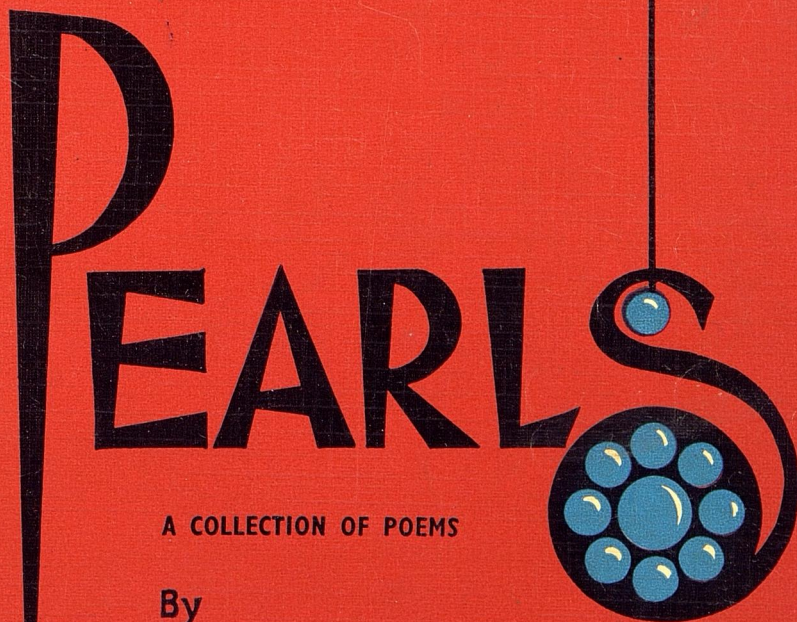


PEARLS



A COLLECTION OF POEMS

By

M.KARUNANIDHI

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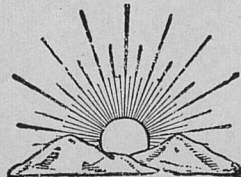
M. KARUNANIDHI

(Chief Minister, Tamil Nadu)

Translated from original Tamil by

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RISING SUN



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The Poets' Meet is a traditional aspect of literary activity in Tamil. A team of poets assembles on the dais and each member recites his composition on a specific subject. The Presiding Poet provides the introduction, connecting links and the conclusion, and the end-product of the interesting programme is an anthology of varied splendour.

This book Pearls contains extracts from the poetical works of M. Karunanidhi and the compositions were his creations in his capacity as the Presiding Poet in many a Poets' Meet. The Author's intense love for Tamil and the reverence in which he holds Valluvar, the poet-sage of Tamil Nadu who lived over 2000 years ago, are evident throughout his literature.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

What grows in a field
not furrowed by the plough ?

— Weeds, weeds, weeds.

And when the plough does its work,
the same field yields

— Grain, golden grain.

What is the consequence
when the clouds play truant ?

— Famine and pestilence.

And what is the blessing showered
when the same clouds relent ?

— Plenty and prosperity.

SWIRLING HEADS

Brain forms the contents
of our skulls of varying thickness,
on which the lice are awake and active
even when we are sunk in slumber.
There are some amongst us
whose heads lack the grey matter
and these folks are as good as
non-existent.
For some others the brain
is of the size of a pea
and even that is suffused
with fumes spirituous ;
No wonder such heads
are ever in a swirl
and their output is mere
incoherence !

FIVE SENSES

Ere coming to rest,
the physical frame
moves hither and thither,
the mouth
speaks and sings,
the eye
flits about in restless quest,
the nose
sniffs and snorts,
and the ear
pricks up to gather news.

They say it is ideal
to rein in and subdue
the senses five
but it is easier said than done.

For,
would the ear ever
reject the tunes
of the singing bird ;
would the frame
renounce the warmth
of love's embrace ;
would the mouth
remain sealed
when Tamil comes to the brim ;
would the eye
pull down its shutters
on the moon's fluid silver ;
and would the nose
be able to keep out
the fragrance of blossoms in Spring ?

Ascetics countless
strove through Time
to vanquish their senses
but with what success ?

Renouncing the splendours
of kingship and all
Viswamitra
settled into penance
in the deep forest
And yet he fell a prey
to the charms of Menaka,
that celestial dancer
who mothered his beauteous child !

Listen to another tale —
that of Arunagiri
who composed a paeon unique
on Lord Subramania.
Arunagiri had allowed free rein
to his senses five ;
he had eyes but could not see,
he had ears but could not hear,
his frame was diseased through pleasure
and his mouth turned sore as it sobbed.
Reformation
came late in his life
after he had paid
a stiff price indeed
for having indulged
in passion unbridled ! —

Which just goes to show
that there should be a limit
for anything,
And one should strike a balance
at some point or other.

Just because a knife is there
in your hand
do not ply it
to slash and stab ;
Temper the knife
with your intelligence
and do not hesitate
to use it to cut
and consume fruit ...

It is fraud
to pinion the senses
and pretend to work
towards salvation ;
And it is crime
to let loose the senses
and run amuck
like a rogue-bullock.

I call upon you all
to serve Tamil
till your nose exhales
the very last breath of life,
and even after that
your renown should be
a tower of strength
to Tamil sweet.

Your eye should convert
 into rousing poetry
what all it scans
 in the world around you ;
And then you should
 translate into action
the message of duty
 couched in that literature.

Your ear should receive
 all that is good
and leave out what
 is other than good ;
your *mouth* should intone
 the praise of the virtuous,
the kind and gentle
 Tamil people.

If the physical frame
 is not for service
on the lines
 detailed above,
then it is
 like futile wood
that deserves to be cast
 into oblivion !

LOVE AND VALOUR

Love and Valour
are twins I would say ;
And family-planning
does not come in the way
of begetting these babes !

Haven't you read the epic-tale
of Ravana's son Indrajit
who loved and wed Sulochana ? —
When the motherland called the Prince
to the field of battle,
he set out with footsteps firm
and with bravery born of love.
Like a tornado he churned
the swarming invaders
and he sold his life dear
while the world watched and wondered.

In the parallel-epic
Maha Bharata,
Abimanyu, the son of Arjuna
kissed the rose-bud lips
of his young wife Vatsala
And straight from the arbour of love
he strode to the battle-ground ;
Breaching the defence
of the enemy
he saved the day for his side
at the cost of his own life.

Here is an instance
of royal and lyric love —
that of the Princess Amaravathi
and the Poet Ambikapathi.
The Chola King frowned upon
the unequal status
and he put the poet to the sword
thereby making him immortal.

Coming to recent times,
did not King Edward VIII
renounce his throne and crown
for the sake of his love ?
Love is all that's needed
to seek to rest one's head
on the lap of a woman ;
but to renounce a kingdom
calls for valour —
valour and sacrifice.

Unfulfilled love
spurs the victim to suicide
and the tragedy is because
Love stands all alone ;
If Love takes as consort
the strength of Valour,
then it turns Guardian-Angel
to the lovers.

In conclusion, I call upon men and women
to make vigorous love
with valour embellished.
Frustration springs from
Love without Valour
and life then gets drained
of determination.
Valour without Love
is harsh and hard
and life then remains
wholly unmellowed.

Hence I repeat that
Love and Valour are twins
and Family - Planning
is taboo in this theme !

FREEDOM REAL

Myriad heroes
laid down their lives
and their valorous blood
did flow in torrents
so that our land
may breathe in Freedom.

Having delved deep
into the earth
and brought up gold
pure and radiant,
would we ever
throw it amidst garbage,
rather than fashion it
into jewels bright
to adorn our beloved ones
much to their joy ?

Having collected roses
defying the thorns scratching us
would we like to see them
lodged in the hands of leprosy,
rather than set the blossoms
on the tresses of maidens
or string them into garlands
for those we revere ?

Freedom has come to us
as the fruit of our sacrifice
and we shall nurture it,
defending it with our lives.
Paying proud homage
to the valiants who fought for freedom
we shall prove worthy of
the trust reposed in us.

Freedom is not divisible
nor narrow in its impact,
and freedom is not freedom
if a few alone live in comfort.
Light should reach out to
every hamlet and hut,
wrapping in its embrace
the learned and the unlettered,
the tillers and the workers,
the womenfolk and the students.
It is such a state
that is freedom real
and let us strive for it
in dedication
and let us not rest, my friends,
until we reach the goal ...

ABOUT MY POETRY

I am a bird that knows not flying
— that is, flying from nest to nest
in opportunist fits.

My poesy is a fledgeling that hops about,
for it has not as yet grown
the wings of grammar.

Whether it gets those wings or not
may my muse be never burdened with
a wagging tail.

This my confession
is not out of modesty ;
for, as you will see for yourselves,
my prosody is all in a tangle.
You have got to exempt my literature
from rigid patterns and rules,
else I have to get up
and walk off with my wares !

SIX DAMSELS

Sunk in slumber one day,
I had a dream so grand —
Don't find fault with my statement
and demand whether one could
dream while wide awake —
For I could then join issue with you
and ask ; “ Did not Mahatma Gandhi
secure freedom for India
by dreaming in wakefulness ;
And did not our beloved C.N.A.*
translate a waking dream into reality
by ushering in good government
through the weapon of the ballot ? ”

Coming back to the dream I had
while I was asleep in the car
parked in the south of the town,
on the bank of a lily-pond,
in the zephyr-swept shade
of a leafy banyan tree —

Six damsels
swept into my vision,
they were beauteous of form
and eloquent in every gesture,
In dulcet tones
blending harp and flute
they asked : “ Have you seen ever before
the likes of us
in this wide world ? ”

* C. N. A.—Mr. C. N. Annadurai who was Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu prior to the Author.

Ere I could recover my breath
and power of speech,
they had put forward
their proposal :
“ Six are we here,
select one of us
and with her spend the rest
of your life in ecstasy ;
Make haste, Sir,
for Time is slipping
underneath our feet,
going to waste like capital
that collects no interest.”

The simile set my tongue free
and I demanded rather sharply :
“ Are you from a clan of financiers
that you should talk of money-lending ? ”
“ Oh, no Sir, ” came the reply,
“ we belong to the human race,
and caste and creed and religion
are far beyond our ken.”

Needless to say,
I was all agog to consort with
any one of these beauty-queens
but how could I make a choice
when the six were of the same class ! —
Fair and sweet-natured,
vibrant and vivacious,
eyes like stars on earth
and speech like nectar sweet.

I had almost reached
the frontiers of despair
when the thought struck me
that the names of the maidens six
could not be the same.
In response to my query,
they smiled in enchanting mystery
as they gave out their names :
“ Mercy ” and “ Modesty ”,
“ Soft Speech ” and “ Tolerance ”,
And “ Kindness ” and “ Gentleness.”

Where mercy is present,
modesty is concomitant ;
and soft speech is a symbol
of tolerance enthroned.
Kindness excludes anger
and gentleness flourishes there.

I was nowhere nearer solving
my puzzling problem
for I could not choose one damsel
without bringing the others in her wake.
So, to gain time I asked :
“ May I know the name
of your mother noble ? ”
Prompt came the reply :
“ Our mother is “ Tamil ”
and our father “ Valluvar ” ”.

Awestruck by the answer,
I decided then and there
that I could not presume to wed
a daughter of Valluvar ;
for is he not among
the world's leading teachers
who gave a code supreme
for all time to come ?

My predicament was ended
and I told the damsels six :
“ You, shall be my sisters
united in affection deep
and I can bear nevermore
to be away from you, dears.”

Radiant with happiness
the damsels came to me,
calling me “ Brother dear ! ”

Thus did my dream so grand
come to a joyous close
and I shall carry its imprint
evergreen in my heart...

MODESTY

Modesty has its root
in the field of knowledge real ;
and it is the antidote
to ego in arrogance.

One's feet are meant for
walking and not kicking ;
Oh, what use is the knife
if it is only for folding ;
the implement should be wielded
for collecting and slicing fruit
but certainly not to cut
the line of life precious.

Wordy bravery
is an effigy and falsity
whereas the valour born of modesty
is valour true and bright.
Like the tortoise we should restrain
the senses five in us
but does it mean that we should remain
dumb and deaf and blind ?

The eye is restrained
by the doors that are lids,
and the tongue is in check
in the chamber of the mouth,
the breath is contained
by the power of the wind,
the body is circumscribed
by the vault of the grave
and the mind is curbed
by the halo of wisdom.

“Whatever else you may guard or not,
guard your tongue,” said Valluvar—
And that is the first step
of the uphill journey to Restraint.
Keeping a rabid dog
in the interior of the mouth
is the topmost step of arrogance,
from where if one slips,
the fall is thunderous
that shatters one’s stubbornness.

TOLERANCE

The crescent practises patience
in order to become full moon ;
likewise those that are patient
would rule the world over ;
don't confound this quality
with the strategy of the stork
which bides its time to snatch
the best prey swimming along.

Has not Valluvar said
that they who bear with those
who revile and persecute them
are verily like the Earth
which bears up those who dig it ?

To run behind flatterers
is totally wrong indeed,
and likewise to fight those
who stoop to revile us.

The heart of Tolerance
is vast as the ocean
and they who seek to hurt it
would surely be thrown into torment
like the fish cast on
hard and scorching ground.

Oh, how easy indeed it is
to prod and prick a heart,
And how rare is the sight
of the spirit of forgiveness !

CONQUERING ANGER

“ Anger kills, ” said Valluvar
and don't we see angry men
red-eyed and roaring-throated,
waving their arms about
and swaying on their feet —
just like drunkards vile.

Jealousy is a vice
and lethargy is evil,—
while ignorance spells ruin
to home and State alike.
Conquering anger is a virtue
on a par with doing away with
the urge to hurt and kill.

FORGIVING

Not to harm others
calls for discipline
and one who acquires it
becomes foremost among men.
Did not Jesus say
that if one smites you on a cheek
turn to him the other cheek too ?
And has not Valluvar taught us
to return good for evil
and put the wrong-doer to shame ?

Those who take pride
in the coarseness of their tongue
and scatter hurtful words
indiscriminately —
they would never be classed
in the assembly of the wise
but would be left to fume
on the dunghill of their making.

MERCY

Valluvar did declare
that this world is not for those
who are without wealth
and that the other world has no place
for those devoid of mercy.
It is even now a moot point
as to what he meant by " the other world "
and there is a theory
that it is not overpopulated !

Can we trust the claim
that rope is spun out of rock
and may we believe the tales
of heaven and hell elsewhere ?

Heaven is here on earth —
and it is helping the needy,
it is to be loving and kind
and it is in soft speech.
To live in renown, even after death,
is heaven indeed
and it is to reach that status
did Valluvar stipulate
that the prime requisite
is mercy ennobling.

CREED FOR ALL TIME

The world cannot be reformed
in a single day
but it is the effort that matters,
on the bedrock of dedication.
The mission should begin with ourselves
ere we reform the land
so that our word and deed
may carry conviction.

He is simple of appearance
and doesn't know harsh language
and so some wondered aloud
whether he could rule the land.
These critics forgot
that a true disciple of Mahatma Gandhi
could only be simple and plain,
that one who walks the path of Buddha
cannot be unkind or harsh.

His words are soft and sweet
and he cannot cause harm,
he is modesty personified
and mercy is his deity ;
He is tolerant to a fault
and anger is foreign to him.

It is in the configuration
of qualities of this class
that love does pave the way
for lasting peace to hold sway.

To exaggerate grievances
and capitalise on it,
to brandish weapons about
and spark off violence —
such aberrations wreck
the fabric of social order
and they sow the seeds
of a whirlwind disastrous.

To tame the tornado
and turn it into zephyr,
the need is clear thinking
in the light of humanism—
This is the creed that we spread
by propagating *Thirukural* :
and ultimate victory shall be ours
for we are on the path of virtue supreme.

LIFE-GIVERS AND LIFE-TAKERS

The world cannot survive
without water from the skies ;
and when man learned to tame
the turbulent flow of rivers
and canalise the energy
to quench the thirst of fields,
he mastered an elemental force
to yield him golden grain
that piled high in granaries
to keep famine away.

The farmer is a lotus —
his life blossoms in mire —
he is a monarch —
his head is crowned with straw —
he is a warrior
for he operates in the field ;
and he is an artist
for the lands are his painting.
Verily the farmer is God
for he sustains life on Earth.

Our salutations to peasants,
toiling season after season,
shedding their very life
for the welfare of the country.
They are yoked to the open
till the last bit of their strength
and yet the yield is seldom
commensurate with their labour.

This position will change
only when the methods of cultivation
are modernised totally,
as in the developed countries.

The picture can still be seen
of landowners being tyrants,
of cattle alone contributing
the manure for the field,
of water being drawn
by the use of manual labour
and of the plough being pulled
by skeleton-bullocks yoked.

This time-honoured system
has continued too long,
for elsewhere Science has
revolutionised farming.
There the educated
till and sow and reap
through implements propelled ;
while here their counterparts
fight shy of the soil
and queue up for desk-work.
Oh, when will the awakening come
that there is no nobler job
than that of providing food !

We have lagged far behind
for decades on the food-front
but now ' self-sufficiency '
is the call that is going forth ;
and the Government is committed
to aid farming to the utmost.

But when we say, "Produce More
in farms and factories,"
the directive is implemented
more in the home, it seems !
For, children tumble out
in hundreds and thousands,
straining to the limit
the economy of the land.

Under the inspiring leadership
of Mahatma Gandhi,
we made the aliens quit India
after a long-drawn-out Struggle.
What tragedy this,
that here in the land of freedom,
some of our own brethren
have turned aliens in their outlook
— the hoarder heads the list
of this band of traitors
for he starves and kills our countrymen
in order to add to his pile ;
the smuggler is his accomplice
in evil strategy
and he who impedes procurement
is worse than a wild beast.

Public opinion should crystallise
and agitate for freedom
from these the stranglers
of national economy.

WRITING

When the cloud gets to writing,
the output is pouring rain
and the rain's essay on earth
is the river on a long march ;
Where the winding river writes straight
there is a pond or lake or well
and the end-point of all this writing
is the sea feeding the ocean.

The superstitious moan
about the ' writing on one's forehead '
and copious tears they shed
in futile resignation —
That writing could be altered
by the sweat of the brow,
in militant challenge
vanquishing the so-called fate.

THUNDER AND RAIN

If I were to describe
the sky as an old man
whose coughing is thunder
while lightning is the rheum
oozing from his eyes,
and if I were to add
that his sputum is rainfall
then, no one here would
like to welcome rain !

Let me try metaphors
to titillate youthful hearts —
The roar of the thunder is
the conversation of maiden-stars
and the sweep of their bright eyes
is the streak of lightning ;
the perfume they scatter
on their lover who is the moon
comes to the earth as drops
of cool and tingling rain.

To attempt figures of speech
on martial lines —
It is the clash of two warrior hearts
that is the clangour of thunder.
The grazing of their spears
sparks off lightning
and when brave blood is shed in battle
it flows in the form of rain.

CIRCLE IN LIFE

Sixteen months have passed
 since I became Minister ;
Every day I have to meet
 a countless number of citizens,
armed with petitions,
 laden with grievances.
Even a swirling top
 would come to rest in time,
but I am rushing on constant tours
 like a ball that is kicked about.

The toil and travel has
 weakened my physique somewhat
but the life-force is energetic
 for its source is sweet Tamil.
That language of grandeur,
 that ocean of joy supreme,
that perennial greenery —
 is what keeps me alive and active.

I have no quarrel with
 Grammar grim-visaged
but alas, it teases me
 like a stubborn though loving child.
My song may be in conflict with
 the rules of prosody
but its heart-throb is love of Tamil
 and that's all that matters to me.

I am now in the centre
 of a circle of poets here —
the figure is geometrical
 precise to a pinpoint.

The 'tilak' on the brow of beauty
is a circle of bright colour
and the moon that showers light
is a circle of silver.

The sun at such vast distance
is a circle of fire unquenched
and the marks which some pupils collect
are circles so eloquent !
The bed forms the circle
for the dalliance of love
and the cradle is the circle
for the infant lispings its thoughts.

The code of chastity
is the circle for woman's life,
and as for the warrior,
his circle is the field of battle.
The circle for the peasant's plough
is the land it operates in ;
and the circle of affection
defines the ties of friendship.

The rectitude of the ascetic
is demarcated firm
by the circle of his mind
in rigorous discipline ;
And if you talk of a scoundrel,
his villainy is not limited
by a circle of any sort
since he is a crooked freak !

WARRIOR AND FARMER

The warrior marches
to the field of battle
while the farmer toils
in the field for paddy ;
The warrior hunts
the heads of his foes
while the farmer gathers
the crowns of stalks.

Thus,
There are similarities many
between the warrior and the farmer
but there is one difference —
and that is vital indeed —
The farmer nurtures life
while the warrior takes life !

Comrade peasant ! Listen,
and look at the soil fertile ;
if you dig patiently
there is water for your crop
and if you delve still further
gems would come to light.
So do not be lethargic
but get down to solid work.

SEA

The Sea is the giver:
of pearls wondrous bright
that're likened in literature
to the teeth of the beloved.

The Sea is a silk garment,
dyed in the blue of the sky
and clad by the damsel Earth
as she sails through starry space.

The Sea is a handsome youth
with shoulders broad and strong,
who raises his wavy arms
to embrace his sweetheart, Moon.

The sand on the seashore
forms a bedspread
for lovers in ecstasy
to attain fulfilment.
And, for the strolling poets
the shore is a reservoir
of fancies kaleidoscopic
lending radiant wings to their muse.

The darkened in mind do see
only the crab and snail,
for the seashore is a mirror
reflecting their thoughts.

It is the sea that provides
the spectacle impressive
of ships anchored in a row
like cattle tied up in shed.

The attributes of the sea
are too many to be detailed —
Did not the sea put in place
King Canute's flatterers
and did it not get into history
when Mahatma Gandhi
marched to defy the Salt Law
through Dandi Satyagraha ?

The sea charted a pathway
for Vasco da Gama
and it led the ancient Tamil people
to distant climes even.

The sea has been a simile
for hearts humane and large.
Most of the time it is
dumb though animated,
but on occasions it uprises
like the very doom
to devastate parts of the world
before curbing its primitive ire
and turn into a tortoise
like an ascetic.

RIVER

Having its origin
in the region of the clouds
the River descends on the hill
and slides down to the plains,
like a raiment of gold
flowing out of the loom
and like the parting-line
of the combed tresses of a maiden.

Rollicking, the River flows
nurturing grain-fields and pastures,
sustaining groves and gardens
for miles and miles at a stretch.
Plenty and prosperity
are the gift of the River's grace.
And no wonder it has been said
in Tamil literature
that a place not blessed by the River
is a place with its beauty marred.

WELL

I am a frog in the well
but since the well of my choice
is poetry perennial
I am quite familiar with
the events of outside.

When the clouds withhold their grace
and the rivers and ponds dry up,
when the land is scorched and cracked
and there is not a drop to drink
then, don't we conserve our saliva
and ration it down our throat ?
Likewise do we dig
wells of varying depths
and bring up water precious
to save us from the drought.

TANK

A tank adds grace to a town
and if lotus blooms therein,
its charms are a thousandfold.

Every tank does need
an inlet and outlet
so that the water it stores
may be pure and crystal-clear.
Likewise the mind requires
the inlet of knowledge
and the outlet of affection.

TEARS

The sea is vast of course,
and the rain is a blessing
to the entire humanity.

As for the river, its renown
is of dimension magnificent.

The well is spring undefiled
and the tank is cool grace stored.

But all these come alive
only when the clouds shed tears of joy.

The blossom is wrapped in dreams
all through the night ;
and when dawn breaks and dispels
its fantasy romantic,
the flower sheds tears
which we call “ dew-drops.”

The tender shoot of the palm
pours out its feelings
in the form of tears
rolling down in crystal drops —
And the collection is the essence
of the ambrosial drink.

The tears of Poverty
turn into spears and swords
to erode the riches
of the tyrant exploiter.



M. KARUNANIDHI

M. Karunanidhi (b. 1924) Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and President of the ruling D.M.K. Party, combines in himself the great qualities of a Statesman, Administrator and Writer. A fearless fighter for justice and social reforms he courted imprisonment several times.

A prolific writer and a poet, he has 150 short stories, over 20 plays and scripts for over 35 films to his credit.

A founder member of the D.M.K. he came under the influence of Periar E. V. Ramaswamy, Social Reformer and the late Dr. C.N. Annadurai, in his early life.