenance from  
Our mother's breast.



## A NEW VESSEL: A NEW CAPTAIN

My dear land: why did you descend  
so low as to accept the leadership of  
those small men who would not  
bear the world to survive  
if they could not flourish and prosper :  
A nation, not well endowed with leadership,  
can have no great future.

It is your fatal fault my land,  
that you mistook the mound of waste  
for the temple tower.  
Politics today is a new device to plunder:  
the magic word of those who live  
in ease and wealth!

It is a new balm to mesmerize  
the innocent ones that suffer  
from deprivation and disease;  
a harvasting field for the fraudulent:  
In this world of impostors, whom  
are we to trust?

Rot has set in our administrative boat:  
It is steered by blind sailors  
who do not have the vision of conviction.  
When and how do we reach the shore?

What we need today is a new vessel  
and a new captain.

## WE THE LEADERS

We divide and further divide our own people  
and thrive now, on divisions and dissensions;  
Exaggerate every trace of diversity  
and seek in differences a soil for sustenance.

The system of caste a monstrous device,  
an ancient relic, a cruel craft:  
But how long do we make a living  
diffusing discontent and inciting passions?

Productive programme, none to our credit;  
A thousand holes we pick in others' deeds.  
Prosperity never descends like rain,  
Wealth is what work alone can create.

We write and speak and organise marches,  
Louder and louder we raise our slogans  
What have we to leave behind us  
and claim it as our proud bequest?

The poor and the humble rely on us,  
With expectant eyes and hope they wait:  
"Prosperity is yours", we declared,  
Barring ourselves, who else prospered?

## MY WRITER FRIEND

My writer friend, where can I search for you?  
I went through all the pages: your address is missing.  
I entered all the places fit to be frequented  
by writers; you are not there.

Have you a path of your own? Are you on a journey?  
Are you sitting on the sacrificial stage  
Striving for achievements?  
Have you been imprisoned in any war against evil?  
Are you wounded in any revolution  
that erupted to put down wickedness and uphold *dharma*?  
Perhaps you are bound somewhere, struggling to be free!  
Protagonist of the will for freedom,  
the supremest of human emotions!  
I have searched for you in all places I could think of:  
You have not been found.

In the pathway of the satellites, in the triumphs  
of the scientific age; in the miraculous feats  
of electronic engineers; in that superb tool  
that handles with aplomb tiny jobs like addition,  
subtraction, choice among alternatives and solves  
thereby a million problems, too complex to itemise:  
the wonder of a brain created by the human brain;  
the base for a new age;  
a device that renews itself; develops every day,  
the topmost of tools invented, the computer.  
I thought you might be interested and found  
In the company of the scientists, the tireless  
seekers of truth, struggling hard in the laboratories;  
I searched there and in all directions;  
my eyes that travelled grew tired; I saw you nowhere.

Since the day man came to be, as individual,  
and as part of society, he grew limbs  
of politics and economic theories  
and stabilised the procedures of administration.  
A million laws were made as civilisation grew,  
and a noble cultural way of life came to be.  
They created divisions and differences  
based on one's calling, and established  
status according to the natal cradle.  
The four castes were ordained and  
a grammar of casteism too.  
With that past signet,  
our people negated Buddha, the Jains,  
Siddhas who frowned on untruth, Vallalar himself,  
revolutionary movements and everything new.  
Uprisings were downed with an iron glove:  
The curse, the caste has now grown strong  
and become a blot on our race, an enemy of development;  
This is a disease that stains by a glance;  
An evil that is an amalgam of diseases;

I thought you were tired of swimming  
in the turbid flow of casteist politics  
and had lost patience;  
That in searing anger you had taken up the pen to write  
a sharp novel, a song, a short story or barbed criticism;  
Or that you were engaged in an oratorical battle  
facing a sea of followers; so I thought  
and searched for you in the village and the town  
and everywhere else; but saw you nowhere.

Our forebears strengthened our language  
by diving in the springs of knowledge  
and association of scholars engaged in research;  
With its three great divisions, Tamil became  
rich in significance and word power,  
in sterling literature, grammar superb:  
such was the gift of our ancients to the world.



We raised ourselves as the successors to the same.  
Today a million sciences; every day there bloom  
a million more; philosophies of life  
that take birth with ease in life's vast space;  
I thought perhaps you are deeply involved  
in the service of our language, which is our  
life-breath, making it blossom  
with all the arts of the advanced world,  
gaining for it an image and life totally in tune  
with our culture and the literary tradition.

I searched for long through all the written stuff,  
trying to locate you; you were nowhere.

What use new discoveries and the rules of finance  
drawn by eminent economists:

What use passing a law that all are equal?

Here continues the rule by the cheats,  
middle-men who do not engage in hard work,  
bamboozlers of the common people,  
unpatriotic ruffians who do not care  
for their motherland:

While poverty spreads everywhere  
and the common mass wilt in drought,  
wealth accumulates in the hands of the few,  
and the tears of the poor become flames of fire.

I thought, seeing all this and simmering,  
you have undertaken a vow to usher in a New Age,  
to shake to the foundations the rotten present;  
So had joined the group which wants  
to destroy the obsolete and then rebuild anew;  
Thus thinking, I searched for you,  
in such company, but in vain.



My writer friend! Where shall I search for you?  
I read the whole page but still no address.  
I searched in all the haunts fit enough for writers,  
yet did not get your address.

Word came to me that you now frequent  
places where the frivolous abound;  
I think, it is idle gossip and not the truth.  
I did not believe it; so I have not yet  
searched for you there.

(Translated by Prema Nandakumar)

## JEWELS TURN INTO LEECHES

The medicine has become  
worse than the malady;  
Those whom we accepted as jewels  
have turned to be leeches.

Those who boasted of the  
uniqueness of Tamils  
have ultimately left them in  
isolation and despair.  
They thundered: "It is  
our land, our race, our language"  
but are now seen to be leaders  
who care for themselves alone.

Seeds given for sowing  
were made use of for feasting.  
Immersed in frivolous illusory delight,  
they forgot the journey and  
missed the path,  
gave up the striving to advance,  
lost the fervour and slowed in speed  
and set aside the aspirations  
for upward progression.

Ah! for them the language issue was a pasture,  
an yielding rice field,  
a device used to fulfil their needs,  
verily utilitarian stuff.  
Our people were mesmerized  
by their appeal.

Ungrateful towards those  
who so completely pinned their faith in them,  
they exploit the poor, proclaiming  
"We'll establish a world  
better than the heavens above!

There shall be no poverty.  
Mother Tamil will be enthroned.  
We shall regain the merit and glory  
of the Sangham age of the past!"  
Such double-thinkers  
have set up shops now.

My dear mother tongue!  
My darling motherland!  
My race that blossomed rich,  
aeons and aeons ago!

Ours is the race that in ages past  
declared: "All countries are my home;  
and every one is my kin".  
They reached the peak in refinement  
so as to proclaim "When friends give,  
even it be poison, the cultured ones will drink"  
They believed that this world  
endures only because it produces  
great ones who value fame and live  
not for themselves but for others.  
A people who had realised  
that unity was everything,  
rising above worldly untruth,  
falsity and warring,  
these people spoke of One Race  
and One God Supreme.  
They were superior then.

Today smaller than the pigmy,  
a land overgrown with moss,  
a country split into fragments:  
fighting among themselves

wherever they be  
or even when an enemy  
knocks at the gates.  
Is it right my land,  
you keep decaying thus?  
My heart! day and night  
you brood over this shameful state.  
What have you gained?  
You are not prepared to accept  
that the day of revival for your race  
is nowhere in sight.  
"When will we rise?" you ask again and again;  
Who is there to answer, dear Tamils,  
We have not raised a leader  
tall enough to give an answer.

(Translated by Prema Nandakumar)

## MOON'S LOVE AFFAIR

I see the full moon and observe its beauty  
I stand with my heart drenched in  
pouring rain of milky rays.

Moon, the pleasant lady, has known  
no one's touch but the embrace of clouds.

Now she entertains humans who come and go;  
seems to have developed a new love affair.  
I could hear the gossip among the stars  
that wink at the moon and whisper among themselves.



