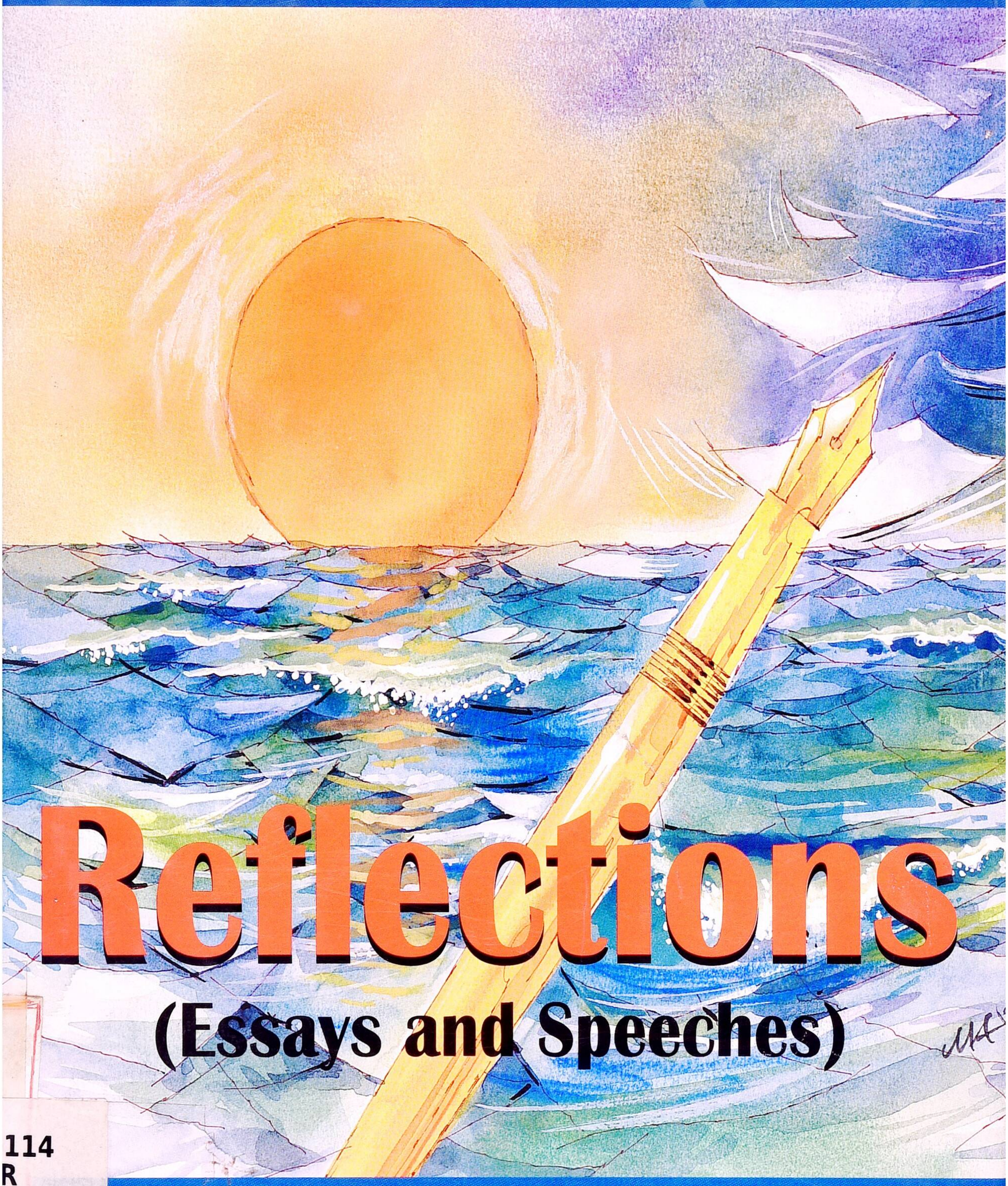
Kalaignar in English Translation



Reflections

(Essays and Speeches)

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BHARATHIAR UNIVERSITY

Charming vignettes addressed to crescent moon, river, mountain, green parrot....from Kalaignar's prison cell each with a sting in the tail, a sharp social comment. Essays carved out of his speeches on a range of themes – state autonomy, the transforming role of education, the role of the youth in national resurgence, the meaningful approach to structuring history. Perceptive and anecdotal reflections on public speaking, with humorous and quirky flashes. Accounts of some lively exchanges in the Tamilnadu Legislative Assembly, containing his good-humoured and combative repartees.

The pieces included in this volume reflect the quintessential elements of Kalaignar Karunanidhi's personality and orientation, pride in the Tamil language and culture; penchant for social justice; rationalist perspective; combativeness as a political leader; championing the cause of state autonomy; faith and confidence in the youth; a natural flair for humour and gentle sarcasm; and a lyrical quality in his use of words.

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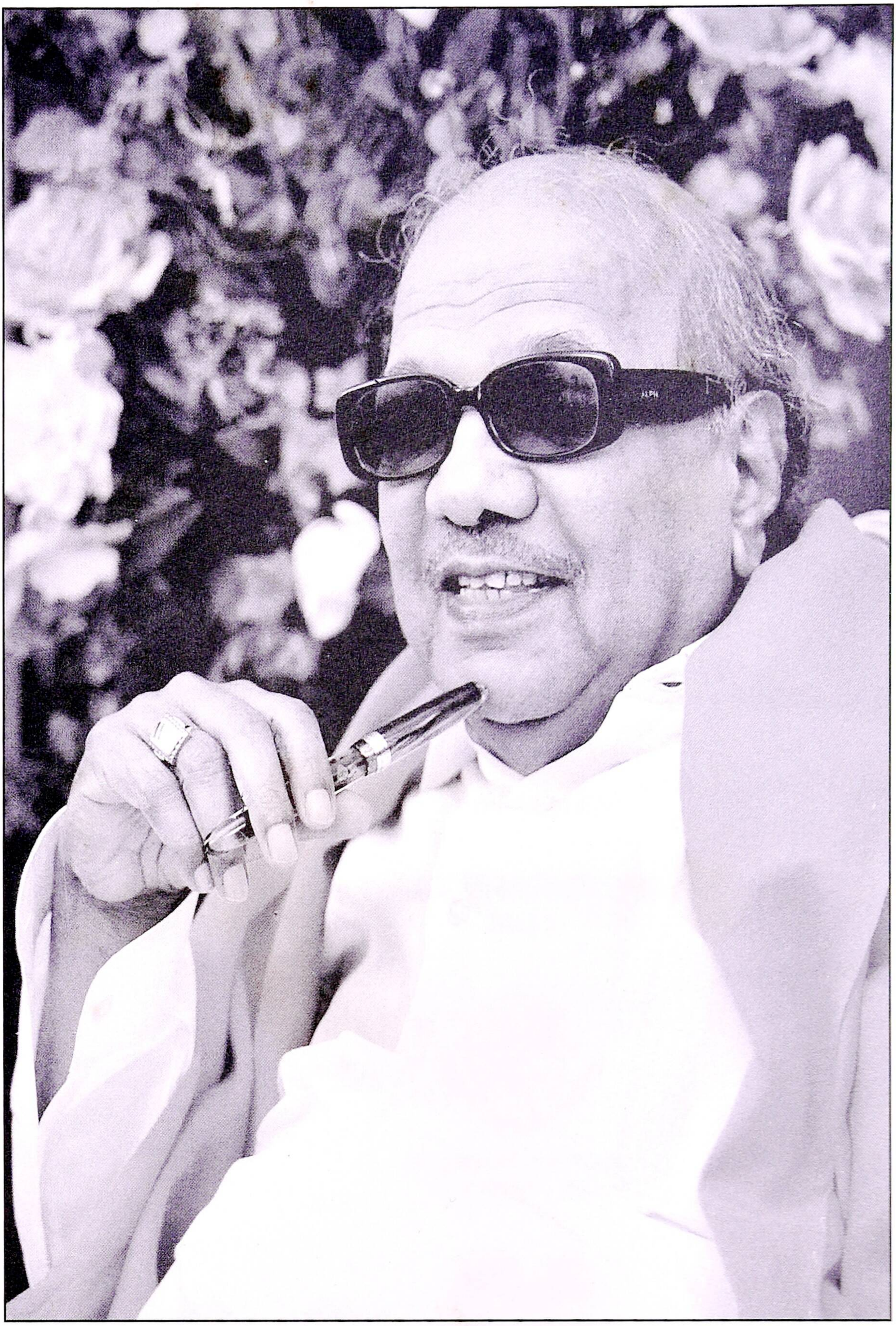

Dr Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi

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Kalaignar in English Translation

Reflections
(Essays and Speeches)

Compiled and translated by

K. S. Subramanian

Edited by

P. Marudanayagam

V. Murugan

8827

Bharathiar University
Coimbatore, India

MACMILLAN

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M. Karunanidhi
Chief Minister

Secretariat
Chennai - 600 009
Date: 12.05.2009

Foreword

I am extremely happy to know that Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, has taken the initiative to bring out a selection of my writings in English.

Bharatidasan, a formidable revolutionary poet, instilled in the Tamils an intense love for Tamil in such exhortations as

May you thunder, O Conch!
That the never diminishing Tamil
Is our life-breath and our prosperity.

Periyar E.V. Ramasamy and Perarignar Anna devoted their entire lives to promote among the Tamils an awareness of the dignity of their race. Following in their footsteps, from my childhood to this day I have immersed myself in the task of writing in order to keep the Tamil youth ever vigilant because of my desire that the Tamil land and the Tamil society should progress rising to the level of the rest of mankind. With this end in view, my writings have taken numerous forms such as poetry, drama, fiction, essay, epistle and travelogue.

Many have admiringly observed and continue to observe that my literary output has also contributed to the onward march of the Tamils in several spheres. In such a context, let me unreservedly and to my heart's content praise Bharathiar University, especially its Vice Chancellor, Dr G. Thiruvasagam, for his efforts to publish the most significant of those writings in English.

My thoughts have always centred round the idea that the Tamils should awaken and that the Tamil land should achieve worldwide progress. May these translations effectively serve that cause dear to my heart!

To
Dr G. Thiruvasagam
Vice Chancellor
Bharathiar University
Coimbatore

(M. Karunanidhi)

Vice Chancellor's Note

There is a close parallel between the nationalist Tamil poet Subramania Bharathi (after whom this University is named) and Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi in that both of them have a deep-rooted conviction in art being an agent of social transformation and the writings of both seek to release people from the shackles of slavery and show them the way of dignity and self-respect.

Bharathiar firmly believed that at the root of all social problems lay the evil of the caste system. All his life, he stressed that there were only two castes – the righteous and the unrighteous, the former superior and the latter inferior. A standing example of the might of the pen over the sword, Bharathiar's writings played a very significant role not only in gaining freedom for India from foreign yoke but also in unfettering his countrymen from the utterly dehumanizing beliefs and practices of the Indian society.

Kalaignar, remaining in the forefront of the fight against social inequality in all its forms, is a writer with ingrained social consciousness and has fathered numerous social reforms as the head of the government and as the leader of a political party, thanks to which people from the sections of the society once looked down as being incapable of thought and knowledge are today intellectuals, professionals and leaders of men.

A grand fusion of Periyar, Anna and Bharathiar, Kalaignar stands as a towering personality. Kalaignar now at 86, age has not withered his intellect nor has time made his writings stale.

Determined to secure a presence for Tamil literature and culture on the global scene, this University has already translated Bharathi's poems into English and conferred the"Bharathi Tamil Chemmal"award on Kalaignar in 2007, the University's Silver Jubilee year. The present endeavour, translation of Kalaignar's works into English, is a major step towards realizing this goal.

G. Thiruvasagam

Prologue

Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi's literary works in English translation should constitute a gift of the Tamil language to world literature.

In so far as Kalaignar is both a visionary writer and an active practitioner of his vision, he is a phenomenon unto himself, standing a rung or two above his fellow artists of all genres.

Kalaignar's significance in the history of Tamil literature primarily lies in his restoration and renewal of the pristine glory of Tamil, the language that is the mother of the Dravidian family of languages and that is one of the primary classical languages of the world.

Kalaignar's creativity began to manifest in his concern for the ethnic identity of the Tamils and the aesthetic exuberance of the Tamil language, and today it has matured into a seminal contribution to world literature.

Looked at the need for winning international recognition for Tamil literature, especially in the context of the other pan-Indian language, Sanskrit, enjoying worldwide attention and study, the present translations of Kalaignar's selected works into English are an attempt in the right direction.

Such of these translations are also a need of the hour for the Tamil language to demonstrate its capacity for indestructibility and rejuvenation, at this hour of the prognosticatory threat of the social scientists that globalization would in its wake see the languages of ethnic communities either wear off or die out.

Kavipperarasu Vairamuthu

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Introduction

Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi, born in 1924 in a hamlet of Thanjavur in the southern part of India, has eminently succeeded in making spectacular contributions both as a statesman and as a man of letters. His has been a full life providing ample space for diplomacy, social reformation and creative writing. Neither a philosopher nor a full-fledged academic living in an ivory tower, he has the courage and the wisdom to think and to act remarkably. A prolific writer endowed with unusual powers of observation and meditation, he has been ceaselessly adorning his beloved Mother Tamil with a steady stream of writings, leaving no genre untouched. It may be poetry or prose, song or verse, essay or story, play or fiction, social novel or historical novel, creative writing or criticism, memoir or autobiography, script for a film or a play, broadcast or speech – he can handle it with astonishing ease. What he has written till today may run to more than fifty volumes of 300 to 400 pages each.

What Karunanidhi states in the first volume of his autobiography about the year in which he was born is a telling comment on the ethos of the times as well as on the political, social and cultural forces that moulded his world-view. That was a year that witnessed momentous events. Lenin, the supreme architect of the communist revolution in Russia, died and Stalin came to power. Trotsky's advocacy of violent worldwide revolution was abandoned in favour of Stalin's plan for *"socialism in one country"* and the communist leaders decided to adapt the movement to the differing situations in various countries. Turkey became a republic under the presidentship of Kemal Ataturk during whose fifteen-year reign, the country's political and economic structure as well as its religious and social bases was totally transformed. Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, written during his incarceration in Bavaria, preaching anti-semitism, power worship and disdain for morality and outlining his strategy for world domination later became the bible of

the Nazi party. Since all the empires had been weakened by the first world war, many colonies boldly rose in revolt against them.

When Nazism, Fascism and Communism were becoming prominent in the West, Gandhian ideology started taking shape in India. It was in 1924 that Gandhiji, released from prison, became the President of the Indian National Congress and Jawaharlal Nehru was elected its General Secretary. India had awakened from its deep slumber and Gandhiji's appearance on the political scene electrified the Indian masses. The Belgaum Congress meet had the party's future course of action mapped out. Though most of the Indian political leaders were unanimous in their view that the British should be driven away from the country, they were hopelessly divided with regard to the strategies to be developed for dealing with the foreign power. The labour unions in the country were gradually becoming stronger and stronger. The feudal lords and zamindars were waging a losing battle against the tillers of the soil. If in the south seeds were sown for organized fights for social justice, in the north there appeared signs of disruption of communal harmony.

It was in 1924 that Periyar E.V. Ramasami planned an epic battle against the evil of untouchability that later earned him the title of Vaikkam Hero. Besides laying a firm foundation for the labour movement in Tamilnadu, Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliyar became a fierce fighter for the country's freedom. Finally, Karunanidhi significantly adds that it was the year in which "the revolutionary of revolutionaries, who dispelled the thousand-year-old darkness of the Tamil land," Arignar Anna, was a high school student equipping himself for the historic role he was going to play.

In this chronicle he is able to identify, of course with the benefit of hindsight, the intellectuals and men of action who later became his models as well as those against whom he had to define himself. Though all those personalities, movements, parties and ideologies might have attracted his attention at an impressionable age, he was going to choose Periyar and not Gandhiji, Arignar Anna and not Jawaharlal Nehru, the party wedded to Dravidian ideals and not the Congress, Periyar's Marxism and not Nehruvian socialism, and Tamilnadu and not India. To him, as to his guides and companions in the Dravidian Movement, the social and cultural emancipation of the Dravidians was of greater importance than even the political freedom of the country.

Even as a fourteen-year-old adolescent, Karunanidhi was captivated by the self-respect movement of Periyar E.V. Ramasami, whose fiery speeches and writings exerted an irresistible influence on several thousands of young men and women of Tamilnadu during the early decades of the twentieth century. To the politically,

socially, economically and culturally oppressed of the Tamil land, Periyar appeared as a new messiah who could save them from the atrocities perpetrated against them in the name of religion. His words and deeds, ideas and activities, principles and practices took the southern part of India by storm as he travelled the length and breadth of it tirelessly, asking the Dravidians to become aware of their racial identity and to boldly fight for their release from the shackles of slavery, superstition and inferiority complex which, in his view, had been the handiwork of an alien race. The young Karunanidhi was one of his prize catches.

If Periyar's thoughts made an indelible impression on him, Arignar Anna's powerful oratory became a perennial source of inspiration. He thoroughly soaked himself in Anna's speeches and writings, committed numerous admirable utterances of his to memory and revelled in quoting them as often as possible. When it came to his own speeches, he didn't slavishly imitate Anna but scrupulously developed a distinct style of his own. If Anna's ornate and colourful prose is almost verse and if every paragraph of his can be turned into a *viruttappā* by a few slight modifications, Karunanidhi's prose is punchy, heavily ironic and full of witticisms. If every sentence in the former's speech, having a lyrical charm of its own, is a case of "linked sweetness long drawn out," every sentence in the latter's speech moves fast and quickly reaches its carefully planned climax. If Anna's mastery of Tamil prose is almost unsurpassed, every speech of Karunanidhi is a sparkling performance. One would be reminded of the comparison Dryden draws between Demosthenes and Cicero:

> One warms you by degrees; the other sets you on
> fire all at once and never intermits his heat. …
> One persuades, the other commands.

Of all the modern poets, it was Bharatidasan, the organ voice of the Dravidian movement, who won his heart by a poetry that galvanized the Tamils into action. He can use Bharatidasan's similes, phrases, lines and whole poems to dramatic effect in his own speeches and dialogues for films. Inspired by Bharatidasan's play *Iraṇiyaṉ allatu Iṇaiyaṟṟa Vīraṉ*, he reconstructed the myths relating to Ravana, Vali, Hiranya and Indrajit. The Dravidian stance on many more legends, myths, literary representations and historical personages was later exquisitely articulated by Karunanidhi in different genres and modes.

Kalaignar's lack of college education or of classroom learning of ancient Tamil writings never stood in the way of his becoming an accomplished writer and competing with the university wits of his time. Energetic and strenuous self-schooling more than made up for it. Plunging into studies of classical and modern Tamil works, he got as much out of them as any contemporary Tamil scholar

could. He took to *Tolkāppiyam, Tirukkuṟaḷ, Eṭṭuttokai, Pattuppāṭṭu, Cilappatikāram, Maṇimēkalai, Kaliṅkattupparaṇi* and Sundaraṉār's *Maṉōṉmaṇiyam* just as fish take to water, and a sound knowledge of these stood him in good stead by shaping his vision of life and having quite an impact on the texture of his prose and poetry. Besides writing learned expositions of some of these texts, he could provide new renderings of many of these into lucid modern Tamil so that they could easily reach the masses. Because of his re-presentations of *Tirukkuṟaḷ* in more than one form, Tiruvalluvar became a household name in Tamilnadu.

There is no simple yardstick with which the performance of any writer can be assessed. It has to vary from group to group if not from individual to individual for there are writers and writers. Their missions vary; their methods differ. Gandhiji was a prolific writer but would never claim the title of an artist. Among those that have produced many works of lasting value, there have been political revolutionaries such as Lenin, Trotsky and Mao Tse-Tung, political theorists such as Hobbes, Thomas Paine and Karl Marx, statesmen such as Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill and Malraux, philosophers such as Voltaire, Bertrand Russell and Sartre, activists such as Mahatma Gandhi, Periyar E.V. Ramasami and Martin Luther King and scientists such as Charles Darwin, Julian Huxley and Einstein. The writings of these can't be measured against those of creative artists such as Flaubert, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, who firmly believed that artistry was of primary importance and that their loyalty to language came before everything else.

Karunanidhi is almost equally split between his responsibilities to art and politics. He may be in or out of power; he may be the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu or the Leader of the Opposition but his creative vigour shows no signs of abating. The older he grows, the more voluminous the literary output happens to be. For the life, career and achievement of Karunanidhi, we can find three amazingly close parallels in contemporary world histoy: Arthur Koestler, Pablo Neruda and Wole Soyinka. Koestler, who, interestingly begins his autobiography with an account of what happened in different parts of the world on his birthday, was a communist when he was in his twenties, left the party during the Stalin purge trials, became an influential spokesman of the non-communist left and is now remembered for his writings characterized by an impressive journalistic style and a sense of commitment. Neruda earned a name as a poet, diplomat and communist leader, received the Nobel Prize for literature while serving as ambassador to France and is known for his highly personal poetry in the collection *Twenty Love Poems and One Song of Despair* and for his writings that glorify his home country's landscape and condemn the exploitation of the Red Indians. Soyinka, a Nigerian

revolutionary, playwright, poet and novelist, has won international acclaim for his writings which combine Western and Yoruba traditions.

Karunanidhi's writings, dashed off in the white heat of inspiration in the midst of a hectic schedule, are in Tamil, at once a classical and modern language that has, because of several centuries of constant use, become a supple medium of prose and verse. They have to be made available in English if the world at large, especially the West, has to recognize their power and glory.

Prof. P. Marudanayagam

REF - 2

Preface

Kalaignar Karunanidhi is widely known as a major political leader of the Tamilnadu State in India, playing an increasingly significant role at the national level. A five-term Chief Minister. An important and enduring presence in the Dravidian Movement. The pre-eminent leader of the ruling party in Tamilnadu, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). A powerful speaker, who can enthral and also energise his listeners. This is his public persona.

This public persona captures but partially the personality of Kalaignar Karunanidhi (Kalaignar). There are many more dimensions to it. An abiding and deep pride in the Tamil language, literature and culture. A fighter for social justice and against caste-based inequity. A rationalist battling against religious obscurantism and superstitions. A master political strategist of uncommon acumen. A dauntless leader of his party, each political adversity spurring him to redoubled vigour in galvanising his party out of potential dejection. A strong crusader for more powers and autonomy for the states in the Indian polity. A strongly committed journalist, with his uninterrupted contributions to his journal *Murasoli* for over 50 years—particularly, his epistles to 'siblings' (DMK colleagues and cadre). Such a steady and continual involvement over such a long period should be a peerless record in the world of journalism. A cult figure in the field of Tamil cinema, with his storyline and scriptwriting in several path-breaking Tamil films. A prolific writer—of novels, plays, poetry, essays, and interpretive works on some ancient Tamil classics (releasing these treasures from the clutches of pedants and bringing these within the popular domain). And, his monumental memoirs in five volumes, capturing the growth of the Dravidian movement, and elements of Tamil social and political history spanning sixty years.

The present volume is an anthology of Kalaignar's essays and reflections, gleaned from a variety of sources. Charming vignettes addressed to crescent moon, river, mountain, green parrot... from his prison cell—each with a sting in the tail, a sharp social comment. Vignettes couched in purple prose, flavoured with

poetic touches. Essays carved out of his speeches on a range of themes—State autonomy, the transforming role of education, the role of youth in national resurgence, meaningful approach to structuring history.... As a consummate public speaker, his perceptive and anecdotal reflections on public speaking, with humorous and quirky flashes, also find a place in this volume. Kalaignar's accounts of some lively exchanges in the Tamilnadu Legislative Assembly, containing his good-humoured and combative repartees, lend colour to this volume.

The pieces included in this volume reflect the quintessential elements of Kalaignar Karunanidhi's personality and orientation—pride in the Tamil language and culture; penchant for social justice; rationalist perspective; combativeness as a political leader; championing the cause of State autonomy; faith and confidence in the youth; a natural flair for humour and gentle sarcasm; and a lyrical quality in his use of words.

Any further comment on my part on the individual pieces in this volume would constitute an invasion into the reader's space.

Dr K S Subramanian
Director (Retd)
Asian Development Bank
Manila

1 Crescent Moon!

Oh! Crescent moon! Foam from the sea of the sky! Why are you peeping through the latticed window of this prison cell and casting a smile on me?

I am able to listen to your whisper, 'Ye Prisoner'. As if you are circling the globe in a chariot of liberty! Do you enjoy unlimited freedom? Your right is circumscribed—not crossing the course charted, eyes open in eternal vigil, treading your path like a mere prison guard!

True it is that I cannot jump over the prison walls and reach the eager arms of my beloved. Is your situation any different? You too cannot stretch your hands beyond your scripted boundary and touch the star damsels winking at you.

I am a prisoner!

You, a prisoner too!

In the outside world, I am subjected to blackout. You are not free from it either, the monthly new moon! They won't allow me to shine properly—would shroud my gleam shrewdly. And you, any different? You are surrounded by clouds, and enemies encircle me.

I am a prisoner!

You, a prisoner too!

I will gain my freedom, along with my country. But, no freedom for you - no change from your endless circling routine.

Oh! Crescent moon! Lovely boat of the sky! Why don't you carry unto me my colourful peahen? Bring to my side my lovely beloved languishing in yearning for me. Let me savour her sight through this latticed window. Bring unto me my queen of liberty.

How naïve of me that I am imploring you! How can you ever accomplish this—after all, you just can't transgress your defined bounds!

You are a prisoner!

Me, a prisoner too!

2 Oh! The *Aadi* Wind!

Oh! The roaring wind of the *Aadi* month! Whom are you threatening? Is your rage more fierce than the wrath of those on the throne? I have experienced it. They imposed a ban on me—that my kith and kin, my wife, my children, my mother, my father, my friends… all of them were barred from my side. And, whatever is the mystery behind their dispatching you here, inside this cell!

As I cannot witness their cruel rule outside, have they sent you here as an embodiment of their brutality?

Oh! The roaring wind of the *Aadi* month! Why are you shaking the trees so viciously? Why, like a magician manoeuvring a devilish dance? Why, like these ministers manipulating the hapless people? Why do you torture these trees? What crime have they committed? They flourish, and is it a crime? Their grace, a crime? Their lush resurgence, a wrong? Donning fragrant flowers in their crests and dazzling like paragons of beauty, is this a crime? What is their crime? Why torment them? Oh! The *Aadi* wind! Better give me the reason. I know you won't. Just like you, the government too fails to give us the reason.

Oh! The *Aadi* wind! Do you imagine that we will be browbeaten by your throwing dust and sand into our eyes? Are these sprays of sand more vicious than the bursts of tear gas? You have jumped over the massive prison walls and are dancing like a monkey. Should you be persecuting me even after I am trapped within the prison? With no trace of a reply, why are you hissing so fiercely?

Just like you, the dictators roared gruesomely; indulged in a dance of tyranny. They and you are of the same ilk. Oh! The *Aadi* wind! In your harsh howl, you are singing this truth. Wait! Wait! When the month of *Aadi* passes, you'll pipe down. After you simmer down, you will be meeting your bosom friend, the government pal who was also prancing like you. Poor he! But he would have meekly slithered into a hole!

Go, go. Whip and scatter the sand and flee!

3 The Dark Damsel

Come, oh night, come. Come, oh lovely dark damsel! You're a beauty, a great beauty. I like the dark damsel, I love her. But I am already married! So what; is it wrong to describe your beauty with an unsullied mind? Should I beckon you as 'emerald belle' or 'dark beloved'! You may chide me; that would be but fair. I have decided that there is no sin in calling you my friend.

The damsel of night! Come here. Sit down. Won't you? Fine. I love a dark girl. Know the reason? Only when a dark girl breaks into a smile, the pearly teeth find a presence. Are not the eyes the signature of a girl's beauty? The white eyes in a dark body – Ah! What allure! What allure!

As you are dark and you smile so often, the world is lost in praise of the diamond lustre of your star-teeth. You smile; and your mouth resembles an open shell encasing a thousand pearls. Girl! Even the murmur of your beating heart is discernible to my ears. You are immersed in such a tranquil poise. You are adorned in serenity; but your heart is anything but tranquil. It is ever turbulent. I can feel its flutter, you require a lover. Robbers love you; and you resent, you agonize. Drunkards seek refuge in you. And you simmer. Your heart does not fail to express it.

You are a constant witness to the amorous exchanges of lovers in embrace among the fruit-laden groves and on the banks of the Kaveri – your heart grows heavy with unfulfilled yearnings. You smile, but it is only lip-deep, meant for others' consumption. I am able to discern the muted cry of your heart. You are

pining away for a handsome young man worthy of your love. I am, alas, a married man. Leaving behind my queen of liberty, I am languishing in a cruel dungeon.

The poets, the savants and the artists enter the chamber of your suitors… you enter the arena with a garland in hand to seal your choice… they get intoxicated by your rapturous smile… they merely mutter some pleas on behalf of the world and wilt.

I am able to find your tears lingering as dewdrops in the flowers in the garden and in the woods. Of what avail? You are looking for solace. You are hungering for some intimate girl-friends to appear. They too appear. But they all earn their keep by the condemned drama they enact in the benign darkness provided by you. Crushed women.

Well, your brother, moon, had provided you with a white sari. Who snatched it away? Nature? Oh! He is truly a prankster, Kanna! He derives a strange satisfaction in stealing your sari. You don't like that playful thief, right?

Then, how at all would you get married? Dark damsel! Princess of night! All my worries are focussed on your marriage. Why is your face turning pale? Because it's getting late? Weighed down by sorrow? Out of pangs of separation? Wait, wait. Here comes my friend. A lover made for you. Do you know him? The handsome young man named morning. Let us settle your marriage here and now, Marriage between a Dark Damsel and Morning. And, its name—Pre-dawn grey.

Hey! Where are you heading? Oh! Night dear! Evergreen Damsel! Wait, wait. So bashful on seeing your lover? Okay, go your way.

4 Oh! Ocean!

Oh! Ocean! You swallow the sun and yield the moon. You're the blue robe decking out the damsel earth. You're the gossamer veil fluttering over the sandal frame of the earth belle. The foam you spew out is the milk spilling over the coral lips of a tender babe! They are the same. You scatter with your lovely wave-hands beautiful shells, reminding us of the charming pranks little children indulge in, with their tiny sugar cane hands.

I seek your shore to relax. You rock my mind with your wave-lullaby. Oh mighty ocean untouched by sleep! In our bond of pristine purity, a touch of slackening. Even so, do reply to my epistle.

"The toiling worker, the flourishing capitalist, the savant dispensing truth, the poet sharing his lofty muse, sculptor, painter, intellectual—everyone gets a rest. But, why no respite for you? Are you taunting the compulsive idlers with a teaser, 'See how I keep toiling ceaselessly!' I used to pose this query in the past. Are you expecting the same question? No, not this time.

Mixing the gruel with her candy hands and handing over the pot to her lover… planting a sweeter kiss and waving 'farewell' to him… 'the sun has sunk into the ocean, but he hasn't returned yet'—the beloved wife waiting yearningly outside her hut, with lingering eyes and tired legs… the young belle with all her hopes pinned on you. Saving her from gloom, from despair, are you ferrying back her husband daily on your blue shoulders? Are you expecting to hear from me this usual question? No, not this time.

Reposing their trust in the Ocean Mother, these humble huts have sprouted on your shores, and you toss them away. You too have joined the band betraying toiling workers? I've posed this question time and again. That's not the query today.

Oh! The mighty pond of pearls aplenty!

Trapped as I am in prison, the atrocity you unleashed on a day long past, flashed on my troubled mental radar. Kavirippoompattinam—a town of great beauty, the garden of Eden of the Tamils—you devastated it with your ruthless wave-arms. I'm not asking you why you had indulged in such a mindless cruelty. I'm not suing you for that.

But, Oh Ocean! You laid our dear town to waste! Likewise, can your arms not burst forth on Kallakkudi* and wipe out the vicious symbol of the North?

Do reply to my letter!

If not, please keep quiet!

Alas! Either is beyond you!

*Kallakkudi is a railway station in southern Tamilnadu and became a major symbol in Anti-North Domination Agitation.

5 River

Beauty

Oh! River! Dancing damsel! What bewitching beauty—your charming wriggle resembling the expressive fingers of a dancer! A flood of surging foam! Can even the piercing silver gleam be your peer? Rhythmic rustle recalling the music of a dancer's tinkling anklets, graceful gait all colourful splendour, a form bringing glee to the farmers' hearts—this great blend, Queen Ponni! Praise unto you!

Beloved

Oh! Beloved! Damsel Kaveri! Beauty with ruddy coral lips! Alluvium—is it the betel cud you've deposited in the soil-lover's mouth out of overwhelming love?

Mother

Oh! Mother! You nurture with eager nourishing hands the tiny lisping infants. In your loving embrace, you cast your benign look on the infant paddy seedlings swaying their 24 - carat bodies and flashing their ruby smiles. You channel the joy of nature. Oh, loving mother! River mother! Knowingly or not, you also suckle evil weeds. Did you learn this blemish from your mother? Habit born in cradle or that noble one too learnt it from you?

Government

Who can equal you in the sheer joy you derive from row after row of benediction? The ears of golden corn raise their heads from the cosy comfort of your lap. You wash the sugar cane's feet and suffuse node after node with taste. Banana, mango and jackfruit—all the sustenances of life conceive at your touch. You toil constantly for public good, you are a benign government. Oh King River, wending your way to the ocean after performing your duty! Pray, don't imagine that you're the exclusive source of the waters of the ocean. That's how the wielders of governmental power tend to think. As the waters of the oceans turn into rain-laden clouds, you're travelling as a sandal-hued river. A government is also like a river. The creation of the ocean of humanity! If you run haywire, oh River, you'll be tamed by a dam.

A government in power too shares the same fate!
As you run your course, chanting this refrain,
Long live, River! Long live!

6 Dawn, I Greet Thee!

Oh Dawn! Come here. Accept my greeting. Come on, you come scampering on hearing the word 'greeting'. Oh seeker of repute! First, rebuke; and only thereafter, praise. Yes—You've woken up the rooster, and also the crimson sun. In between, why are you in such unseemly haste to bang the toiler's door? He had been tossing in pain all night on the mud floor, and is only now closing his eyes in utter exhaustion. Do you imagine he is sound asleep?

Disdain for the poor seems to have infected you too. That is why you're thumping the door of those curled up in fatigue in their huts? Are your legs afraid to negotiate the steps of the palaces? Or are your hands scared of touching their ornate doors?

'Hey! Pick up the plough'—how superciliously you order the poor worker! Have you ever, even once, even with the rhythmic charm of a veena, whispered through the windows of the mansion: 'I believe it is time'?

The day you don't wake up the poor man—is it not the day he has passed away? You don't wake up corpses. You also don't wake up the walking corpses of the mansions.

I have now understood your meaningful ways?

Dawn! Greetings to you!

7 Ladle the Saint

Wearily I stand, holding a plate in my hand. The prison guard pours sorghum gruel. And the gruel breaks into tinkling laughter. From within the ladle it exclaims: 'Fighting to free the Dravidian in bondage, brothers, you are queing up today, plates in hand. Why this agony, on setting your eyes on the gruel?' There is significance in this remark of Ladle the Saint—new vibrant meaning. This saint's sharp tongue pours out such salient truths!

"Brother! Long under salubrious shade, you better experience the summer heat too. The struggle of the farm labour watering the parched land; the hassle of the cowherd running hither and thither regulating the straying cattle; the grind of the vegetable vendor eking out a miserable living, carrying a headload of vegetables, walking in the baking powdery village sands, valiantly protecting his feet with a wrapping of a torn piece of jute-sack held in place by a string of banana fibre; 'Why this measly life, Oh Lord!' - the itinerant beggar gratingly singing this doleful refrain, to the accompaniment of a rustic lute made out of a dried and disembowelled bottlegourd stuck to a bamboo stick—the misery of these wretches will touch you only when you get out of your smugness. Come out to the summer heat from your cool retreat. Do not migrate from the pleasant Kutraalam to the upscale Kodaikkanal hills. Taste the sting of the summer swelter!

"Should you be spending a lifetime savouring a feast of myriad courses? Should your awareness be limited to your own little self? The world enveloping you is very large. A huge multitude surviving on mere gruel, another mass languishing even without this paltry fare—when are you going to spare a thought for these?

"Come on, why do you keep staring without paying heed to what I have been saying? All because I am golden-hued? No, no... you are eyeing the chaff mixed with me. The chaff too belongs to my race. My kith and kin too. You human kid! Is your race's lot all that great? There is chaff in your tribe too. They are, however, not called chaff. They bear a different name—proprietors, landlords, incarnations! They also go by another name, political pundits!

"So, there is chaff aplenty in your race too. If you can remove this chaff, I can do it too. Try!"

Ladle the Saint kept haranguing. The queue of four hundred tapered off. At last, my turn. Me, with a plate in hand! The residual gruel jumped on to my plate and exclaimed, "Hey, brother! Do you understand what I've been saying?" "No salt," I ventured to remark. Salt is lacking in some in your race too, he said.

8 Mountain! Salutation to Thee!

Oh Mountain!

I would call you the golden crown studded with emerald, adorning the head of Mother Earth seated on the throne under the canopy of sky gleaming with lamps of diamond lustre. To describe you, a hundred imageries crowd my mind. Your myriad appearances fit these imageries.

When you wrap your frame in snow, I am perplexed—have all the white clouds of the sky descended and piled up to heady heights?

Snow-capped mountain! Another fancy seizes me—I entertain a doubt if you are indeed a veiled damsel, with your face and body covered in a white robe.

Oh Mountain! You are a great saint, it seems. Many find in your unrelenting resoluteness an apt simile for the hermit beyond the lure of the voluptuous entreaties of women. But, I well know your ways. I do know how you stretch your cool arms to mollify the passion of the cloud-lasses embracing your shoulders... how, at your mere touch, these damsels drool over you, are unable to rise any higher, dissolve into rain, and clasp you with ardour with myriad arms of rivers!

Only thereafter, I proclaim to the world that the hermits, who have renounced everything, cannot keep off 'that' attraction.

Oh Mountain! You are a strong-willed lover. And, you are also an intelligent poet. A poet shares with the world the thoughts surging in him; you too bestow on the earth the bounty of rain showers.

Oh Mountain King! If you don't flourish, if you don't raise your sturdy arms of teak and eaglewood... where is prosperity? Where is life? Salutations to your robust arms!

As a dispenser of gold and wealth, you are the world's benefactor... as a provider of succour and support, you are a social worker. You are a bejewelled throne of the earth. You are an artist too. Without you, can we think of the massive sculptures of Egypt? And the Ellora caves? The bewitching art of Ajantha? Can our eyes feast on the glory of Chithannavaasal or the grandeur of Maamallapuram?

Oh Mountain, casting a smile as a cave of art! All the arts dazzling on your broad forehead are lofty. Exalted, lending beauty to the earth.

But, Mountain, there is but one blemish. You've become the raw material for the millions of gods crowding the four corners.

But, you're nobler than the humans. Though man tramples up your crest, you're greater than man.

Reason:

As per man's religious tenets–

'God created mountain!'

It is only out of a bead of the mountain that man creates god!

9 The Star

Oh Star! You, a speck of light splintered from the full-moon diamond on its impact with a cloud hill! An offspring of a leaping lightning! A scatter of rubies from a fallen, bejewelled crown! The nature-mason has thatched the sky-roof with gems aplenty! Are you the flowers laid out on the sky-couch by the moon damsel eager in wait for her lover?

Looking at the dance of the peacock in the woods, a turkey too spread its ungainly feathers in pathetic imitation... Much like this, like diamonds spread for display on a blue velvet tray in a jeweller's shop, looking at your twinkling presence in the sky's expanse, a firefly would convene a conference of its kin on the branch of a tree!

This new contest of imitation is not the preserve of only the insects and birds. Chee! Some among the humans have also entered the fray!

Mandhi kaiyil malarmaalai—'A garland of flowers in a monkey's hand'—is a charming exercise in alliteration. A bouquet of flowers from the savants! Aping this, with a bravado, 'Don't I know how to arrange Tamil in alliterative format', some tend to arrange 'A's and 'ka's in weary stacks, lose their meaning en route and flit around as fireflies, in the face of worthy stars!

Oh stars of Tamil—paintings, epics, prose works, music, dance and the myriad art forms—it is perhaps natural for pretenders to flaunt their wares like fireflies.

The turkey—all because it is called 'sky hen' in Tamil—can never become the colourful peacock. Fireflies can never aspire to be the sky's resplendent star-flowers. Golden pearl of light! Bunch of ruby flowers! Declare aloud that man too should learn this lesson.

Flame of lamp golden! Let me say this finally. We sing in praise of your famed lustre. But, one day one of you will grow a whole tail. Alas! At that point, the world which showered praise on you as 'star' would disdainfully call you a mere 'tail-star'—the Tamil term for a comet. Among men too, some famed worthies fall victim to this blight!

Lamp of the cloud-niche! Fragrant ape-flowers scattered in the shade of the full-moon tree! The golden shower of light poured down by the sky! Flower of sheer gold! Star!

You are a great painting in the earth's eyes.

An epic yielding new fancies.

10 Freedom of Thought

We are all aware that, by and large, these books have been published (by the University) ensuring the freedom of thought of the concerned authors. Freedom of thought is, of course, necessary. But we should not forget one thing: this freedom of thought should not make us lose the new awakening which has taken shape in this country as a result of long years of sustained endeavour.

While I do not point to any work in particular, I would like to flag one point. While the many profound thoughts emanating through Endowment lectures are being given a shape, but before their eventual publication in a book-form, it would be appropriate for a committee of the university to review the draft, point out any shortcomings to the authors and for the authors to incorporate appropriate changes. I would appeal to you to adopt this approach.

It would be a worthwhile idea for the researchers to think incisively of the very subject matter of research. Just to illustrate with an example. We have identified Kattabomman as one among the freedom fighters from Tamilnadu. This has also been celebrated in plays and films. Against this backdrop, in the name of doing research, should a researcher try to establish that Kottabomman was a mere local chieftain, a brigand, that there was a feud between him and the foreign ruler only because he refused to pay tax, and that he was no freedom fighter... What do we gain by such a research? Do we not suffer a collective loss? We should bestow some

thought to this aspect. The spirit of freedom nurtured over a long time may get devastated by this kind of research. I am of the view that researchers should stay clear of such research endeavours.

So it is good for everyone not to mess around with the forces leading the people of this country along the noble path and the spirit of valour, and to thwart these efforts by their research.

At the same time, it is essential to direct research to rescue people from the tendencies which, in the name of God and religion, reduce the people to be slaves of superstitions. Let such researches continue.

I note with pleasure that an Endowment was established in the University today in the name of Periyar.* Through this Endowment, it is imperative to conduct research subserving rationalist thought. These researches should definitely serve the objective of uplifting the communities kept downtrodden in the name of caste.

I do not seek to belittle the proficiency of those involved in research. I am only underlining the need for them to be conscious of their objective. I would appeal to the University to examine the range of their publications, and take wholesome decisions.

While the publications in Tamil cover the literature and history of the Tamils, works of value from the other languages should also be brought out in the Tamil language. We should also undertake the task of reaching to the outside world the Tamil sciences, Tamil literature and Tamil history.

While we savour and derive benefit we should also find ways to make the world know about us. The University should channel its endeavours in this direction too.

(At a book release function at the University of Madras on January 26, 1974)

*Periyar means 'great man'. The founder patriarch of the Dravidian movement, E V Ramasami is affectionately and respectfully referred to as Periyar.

11 Flower Show

Among flowers, some are endowed with fragrance, and some others are not. Some flowers are beautiful, but without fragrance. Some flowers have fragrance, but do not have alluring looks.

When we reach out to pluck the flowers, both fragrant and lovely, we encounter thorns.

The poor, lowly and oppressed people in our land languish as flowers bereft of fragrance. But they are blessed with noble hearts. Our government has taken on the responsibility of infusing fragrance in their aroma-free lives.

When I set my eyes on this flower show, these thoughts occur to me. While I am now in the salubrious Ooty bursting with lovely flowers, my thoughts hover around the arid Ramanathapuram District. Likewise, when I see the wealthy luxuriating in stately mansions and grand villas, my mind remembers the abjectly poor wilting by the roadside in slush and penury.

As the thoughts of dreary Ramanathapuram haunt my mind in the presence of the hill-mother draped in green silk, when I see the opulent rich, my mind is filled with thoughts about the poor.

It is not our policy that Nilagiri hills should turn into another barren Ramanathapuram District. No. The barren Ramanathapuram should transform into a bountiful Nilagiri.

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And, it is not our policy that the prosperous rich should roam the streets as pathetic poor. Our objective is that the indigent should lead a flourishing life.

(Ooty Flower Show–September 25, 1971)

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12 Let us Convert Pebbles into Diamonds

A university should mirror a nation's life. Should reflect the progress in the society. Should prepare the new generation in resonance with the changing world.

Youth is springtime, and very attractive too. But there is one catch here. Each day, each minute, each moment—old age is gradually winning, overtaking youth. If youth should be evergreen, it should not be obsessed merely with the body, but take refuge in the mind. They should change the direction of their thinking to "mature in body and mind, yet eternally young in waging the war on behalf of truth."

I would term academic education a proper manure for a growing plant. But is it not a folly to think of manure as the be-all and end-all of a tree? The branches lending support to creepers, leaves both tender and brown, bunches of fruits, lending shade to the weary—these are elements of a noble tree, aren't they? The

benefits of education should also have such characteristics. One may be educated up to the school or up to the university level; but of what benefit is it to the nation, if it does not make one useful to others? Mere bookish education won't do; native intelligence should also be enhanced.

We need an education which converts pebbles into diamonds, and not one which dims diamonds. "Ah! Making diamonds of us! What value for a diamond in a poor home? When a well-heeled lady wears a mere artificial diamond, people would call it Kohinoor! Is there any value for a diamond in a garbage dump? There is widespread awareness of the lament of you, the cut diamonds, as to where is employment. While we may say that a job in not the ultimate aim of education, we should also be aware of the imperative of enlarging employment opportunities to save our land from arid poverty.

To help find avenues of employment for their graduates, the universities should establish separate employment facilitation cells. In this context, there is an obvious advantage in setting up advisory committees involving leaders of the industrial and business establishments in the private sector. With a view to training students in skills required in the private sector, it would be necessary for the universities to redesign their curricula suitably.

All the graduates should not look at employment in the private or the public sector as their sole salvation, and seek avenues of productive self-employment. The nationlised banks are coming forward to provide funding support for the educated youth in this area.

Why are even graduates in Agriculture hesitant to take on farming responsibilities on their own? If their education and training should be useful to the country, they should come forward to get involved in farming. Likewise, engineering graduates should move to the rural areas and set up small industrial units and workshops. This would help them and also benefit the society. As a part of our development plans, thousands of water pumps, insecticide sprayers and other implements related to technology-based agricultural practices have been provided in the rural areas. We find that many of these gadgets are in a state of disrepair. As the rural communities lack the local expertise to sustain these facilities in good condition, many of these items are not in proper working condition. To remove this shortcoming, engineering graduates should migrate to the rural parts, set up workshops and ensure that the agricultural machinery is kept in a proper fettle.

Nowadays students evince considerable interest in science education. This is a welcome development. But we also observe that the science students have little interest in history, humanities and arts. This is not conducive to their wholesome

development. I believe that we should remove this defect in the system by a two-pronged approach. The students who specialize in science studies should be made to study, during the entire course of their study, one of the subjects such as Arts, History or Economics. Likewise, any student specializing in Arts or Social Sciences should be made to study one of the science subjects such as Physics, Chemistry or Biology. This should be made a part of the prescribed academic requirements.

The twin objectives of employment and resultant income should not convert the young generation into mere machines. If every young man gets obsessed with his own monthly budget and has a narrow focus on his own little family, the overall development of the country would suffer. It is up to the multitude of youth to be in the vanguard of such a wholesome national development.

The youth has always been in the forefront of progressive ideas. The ferment among the youth is not a unique Indian phenomenon; it has a global reach. Every passing generation has been accustomed to chastising the new generation. This has been happening since the day of Plato. "This generation is not like those of the old days; standards have declined." This has been a constant refrain over many generations. When the tuft gave way to a cropped head, there was resentment; on seeing the figure-hugging dress of today, there is rancour too.

Not the surface changes in dress and deportment, but the more basic changes in the mind have the capacity to usher in a new outlook in the social and economic domains. There is no harm when there are differences between two succeeding generations. What is significant is that this should lead to the flourishing of constructive growth.

(Convocation Address at Annamalai University, July 23, 1969)

13 Oh! Journal Damsel!

Poet Bharatidasan sang beautifully about journals:

Thou the lustrous ray
In the darkness of mind!
Oh Journal Damsel!
Born in minds noble.

When I read this poem long years ago, I could readily see the appropriateness of the remark—"Thou the lustrous ray in the darkness of mind." But the observation "Journal Damsel born in minds noble" somewhat intrigued me. I tended to ask myself as to why the poet referred to the journal as a woman.

I feel that I have found the answer to my old query only now. Acid words appear in journals. Intolerable attacks appear too. Sharp barbs fly from the opposition parties. Torrents of vitriolic words surge forth and singe the atmosphere. Even so, there is reason behind the poet characterising journal as a woman. In this context Valluvar lends clarity. He has identified four qualities in defining a woman.

Protecting herself
Caring for her husband
Standing by the worthy word
Shunning weariness—
This is woman.

At the outset, a journal should protect itself. Like a woman should protect herself, guard her chastity—a journal should protect itself.

Protecting itself—what does this mean? To run a journal, one should possess the basic business acumen related to this field.

How to spread the journal among the people; what are the people's preferences; which ideas should be disseminated to the people; what should be the style of writing; how to narrate a story—there should be knowledge and skill in all these areas. Over and above these, access to advertisements is essential these days. And, those who run journals should save themselves from the scourge of delays. Only by removing this shortcoming can they be true to the requirement of protecting themselves.

Then Valluvar talks of 'caring for her husband'. Referring to the woman, he meant several attributes—protecting the husband, nurturing the husband, guarding the husband.... As far as the journals are concerned, they should nurture the principles they propound or seek to propound.

The journals should not forget, but protect and uphold their basic principles. That would be 'standing by the worthy word'. This is of paramount importance for journals. 'Standing by the word' could mean standing by any and every word. Apprehensive of such a misreading, Valluvar found in woman an upholder of the *worthy* word.

Do we find women these days, 'standing by the worthy word'? I am afraid not. Don't get me wrong. I am only referring to the Journal Damsel!

While we do find one or two exceptions, the Journal Damsels 'standing by the worthy word' are rare indeed.

Bharatidasan compared journal to a woman, because a journal should have self-restraint typically characterising a woman and also the beauty associated with women.

'We have self-restraint; we have skill; we have intelligence'—with all these claims, if you dab the pages of a journal with an indifferent splash of black ink, people would dismiss it as ungainly and not value it. So, as in the case of a woman, both self-restraint and beauty should be present in journals. Further, there should be worthy words. You know only too well how the journals of these days publish sleazy words, unsavoury words, graceless words.

Maybe out of concern over these aspects did Bharatidasan call journal a woman. And centuries earlier Valluvar spelt out the grammar of woman.

'Shunning weariness' is the fourth attribute of woman. In running a journal, weariness has no place. If, at the very early stage itself, you become a victim of

despondency over the journal's poor circulation, that negative feeling will persist as a canker. Weariness and despondency should be firmly discarded.

I remember vividly Periyar's sardonic remark. When he launched the *Kudiyarasu* ('People's Rule') journal, it used to be called 'Green wrapper journal'. A time there was when the readers of that journal used to shield it from others' view. After reading the journal, they would conceal it in another journal and keep it close to them.

'The guy who reads the Green wrapper journal'—this used to be a pejorative remark. During that phase, Periyar used to say. "I am not bothered whether or not persons buy the journal I write in and publish. I'll be the lone writer, the lone publisher and the lone reader." Because of his resolute stand the *Kudiyarasu* journal—that Green wrapper journal—grew to reach tens of thousands of readers; nurtured the 'self-respect' principles; and flourished to provide a wide reach to Periyar's thoughts and writings. We should not forget that it laid the foundation for the establishment of today's government, based on rationalist principles and run by rationalists.

So, give no room for weariness or despondency. If weariness infects us, our efforts—particularly in the field of journalism—cannot march triumphantly.

(Inauguration of the English journal *The Rising Sun*—September 14, 1971)

14 Wanted – A Mental Revolution

Two groups were engaged in a debate today – one group arguing that social change occurs only through a mental revolution; and the other group asserting that it occurs only through laws.

How do laws take shape, and how to sustain the laws so enacted – these are important matters. When human society first appeared, those people did not commence their social life with the support of laws. To begin with, they were mere living beings, almost living on a par with animals. At that stage, no laws had been evolved.

The civilization that gradually unfolded created laws in its trail. After laws were so created, human race has witnessed various changes over the centuries, sometimes even year by year.

Is law the requirement or the fallout of mental revolution? We cannot escape the conclusion that both are necessary. While so, once a law is in place and is at the implementation phase, mental revolution plays a foundational role in directing the mode of implementation and in shaping the outcome. The proponents of law would sure not oppose this position. There is also another side to this matter. Just as a rope is required to bind together dried twigs of varying sizes into a bundle of

firewood, law is required to organise and shape together a multitude of ideas thrown up by mental revolution. The protagonists of the 'mental revolution' school would not challenge this position, I suppose.

A law was enacted granting the right of temple entry to the oppressed castes and to the untouchables. But decades of attempts to bring about changes in people's attitudes had to precede this law.

Religion forbids these castes to enter the temples, obscurantism forbids. Puranas forbid. Why, even law had forbidden, at one point. At that stage, when some progressives put forth their position among the people that everyone can enter the temples, that anyone can enter the precincts of God, that all are equal in the presence of God... these pioneers were subjected to considerable harassment. What were the reasons advanced by the opponents?

If a person from a depressed caste or an untouchable entered a temple, God would get annoyed, evil would visit the village or town, we would be committing a sin. All these traditionalist reasons were adduced.

But the situation changed gradually after sustained campaigns. People were told that God looked at all human beings as equal; people slowly veered towards this view; majority support ensued, relegating the opponents to a minority. And, law got enacted reflecting the will of the majority, and the reluctant minority is now obliged to obey this law.

So, in shaping any law, in giving life to any law... at the time of enacting the law, the mind of the majority must have been converted in this direction. We should bear this in mind.

But some ideas are naturally ingrained in the minds of a preponderant majority of the peoples of the world. Do not steal – there is no need to campaign around the world and obtain endorsement before enacting a law in this regard. The same applies to the legal prohibition of murder.

It follows that some laws do evolve naturally. There are other laws enacted on the basis of changes in people's attitudes, in the nature of a statutory stamp of endorsement.

Another point. Much like mental revolution, laws too are subject to change. Just as the collective social mind has a tendency to change laws in tune with the times, law also has a history of changing itself in step with the changing times.

Here is my verdict in this debate. Laws get enacted on the basis of mental revolution. Law consolidates the social changes.

(Moderator's remarks in a debate: September 5, 1971)

15 Philosophy– An Angle

Natural wisdom is philosophy. Philosophy is not an isolated, unique discipline. Philosophy contains political thought. Philosophy also revolves around society. Philosophy lends flavour to Communism. Philosophy also welcomes noble principles. Sometimes condemns violence.

We say that when a human being is born he/she does not arrive with any companion. More than his bosom friends, only his shadow stays with him till his very end, we say. No. Born with his birth and staying with him till the end is only one. That is death! No one is as steadfastly with him. What do philosophers say about death? Many views are expressed. "Man's life departs from his body and goes outside. That is death" – This is what some say.

But do we accept that life travels out of his body? The word 'life' has been in use for long. And, in a manner of speaking, we do routinely use expressions such as 'life leaves' and 'life has departed.' But the question arises: where is life migrating to? After all, only if it had, in the first place, come from somewhere, it would have to release itself and go away? Life is not something which comes in and goes out.

Much like the different component parts and forces of a machine, the different parts of the human body help the man function. Has anyone stated that a person has directed his life to go out at an appointed time – seven or eight in a morning? Has anyone claimed that a man's life had ceased, without any malfunctioning or collapse of any part or organ in his body? No! It could be some problem in the liver

or some malfunctioning of the urinary tract. Could be some complication in the nervous system, or some infection of the brain, or the heart giving way. Any one such disease sets in some part of the body, spreads through the system, eventually stopping the functioning of the heart, and thus, in turn, stopping the inhaling and exhaling of breath. With the breath stopping, life ceases and sinks within him. It does not come from anywhere nor does it take leave and go somewhere. Movement freezes! That is all. We should understand this.

If we accept an entity called life, we adorn it with a soul. What next? With a yearning that this soul should rest in peace, an architecture of many prescriptions and offers of gifts gets built. This ritual framework also enjoins who should be the recipients of these gifts and what should be the nature and quantity of these gifts. And, we go through the entire routine.

What do these advocates of the existence of soul tell us? This soul separates from us, wanders aimlessly, enters another body, and starts its next *janma* or birth. At the same time, the annual ritual homage to the soul residing in the heavens goes on, to bestow peace on that soul—what with the gifts of vegetables, gold and cow to the priest folk. What a contradiction!

As such questions raised from a rationalist perspective are found to be uncomfortable with no credible answers, we are often hated and condemned. We are attacked with harsh words.

Philosophy can be handled in many different ways. It is like a piece of iron. It can be made into a sword for a brave warrior, can be shaped into a hammer, can be used to make nails. Likewise, philosophy can be made use of by people to suit their nature and predilection. Many savants of the world have utilised philosophical systems in different ways—as paths leading to God, as a position hitched to a religion or as a system exclusively used in line with a rationalist perspective.

The students who study philosophical concepts should learn all these schools. We are told that honey has extra potency because the bees collect honey from all kinds of flowers. Likewise, the students should delve into varied concepts and systems and hone their skills.

There is nothing like an eternally valid position. There are many concepts in our country itself, requiring further research, and more incisive thought. We should devote our time and thought in this direction.

We tend to get philosophical when we bang our head against a doorframe. Philosophy is akin to the path we traverse everyday. Philosophy is like the seashore we stroll on. Philosophy is like the breeze that caresses us. Sometimes philosophy is also like a tempest. Philosophy is suffused with love. At the same time, philosophy also occasionally presents itself harshly. What is omnipresent is

not even God; it is philosophy. The students of philosophy should think of themselves as future leaders of Tamilnadu and of India, as ambassadors of the country's progress, and develop themselves.

(Pachaiappa's College, Chennai – November 18, 1980)

16 Golden Jubilee of India's Independence

It is fifty years since our motherland broke the fetters of slavery. We should, however, be aware that we are still in the early dawn, waiting for the emergence of wholesome freedom.

Poet Bharati sang of a White official chastising a freedom fighter:

You measly vassal—
Thoughts of freedom for you?
Seen wealth ever?
Even deserve it do you?
Banished caste squabbles?
Given up religious conflicts?
Dare you talk of justice?
Get out of my sight!

This admonition seems relevant to our predicament even during this golden jubilee year. This thought fills us with hurt and anguish as if a spear is goring a gaping wound.

Shouldn't we hark back? Should not those thoughts haunt our hearts? So many flaming lights of sacrifice had soaked their bodies in blood, and lent their life breath to enable the flag of freedom to fly aloft, and laid the foundation for the country's liberty.

Mahatma Gandhi had said that it was the ultimate sacrifice of that jewel of womanhood Thillaiyadi Valliammal against South Africa's racist scourge, which spurred the passion for the motherland's freedom in him. This is the golden jubilee of that freedom gained under Gandhi's leadership. What gift did this land present to him?

Gandhi would have died with these parting words: "I care not for my life; at least save the country's freedom I got for you."

Let us think of him and resolve this day to nurture our freedom.

When we compare our lot with that of the other countries enjoying freedom, the situation in India is totally different. The other countries give practical shape to the dictum that children should be provided with nutritious food. And here? The hapless poor are languishing, yearning for something in the name of food to fill their hungry bellies, with no thought of the nutritional values.

A large proportion of our people are spending their lives in misery—with hands for umbrellas as protection from the scorching sun, and resorting to the foot of a tree for cover against rain, treating it as their mansion.

Millions of Adi Dravidas, lovingly called Harijan or God's people, live in hovels, which are but the garbage dumps of villages.

The farmer producing food; the weaver dispensing cloth to protect our self-respect; the toiling worker sprinkling his sweat as rose water on the soil of his motherland; the miner burrowing the bowels of the earth; the pearl diver; the fisherman; the blacksmith sweltering by the furnace; the worker ferrying headloads of sand; the tree climber; the washerman; the barber; the person with a nominal education engaged in clerical chores—no salubrious breeze touches the lives of these multitudes. Not that ameliorative measures are not being taken. But these measures have not produced wholesome results. Whatever development plans are drafted, unbridled explosion of population would make such development plans mere moonlight flooding forest lands.

Against such grave odds, while service is being rendered to the people, forces are aplenty to thwart the efforts of the government—economic offenders; enemies

of society; and caste and religious fanatics. They are on the prowl making hay while the sun shines, with utter contempt for social good. The common people should extend cooperation to the government in its efforts to thwart the designs of these enemies of the people.

Smugglers, black-money sharks, tax evaders, traders indulging in adulteration, hoarders, bandicoots of corruption, votaries of violence—one hesitates to recognize such merchants of evil as a legitimate part of the society. They are growing as a cancer destroying the vitals of the society. Let this golden jubilee year be the occasion for us to take a pledge to root out this scourge and to rescue our people from its gory grip.

Like wending one's way amidst darkness, downpour and cyclone, but with the aid of some light shed by occasional lightning, our Indian democracy stands tall in this fiftieth year, after braving and crossing the river of fire in the form of an Emergency.

This large land of continental proportions has been flourishing as a democracy in the comity of nations, and has been enhancing its esteem. This fills us with pride and exultation.

Our literatures bear witness to the signs of people's rule even during the Sangam period. The Uttiramerur stone inscriptions have recorded the election of municipal leaders by the people.

I would give a solemn assurance that this government will tread the path blazoned by Anna which enjoins that the government machinery should function with focus on resolving the problems of every one—depressed people, backward classes, most backward castes, office goers, and the whole gamut of workers.

Guarding the unity, the integrity and the sovereignty of the nation, we will serve well, holding the Tamil honour aloft.

We will follow the path hallowed by noble patriots.

Mahatma Gandhi said that truth is God.

Arignar Anna exhorted that we should find God in the poor's smile.

Do your duty unmindful of return, urged Periyar.

Hard work would yield greatness, said the great leader Kamaraj.

Let their thoughts illumine the lives of the Tamil people. Let us resolve to serve this cause on the occasion of this golden jubilee.

(*Murasoli* – August 16, 1997)

17 A Call to the Youth

Two thousand years ago, this state offered to the world the principle of universal brotherhood. It was here that a Tamil poet by name Kanian Poonkunranaar declared to the world: 'The world is my village, humanity my kin.'

It was here that the great poet Thiruvalluvar proclaimed that the noble adopt every nation as their own:

The educated find
All countries their own
All places their own;
Why at all should one
Stay unlettered
Till death knocks at door?

Both in history and in the epics, the heroes are remembered mainly for the achievements in their youth. It was in his youth that the Pandya king Nedunchezhian had vanquished seven kings at the same time in the Thalaiyalankanam battle, and won the honoured title, 'Nedunchezhian the Victor of the Thalaiyalankanam Battle.'

In the Kurukshetra battle, Abhimanyu displayed greater valour than Arjuna.

Arjuna developed as a reputed warrior during his youth, as a disciple under Drona.

In the *Ramayana*, the young Indrajit performed greater acts of heroism than any other character.

Take the modern times. Leaders such as Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, Periyar, Anna and Kamaraj got initiated into public life in the prime of their youth.

It is but appropriate that this national youth festival is being celebrated on Swami Vivekananda's birthday. He had pinned high hopes on the youth in raising India to an exalted position.

Civilization has struck deep roots in the Indian soil. Our motherland had spread the message of civilization and culture far and wide. During the ancient times people from Tamilnadu had gone on long ocean voyages towards the east and the west.

Tamil is one of the great languages. It was born several millennia ago. It forms the foundation of our intellectual development.

India has a flourishing scientific and artistic tradition. We can take legitimate pride in our heritage.

"The nation of Bharat is ancient and illustrious. You are its children. Keep it firm in your thoughts." These are the golden words of the poet and freedom fighter Bharati. These words should remind us of our duties. Restoring India to its old glory is that duty.

Those of you who have assembled here belong to the post-independence era. You are reaping the benefits of independence. We won our freedom through selflessness and sacrifice. Apart from protecting the hard-won freedom, we should also recreate the magnificent esteem of the past.

This calls for unrelenting endeavour. Let us apply ourselves to this task quietly and resolutely. Let us not fritter away our time and energy in inconsequential pursuits.

As the birds from the different parts of the world congregate in the Vedanthangal bird sanctuary in Tamilnadu, youth representatives from all over India have assembled here to accomplish the objectives of this festival. Friendship, peace and development are these objectives. Only when we treat all the peoples of the world as equals can we realise these objectives.

Without according importance to basic human values, we cannot achieve sustained camaraderie. Festivals of this nature should promote unity and harmony among all Indians.

The fruits of development should reach all sections of the society, particularly the deprived sections. My fervent and sincere appeal to you is that you should extend help to these disadvantaged sections. Our energy and efforts should be

applied to constructive activities. The government's efforts to enhance the welfare of the poor should be got channelled on constructive lines. This would assist these efforts.

The youth-phase abounds in amazing power and capacity. You should get involved in nation-building activities. When you are armed with hope and determination, the obstacles in the path of progress would vanish like water bubbles. Transient allurements should not deflect you from your voyage of development. Passing gains would not lead you to lasting peace and growth.

My great desire is that the youth should resolve and toil in the direction of making India a powerful and a vibrant nation.

The freedom fighters have entrusted the torch of freedom in the hands of the young generation. You should not look at it as a mere wick of a candle. This is a lamp bestowing light on millions of our people. Let us resolve on this golden jubilee day of our independence to accomplish this goal.

This is Vivekananda's birthday. So let me conclude with his famous clarion call:

"Arise!

Awake!

Stop not till the goal is reached!"

(National Youth Festival, Chennai – January 12, 1998)

18 Homage to a Musical Genius

August 27, 1898. A hundred years ago. The musical genius, Nadaswara Chakravarti ('Emperor of Nadaswara instrument'), T N Rajaratnam was born. He passed away in 1956, as a mere 58-year old.

Unlike the many who had known T N Rajaratnam, I was one of the privileged few who had known him very closely.

It was remarked here a while ago that till TNR actually arrived at the concert hall, the organizers of his concert used to be sceptical if he would at all show up. Many aficionados would have waited for him and left in disappointment. But a mere five minutes of TNR's musical virtuosity at the next concert was enough to completely wipe out the earlier disappointment or even resentment.

We have heard and savoured Anna express admiration for T N Rajaratnam's art. One instance. A function in the house of a close friend of Anna. TNR played *naayanam* (another name for nadaswaram). He had agreed to play for one hour. The concert extended to over three hours. Anna made the following laudatory remarks about TNR.

"In the Western orchestra, listening to individual instruments is one kind of pleasure. Hearing the blend of the whole gamut of instruments is another kind of

pleasurable experience. Likewise, hearing from a distance, Rajaratnam's melody would resemble a flute's; sometimes, as authentic *naayanam*. On still other occasions it would sound like orchestral music. This incredible virtuosity is unique to Rajaratnam."

Rajaratnam had the distinction of blending melodically the sounds of a range of musical instruments, yielding rare pleasure to the ears.

He was born in an ordinary, middle-class family. Those days, the families traditionally devoted to music were of modest means, not wealthy families. Not only that. It was a period when this community did not command social esteem or respect. Others making such an observation might be mistaken. (As one belonging to this community), my referring to this situation may not be taken amiss, and so I speak out.

However great an artiste, he could not wear a shirt, while taking part in a concert. In fact, he could not even wear a towel over his shoulders at the concert stage. An eminent *naayanam* artiste, a great percussion (*thavil*) exponent—whoever it be, he was obliged to sport a tuft, as per the custom of those days.

TNR challenged these norms. "Can one play *naayanam* only with a tuft? See me play with a cropped head"—He sported a cropped head and performed. "If an artiste wore a shirt and played *naayanam*, would melody desert that *naayanam*? Couldn't he do an *aalaapana* or a pure rendering of a raga?" He threw down the gauntlet, and played *naayanam*, wearing a shirt. In a milieu where even a basic footwear was a taboo, he wore shoes and played *naayanam*. Not only that. When he performed at royal courts, he dressed much like a Maharaja—the entire sartorial paraphernalia of gilded turban, ceremonial sherwani and ornate dress—occupied a stage on a par with the royalty and performed. This audacious display of self-esteem belonged only to Rajaratnam, and to none else, and I feel duty-bound to mention this here, with great pride and joy.

How do I know about this inequity? As a young boy, my father had entrusted me to the care of a relative so that I could learn music and later become a *naayanam* artiste.

But I did not continue the music lessons beyond three months. I returned home to Thirukkuvalai, and declared that I would not continue the tuition. In response to an angry query from my father, I replied: "The vidwan (learned artiste) who gave me training is another distinguished vidwan like you, in this village. But when a supervisor from the local religious mutt appears in the street, my teacher removes the towel from his shoulder and ties it subserviently around his waist. Removes the slippers from his feet and pays respect to him with folded hands. If I become a big vidwan, I will have to do this very thing. So I won't continue the music

practice." Only thereafter, my father sent me to Thiruvarur town for further school studies.

I am referring to this just to point out that I had developed a feeling of self-respect at a young age. It was to Thiruvavaduthurai Rajaratnam's credit that he sharpened this self-esteem, manifested it in his life, became a role model for the other artistes, and paved the way for them to follow his example. I have narrated my story only to highlight Rajaratnam's role in this transformation.

Another recollection. The Independence Day celebration commenced with TNR's auspicious invocatory music. The first State-level conference of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam at Tiruchi also started with his *naayanam* melody. We may note gratefully that during the 50-year history of free India, in two major events, TNR's *naayanam* melody had adorned the inaugural proceedings.

TNR should have lived for many more years. But he passed away in his 58th year, without reaching even the milestone age of 60. Why? Likewise, do you know at what age another great artiste N S Krishnan died? In his 49th year, short of even a golden jubilee.

We should spare a thought as to why they died young. We nurture music, are geniuses, bring joy to everyone. But we should also provide our body with requisite strength. We should not destroy our own body. Such self-ruination is destruction of arts, betrayal of society, a wanton abridgement of our potential to serve the society. This awareness dawned, no one would indulge in such senseless self-destruction.

The rising musicians, as also musical luminaries, should bear this factor in mind – not merely for their sake, but in the interest of the society, of the country. Let TNR's life be an object lesson to us all.

(T N Rajaratnam Pillai Centenary – August 27, 1998)

19 Students and Politics

While students may learn Political Science (as an academic discipline) during their student phase, they should firstly concentrate on learning their subjects without blemish, and only thereafter offer themselves in the field of political activities. Till then, their focus should be studies. Students should not raise their eyebrows at an opposition leader proffering this counsel.

Be it a college, a university or any educational institution – the swords produced there and the spears fashioned there should be fully formed and sharp. If not, the products of these institutions would not be effective weapons in the hands of any political party.

So students should emerge as meaningfully shaped and properly refined young men and women. They may have their own social orientations or inclinations towards any political party. There should be an enlightened self-denial on their part during their student career, and they should wait for the post-student life to manifest these aspirations and inclinations. I wish to place this request for your earnest consideration.

For many long years I have etched in my mind the thoughts Anna had shared with the student community. The students in colleges and universities and schools are like the seedlings in a nursery. You should get nourished and gain strength at the nursery. Only after you have matured beyond the seedling stage, should you be transplanted into the main paddy field. Fully bearing in mind Anna's characterization of students as seedlings in a nursery requiring careful nurturing, I feel duty-bound to express this sentiment.

While I urge you not to involve yourselves totally in politics during your student days, I realise that I myself plunged into politics even as a student.

I became a politician even as a student in Thiruvarur High School. Informing those in my house that I was proceeding to appear for my final school examination, I joined Periyar in his political tour of Thanjavur District. On returning home after a week's tour with Periyar, I told my parents that I had fared well in the examination!

You may be tempted to think that by doing as I did you could also become Chief Minister! But that was an exception.

Exceptions cannot become models. Exceptions and models are very different.

The tasks before us are enormous. Mahatma Gandhi had appealed to the students during the years long past to get involved in the freedom struggle, to take part in reclaiming our land from foreign rule.

In principle, struggles by students should only be peaceful agitations to press for legilitimate demands concerning their college life. Beyond this, in any part of the world, there can be only two areas where students may find it compelling and inevitable to agitate and fight for.

One, the fight to reclaim their land; or a struggle to save their land from enslavement.

Two, a fight to protect one's language, dearer than one's eyes. The student community forms an inescapable part of this army.

(Valluvar Day – January 12, 1979)

20 An Introspection

"So, have you grown big enough to write your own life story?"

Not anyone else, it was my mind which raised the question. But it also had a ready answer.

Are life and history the exclusive preserve of the high and the mighty? Not for the humbler folks?

Every man has his life history. But he does not think of reducing it to writing. Has no time to write or does not have the skill to assemble, organise and write.

But even two prisoners exchange the stories of their lives between themselves. One could chance to hear it.

Two elderly rickshaw-pullers lean gracefully on their rickshaws parked under a tree shade, and share with each other interesting anecdotes of their lives.

If you closely observe the conversation between two insomniac hermits, lying languidly on the pial of a travellers' inn, again their life story.

A sick person lying in his deathbed and aware of his impending demise, his life story silently revolves in his mind's eye. Unable to write, too weak to speak, he lets it play out as a film in his mind. Even at the threshold of death—smile, sigh and tears. All these are but chapters in his story.

Maybe, every individual's history does not bear seeds of major social change. His life story has perhaps no room for political revolution. But he might have unwittingly been a part of the changes and revolutions in the country. He is a part of the society; society and nation are but a confluence of individuals like him. Who can at all deny this?

So, somehow he has a role in the changes undergone by the country. He might not have considered it significant enough to record it as a marker in his personal history. A branch of a tree is tossed by a destructive cyclone, lands at the façade of a house and knocks it down. Which is the active agent here – the cyclone or the tree branch? Somehow, an event in history has become a part of the story of the tree-branch.

Only after rolling all this in my mind, did I muster the assurance to render justice to my heart. The verdict came in the form of a question.

"Are life and history the exclusive preserve of the high and the mighty? Not for the humbler folks?"

After hearing their verdict, my pen embarked on its journey with no let or hindrance.

My birthday was celebrated on the third day of June. I did not fail to recall the words of the thinker Rousseau.

"My first regret is that I was born as a human being," he had said.

It was indeed amusing that the great thinker, who had taught the entire mankind ways to nurture universal birthrights, was sulking, cursing his own birth. Possibly, the situation in his house and in his land, the social and political malaise at the time of his birth would have troubled him. Years later, he might have thought of the milieu in which he was born, and lamented 'Why at all was I born?'

My birthday was not born in such an environment. When I was born, my family was not enjoying opulence, nor were my parents buried in a dark pit of poverty. Likewise, while my motherland was in political fetters, it was not hurtling towards chaos and doom as Rousseau's birthday-France had been. So I would rather listen to Voltaire, another great French thinker. Voltaire found fault with Rousseau's position that as man enters the world crying as a baby, he wastes away his life fruitlessly sobbing. I go along with Voltaire's perspective.

A man's life is sure littered with days which compel frequent recall and lament. I am no exception here. Still, there are many days which overwhelm me with joy and fulfilment: the day of my birth; the day I got married; the day I met Anna, my loving god and noble leader; the day I entered prison for the first time in the battle to protect my language. Days that I look back and savour.

Looking back at the path I have trodden, I do not want to sink in despair exclaiming: "Oh! Have I walked this far? Can't walk any more." Instead I should declare, "Not bad! Walked this far. Only some more distance to cover," and gain renewed vigour.

It is to gain this vigour, do I look back at my life.

There are those who describe life as a struggle. In my case, struggle itself has become my life.

"Why don't you take a rest?" – some friends from the opposition parties tell me mockingly. "The man who shunned rest all his life is now resting here – this inscription will appear only on my tomb." This is my reply.

This book is a collection of these sentiments.

You might well be tempted to remark: "Why are you beating about the bush? Why don't you candidly admit that you are writing an autobiography?" Well, in the past, I have written about some events in my life in some journals. This is different. Within my fiftieth year, a great epoch had commenced; but the historic hero who had ushered in that epoch is gone. But that history will endure. Keeping me as a strand, I am going to string together those pearls of history.

Holding me as a mere string, I am going to thread the flowers of fame of that epochal leader into a garland. In the name of a life story, one could present the history of a movement. All because references to me might appear, not fitfully, but in a somewhat sustained manner, do not think of this as an exercise in self-projection. Evocative events of historic significance, rejuvenating rationalist achievements, exhilarating literary vignettes, shocking political changes – I have tried to bring these to life.

Each person should render justice to his conscience, to his own self. Likewise, a society, a party or a group should get trained to render justice to its collective conscience, on the basis of their good and evil deeds.

It is easy to condemn someone. This would receive applause. But should not the critic do justice to his own conscience?

It is easy for anyone to thump his chest and proclaim himself to be noble. But, should he not subject the justness of his claim to a test at the touchstone of his conscience? Rendering justice – declaring the verdict! Accepting justice – accepting the verdict! There is room for appeal against the verdicts of the courts. Where is the appeal against the justice rendered to conscience?

[From the introductory part of
Kalaignar Karunanidhi's memoirs
Nenjukku Needi (Justice to the Conscience) 1985]

21 Old History and New Generation

The Tamils have a history of their own. But it has not been properly recorded. The history of the Tamils is intertwined with the history of India.

We cannot ignore the elements which should rightly govern the writing of a nation's history. Sundaram Pillai, the author of *Manonmaniam*, had spelt out how Indian history should properly be presented. The eminent historian of ancient India, Vincent Smith, had approvingly referred to Sundaram Pillai's position in the Introduction to his book.

Any attempt at writing the history of the Indian nation should embrace the beginning of the history of the peninsula. The peninsula here refers to the southern land mass bounded on three sides by the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. The Indian history's beginnings should be traced to the major river basins in the south – such as the Krishna river basin, the Kaveri river basin or the Vaigai river basin. Vincent Smith stated that he had fully endorsed Professor Sundaram Pillai's assertion that only a history so written could be authentic Indian history. The historian Vincent Smith concluded his Introduction with a lament that, as the time had not become ripe for this approach, he was constrained to

commence his account of Indian history from the river Ganges, in line with the then prevailing convention and practice.

I am referring to this mainly to underline the fact that the accounts of the nation's history had not commenced at the appropriate point. We should bear the sole responsibility here. When I refer to 'We', it includes our ancestors as well.

We should realise that poets do have an inclination towards exaggeration. While so, the only foundation and the only raw materials we have in constructing our history are our literary treasures. Realising their limitations as building blocks of constructing history, I seek to state that we have to look at our history by making a percipient use of these literary sources.

I had earlier referred to southern land mass, the Krishna Valley and the Kaveri and Vaigai river basins. These were the parts peopled by the Dravidians. I do not mean this as a political category.

The Dravidians had established a distinct civilization of their own. Likewise the Aryans had established their own distinct civilization.

There are many ethnic groups in the world such as the Mongols and the Jews. The Dravidians are one such ethnic group.

At this point, I would like to underline that the savants belonging to the Brahmin community were the pioneering researchers in the field of the Dravidian society, the Dravidian culture and the Dravidian languages. They had also rendered yeoman service in unearthing and preserving and publishing our ancient literary treasures. Particular mention should be made of Dravida Vidya Bhushna, Maha Maho Upadyaya U V Swaminatha Iyer. As I pay my grateful homage to such Brahmin savants, I firmly believe that the distinction I have drawn between the Dravidian and the Aryan cultures would not be viewed in a wrong light.

All the historians are of the view that the earliest naval force was in place only in India, particularly in the Tamil land. While many mighty emperors ruled in the northern India, historians have referred to their imperial sway as extending only up to the seas, and lauded them on this basis.

But during these very periods, the kings in the south and in Tamilnadu had significant naval forces at their command. This thought should fill us with elation and pride as the inheritors of a glorious heritage.

Historical evidence points to the products of Tamilnadu having been famous and treasured purchases in distant Rome and Greece. Those were the days when peoples in foreign lands were yearningly waiting for the arrival of products from Tamilnadu—pearls, peacock feathers, pepper, ivory and rice.

Our State of Tamilnadu should be transformed into a State extolled by the others. Who should play the role in this direction? Who should sow the seed?

Many great people had toiled in this field and departed. They have left their marks behind, each mark a legacy, a stepping stone for us to use as a ladder to scale new heights.

Who should form the vanguard of this onward march? Our nation is in the hands of the youth. Be it the protection of one's language, be it the safeguarding of one's race, be it the aim of equality and justice, be it economic regeneration, be it political awakening – the force which can usher in this great tomorrow is the army of youth.

The nation has no salvation, no new dawn without the contribution of the youth. For the nation to prosper, for safeguarding and nourishing the hard-won freedom, the nation looks up to the youth.

(Alagappa Engineering College, Karaikkudi – 31 August 1980)

22 State Autonomy in Indian Polity

A few weeks after I took charge in 1969, after Anna's passing, I had gone to Delhi as the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. On March 12, 1969, more than 50 press- persons from various parts of India met me. They asked me what I planned to do in respect of my leader Arignar Anna's frequent assertions in the cause of enhanced powers to the states in Indian polity. I replied: "I am thinking of establishing an expert body to examine the whole gamut of Centre-State relations and frame recommendations regarding the devolution of powers from the Centre to the states."

I did not rest there. On behalf of my government, I set up a three-member committee in this regard. The committee consisted of three distinguished persons: Justice P.V. Rajamannar, Dr. A. Lakmanaswami Mudaliar and Justice Chandra Reddy.

The committee carefully examined the matter and submitted a report outlining the rationale for the devolution of powers from the Centre to the states and the scope and range of such devolution. This report was reviewed by a group under

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the joint leadership of Murosoli Maran and Era. Chezhian, the matter discussed at a Cabinet meeting, and a resolution on state autonomy adopted by the Legislative Assembly in 1974. The resolution urged enhanced powers to the states, meaningful state autonomy, and the removal of Article 356 of the Constitution of India granting powers to the Centre to dismiss state governments.

I moved the following resolution in the Legislative Assembly on 16-04-1974 and the same was adopted:

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This Assembly has taken up for consideration the question of state autonomy, the position of the Tamilnadu government, and the report of the Rajamannar Committee. Taking into account the objective of preserving the unity of India - a nation encompassing different languages, civilizations and cultures- promoting economic development to facilitating unhindered functioning of the state governments which are in close touch with the people, this Assembly hereby resolves that the Central government should accept the Tamilnadu government's position on state autonomy and the recommendations of the Rajamannar Committee; and that the Constitution of India should immediately be amended suitably to provide the basis for a federal government at the Centre and a meaningful federal polity on the basis of state autonomy.

I sent a copy of the resolution to Prime Minster Indira Gandhi.

Even earlier, I had forwarded a copy of the report of the Rajamannar Committee to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1971. On receipt of the report, Prime Minster Indira Gandhi wrote the following letter on 22-06-1971.

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Dear Thiru Karunanidhi,

I have received your letter of the 15th June with which you have sent me a copy of the report of the Centre-State Relations Inquiry Committee. Your Government will probably examine the recommendations of this report. As you know the Administrative Reforms Commission also went into the questions and has already submitted a report which is under our consideration. If the views of your Government on this matter are made available to us, they will also be taken into account. These are important issues and we intend to consult all the Chief Ministers.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Sd.) INDIRA GANDHI.

But what followed was one more commission under Justice Sarkaria to examine Centre-State relations. No action has been taken by the Central government of today or by the Central governments which functioned during the intervening

period, to introduce amendments to the Constitution of India or to implement the measures for enhanced powers to the states. This has been our grievance.

I would like to recall how Perarignar Anna had characterised the status of the states in our country:

Our concern is that the Central government is hankering after a burden beyond their carrying capacity.

The power of the Central government is but the aggregate of the powers of all individual states. This understanding is logically sound, politically proper and practically wise.

But it is totally inappropriate that the Central government would be the repository of all the rights and powers, and that the state governments would stay hobbled with scanty powers.

When the Central government appropriates all the powers of the states, what is the result? Not only are the state governments weakened, but the Central government does not gain any new strength.

Let us think of all the areas barring national defence. Let the states take all the necessary powers.

Let the Centre take whatever residual powers the states willingly part with.

It is the state governments which are intimately intertwined with the joys and sorrows of the people at large, and not the Central government. So, it is erroneous to think that only a strong Central government can effectively address problems. If the Centre is reluctant to provide for state autonomy, it would get snowed under an overburden of responsibilities, and end up compromising on grave issues of national defence. We do harbour this misgiving.

The concept of state autonomy is born to change this mindset of unhealthy concentration of powers in Delhi.

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam is holding the flag of state autonomy, in line with the position so clearly enunciated by Anna. It is in consonance with this line that a noble resolution has been adopted at this conference.

We would no longer tolerate the Centre's sword of Damocles of whimsical dismissal of state governments. We had been victims of two such dismissals in the past. The first such victim was the Communist Party government in Kerala. So far, using Article 356 of the Constitution of India, state governments had been dissolved on as many as 90 occasions. They are eager to score a century, it seems. Let us resolve solemnly that we would no longer allow such transgressions.

Likewise, they also appear to be bent on wielding Article 355, as their whim dictates. All of a sudden, they send a Central committee to the states on a plea that

they want to assess if the state government is functioning properly or if the law and order situation is in a good shape. Who should monitor if the governance at the Centre is not on an even keel? Should there not be an acceptable answer to these questions?

So, the power to monitor the proper functioning of a state government, or to change a state government rests with the people at large and not with the Central government. The mission of this conference is to proclaim this principle in unequivocal terms.

There should be a clear departure from the mindset that criminals are the exclusive preserve of the state governments and that those at the Centre are paragons of virtue. The resolution adopted here underlines this point.

All and sundry would demand, and on this basis we would threaten to dissolve a state government-massaging their ego and threatening our survival. We cannot tolerate such arrogance any longer.

You would have read the story of a rat and a frog forging a relationship, tying their legs together. This is exemplified in the coalition government at the Centre today. We should not lower our guard. Let us take a solemn pledge today – to save the people from the scourge of communalism, to stop the Central government from raising the sword to destroy the legitimate rights of the states, and to fell the demon of untouchability.

(Conference on Communal Harmony at Madurai, 29-08-1998)

23 True Story of Tamil Music

This function is being organised to release the book entitled *True Story of Tamil Music* written by P.T. R. Kamala Thiagarajan.

You should not fall into the trap of imagining that I am a know-all, merely because I am a Chief Minister. It is true that I was born in a family devoted to music. My father was a musical virtuoso in his time; great artistes like Thiruvaavaduthuraiyar and Thiruvenkattar used to visit my father in Thirukkuvalai to resolve some of their doubts and to learn some musical nuances. While my father had such a reputation, the fact remains that I did not involve myself in the field of music. I had already mentioned on a few occasions why I did not follow in my father's footsteps.

As a young boy, I was sent to have musical training. One aspect struck me like a bolt. Whenever my teacher or those associated with him encountered in the street the landlord or the local worthies or those belonging to the 'higher' castes, they used to remove their shoulder towel and tie it around their waists obsequiously. I could neither accept nor tolerate this humiliation.

The very next day I stopped going to the house where music was being taught. When my parents and relatives attempted to pressurise me to continue my musical training, I told them firmly: "I can't go to a place where my self-respect is trifled

with. I might become an expert musician through training. But, if I should lose my right to keep my shoulder towel in place, I don't want that music."

Those who spoke earlier referred with anguish to the past glory of Tamil music and to its present plight. At the commencement of this function, you heard the Hymn to Mother Tamil - a poem by Manonmaniam Sundaranaar. This was introduced by me as a standard invocation piece in all functions, when I took charge as Chief Minister. When you look at it closely, you would observe that it talks of Tamil damsel who 'had been bathed in glory in all directions'. This can imply that the glory of Tamil is an aroma of the past, and not a reality of the present.

This invocatory hymn may also be taken to be a clarion call to us. Bearing in mind the splendour of the past and the sorry plight of the present, we should resolve to focus our energies to restore the grandeur and the majesty of the bygone days.

There is one recurrent refrain in this book - how the string instrument *yaazh* had left the shores of the Tamil land and how it had migrated from the realm of Tamil music. While the *yaazh* instrument is not in vogue with us today, the term *yaazh* continues to have an evocative presence for us. Bharathidasan's poem yearningly says: 'When grief overtakes me, why don't you strum the *yaazh* and bring joy to my shore?' This poem was written when *yaazh* had ceased to be an actively used instrument. Because, the very word *yaazh* resonates with joy.

The author writes in this context: "The history of music has been forgotten, has been masked. We do not find authentic account in any book. So, I would venture to declare in a forthright manner, as my primary duty, that the books dealing with Tamil music have so far not outlined the true history of Tamil music. It would also not be true, if I pronounce that having realized that a true history of music has not been written, I have delved into everything and have presented a total picture."

Think of the intellectual modesty in these words. Be that as it may, I would venture to say that, without my going in search of it, the true history of music has well and truly fallen on my lap on its own.

See how deftly she has planted this thought. She provides a simile too. Hear the author herself:

"Many years ago, writer Devan wrote a novel *Thuppariyum Saambu* ('Detective Saambu') in the journal *Ananda Vikatan*. This Saambu would not go in search of criminals. Evidences of the crime would manage to reach him, on their own. The criminals too would find their way within his reach. The story portrayed such a detective. Likewise, I have not sought out this true history. It come to my shore by

itself. As far as the true history of Tamil music is concerned, my role is similar to the detective Saambu's."

Mark the humility. No bragging that only she could accomplish this feat, no cataloguing of the books she had referred to.

The author adds: "I could not find fulfilment by looking at the books written on the basics of Carnatic music, or by looking at the books written solely based on Tamil music. If we have to believe those dealing exclusively with Carnatic music, we get a picture of this genre of music having been born and nursed to growth somewhere in the north, and landed here after a sojourn in many countries. We are not able to find fulfilment in this version, nor can we find it acceptable."

These lines have not been written because she hails from a family background rooted in the Dravidian movement; these have resulted from a search for true history.

She further states: "Those who write about Tamil music speak, on the basis of a nameless conviction about Carnatic music and Tamil music. Not only have they failed to put forth a reasoned analysis, they tend to look at Carnatic music with suspicion."

"Before I ventured to write this, the Music Academy of Chennai had requested me to present a paper on music under an Endowment. "Contribution of Tamil to Carnatic music' was the suggested topic. I collected the necessary materials and put together a paper. On completing the paper, I realized that the suggested topic was not a suitable one. My position was that Carnatic music and Tamil music are two distinct genres. My paper would not accept that Tamil played but a part in the Carnatic music tradition. The finding of my paper was that Tamil music had evolved into Carnatic music. So, I wrote to the Music Academy that the title of my paper should be changed as 'New light on the musical history of Tamilnadu'. Along with this suggested change, I also sent them a copy of my paper. They appreciated my sentiment and ideas in this regard, and agreed to the change in the title of the proposed paper. It is only as an extension of this paper that I have written this book entitled *The True History of Tamil Music*."

I would like to emphasise that this is a very significant part of the book. Because, Tamil music and Carnatic music are two different musical traditions. As against a position that Tamil played but a part in the evolution of Carnatic music, the paper had posited that it was Tamil music which has evolved into Carnatic music. Logically enough, the original title cannot be sustained. Kamala Thiagarajan has clarified to the world the true history of music. This book plays a role in establishing the true eminence of Tamil music.

The great artiste Thiruppaambaram Shanmugasundaram referred to *gamakam* - the transition from one *swaram* to another in the rendering of a composition through voice modulation. He also demonstrated it by signing. The author has stated that the string instrument *yaazh* could not handle the *gamakam* mode, and that this factor had led to the *yaazh* becoming extinct.

She has delineated beautifully in this book that music minus *gamakam* would not be mellifluous.

Music aficionados would characterize music without *gamakam* as *'mottai'* or bald. Generally *'mottai'* refers to an arid pate. Tamil literature has a convention that if a *kavari* deer lost even one strand of hair, it would end its life.

While referring to the music without *gamakam*, the author alludes to the literary convention linked to the *kavari* deer. She points out approvingly the concept of honour implied in the *kavari* deer convention. There are people in our midst who see no compromise to their esteem even when all traces of self-respect are annihilated - even when they get completely 'bald'. While we live in this milieu, the author Kamala Thiagarajan makes the following observation:

"Literary tradition has it that the *kavari* deer courts death if even a strand of hair is removed from its body. Man also invests value in his hair only till it stays on his head. When it falls from his pate, he treats it with abhorrence. This is highlighted in the great Tamil classical work *Thirukkural* in the following lines: A man fallen from the stature is no different from the hair fallen from head. The term *'mottai'* meaning 'bald,' is used not merely to refer to a pate bereft of hair. *Mottai* neck and *mottai* hand denote neck and hand shorn of ornaments. Bearing in mind these parallels, singing without *gamakam* is aptly discribed to as *'mottai'* or bald or flat singing." She has brought in so many literary allusions to highlight the point that music sans *gamakam* is *'mottai'* or bald music.

My sincere good wishes to the author for her service to flourish all the more in the future.

(*True History of Tamil Music* - Book release function, Chennai, 05-10-1998).

24 The Glory of Tamil

The students of the Tambaram Christian College have set up a Tamil forum and have organized *Muthamizh Vizha*, to celebrate the three facets of Tamil – literature, music and drama. This effort calls for praise and joy. I am able to see the great enthusiasm of my student friends on this happy occasion.

While addressing a gathering of students, one gets a bout of energy. Sometimes a reserve of energy would also become necessary to deal with this challenge.

Everyone goes through the student phase before growing into adulthood. Every student should realize that, in fullness of time, she or he would have an opportunity to become a leader guiding students or to shoulder important responsibilities in the future. Bearing this in mind, I would appeal to each one of you to value this phase of life as a golden era in your life, and not fritter away the significant opportunity. The student phase is usually marked by fearlessness. A phase in life for forceful articulation of one's position. You should not forget that this is a foundational period when plans for the future get embedded in your minds, nurtured in your hearts, to be accomplished at a future date.

Just as the students of Christian College manifest their love of the Tamil language, I witness the spectacle of such love flowering amongst the students of many other colleges. We cannot forget that, during an interim period of five years, Tamil consciousness had suffered a decline. In 1938, streets of Tamilnadu had reverberated with a call to inculcate Tamil spirit and love of Tamil amongst the

Tamil children and the Tamil youth. I don't want to enter into a political analysis of this phenomenon. Thereafter, a new milieu took shape in Tamilnadu – we can handle anything in Tamil; Tamil will be our benefactor and saviour; a spirit that any harm to Tamil will be resolutely fought and Tamil saved even at the risk to one's life.

But, during an intervening period, doubts cropped up regarding Tamil's capacity to assist our growth. Consequently, there was a tendency to forget Tamil. If we forget or marginalise Tamil, Tamil consciousness and the resurgence of the Tamil society will be ruined, and Tamil culture will face neglect and decline. We are glad to find that this fear has since led to the re-emergence of the Tamil spirit.

Tamil has many special merits in comparison with the other languages. I don't make this claim because I am a Tamil. Many savants from foreign countries who participated in the World Tamil Conference had read about Tamil literature and culture in different languages, had realized the glory and richness of Tamil, and have been spreading this message in various international fora. Today, there is an emerging consensus that Tamil history, culture and civilization are superior to those found in the literatures of many languages.

There is another unique characteristic in Tamil, in the way we pronounce the word 'Thamizh'. We find that it incorporates a particular grammatical norm of the Tamil language. Tamil consonants form a part of a tripartite system – *vallinam* or hard consonants, *idaiyinam* or medial consonants and *mellinam* or nasal consonants. In the word *Thamizh*, '*tha*' is a hard consonant, '*mi*' is a nasal consonant and '*zh*' is a medial consonant. So, *Thamizh* is a pearl necklace stringing together all the three types of consonants – *vallinam, mellinam* and *idaiyinam*.

The civilization, trade and valour of the Tamils did not stop at the boundary of Tamilnadu but crossed the seas and reached Burma. The story of Tamil valour had been scripted on the walls of the Himalayas. Tamil royal insignias of tiger, bow and fish had been sculpted at the Himalayan heights. Cheran king Senkuttuvan had a successful expedition in the north, and had the northern kings Kanaka and Vijaya to carry stones for the Kannaki statue in the south. This is no fiction, but a proud chapter in the history of Tamil valour.

The Tamil had the distinction of spreading his renown among many countries of the world through trade, valour and cultural contacts.

I would make one appeal to my student friends. I was also a student once. But not like you. My education stopped at the school level. I was tutored in the college of Kanchipuram (Arignar Anna's native town), and I had seen no other college as a student. But, even when I was in the final year at school, I was so deeply attached to Tamil; Tamil attracted me and held me in thrall; I was madly in love with Tamil.

I am sharing this with you not to blow my own trumpet, but to underline the point that many students like me had a passionate concern for Tamil those days.

1938 marked the imposition of another language on the Tamils. I was then studying in Thiruvaaroor. I took part in a peaceful revolt which energized hundreds of students into realizing that the Tamil language would face ruin by such an imposition, and that they should join the upsurge.

Revolt is not merely shouting hoarse or indulging in violence. Whether it is Gandhian path or Arignar Anna's path, one form of revolt is to give expression to inner feelings. I adopted that approach. As a part of this approach, to save Tamil from the domination of another language, we composed songs in Tamil, and brought out journals.

When I arrived at this College today, student friends demonstrated and explained how telegrams can be transmitted in Tamil. They also showed me a telegram scripted in Tamil: 'My good wishes for the success of this festival'.

'The Tamil language can handle anything, Tamil is our life breath' – this spirit flourished amongst students in 1938, in 1942, in 1944; after an interval, in 1965. I am sad that such a fervour is not present among the student community today. I want the spirit of 1965, and not a recurrence of the untoward incidents of 1965.

Perarignar Anna had adopted a certain approach in this regard. Be it a speech at a function or be it an essay in a journal, he used to give greater prominence to the Tamils, to the Tamil language, and to the preservation of Tamil culture, than to the political issues.

Tamil students of today may have affiliation with one political party or another. Be that as it may, they should bear in mind that Tamil is the national language of this state and also of India, it is the very lifebreath of all the Tamils; the Tamil spirit present in our body should permeate each blood cell and its vibration. There is no place for politics here. It is on this account that C. Subramaniam had written a great book entitled *Tamil can do it*. The book declares that Tamil can – Tamil can be a medium to teach science, geography; Tamil technical terms can be developed in various disciplines. 'Tamil can' is only a pious declaration, and has not become a practical reality.

In 1968, Perarignar Anna got a resolution unanimously adopted in the Tamilnadu Legislative Assembly: 'The Tamil language will become a medium of instruction in five years'. But many difficulties had cropped up subsequently: political problems; the doubts in students' minds; an environment of misgivings as to whether their personal interests and family wellbeing would be adversely affected if they studied only Tamil or only in Tamil. In the light of these intervening factors, we are now in a fix, unable to fulfil the five-year timeframe

envisioned by Anna.

Cannot the government take unilateral action to enforce the change? No. The government expects cooperation from the students in this regard. I look forward to such a cooperation. 'You stated in a telegram to us that Tamil can; you pointed out to stone inscriptions and declared that it is possible in Tamil; everything is possible in Tamil. Why are you still not taking any decisive steps?'

You should develop sufficient love and concern for Tamil to taunt me with these questions. That is the path to nurture Tamil.

(Christian College Tamil forum, Tambaram, 17.11.1973)

REF - 6

25 In the Legislative Assembly – 1

Ever since the formation of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in 1949, demands had been submitted to the Central Government to utilise the natural endowment of Tamilnadu – iron in Salem, oil in the Kaveri basin and lignite in Neyveli. There had been times when these demands were ridiculed. Neyveli Lignite unit had been established during the Congress Party regime. But the royalty amounts on this account due to the Tamilnadu Government from the Centre – including the past arrears – were collected only in 1989 after the DMK came to power in Tamilnadu, after forcefully raising the matter with the then Prime Minister V. P. Singh. This is history. The Salem Steel Project, which had been in limbo, was won during the 1970s, thanks to the Kazhagam government's valiant efforts. The oil reserves in the Kaveri basin – dismissed as a pipedream – were also discovered, much to the elation of the Tamils. An interesting exchange took place during the Question Hour in the Tamilnadu Legislative Assembly, when the Kaveri basin oil issue came up.

April 20, 1989. As the Chief Minister and the Minister for Industries, I was fielding the questions from the members. Manimaran, a ruling party member, asked about the status of land acquisition for the proposed Narimanam Refinery

Unit. "At a preliminary stage," I replied. Following this, a Congress Party legislator P. V. Rajendran and a few other members raised supplementary questions. The questions concerned the likely by-products from the gas output.

I gave a detailed reply. "Electricity generation, fertilizer production, chemical products such as polypropylene, plastic, and C2, C3 sub-products. Methanol will also be produced – a useful input for chemical industries. There is also potential to produce L P G which can be utilised as cooking gas."

A Congress Party Member, Ariyalur Arumugam, had unfortunately been inattentive and not registered my detailed reply. He ventured to raise another supplementary question. His question and my reply:

Question: What subsidiary products and industries are expected from the Narimanam Refinery Unit?

Answer: One of the subsidiary industries would be where hearing aids are also produced.

On hearing this reply, the entire House broke into laughter. Arumugam realised his folly and joined the laughter. This is an example of the lively nature of exchanges during the Question Hour in the Assembly during the Kazhagam rule.

26 In the Legislative Assembly – 2

When Indira Gandhi clamped the Emergency in 1975, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam was the first party to pass a resolution against the Emergency and to mobilise the people against it. We had supported the 20-point agenda of Indira Gandhi. But we forcefully asserted that, to implement that agenda, it was not necessary at all to arrest leaders such as Jayaprakash Narain and Morarji Desai, or to throttle the press.

At that point, Congress Party member A R Maarimuthu tabled a resolution condemning the DMK Government, and it was seconded by a Communist Party member K T K Thangamani. In an endorsement of the resolution, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) member Hande had some strong words to say. As the Chief Minister, I intervened during the discussion and offered an explanation. During my reply to the debate, several opposition members too intervened. Here are some of the interventions and my replies.

Hande (AIADMK): One resolution against the Emergency in a DMK Working Committee meeting. Another resolution in a public meeting at the beach. Yet another resolution during the DMK Conference in Thirunelveli. Why these mutual contradictions? Why have you backtracked?

I (Chief Minister): It appears that Hande wants us to make our opposition to the Emergency sharper and stronger. This is my reading of Hande's position. He wants to oppose the Emergency. But he is under a leadership which does not want to register any opposition. So he appears to want to urge us to oppose more stridently.

Hande: On several occasions in the past, I have lauded Chief Minister Kalaignar's imaginative skill. He has only given me one more opportunity to admire this skill of his. I would like to add that his reading is totally out of line.

P Srinivasan (AIADMK): You have been condemning the Emergency in your Working Committee, in public meetings and in your meeting with the press reporters. Why don't you pass a formal resolution to this effect in this Assembly and forward it (to the Central Government)?

I: The warrior in the battlefield knows best—in which hand to hold the sword and in which hand to hold the shield.

On hearing this reply, Srinivasan smiled and settled down. The reply I gave to the resolution condemning the government, was later published as a book. The book was entitled *The Sword and the Shield*.

Later, when the Kazhagam Government was dismissed, and the atrocities of MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act) were unleashed brutally, copies of that book were seized by the police in different parts of the State. The MISA days of the Emergency did not tolerate the voice a Chief Minister raised in the cause of democracy on the floor of a Legislative Assembly appearing in the form of a book. This has to be one of my memorable recollections.

27 In the Legislative Assembly – 3

1962. I was the Deputy Leader of Opposition in the Tamilnadu Legislative Assembly. I had notched a victory, with a difference of 2000 votes, over Parisuttha Nadar—a wealthy and influential landlord—in the Thanjavur constituency. It was viewed with astonishment by political observers. Anna had to face defeat in the Kanchipuram constituency. So in a party meeting presided over by Anna, Naavalar Nedunchezhian and I were elected respectively as the Leader and the Deputy Leader of Opposition by 50 Kazhagam legislators. I am tempted to recall an episode in the Legislative Assembly during that period.

One day in July 1962, a member by name Maada Gowder raised a privilege motion against *Murasoli* journal edited by me. The following sentence had appeared in a *Murasoli* editorial: "Chief Minister Bhakthavatsalam keeps telling the DMK legislators to study properly before speaking in the Assembly. This is like a drunkard's blabber." The Congress Party member had raised the privilege issue on the basis of this remark. On hearing his argument, I wanted to intervene and offer a clarification. Without dealing with the question as to whether the matter infringed the privilege of the House, I felt that the remark in the said Editorial had flouted norms of political culture. So I made the following observation.

"Hon Speaker, as the Editor of the *Murasoli* journal I would like to offer some remarks on the subject privilege issue. While I am the Editor, sometimes—in fact, very often—only the Assistant Editors get the opportunity to write the Editorial and the other parts of the journal. Those in the field of journalism know this practice well. The portion of the Editorial referred to by Mr Maada Gowder is really regrettable. On my return to the city yesterday after a tour, I had summoned the Assistant Editor and reprimanded him over the offensive portion of the Editorial and demanded an explanation. I truly regret the offending remark. I have also issued instruction that the journal should carry an apology for this rude remark. In line with our culture to regret any wrong doing, I offer my deep regret to this august Assembly.

Chief Minister Bhakthavatsalam immediately stood up and spoke as follows:

"This problem concerns me. Hon. Deputy Leader of Opposition has clarified that he had not written the subject Editorial and has also expressed regret over the offending sentence. After this strong expression of regret, I submit that there is no need for any further action on this privilege motion."

Following Chief Minister Bhakthavatsalam's remarks, Maada Gowder did not press the privilege motion. At this point, I can only heave a sigh that the Legislative Assembly had flourished those days as a forum where such a political culture had been nurtured.

28 In the Legislative Assembly – 4

25-01-1969. Governor's Address to the Legislative Assembly. Perarignar Anna was the Chief Minister. The Resolution to thank the Governor was proposed on 27-01-1969 and the discussion on the Resolution got under way. Around 11.15 hours on the 29th, news reached that Anna was gravely ill. The house was adjourned suddenly.

After spending a little while in the morning in the Assembly, we left Madhavan and Muthusami in the House, and rushed to the hospital.

For the first time in the history of the Assembly, it was adjourned without fixing a date for the next meeting or even without announcing that the House was being adjourned 'sine die'.

I was elected as the Chief Minister on Anna's passing, and the House assembled again on 21-02-1969.

The discussion on the Thanksgiving Resolution continued.

While replying to the discussion on 25-02-1969, I made the following observations:

"I belong to one of the most backward communities. My community finds a place in the list of the most backward communities.

As I have assumed this responsibility, I would stake even my life to fight for the welfare of the backward communities.

While I say this, let me clarify that I would also ensure that no harm visits the forward communities.

I had expected that the Leader of Opposition Mr Karuthiruman would offer his good wishes to me on my assuming the responsibilities of the Chief Minister. But he has instead chosen to administer a warning to me. I accept it on the basis that warning is also a kind of compliment."

Karuthiruman: Chief Minister has remarked that I haven't conveyed my good wishes to him. I convey my heartfelt good wishes to the new Chief Minister. He always has my good wishes.

Chief Minister (I): I now understand the truth of the lines: 'Ask, thou shall be given. Knock, door will be opened'.

29 In the Legislative Assembly – 5

Land-ceiling legislation was enacted during the Congress Party rule, with 30 'standard acres' as the ceiling. But hardly any land had been acquired and distributed to the landless peasants. During the DMK rule, land-ceiling was revised as 15 'standard acres', about 2 lakh acres of surplus land was acquired, and distributed to thousands of landless peasants. In 1979, during MGR's rule, Binami Land Abolition legislation (to eradicate nominal ownership of land) was proposed by the Revenue Minister S. D. Somasundaram, and amendments were being discussed. Following extracts from the discussion should be interesting.

Minister SDS: The Leader of Opposition had mentioned that this legislation could have been tabled after discussion with them. I welcome this sentiment. But, sometimes such prior discussions could give rise to some difficulties. It happened in 1961.

Leader of Opposition (I): The Minister has misrepresented me. I did suggest consultation with us, reference to a select committee and submission to the House thereafter. But all these related to the Prohibition Act, and not to this Act. Because, I well know what happened in 1961.

In 1961, they kept saying in advance – 'Tiger is coming, tiger is coming', before tabling land-ceiling legislation. This gave enough notice to the landlords to parcel

their lands and take evasive action. So, adequate excess land could not be identified. I know that.

Minister SDS: They said 'Tiger is coming'. I won't bring the tiger. It can do us harm.

Leader of Opposition (I): I fail to see why the Minister is so eager to understand my comment in a confused manner. My reference to 'Tiger is coming, tiger is coming' was to the 1961 situation under Congress rule when advance notice of the proposed legislation had facilitated the landlords to convert their surplus land into benami landholdings and cheat the legislation.

The present legislation has not been brought in with the 'tiger in coming' formulation.

Minister SDS: They had said 'Tiger is coming'. But the tiger did not materialize. I won't threaten that tiger is coming. With your cooperation, I would bring in at least a cow. When the cow comes, it would benefit one and all.

Leader of opposition (I): Bring only the cow. Don't bring the cow and the calf. (Laughter) (In 1979, 'Cow and Calf' was the election symbol of the Congress Party).

Minister SDS: Without the calf, the cow would not yield milk.

Leader of opposition (I): Minister is new to Chennai. Here, cows are cheated with taxidermic versions of their dead calves and milkmen manage to extract milk. (Loud laughter).

30 In the Legislative Assembly - 6

I rejoice in recalling my remarks during a discussion in the Legislative Assembly during November 1966. The then Chief Minister Bhaktavatsalam would often taunt the Opposition that it lacked proper training and expertise. Bearing this in mind, I made the following observations in November 1966, shortly before the 1967 elections.

"If there is a god, and if I get a chance to meet him, I will seek this boon from him: 'Please grant me the ability to be a workaholic like the Chief Minister. The next request would be this: 'Please remove the Chief Minister's obdurate tendency.'

When I refer to the Chief Minister's stubborn attitude, I don't mean his commitment to his party's interests or to his principles. I am only referring to his obstinate refusal to accept any resolution tabled by the Opposition parties.

As a youth of seventy today, he has served in this august forum for twenty years. I don't say this out of jealousy. No. He has served for such a long period as to generate awe and astonishment.

While he seldom accepts our demands, his service and his committed toil are indeed worthy of emulation by the members of the other parties. I should make a particular mention of the manner in which he has, over the past five years, demonstrated and taught us how a leader of the ruling party should function.

The Chief Minister has often been saying that the Opposition parties lack proper training and expertise. With a view to giving us that experience, he should capture the Opposition bench soon, and teach us how an Opposition party should function."

This was an occasion to felicitate the Chief Minister. Is not my speech a pleasurable recollection? A few months later the Congress Party sat in the opposition benches in Tamilnadu!

31 In the Legislative Assembly - 7

This recollection concerns a part of the exchange between the Leader of Opposition Karuthiruman and myself as the Chief Minister. The occasion was the discussion on the Demand for Grant for the Police Department during 1969.

During the discussion, Karuthiruman mounted a frontal attack on the government. He accused the government of having ruined the police department and made it into a *'kuttichuvar'* (a dilapidated wall) (this term has a strong pejorative connotation in Tamil).

The Speaker Pulavar Govindan immediately interjected, "The Leader of opposition is a man of letters. Hailed as Kamban of Kovai. Is it proper that an offensive term like *'kuttichuvar'* should emanate from him? I would appeal to him to give this matter some thought."

Karuthiruman: If the present rule had been like Kamban's rule, I would also have spoken like Kamban. Kamban had said: 'As there were no thieves, there were no guards either'. If such a situation had prevailed here, I would also have praised like Kamban.

In my reply, I dealt with the matter in detail with supporting statistics. I pointed to the law and order situation in the other states, as also in Tamilnadu over the past many years. I also said this in passing:

"The Leader of Opposition questioned sarcastically if Kamban's rule was prevailing here. He also said that in Kamban's rule, 'as there were no thieves, there were no guards either'. I would have accepted his position if he had referred to Rama's rule. I am not aware if Kamban ever ruled any kingdom. He had ruled only Tamil.

Karuthiraman: In the rule witnessed by Kamban.

Chief Minister (I): He says that there were no thieves in the rule witnessed by Kamban. There was one who had abducted Sita herself. (Laughter)

32 In the Legislative Assembly - 8

March 1968. Discussions were on, concerning the Demand for Grant for the Public Works Department.

After 32 members, including the Leader of Opposition Karuthiruman, had spoken, I replied as the Minister in charge.

Chief Minister Anna was present in the Assembly.

Karuthiruman had stated that a project to bring water from Krishna and Godavari rivers had been taken up for evaluation even during the tenure of O.P. Ramasami Reddiar (in the forties) and that it should be implemented.

I referred to this in my reply and said, "Since OPR's rule, the State has continuously been under the Congress Party rule. The Leader of Opposition is raising the question with us so forcefully.

Has he raised this question with the Congress ministers even once?"

Remaining in his seat, Anna remarked: "If he had raised it, would he have been left in peace?" This provoked laughter in the House.

Then, I referred to all the projects taken up by the government for consideration, districtwise.

North Arcot	:	Thandarai Dam Project
South Arcot	:	Nandan Canal Project
Mugavai	:	Pillaru Canal Project
Dindigul Taluk	:	Maruda River Project
Nellai	:	Karuppa River Reservoir Project
Tiruchi	:	Perambalur Reservoir Project

I was listing the projects one by one.

At that point, Chief Minister Anna stood up suddenly and asked: "Nothing for our Chengalpattu District?"

I was only announcing the projects as decided by Anna. At Anna's unexpected interjection, I quickly collected my wits and stated:

"Anna is asking if there is nothing for Chengalpattu District. Chengalpattu has the distinction of having Anna himself."

The House was drowned in laughter. Anna too joined the peals of laughter.

33 In the Legislative Assembly-9

February 1989. I had taken charge as Chief Minister for the third time. During my reply to the discussion on the Governor's Address, I had made some remarks on the opposition parties. I am stringing them as a garland of memories.

"Thirunaavukkarasu is seated here as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, representing AIADMK. Kumari Ananthan is here as the Deputy Leader of the Congress Party. Though the leaders of their parties (Jayalalitha and Mooppanar) have not come to this House and lent distinction to this debate, these younger leaders have honoured the discussion with their contributions. On this basis, I find it appropriate that they bear the titles of Deputy Leaders. I compliment and thank them.

The Deputy Leader of Opposition Thirunaavukkarasu stated that he had not had the opportunity to move closely with Kalaignar. He is a vibrant young man. Forgetting that I am 65 years old, and forgetting too that he is far younger... in the manner of Muruga serving *'gnanappaal'* or the milk of wisdom to his father Shiva, he has advised us that we should govern with caution! I was delighted to hear his note of caution. Some other members had used strong language. I take it as therapeutic inputs to this government.

Purana says that devotee Kannappa Nayanar planted his sandalled foot on the god's face and tended to the god's needs. It was not Kannappa Nayanar's objective to plant his sandalled foot on the god's face. Likewise, even if some opposition members had used harsh or rude words, I would accept it as analogous to Kannappa Nayanar's ministrations to god."

Is it not gratifying to recall that at some point in the past, the Tamilnadu Legislative Assembly had indeed witnessed such a manifestation of political culture?

34 Ruling Party–Opposition Relationship

Treating opposition parties with disdain and referring to them in an insulting manner should never become the behavioural norm of any ruling party. With a view to underlining this point, I am inclined to recall the remarks I had made in the Legislative Assembly as the Deputy Leader of Opposition in March 1966:

"While addressing gatherings, Chief Minister Bhakthavatsalam tends to say: When the leaders of foreign countries visit here, they are gratified to meet only the leaders of the ruling Congress Party. Should they meet the leaders of the opposition parties, they remark: 'These are your opposition leaders! Poor stuff!' I am sure our Chief Minister is aware of the *Kural* counsel: 'Whatever you control or not, control your tongue. If you fail here, the folly of your word will hurt you.' I am truly shocked that, with this awarness, our Chief Minister is spilling such words.

"Let me accept, for the sake of argument, that the opposition party is mean and lowly. By having a lowly opposition party pitched against it, what credit does a

ruling party gain? Would not a question be raised – Ah! You vanquished only this measly opponent? Alexander's achievement and renown was his victory over a king of Porus' stature. Jayankondar paid poetic homage to Karunakaran because he scored a victory over Kalinga. Flattened the fortress; held the banner aloft; filled up the moat, captured the king – only such achievements draw wholesome praise and rapturous welcome. On the contrary, if you boast – 'Encircled garbage dump; caught hold of a few roosters and hens; planted the flag pole' – can you expect laurels such as Great Hero, Valiant Conqueror? So it would redound to the honour of a ruling party and its Chief Minister only if the opposition was presented as a strong party.

Democracy cannot be sustained without an opposition party. Even after elaborate coiffure, floral adornment, wearing a *pottu* on the forehead, donning a silk sari, and painting the eyebrows – even a great beauty would be inclined to look at a mirror. Likewise, however eminent a ruling party be, it should not be forgotten that the mirror of an opposition party is essential. You may say dismissively that the mirror lacks the reflective coat of amalgam. It is easy enough to retort that only those with no worthwhile face would gripe in this manner. Only when *ammi* the grinding stone and the stone roller act together, can the chillies be ground into a paste. The ruling party is the *ammi*. The opposition is the stone roller. The stone roller cannot be treated disdainfully, all because it is small. Left alone, *ammi* cannot grind anything. So only when the ruling party and the opposition act in concert as the *ammi* and the stone roller, can true democracy be established.

I happened to read the press report of a Congress Party meeting in Santhome, Chennai. In the immediate presence of the Chief Minister, some Congress friends had thundered at the meeting that no concession should be extended to the opposition parties and that they should be hounded mercilessly. Respecting the opposition parties and protecting them – only such an approach will help democracy flourish.

I have heard of a story from Malayalam literature. An elephant. Festival time. The mahout orders the elephant to lift a huge pole and plant it in a hole. The elephant, which dutifully obeys all the orders, hesitates to plant the raised pole in the hole. The mahout tries to spur elephant into action with the goad. Eventually the elephant leaves the pole on the ground, and slips its trunk into the hole. It lifts a kitten from the hole, places it carefully on the ground, and then plants the pole in the hole.

The elephant is the ruling party; the kitten is the opposition party! As the elephant suffered difficulties to save the kitten, you should also approach the opposition parties with forbearance and save the democracy. In the light of this

remark of mine, the Chief Minister might declare that Karunanidhi himself has accepted that the opposition party is a mere kitten. But let us remember the adage—'If the elephant has its day, the cat will also have its day.' I believe that day will come in 1967."

I expressed these thought some thirty years ago. I believe it is still valid today, in 1985!

35 All the World my Village, Humanity my Kin

The president of this meeting, our Naavalar, referred to the evocative statement of a Sangam poet that 'all the world my village, humanity my kin'.

When he was making this observation, a young friend rushed up to me and asked me if the great Puranaanooru poet Poonkunranaar hailed from a particular village.

I don't know if he belonged to that village or not. But he authored these immortal lines. These great lines - 'All the world my village, humanity my kin' were beamed to the world at large, not only during the Sangam age. After so many centuries, it is the privilege of Tamilnadu to broadcast this message of universality even today. This thought fills us with joy and pride.

Tamilnadu is the beacon light for so many noble sentiments and concepts.

Maybe, Aurobindo thought that only by moving to the Tamil land and absorbing this culture could he proclaim its eminence to the world in an authentic voice. I am tempted to think that this factor had prompted this savant to settle

down in the Tamil land, after originating in Bengal and spreading his message across the globe.

And, a strong concept, a welcome philosophy is taking shape as 'Auroville' in our midst today.

In the French language, 'Auroville' means 'new city' or 'the birth of a new life'. I asked my friend here if Auroville is one word or a combination of two words. He clarified that 'auro' means 'birth', and that 'ville' connotes 'a new town suffused with life'.

It sounds appropriate in French. In a sense it is meaningful if we look at the word with a combination of English and Tamil.

Combine English 'arrow' with Tamil '*vil*' or bow. When an arrow is released from the bow, we can see it speeding towards its target. Likewise, since morning, I have been witnessing the spectacle of workers and volunteers working in great speed in constructing this city of new dawn.

In this city being born and still taking shape, my friends and I have seen many parts since this morning. We have had the opportunity to feel proud of the many new initiatives, and to meet many public-spirited friends from different parts of the world.

This is truly a magnificent achievement. We cannot realize the full significance of this achievement in a day or two. But we can say with assurance today itself that this endeavour has a great future.

We cannot build that future today itself. But there are clear and continuing signs here that such a future is possible and is indeed in the making.

The banyan tree provides shade to hundreds of people. Look at its tiny seed, and if you do not know it to be a banyan seed, you might entertain doubts if the tiny seed can at all grow into a mighty tree.

But we have realized out of experience the evolution of a miniscule seed into the massive banyan. The Auroville town is at the seed stage, nay has sprouted tender shoots. I have no doubt in my mind that Auroville will grow as a guiding lamp to the nations of the world.

It is true that initially the people of these parts had nursed some misgivings – whether the rise of this city here would adversely affect their life, whether it would place hurdles in their path.

Over millennia, this tendency has persisted. Any new concept, any new thought, any new development is viewed with suspicion and concern.

When a scientist declared that the world is round, many resisted this idea. That the world is circling and spins around its axis – this finding had few takers.

This city joins such a list. When it was declared that this monumental city would be a shining guide not only to the people of Tamilnadu, but also to the people of India and to all the countries of the world, many looked askance at the proposition.

This is an indication that man has not yet saved himself from his dread of new ideas. I vividly remember an incident. Forty years ago, I was living in my village with my parents. My father and mother had grown up in a rustic setting.

One day a venturesome photographer visited our village, and tried to persuade both the old and the young to get photographed.

Some agreed. But many refused, and my father was one of them.

The reason was a prevalent belief that if you got photographed, half of your life entered the camera and got imprinted in the picture! So, they had a misgiving that the lives of those getting photographed would get shortened. Then we coerced my father and got him photographed. Of course, he lived a number of years thereafter.

So, man has not yet freed himself from the unease about things new. This was manifested in the local people's misgivings about the birth of this new city. But now I see that a bulk of these very people are enthusiastic about this concept.

The administrators of this project and the many foreign volunteers working here are proudly sharing with us the excellent cooperation being extended to them by the rural folks of these parts.

A White foreign national, wearing dhoti and shirt just like us, greeted us effusively in Tamil, *'Vaarungal, vanakkam'*. Not only that. While explaining several aspects to us in English, he broke into Tamil off and on.

He pointed to the cows and calves and enquired about our reaction in Tamil with a distinct local flavour. It is obvious that these White foreign nationals have been interacting with the indigenous population and internalizing the local dialect.

In this manner a link is being established, a union is being forged - not just between one state and another, but between a number of nationalities represented here.

We are participating in the foundation stone laying for the Tamilnadu stadium here, standing as a symbol of this integration.

We are enthusiastic about integration at a global level; this is our cultural heritage. We reject forces of divisiveness.

In the report which was presented here, there was a frequent reference to the terms 'unity in diversity', and 'diversity in unity'.

As if exemplifying the concept of 'diversity in unity', 19 stadia are proposed to be built here under an umbrella name of Bharat Nivas. They have not lumped all

the 19 together into an amorphous and lumpy Bharat Nivas. There is to be one stadium for each of the 19 states, and the entire complex is to be named Bharat Nivas. They have also told me that each state stadium would bear the distinctive stamp of the particular state.

We are also in favour of this kind of unity and integration. When we see such a link, such an integration, we are truly elated.

The Tamilnadu government will view the proper growth of Auroville as a part of its ideal, and will extend all possible cooperation in this venture.

(Laying foundation stone at the
Tamilnadu stadium at Auroville, 28-10-1973)

36 The Elusive Art of Public Speaking

"Clarity of thought; words of beauty; logical consistency; appropriate anecdotes based on experience; penetrating the minds of the listeners; emotional element which carries conviction to the audience—these elements should mark a speech. Only such a speech is a good and effective one. This is verily the grammar of public speaking." Prof. A K Paranthamanar has characterised public speaking so succinctly.

"Public speaking is an art; has great power; has the prowess to create, nurture and destroy. Wisdom lies in transforming speaking into an art. Public speaking can help the country to grow; can cultivate the electorate; can ennoble the legislature; can ensure good governance." These are the wise words of Thiru. Vi. Ka. What is Thiru Vi. Ka's message? Not that public speaking would necessarily lead to these gains. We should bear in mind that public speaking should constantly keep these goals in view.

A music concert in the evening. The musician, along with his accompanying artistes, ensures that morning that everything is in order.

A play at night. Even if the play had been staged on many previous occasions, the actors do rehearse their important lines during the morning or the evening.

Likewise, the speakers too should organise their thoughts more than once before the meeting and mull it over. Getting on to the stage with such a preparation will help them scale peaks of excellence as public speakers.

There are occasions when even persons with speaking ability falter on the stage and come to grief. In haste, in the grip of anger, losing equipoise, subject to perturbation... they tend to forget what they had planned to say, get flustered and say the wrong things, and later regret their folly.

Years ago. A District Conference of the DMK in Nagarkoil. A speaker from Thanjavur was speaking: He had the habit of marshalling and highlighting anecdotes to underline the poverty in the country. He had repeated the following sentence at many meetings: "Eight respectable comrades from Dindigul had died after eating aloe tuber." While speaking that day his sentence had a quirk. He said: "Eight comrades from Dindigul had died after eating respectable aloe tuber." 'Respectable' comrades yielded place to 'respectable' aloe tuber! The price paid for unseemly haste while speaking.

Another speaker at the same Conference. A person with a tendency to be poetic! In an attempt to ridicule a 'literary' speaker from the Congress Party, he himself ended up as an object of ridicule.

He said: "That 'literary' speaker from the Congress Party had said that in his attempt to win Sita's hand in marriage, Rama had broken Janaka's bow in Ayodya! Poor man! That literary star does not even know whether Janaka's capital was Ayodyapuri or Hastinapuri."

Anna, I, Peraasiriyar, Naavalar, Sampath and others seated on the stage could not control our laughter. Asaithambi interjected and corrected, "Hey! Janaka's capital was Mithilapuri." The speaker dug his hole deeper. "Excuse me. I made a mistake, thinking of the *Ramayana* story." His ignominy was complete. The Conference venue reverberated with laughter.

It is essential for the speakers to have the composure to string the words properly.

The renowned English savant Addison was at the pinnacle of his fame during the eighteenth century. The story goes that, while speaking somewhere, he faltered saying, 'I conceive, conceive, conceive'—repeating three times and standing

helplessly. Looking at Addison's discomfiture, a person from the audience reportedly stood up and remarked: "Addison has conceived thrice, but has brought forth nothing."

The great English orator Disreli had initially been very nervous about speaking in the Parliament. "I would not be afraid of leading the British forces and venture to the battlefield. But I trembled a great deal while speaking for the first time in the Parliament," he reportedly confessed. After such a nervous start, he steeled himself, exorcised the demon of fear, and established his reputation as an eminent orator.

37 Discretion – The Better Part of Public Speaking

A public speaker should be mindful of one important consideration. The speech should not be an exercise in unloading all he knows, to impress the other speakers and the leaders on the stage. It should be useful to the hundreds or thousands of assembled listeners. If a person wants to inform the people about the details and the statistics known only to a few knowledgeable and well-read persons like himself, he should choose the appropriate forum and a subject which is apt for the forum.

Let us take, for example, a forum convened to underline the imperative of State autonomy. A speaker may be inclined to load his speech with many relevant

details: powers and responsibilities under the Central List, the State List and the Concurrent List under the Constitution of India; the provision in the Constitution regarding the Centre's authority to dismiss a State Government; how Ambedkar, one of the architects of the Indian Constitution, had advocated a reversal of the provision in this regard; the main thrust of the report on State autonomy submitted by Justice Rajamannaar; how during the DMK rule, this report had been examined carefully and a resolution on State autonomy was passed in the Tamilnadu Assembly; and Prime Minister Nehru's endorsement of the need for the States in India to enjoy meaningful autonomy. While so, even when a speaker is addressing a forum in the capital city of Chennai, he should tailor the nature of his speech, taking into account the part of the city where the meeting is held.

He may reel off the Constitutional provisions and intricate arguments among the elite sections of the city, such as Mankollai in Mylapore or Shanthi Colony in Anna Nagar. He would be well advised to resist this temptation, while speaking in the plebian parts of the city. While addressing these sections, earthy arguments which would easily carry conviction with them should be used. In such a case, it would evoke positive response from them.

One should speak only what one knows, and should not unburden all that he knows out of sync with the occasion.

Some persons start speaking about things that they do not know, and stumble on the way. When pompous persons, armed with the arrogance of wealth or power, get to address public meetings, such follies creep in.

A person occupying an important position of responsibility was speaking in a forum full of eminent persons. The discussion centred on the damages suffered by many parts of Tamilnadu owing to floods and cyclone. That worthy stated in his speech, "I had witnessed terrible floods in Chennai City, when I was a young kid." He did not stop there. He went on. "I must have been seven or eight. The time when the Emden bomb had devastated part of Chennai. Torrential downpour too. It appeared as if all the lakes would burst their bunds and the entire city would be engulfed in floods." An elderly gentleman interjected: "Emden bomb incident occurred in 1914, right?" But the worthy would not budge. He declared emphatically: "You don't know. I do remember vividly. I was a seven years old, then."

The speaker occupied a powerful position. The elderly gentleman, who had rightly intervened earlier, kept quiet now.

Do you know the truth? Emden was the name of a ship. A German ship. During the First World War, in 1914, a bomb was hurled on Chennai from that ship. The incident is recorded in a stone inscription located in the precincts of the Chennai

High Court. The eminent person claimed to have been seven at that point. And, he was born in 1917!

It was, after all, the blabber of a man of high office! This remark was cleverly deleted from the record of the proceedings.

Take my own case. Let us assume that I have been invited to speak at a Students' Union meeting in a Medical College. The speech would be received well only if it covers a general subject such as literature or the overall situation in the country. On the contrary, if I tried to appear wise and expatiate on how to conduct a heart surgery or on what kind of treatment should be administered to a person struck unconscious by a serious head injury… if I ventured into areas of my ignorance, what would be the result?

As I write this essay, partial prohibition is in force in Tamilnadu. Anyone can obtain a liquor permit for a mere twenty-five rupees. At this point, Chief Minister of Tamilnadu M G Ramachandran, while speaking in a government-sponsored event in Kanchipuram, makes the following remarks:

"Two days back, I received a message from a police station. A person had been arrested for drunkenness. They said that someone had come to take him out on bail. If a guy has come to rescue a drunkard on bail, arrest that guy too, I ordered. And this is Ramachandran."

The news should have been false. Because, it is incredible that a phone call would have come from a police station direct to a Chief Minister. Even if such a phone call was received, a person could not be arrested merely for attempting to get one released on bail. That was a faulted speech, based on ignorance of law, and merely to attract the attention of the people.

Any attempt to speak on subjects of which one is ignorant, would land one in discomfiture.

38 Funny Incongruities

One cannot ignore the need for a speech or an observation to be in sync with the speaker's appearance and age. In this context, I am inclined refer to a play staged some thirty years ago, with an advertisement that Anna would preside and that I would also be present.

The play was staged in North Chennai. Scripted and produced by Party comrades. A person fighting for the cause of the poor. He raised the banner of revolt against the head of a religious denomination. Followed by a crowd of poor people, he barged into the religious mutt, and thundered at the head of the mutt seated on a golden throne.

"Look at the poor class toiling ceaselessly and reduced to bare skin and bones. Should we shed rivers of sweat only to fatten the paunchy idlers of mutt-heads like you?"

So ran his script. It was a scene which should have evoked appreciative applause. But the audience broke into mocking laughter. Anna too smiled and looked at me. I could barely suppress my laughter.

The powerful words deserving of rousing applause got drowned in derisive laughter from the audience. Do you know why?

The champion of the poor had thundered at the mutt-head as pot-bellied idler. The artiste playing the role of the mutt-head was a thoroughly emaciated wimp. A pathetically shrivelled, bare skin and bones. The person who harangued about

the toiling poor reduced to be skeletal wrecks, was a portly giant. They should have either changed the script, or swapped the cast.

Such boo-boos occur in the public platforms too. A sumptuously made person, speaking about the poor and downtrodden, in a touching manifestation of identity with the poor, would include himself in the ranks of the poor and declare:

"Look at our sunken, lightless eyes. Look at our hollow stomachs devastated by hunger. Look at the parched lips. Let us embark on a journey to find ways to banish poverty scarring our debilitated bodies."

Instead of lauding his impassioned eloquence, the audience would be eyeing the speaker's body of massive proportions!

Sure, one should advocate the cause of the poor. Even if the speaker was not a person of wealth, including himself with the poor with sunken eyes would not have the desired effect on the listeners.

A weedy decrepit of a speaker may be able to attract the listeners, by dwelling upon the prowess of Alexander or the heroism of Napolean or the great exploits of the Chola or Pandyan emperors. The speaker should choose words with discretion to manifest the emotional intensity, but should steer clear of any suggestion of his physical might. This would only end up drawing disdainful laughter from his audience, and not make them resonate to his emotional frequency.

Like appearance, so is the age of the speaker. Observations unbecoming of a speaker's age, may provoke nominal applause, but the related ideas would not gain due respect from the listeners.

"Avvai Paati (grandma) composed *Aathichoodi*. Her counsel—'Get involved in noble deeds,' 'Govern your anger'—should ever be remembered... not only in our early days, but also in advanced years." When a young boy or girl expressed such sentiments, it would be becoming and natural.

Should the same young girl or boy declare, "There was not just one Avvaiyar, but many. The Avvaiyar figuring in *Puranaanooru* is different from the Avvaiyar who had composed *Aathichoodi*. One should not commit the mistake of taking the two Avvaiyars as one and the same person." Should she or he also proceed to quote a *Puranaanooru* verse in support, it would not be natural nor would there be an emotional identification of these kids with these words.

Youngsters speaking on essentially adult themes, and even adults speaking like the elderly and thus cross their bounds, do not end up as becoming and tasteful.

"Getting married is foolish. If a man and a woman love each other, let them lead a life together. If they don't like it later, let them annul the relationship. What is so sacred about marriage. Rubbish!"

Only one person in Tamilnadu could manage to utter these words at a marriage ceremony in the immediate presence of the bride and the bridegroom, and attended by hundreds of guests. That one person—Periyaar.

His ripe age; his life-long toil; his sacrifices; tireless service; the respect reposed in him by even the devout believers, their disagreement with him notwithstanding—all these factors stood solidly by Periyaar's side. That is why, when he spoke against the very institution of marriage at a wedding function, even though many in the gathering disagreed with him, they did not display any resentment, but relished his remarks. If lesser men should express such sentiments, feigning to speak like Periyaar, it would turn off the listeners.

The eminent leader Kamaraj's manner of speaking did not involve clever turn of phrases or undue concern for structural finesse. But he had a unique way of addressing people's problems in his speeches. People listened to him in rapt attention with a conviction that he was a leader who spoke for them. His age, his efficiency, his sacrifice, his relentless toil, his eminence—all these provided the background and foundation for his speeches. So people savoured his speeches marked by simplicity, and accepted his ideas wholeheartedly. "I spokes like our great leader Kamaraj. But people did not listen to me with interest!"—If any speaker gripes in this manner, our reply is that the speaker has not grown to be a Kamaraj.

39 Mannerisms Aplenty!

Public speakers are not spared the influence of mannerisms. Without their conscious awareness, their unique body language and unavoidable mannerisms slowly creep in, ending up as those speakers' distinctive characteristics.

Some speakers would stand still on the platform, and words and thoughts would pour forth in torrent.

While speaking, Arignar Anna would be turning his body to the right and to the left alternately. His hands would rise and fall ever so slightly. He had the snuff habit. One hand would slip into the side pocket of his shirt. When the throng burst into a long and appreciative applause, Anna would quickly pick up a pinch of snuff, stuff it into his nostrils with no one noticing it, and wipe his nose with his shoulder towel as if wiping out the sweat on his face, and continue his oration.

During his advanced years, Periyaar used to speak, being seated. I was one of those who had attended his meetings, when he used to stand and deliver his speeches. Sandal colour, or coffee colour, sometimes a mix of white and yellow – he would have covered his upper torso with a shawl of one colour or another. While speaking he would keep pulling the shawl and cover himself up.

Alagirisami. Strapping, erect figure. Intense look. Swaying his arms as if charging at the opposing army in a battle. And words to match. The audience would be tossed in a surge of emotion.

Communist leader Jeeva. Sturdy frame. Large moustache. Booming voice. When he spoke, the entire stage would reverberate. There was force and intensity in his bodily movements. Only when his body moved like a cyclone would words issue forth from him in an uninterrupted torrent.

Moving his neck in frequent jerks, and stroking his massive moustache... signal that Ma. Po. Si's speech had warmed up.

Showing his raised hand towards the audience as if in benediction, lining up his arguments with logical clarity – this was Rajaji's forte.

Raising his heels; shrugging his shoulders; while words keep flowing, squeezing some words into a faint drollery and evoking applause – this was Naavalar Nedunchezhian's unique style.

Soon on standing before the mike, head held erect, not bowing down even once, raising his hands skyward, and words flowing unimpeded – this is the distinctive stamp of Peraasiriyar Anbazhagan.

These mannerisms, part natural and part cultivated, become inalienable parts of a speaker's persona.

While we speak, there is no need for us to consciously cultivate any specific body language or some distinctive body movements. Sometimes some idiosyncrasies distract the attention of the listeners from the main speech itself.

Standing in front of the mike and scratching the head, while speaking; twisting the hands and speaking; keeping the fingers on the neck and hip, collecting muck and speaking; kneading the muck, smelling it and tossing it away – all this while speaking from a public platform!

Speakers should avoid such irritating habits and quirks at any cost.

Some speakers tend to lay undue and absurd emphasis on some syllables and spit out the words. Such attempts would be entirely disagreeable.

Among the heads of religious mutts who used to deliver discourses using words in other languages and using quotes from Vedas and Puranas, Kunrakkudi Adigal was a notable exception. He used to speak in chaste Tamil, drawing parallels from Tamil literature, and tailoring his speech to the occasion.

The Tamil savant Thiru. Vi. Ka. thundered in many a forum championing the causes of the country's freedom, literary resurgence, and the rights of the Tamils, and also spreading spiritual norms. He had the habit of repeating some important words three times for emphasis.

Maraimalai Adigal, who had involved himself in spreading the cultural norms of the Tamils and in combating Hindi domination, used only pure Tamil words in his speeches.

Naavalar Somasundara Bharathi had an imposing presence, and was an implacable foe of Hindi hegemony. Strangely, his speeches were peppered with admonitory remark '*Ada Saniyanay*' ('You pest').

While he had delivered speeches in innumerable fora, the Tamil savant Ki. A. Pe. Viswanathan still continued to speak with the assistance of the points jotted down carefully in a tiny pad.

With the appearance of tranquil poise, Pon. Muthuramalinga Thevar can burst into fury and roar like a lion.

Chinna Annamalai can regale the audience with tiny anecdotes.

Writer Thamizhvaanan had the skill to captivate the listeners.

Even though not frequently speaking from platforms, persons like writer Jayakanthan can cause a stir among his listeners by introducing a novel thought or idea in their speeches. Quaid-e-Millath, who conveyed his thoughts in select words of great clarity. . . his confidant Abdul Samad delivering delectable speeches—they hold places of honour in public speaking.

Those who aspire to shine in the field of public speaking should intently note the way eminent persons from different fields mastered or are still flourishing in the arena of public speaking.

40 The Waterfalls

He is a painter creating with his brush myriad forms – forests of cloud against blue skyspace; peacock in full glory; the allure of the forest; sandy stretch of the desert...

Arrays of chariots and cavalry; the king in sheer regalia; dancing damsel; sulking beloved – these are pictures born out of the dexterity of his creative hand.

The weaver, the potter, the artisan stringing baskets, men with smouldering hearts, the poor and the destitute – these are portraits reflecting his vibrant thoughts.

He was held in esteem by the political class, in the intellectual fora and among the artist groups. 'There is but one sun; he is unique as an artist' – this was the refrain that greeted him. No year passed without the king honouring him with adulation scripted in diamonds and framed in gold. 'Is the king going the monitor the gift?' – he would strip the gift into gold and diamonds and give them away to the poor throng.

Had it been the rule of the three Tamil dynasties, there would have been no occasion for appeals from the poor or incidence of deprivation. But it was the rule of some Pallava emperor. Had a reputation as a connoisseur of the arts.

This Tamil artist with a prolific output of creative outpouring had a feeling of inadequacy.

While painting a vista of a mountain savouring the embrace of clouds – he turned into a man yearning for a damsel clasping his shoulders from behind and savoured that blissful fancy – and he painted many a picture in this vein.

When his brush moved to capture a dove amourously approaching its mate on a tree branch – he lamented that there was no pair of lips to gravitate towards his lips.

He had recreated in pigments the force of a wild stream. To portray the surging currents of love raging in one's mind, don't you need a poet?

One day. A damsel arrived to buy a piece of art from him.

He was thrilled that his day of celebration had arrived. She ensnared him in love as she spoke. When a feast was spread out, would the ravenously hungry object to it ? They resolved to become partners. I've lost my heart to your creative art, said she. For me, this is a day of ineffable joy, said he.

"Came to buy a painting, and I have been blessed with a living picture.... Shall return in nine days. Should I obtain parental consent, there would be no bar to my clasping your shoulders." Let us have some fun near the waterfalls, he said. And, she agreed.

Waterfalls – like a host of fluffy white clouds descending in torrent ... like massive tresses in swan-hue, wafting... they savoured the spectacle and savoured each other's presence.

'*Athaan*', she called. "What, dear?" – his response. "Let me bathe in the waterfalls, emerge from my bath and be seated on a rock, with wet clothes clinging to my body. Would you capture me in a painting?"

"That picture would be my wedding gift," he replied, releasing his lips from hers. She left, after inundating him with pleasure all through the day.

He took hold of his brush to paint the picture of Inbavalli, sitting on a rock after bathing in the waterfalls. I have bound in this female form the bewitching beauty even the great Thiruvalluvar could not capture in the *'Kaamathu Paal'* – the love segment of his *Thirukkural*. With this elation he started painting.

He registered the beauty of her eyes, in a manner of so many charming stories. While painting her lips, he planted a kiss on the brush. A picture of her being seated after a bath; so, only the lone sari wrapped around her body; he painted the body brimming with youthfulness, and nearly swooned in a stupor. As she sat vanquished in the challenge, he placed in her hand a golden *kudam* with its head facing down. The other hand was holding a box of bath perfumeries. On completing the painting, he stood in awe of his creative piece, looking in the direction of his beloved.

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Nine days rolled by. And, she returned. He ran towards her and embraced her. "The picture of the bathing beauty is ready," he said. She communicated her parents' consent. "Oh! This news is sheer bliss," he cried out in glee. After a brief while, they entered the art chamber to look at the picture. She marvelled at the picture – so life-like, capturing her golden body – so faithfully in every detail; and the golden *kudam* planted as a foil to her body bursting with bouncing youth. Right there, they embraced each other.

Suddenly she smiled teasingly and exclaimed, "*Athaan!* You've lost to this girl." He was astounded.

"After a bath, with wet tresses, a girl is sitting on a rock. How come she has a red *tilak* on her forehead?" She followed it with an innocent smile.

The artist let go her embrace and slipped away. She tried to follow him. Could not find him. Searched far and wide. Then she returned to the art chamber. She found the art chamber lost in a smouldering fire. Not finding her artist-lover, she started wailing disconsolately. Rushed towards the waterfalls and looked around.

She found a male body floating in the pool of water at the foot of the waterfalls. She took a plunge. Yes, it was he – now a floating corpse. The damsel, who has come with a firm marriage date, joined him. She had asked in innocent jest if the torrent of the waterfalls would not have erased the *tilak* on her forehead. If that very water would end up destroying both their lives, she would not have committed that grave indiscretion.

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41 The Stage

The valiant hero hinting that his sword has no time to enter the scabbard. On his lap, a lovely damsel—a veritable creeper, delicate and demure. Mellifluous melody! Sweetness incarnate! Salutation to the breeze!

Is she a tender vine wafting in the breeze? A dainty bangle emerging from the springs of fancy! A bud untouched by nostrils! A peacock glittering in the garden! Anklets jingling, skirt fluttering, sweet Tamil melody and intoxicating eyes enveloping... enveloping, and the resolve of onlookers slipping... slipping! Ah! What a dance! Ineffable!

Crowned royalty - poets dispensing beauty - dazzling dancers - enchanting singers - the poor – the destitute – stately pillared halls – busy boulevards – mendicants in search of food – seekers of heaven – song of freedom – unbridled cacophony – runaway bands – wealthy brood... See I did the myriad range! Another stage!

Unequalled art form unveiling such a kaleidoscopic variety! The drama stage! Well had the wise declared—you and the world are the same! I agree. One point, though!

You demonstrate gender equality with a dash of jewellery and a splash of colours—man as woman, and woman as man! Woman in man, man in woman! You drive away the distinction by the magic of costume change. But look at the world around—how it sighs away, knowing not how to bridge the gulf with a change of heart. So you and the world are indeed not the same.

You can show the lowly as eminent!

This world is languishing in the cold, with this prowess beyond its grasp. You and the world, the same? No way!

42 Fame

Oh Fame! You are but a courtesan! To those who hanker after you, you dispense your favour only after extracting your pound of flesh.

Oh Fame! You are the sphere of moon. Many a stalwart has not yet reaped success in reaching you. ((It was so, decades back.)

Oh Fame! You are the icy peak of the Himalayas. Out of relentless effort, some manage to conquer your heady heights.

Oh Fame! You are a cube of ice. Even if we hold you in our tight grip, you dissolve into water and disappear.

Oh Fame! You are a jug of wine. The flies drawn to your bosom fail to break into a flutter of wings again.

Oh Fame! You are a shadow! You keep tailing those who care not for you.

Oh Fame! You are a riddle! Explaining your ways—it is truly beyond me!

43 Oh! Thamizh!

Oh! Thamizh!

My heart throbs to call you in myriad ways – Captivating picture! Enthralling epic! Fragrant flower beside the stream! Moon emitting light! Love! Beauty! Nectar! Life! Joy! Salubrious breeze! Cool mist! Fruit! Peacock of splendid plume! Relish of fruit juice! Dazzling emerald! Splendent ruby! Torch of the valorous army! My mind is brimming with appellations.

But, Oh! Thamizh! No word can match the sheer joy I savour by calling you '*Thamizh*'.

44 Henna

Bathed in beauty, shorn of adornments. Delicate swaying figure, like a creeper swinging as a streak of vapour. Waist too slender for a grip. Lips a reservoir of honey!... Jasmine paling in comparison with her, flaunting it as a badge of honour. Parrot in her sweet speech! Can she be spared the pangs of love?

A youth born to savour the nectar... Marudan, his name. Came the young man like full moon. "When I pick up the spear, the thought of your eyes haunts me. The sword dazzles like your gleaming teeth. As I mount the elephant, its lusty forehead drives me crazy..." So saying the naughty bull pins the dainty damsel on the fluffy silken bed and leaves her entranced. The hero of battle royal! Peerless hero!

Royal decree. He should embark on one more battle. Leaves he to the battle front, with the doleful consent of his queen of love. Ten days roll by, but no sign of his return. The damsel withers into a pale shadow. With her girl friends swarming to tug her with their teasing, she misreads the shadow, and exclaims yearningly. "Time is ripe, my darling; Come and slake my thirst." And then she heaves a sigh.

She stands devastated. To assuage her hurt, all she got was an epistle from her loving consort: "Salubrious creeper! Dew-drenched flower! Returning soon as a victor. Before reporting to the king, come I will to peck at your ruddy lips."

Each word was bathed in a shower of her kisses. The palm-leaf epistle was buried in her heaving bosom. Dumb it was. Otherwise it would have burst into a thousand tales embellished with similies!

The girl friends came. "Don't get cooped up inside the house. Come out. Let us go to the river to celebrate the '*Aadi Perukku*' festivities." He was expected back only in the morning. "His torrent of love is more overwhelming than the currents of the *Aadi*-month river," said Mullai. "You silly! Your man in always around.

'Aadi Perukku' festival comes but once each year." And a girl broke into a song in praise of river Kaveri. A wizened old woman chimed in with a counsel that *'Aadi Perukku'* fun should sure be partaken. Mullai agreed to join them. All of them rushed to the adjacent backyard to collect henna leaves.

With Amma's help, she got the tender henna leaves crushed into a paste, and applied it to her pretty hands and at the tip of her ivory feet. On the palms, henna in the shape of a rising sun… on the fingers which strum the 'veena'… on the nails which plant love marks… all henna! Like legendary Kannaki anklets, henna in the feet! With henna so smeared, she reclined on the couch, with her cheeks pink without henna in a stab of nameless bashfulness.

'Should the henna dry up through the night and peel off by the morning… I can greet my victorious lover with heightened beauty.' She beamed at the thought.

She was lying, not sleeping, not turning one little bit, taking care not to disturb the henna paste. Lo and behold! Marudan's voice. She stood up; he stood in front of her. She stood motionless. "Fly unto me and embrace me. I came rushing, thinking that you would cup my mouth with your eager lips before I could narrate the story of the battle. Mullai! Why this hesitancy?" Asked Marudan in the grip of love-frenzy.

"I have applied henna paste as I was expecting you to return only next morning. Your schedule of arrival was missing in your epistle. If I run up to you and embrace you, the henna paste will get smudged. And at the break of dawn, all my friends would sure tom-tom about us all over town. Hence my hesitancy. Let our lips meet right now, but no embracing, my dear." After ardent kissing, he retired to the courtyard to sleep alone. Henna coating intact…her young heart in turmoil—lovely Mullai lay sleepless, not turning one bit, gazing at the sky, counting seconds for the break of dawn.

'Why lament over one lost night… There is tomorrow. The hero will be by my side. Can savour nectar all day.' With fake assurance, she tried to console her mournful heart.

Sunrise. The victorious hero took leave of his beloved and ventured out to see the emperor adorned with bejewelled crown, and to announce to him the proud news of victory. Promise he gave to return before the moon appeared in the firmament.

With the scales of dried henna peeled off, the damsel looked with glee at her hands and feet. Crimson lines, red anklet imprinted on her feet, pink decorative patterns—all adorning her golden body, she left for the river with her girl friends. Festive splendour. Dancing. Singing. Mullai was yearning for the unfolding day to shrink into night.

Darkness descended. Her heart lit up! Come hither, silver moon, she implored. Come it did. "Where is my lover? No bar for embrace and revelry as soon as he appears. No henna paste; no sticky wet; only its trail of beauty in my hands and feet! A night of love-feast is waiting..." Mullai burst into a song at the milky moon. Saw a horse speeding towards the gateway. It is he, she shouted. Instead of her hero came an emissary carrying a palm-leaf epistle.

"My darling! Off to Kadaaram across the seas. An expedition. Don't languish. Take care of your health. Will be returning in a year."

She drowned the words in tears. Slumped on the cot. Ah! How I laid waste the last night! Hankering after decking my fingers and feet, I had abandoned the feast... For one long year, why this henna hue, to flaunt to whom? She squeezed with scorn her hands and feet.

If only the wet henna paste had been wiped out last night, henna would have disappeared... but an incandescent union would have taken place. This hue cannot be peeled off today. 'Now, one more year!' She broke into sobs.

That moment. Tinkling sound. Laughter. She stood up in a hurry. Her own Marudan! "Why did you make me cry, dear?" She embraced him passionately. Are you proceeding to Kadaaram, she was still in disconsolate tears. "Who is more important—Marudan or *marudaani* (henna)?" He asked with an impish smile on his lips.

"Pardon me, my dear. Henna is but a transient streak of colour. And you, my indelible picture perfect." She said, still sobbing. Lost at the bewitching sight of her heaving bosom, he rained her with kisses. The aroma of *mullai* (jasmine) filled the air! Love ruled!

45 Waves of Bliss

A pond decked with a profusion of flowers. There, a paragon of beauty. Tresses, a torrent of rain. Donning a delicate dress with a spray of golden threads, she stands. Eyes inviting the lover eager for embrace. Cheeks, honey chalises! Killai, her name. Teeth, rows of jasmine buds! Lips, juicy nectar!

He, a handsome Tamil. A young trader. His eyes, a cluster of rain clouds to trigger the youthful 'peacock' to break into a splendid dance. Shoulders, sturdy as hills. Valavan, his name.

He comes. To meet the beauty with eyebrows like bows. A damsel who can protect herself to serve and sustain her lover. He, all hunger, all hurry, no time to tarry.

Set his eyes on her - standing as a lovely tree, the fruit laden trees around bending their heads in modesty. She registered Valavan's arrival by the rustle of the dried leaves scattered on the ground. Before she could say '*Athaan* (Darling)', he clasped her from behind. Pleasure aplenty, cooing sweet nothings, two oceans locked in waves of love - a grand feast, long silence. Woke up on hearing the musical medley of the morning birds.

"Blue eyes have turned ruddy, my dear," he said. "Yes, *Athaan!* As if it is any different there!" she interjected and embraced him again.

"For us to revel like this again, it will take 20 more months. In a couple of days, I am off to Rome, darling."

"Oh! My prince charming! Am I born only to be tossed around like a catamaran on the high seas? No, I have resolved to block this voyage."

"No obstacle, dear. No flame of anger in your eyes. If I cross the seas and trade our pearls, floodgates will open for gold coins. The world will know the Tamils' wealth. Grant me leave, dear. And, lend me your lips to feast on."

"When you traverse the raging ocean with loads of pearls, will you remember, *Athaan*, that you've left behind a delicate creeper to wither away?"

"I'll remember not, dear. Only if I forget will the question of remembering arise."

"We have embarked upon the courting phase. Should you forget me tomorrow, earthquake will befall my life. Keep this in mind."

"To inhale and exhale, one need not be remembering. You, my lifebreath! Banish cruel thoughts. Sans you, I don't exist. No sky without the moon!"

"Should stars invade?"

"Would shun meat."

"I understand that the beauties of Rome are veritable beehives."

"There, I would be but a lame person, casting no glance at the Roman beehives. My thoughts would linger on the ambrosial honey of Tamil Nadu, your lusty lips. Would savour it in my dreams."

"Should you fancy savouring a foreign fruit?"

"Am I a squirrel – to be flitting from one fruit to another?"

"Should you decide that a fling with a courtesan is, after all, no crime?"

"While it is a part of Tamil culture today, I am, sure, an exception. Cast aside needless misgiving and suspicion."

No more words! To fill the void of 20-month separation, unlike a camel on the eve of a long voyage in a desert... they were distraught that nature would not allow them to carry bagloads of pleasure to sustain dreary months ahead. Then, they separated, as dawn intervened.

* * *

A Tamil vessel proceeding towards Rome, carrying pearls from the sea of South Pandia kingdom. On the deck, Valavan was lost in thoughts of Killai, love surging in his heart and his eyes welling with tears. 'Why this grief?' – a sweet voice. Valavan turned. Lovelier than Killai. Cheeks with the hue of crimson dawn. Heaving bosom lending lustre to the frame. Eyes inviting, beckoning love-making. Arched eyebrows, framed by coloured dots – like a cluster of twinkling stars. Beautifully coiffured tresses – must have taken two, nay twenty days, for the decorative effort!

Like a beetle on a lotus flower, a dark mole on her face – a beauty spot. A dot of fiery intoxication!

Who? Rome, she said. Name? Legia – Granddaughter of the lead merchant Marcus. He saw her eyes, humming a hymn of love. He understood her heart.

"The Tamil land which gives peacock, pepper and pearls – has given me a prince to slake my love-thirst", she said. "Who's he?". He asked. Doughty she was. Leaning on his shoulder, she whispered, "Of course, you." "Sea water would be saline," he said jestfully and attempted to slip away. "Not for drinking, but to set afloat my boat, my heart," she insisted.

"You're a sailboat. Don't wander at the whim of every passing wind. Hold on to the anchor of chastity." He tried to counsel her. Her response was immediate. "You're my wind… my boat… my sails… the rudder leading to my lovely turn. You're indeed the ocean cradling my boat."

"Ocean is water too."

"Same in my eyes."

"I've noticed it. Pray not float me in the tears in your eyes. Let me go, my dear sister!"

"Calling me your sister?"

"Why get startled? This is the esteemed culture of the Dravidians, *Amma*."

"Is this the respect you bestow on the beauty that God has endowed me with?"

"Unlike the Romans, the Tamil don't get enslaved by beauty. We marvel at it, we cultivate it, we respect it – all without swerving from the norms of our culture."

"So, is my longing doomed to be a mere dream?"

"Sorry, Legia. I've already surrendered myself to another young woman."

"Who is that fortunate jewel?"

"Killai, her name."

"My greetings to her. Would you please adorn her with this pearl necklace, as a token of my affection?"

"Sure."

"I respect her. She's truly blessed. Let her flourish, with the benediction of having got such a steadfast lover. Valavan, any gift for me as a memento of your affection?"

"Here… A gift symbolizing the purity of heart. Please wear this pearl-studded gold ring. This is a gift from an elder brother to his sister."

* * *

Twenty months have rolled by. Has the moon descended in the grove? Killai is standing there. Waiting to rejoice in the love-torment to be inflicted by her *Athaan*. Before the landing of kisses, her hand involuntarily strokes her cheek. Eyes dart here and there, at every suggestion of sound. Her heart waits to be strummed by her Lord of *yaazh*, the string instrument. Her passion gets incandescent... As a shower of rain on a plant at the point of withering... the Tamil sculptor arrived in front of the statue hungering for the stroke of the chisel. "*Athaan*", she beckoned. Battle of lips; without any ado, unannounced, seemingly endless, the battle of lips ensued. In between, some words!

"How was the trade?" "Fine".

"Any flashy damsels?" she drawled.

"None at all... I've brought a necklace. Wear it." He took it out.

"From where?"

"Roman workmanship.... Pearls from Tamilnadu."

"Who gave this?"

"A woman gave, for you."

"She?"

"Like my younger sister. A Roman girl."

"Really?"

"I swear on you. You, delicate creeper! Bring your neck unto me."

"*Athaan*... Did you see this pearl ring?" Valavan looked at it, with evident surprise.

"Who gave this, you may ask. A Tamil, a noble Tamil, gifted this."

"Who's that Tamil?"

"Like an older brother to me."

"Really?"

"Yes. He's Legia's elder brother."

"You're Legia?"

"*Athaan*, I am Legia, in a way."

"Killai! Have you forgotten the traditional Tamil norm that journeys overseas are not to be in the company of women?"

"Haven't forgotten... exception only in my case!"

He smiled. He adorned her neck with the pearl necklace. She gave him a kiss in return. And, the entire night witnessed their stringing garlands of kisses.

46 The Peacock Feather

'Saivites have won; *Samanars* (Jains) are vanquished' – this was the verdict of the Pandian royal court. Time for Minister Kulachirai to act. With eyes bulging in hatred and his neck taut in homicidal rage, he impaled eight thousand *Samanars* of Ennperunkunram at the stake, and gained the exalted Naayanaar saint status. After this horrendous crime, Pandia land remained tongue-tied in fright. The remaining *Samanar* monks were afraid to stir out.

The masses of people who had adopted the *Samana* faith and also family lives had no scope to express themselves. The tyranny of Kulachirai stifled any semblance of protest or assertion of rights. The kingdom issued a proclamation that people at large should follow the royal example.

When the Tamil land was wallowing in this plight – one day!

He, a valiant warrior, with valour writ large on his face. She, a damsel – with arrows in her eyes and the milky moon in her face. A young man and a young woman together – can love be far behind? Nalankilli, the name given by his parents to that noble Tamil young man. The beauty bore the name Peelivalai. They met, thought for a while, and soon reached a point to wonder who should plant a kiss first! "Not seeking a bag of gold coins, resembling the bulging belly of the free-mealing Brahmin. I would gleefully offer my ruddy cheeks reflecting crimson of the sunset sky. But *Athaan*, I belong to the dancing-girl community. I

daresay that I would not degenerate into 'a garland in monkey's hands'. This is a sworn promise." She stopped with a kiss on his cheek.

"You damsel, who have moistened my cheek with your honeyed lips! You moon, circling in the skyspace! Referred to the dancing-girl community... You're painting pictures on your cheeks with tears. Despair not! You tender shoot who have endowed my loneliness with sweetness! The dew on the dainty leaf! Tamil lifebreath!

'My mother yours
Know each other not
My father yours no kin
You and I but strangers
Now...
Loving hearts merge
Rain mates eager red soil'

Remember this Sangam piece. Shun fear. Even death can't sunder our bond." Saying this, he gave her the nectar of lips, eager for a return compliment!

Crossing the flower-laden forests, going past the death-fields where the *Samanars* had been impaled at the stakes, they arrived with bruised hearts at the capital of the kingdom ruled by Kulachirai's tyranny - to savour the splendour of arts and to nurture their love.

She, presenting the delicate dance of a damsel with an absent waist, they surged along the flourishing streets of the Pandian kingdom, like torrent roaring past the intervening bunds.

Singing the peans of the Pandian glory, a crowd would file past, surrounded by royal soldiers.

A chariot carrying the idol of Shiva and Shakthi would be moving in stately gait on the main Chithirai street.

She witnessed all the festivities. The pleasure I gained in your embrace back home, I don't find in anything here - she mumbled. With passion tingled, he parted his lips. Oh! I've forgotten. This is public avenue, he apologized. As they were staggering along in love's stupor, they set their eyes on a very old *Samanar* monk coming with peacock tail feathers.

A *Samanar* elder wedded to a life principle of love and solicitude - gently sweeping the path ahead with the peacock feathers to save tiny ants from getting inadvertently crushed under his feet. A man of valour, prepared to stand by and spread his creed of love - with courage of conviction getting extinct in the Pandia land. No teeth, but no debility in his words.

"The tremor in the body has not infected the mind. No trace of it. Long live *Samanar* faith! What resoluteness in his words! An old man with a sonorous voice who had escaped the fate of the eight thousand!" Many outsiders who had thronged there to witness the festivities said in wonderment.

A soldier came roaring. "You useless Odina tree! You've no right to tread this path." He stood in front of the old man.

"In the Tamil land, with a heart expansive as the peacock's fanned feathers, don't I have the right even to walk on its ground? Where do I go, *Appa*?" The old man asked politely.

"Go wherever. I can't care less." He hissed. Not waiting for any reply, he rained blows on the defenseless old man. "Till my last breath, 'Long live *Samanar* faith' will continue to be my refrain." It was a booming voice. The royal pathway was tainted with blood. The peacock feathers got scattered. So was the old man's head.

Nalankilli and Peelivalai approached the old man with some trepidation.

'Long live *Samanar* faith.' With these words on his lips, the old man breathed his last, lying on Nalankilli's lap.

"Nobleman! Great Tamil! Beacon light disdainful of life!" Nalankilli motioned to pay obeisance to the martyr. But he held his tongue, on seeing four sturdy soldiers in front of him. He picked up a piece of peacock feather from the scattered fragments, and started walking. His beautiful consort followed him.

He could hear a loud outcry of "Down with *Samanar* faith." She heard it too. "*Athaan!* Why are you appearing out of sorts?" "Nothing," he replied. In response, she forced herself on him. "You haven't savoured the feast," she whined, showing her unmarked cheek. "See the unsmudged *tilak* on my forehead!" She complained. "My mind is restless. Let's meet tomorrow," he said and rose to leave. She tried to draw him back with her ardour and motioned him to stay, with her lovelorn eyes.

He stood still, not savouring the love-juice oozing on her ruddy lips. "*Athaan*," she implored. His eyes strayed from her. She held his hand and leaned on his shoulder. "Tomorrow," he said absent-mindedly, handed over the peacock feather to her and fled.

Looking at the peacock feather, and lost in a daze, she was sitting motionless.

The peacock feather. Myriad strands of beauty. Still, the sheer brilliance of the central eye was overwhelming. Lovelier than rainbow. More dazzling than a diamond crescent. She found Nalankilli in that mind-blowing eye. She found her face too there, a face with his lips planted on it. In her fancy, she painted on the feather's forehead the literary metaphor of 'two bodies welded into one life'.

He had been shattered by the royal street incident. Rights stifled in this Pandia land. It's a crime to draw pictures as your mind dictates. How terrible! Koon (Hunchback) Pandian has turned blind. Kulachirai has gained two more eyes to spout venom. Is it justice to pummel that old man, that noble Tamil, till his backbone was broken and the brain spattered on the ground? Is this the norm of the group of religious followers with an ostensible mission of love? Terrible indeed! If they flourished, it would spell doom for the land. For youngsters like me, the primary calling should be not love, but launching a war of freedom in the Pandia land. *Samanars* should not even walk on the streets, it seems. *Samanar* folks should assemble in strength to break this barrier. Someone should play a lead role here. Who is that man of valour? Who is that lion-like leader?

Nalankilli raised the question skyward; hurled the question at the Pandian soil.

But Peelivalai kept waiting by the grove for a grand 'feast', all decked up. He did not return even past evening. The beauty, who was waiting in a mantap near flower bushes, fell asleep. Her man came. Partook of love play. Only then she asked, why so much delay.

"Mental turmoil, darling! Pardon me. Look at both of us embedded in the peacock feather – the golden salver sprayed with blue and studded with green!"

"*Athaan*, women are called creepers as they spread over a climber-pole, why? How do you explain women being termed *'thogai'* or tail-feather?"

"Peahens do not have such ornate feathers. The feathers lend beauty and elegance only to peacocks. For humans too, the 'feathers' lend majesty, and so they call women *thogai*.

"You're a learned poet, *Athaan*".

"You're the poem, darling."

"You're Thamizh, *Athaan*. Embrace me now."

She woke up at this point. All mere dream. No trace of her man. Daybreak. She started walking amidst sobs.

It's Chttirai Veedi street. There, a young man. Walking with hair in disarray and shorn of ornaments. Just a peacock feather in his hand.

"Long live *Samanar* faith" – the slogan on his lips. Who is this? Who is this brave man flouting the edict forbidding *Samanars* to even walk along the streets? Is he treading the path of the old man? My god, if the palace guards found him, it would spell his doom. Peelivalai shuddered at the thought. The young ascetic was nearing her. Her eyes darkened, and she nearly swooned. To carry the banner left behind by the old *Samanar*, and to mount a battle against hollow

tyranny, marched the resurgent warrior – Nalankilli! He went past the damsel overtaken by love and shock. He had cast away the brush he had used to paint lovely pictures.

"Don't take my life away." She rushed towards him and blocked his way.

"As long as there are brave people to stand up for rights the battle will continue. There's no change in this resolve. If you have the mind, you may wait. If left alive, we'll unite again."

Nalankilli told her and sped on, shouting 'Long live *Samanar* faith.'

From the feathers sweeping the street again, dropped a feather. Peelivalai picked up the lone feather. With moist eyes she looked. She saw his and her faces in the feather, the two merged together. Looking at Nalankilli waging the valiant battle for rights as a lone warrior, she forgot her love momentarily.

47 Oh! Green Parrot!

Tender, green bottlegourd as head; red chilli planted as beak; jasmine leaves as feathers; flat leaves of fragrant screw pine as tail—Oh parrot! A creation much like you! So much like you!

Round head! Red beak! Tiny feathers! Long tail! Sweet parrot! Would you fault me for this imagery?

Even on hearing this portrayal, you won't give a nod of appreciation. Oh dainty parrot! I can discern the cause of your disdain.

Trapped in a cage, you are trembling like a worm caught in a fishing hook. I had enjoyed savouring the sight of your caged presence. I realize today! Prison is cruel! Terribly cruel! Forgive me! Golden voiced damsel! I seek your pardon! The minute I leave this prison, I sure will break *your* prison! Prison has taught me the barbarity of prison.

Enslaved bird! Paragon of beauty! Wholesome experience now I have gained. Soon on my return, freedom you'll gain. Fly, fly, fly high. With bondage sundered, fly aloft with gay abandon! Oh lovely damsel! Fill the sky with your wings in flight!

Oh parrot! I had cruelly trapped you in a cage. I seek your forgiveness. I have understood the trauma of imprisonment. With this new found wisdom, I cannot wait to let you fly into freedom.

Alas, Oh parrot! Those who had tasted the ordeal of prison are wielders of power today. And have pushed us into the prison-dungeon. Why so, parrot? Why so, parrot? Green parrot! Do you have a reply? As I had imprisoned you, I share this fate at their hands—so you might tell me. Well said, parrot!

Had you ever trapped anyone at all, for me to have trapped you in a cage?

48 The Tender Shoot

Setting eyes on a jasmine bud—ah! what ecstasy! A seedling in the field! A minnow in a colourful pond! A fawn in the forest, an infant at home. Oh little one! You're a bundle of joy, displaying your gums and casting a tender smile! Allure of the river of life! An unfailing lamp! A tiny crescent! Wealth ineffable! Pure gold! Delectable honey! Sangam Tamil!

A kiss for the foot that kicks, sugar for the mouth that spits—who but you can be so rewarded? You smile, and it is worth the whole world! You cry—and to comfort you, the poets' quills have poured out epics—ah, all vibrant pictures.

Looking up from the lap or whispering from the womb, you have saved many a woman from the brink of suicide—suicide driven by disgust towards brothers, mother, father and husband.

The *Kural* characterised your lisp as sweeter than the flute and the lyre... and your charming lisp has scored even over the *Kural*.

To see your delicate movement in the gentle breeze, or to find breeze in your movement—I can discern the perplexity of the poets.

Families ruined by the sting of poverty and the tyranny of authority have derived joy at the touch of your silken feet—I have seen this.

Balming cool!

Rising sun!

Sprouting shoot!

A noble mind is likened to a child's heart. Your mind is exalted. Free of blemish. It is the lustre of a ruby—no discord, no divisions, no cleavage, no crookedness, no moss, no fear either. One more, baby!

You have no thought of God. You're an atheist too. A good mind is called a child's mind: So, atheists are endowed with good minds.

Atheists have good hearts.

'No no! An infant doesn't know good and evil... a stage with no intellectual clarity... a stage when even playing with a serpent is possible... so there's no thoughts of God, grown man understands good and evil, finds poison in serpent, and God is discernible to his mind'—I know of people who argue on these lines, darling!

As you play with a serpent, some grown-ups play with disaster—they worship God, go into raptures about God, and sing God's glory! Does it mean that their mind is marked by clarity? In the nature of playing with a serpent, aren't you and they the same, baby?

Serpent—Sin!

Serpent—During infancy!

Sin—As a grown-up!

How did God descend on their domain?

I've found the reason, my dear!

You're a tender sprout with a good heart. The elders are hardened leaves with a good heart.

You play with serpent? They play with 'sin'!

But...

You harm no one. So you have no need for a god.

About the Project Makers

Bharathiar University, Coimbatore – named after the nationalist Tamil poet Subramanya Bharathi, who exhorted the Tamils to identify things worthy in their language, and give them unto the world for enjoyment and edification – conceived this Project viz., *Kalaignar in English Translation* by which to make available in English the extraordinarily rich and varied literary works of Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi, who, by the sheer volume and weight of his output, makes a compulsive demand on us that he be studied and given his due.

Prof. G. Thiruvasagam, Chairman of the Project Committee and Vice Chancellor of the University. The genesis of this Project owes to his academic vision. His initiative and leadership as much as his passionate and studied interest in the excellence of Kalaignar's creativity has seen this Project through within a short span of ten months.

Kavipperarasu Vairamuthu, Vice-Chairman of the Project Committee. An intellectual poet in Tamil endowed with an astonishingly fecund poetic energy and representing a rare blend of ratiocinative powers and aesthetic sensibility, Vairamuthu has brought a sense of direction and significance to bear on the dynamics of the Project.

Dr P. Marudanayagam and Dr V. Murugan comprising the editorial team – the former a ripe Professor of English and a comparatist of towering erudition, and the latter a bilingual lexicographer and a distinguished translator with the translations of *Tolkappiyam, Kalittokai, Tirukkural* and *Narrinai,* and *Oxford English-English-Tamil Dictionary* to his credit.

Dr C. Sivashanmugam, Professor of Linguistics, **Dr R. Palanivel**, Professor of English and **Dr S. M. Ravichandran**, Professor of Tamil, Bharathiar University, the coordinators of the Project, who kept the Project on track.

The late **Dr S. Agasthialingom,** a renowned linguist and former Vice Chancellor, Tamil University, **Sirpi Balasubramanian,** a highly decorated poet in Tamil, **Prof. Tamizhachi Thangapandian**, **Poet Kayalvizhi Venkatesh** and **Dr N. Ramani**, members of the Expert Committee, whose learned counsel, suggestions and views have added to the strength and credibility of the translations as a whole.

Macmillan Publishers India Limited, who have done an excellent job through their passionate commitment to the project, their legendary technical expertise and their unfailing feel for accuracy and perfection.

Kalaignar M Karunanidhi, one among the select 'who is who' of contemporary India, is a ripe political personality of more than seven decade standing, a statesman and a proven administrator, with the rare distinction of being the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu for five terms, besides being a relentless crusader for rationalist revival and an undaunted, missionary-like fighter for social and political causes.

Notwithstanding, it is the title 'Kalaignar' meaning 'an artist par excellence' by which he is identified and characterized, so much so that it is no longer a title but a proform designation of Dr M Karunanidhi, in the same way as 'the Bard' is used to refer to Shakespeare.

For Karunanidhi, whose formal education did not extend beyond the secondary school, is a multifaceted, prolific writer with an amazingly large volume of literary output to his credit. He is a poet, a playwright, a novelist and short story writer, a letter writer, an elegist, a journalist and a columnist, a script-writer, a political satirist, an essayist, a translator, an autobiographer and a social and literary critic, besides being an extraordinarily eloquent and powerful speaker. His creative and critical works have been published in 59 volumes, memoirs and autobiography in another 8 volumes, and other writings in 115 more volumes, large and small.

What astounds one is the fact that he has been writing on all these genres contemporaneously, putting the same amount of interest and energy in each kind, that too in the midst of his most exacting administrative and political activities.

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