



## EVOLUTION OF A POET

Translation of  
Edasseri's essay  
Oru Kaviyude  
Valarcha

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EDASSERI

The Poet Laureate G. Sankara Kurup, while referring to him and me, had once said that 'we are uneducated'. While this statement reflects the innate modesty of the great poet, it is a plain truth as far as I am concerned. I could not get formal education any further than primary classes. I could read some great poetry books in Malayalam literature including the two epics of India, a few Sanskrit books and limited number of English books. This is something any ordinary man in Kerala could have achieved. There is nothing to boast about.

This is not modesty. Then how I could write poems, you may ask. Friends, there is no wonder in it. It is not due to any extra powers bestowed on me by the deity I worship. My capital for writing poems was the inherent passion blessed by the favourable climate.

In my childhood, my mother insisted that I read the epics 'Mahabharata' and 'Ramayana' in Malayalam composed by the great poet Thunjath Ezhuthachan. The erudition or knowledge base that I inherited from 'Ezhuthachan', together with the tunes that my mind imbibed from my mother's singsong recitation of those epics had sown the seed of my poetry. Luckily, the ambience of my home where I was brought up was really fertile. Even though my elder sisters who brought me up were not much educated, they were keenly interested in poems; they sincerely wanted their younger brother to be a rhymester who would receive accolades participating in competitive recital of slokas (four-liners) in high-brow groups. The note books in which they had copied down those four-liner poems were the great books that helped me to learn poems by- hearts. I am recollecting all these with devout gratitude.

You know that I earn my living by writing documents relating to property deals and other legal matters. Because of that, people while admiring me on my ability to write poems wonder as to how I am able to do both simultaneously. They are surprised because, for them these two activities are in intrinsic conflict. The poet I am, basking in the glory that people allow me gratis, pretend that they are in fact in conflict and my poetic creations are despite it!. The fact is this. In both these instances, writing is the job. For those born in India, any writing is a gift of goddess Saraswathy. Then you may ask whether I write poem the way a 'petition' is written. No, nothing is written the same way as something else is written. You don't write a 'petition' the same way you write a 'deed'

But there is one aspect which is unique. The poet needs imagination; he should dream, have the environment to indulge in continuous reverie. Any other work is an obstacle for it. Take the case of a doctor. Will the patient survive if the doctor starts day-dreaming after administering chloroform? What will be the fate of an engineer who engages himself in day-dreaming while working? Nothing more disastrous would happen to a poet if he works as document writer.

I said that a poet needs to engage in endless reverie. Does it mean that for getting some good poets, we engage a few talented people and provide them with food and shelter so that they don't have to do any work other than indulging in endless reveries? I too would long to be one among them! But, it would remain to be seen whether at all any poem will be written in such a perfectly congenial condition. Among the raw materials required for literary work, the most important one is the practical knowledge that a person acquires from interacting with the society. In other words, apart from knowledge derived from books it is essential to have practical knowledge also. How will one achieve it? Unless stimulated by severe hunger pangs, will a human being start working? Let the poet also work for a livelihood and appease his hunger. May be you can supplement him to the extent of compensating for the deficiencies due to circumstances. Never put him in a secluded place and feast him with butter which will only snuff his hunger and make him a patient of indigestion.



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I was poor also. I am not saying this as an excuse for writing fewer poems, but to prove that even such cursed conditions could generate the required stimuli to write poems. Poverty helped to sharpen my knowledge that I gained through experience. Moreover, it made my dreams more exuberant and sweeter.

The inspiration and encouragement that I got from my friends are not little. One thing worth mentioning here about my friends is that except a couple of them, others were young from my generation. They were the first ones to call me a poet. And they brought me up as a poet. I don't want to elaborate much on that aspect. Their love towards me cannot condone even the word 'thanks' if I utter it.

There is a general view among critics that my poems are ideological. I want to touch upon that as well. Like many of you, I was also born a slave. Fortunately, we were slaves who struggled, who had the spark of freedom burning inside us, which enabled us to jump, bark and growl even when the chains of slavery were clinging to our necks. That spark was ignited by none other than the foremost among the ideologists, Mahatma Gandhi. The atmosphere at that time was filled with loftiest of thoughts. Each molecule of air that we breathed was carrying the fragrance of Truth and Righteousness. It was Mahatmaji, who showed us the direction as to where to go. Whether I liked it or not, I was thrown off my feet and floated like a dry leaf in that storm. No matter, this only helped to sharpen the fangs of the existing abject poverty at that time. Even while base instincts writhed in deadly pain inside, a writer like me who lived like a chital spotted by a python could not get out of the magnetic path of that cynosure; especially at the young age when character was taking shape.

Has ideology suffered devaluation? It looks so going by its current market price. In free India, now a days, we can hear wailing about an all round collapse. The poet from the young generation has turned into the apostle of the mantra of "absurdity of existence". How did this happen? Really, this is paining me. A new group of opportunists has emerged pushing behind those who held to their heart the divine principles of 'Truth, Righteousness and Non violence'. This is nothing new and has repeated several times in the history of the world. Pickpockets were close behind the heels of those who laid their lives for the virtue of mankind. Even in olden days, it was like that. Temples and monasteries were built for Budha. And then the Budha died. Churches were built around Christ; the fate of son of God was also not different. Are we building such temples for Gandhiji also? Is it not those unscrupulous traders who deserve to be beaten with a lash and driven out, that occupy various spheres? They became respected and prominent. They shout at their highest pitch, "Send the Veracious to Gallows!"

This is the picture available to the younger generation. It is but natural then, if they turn out to be apostle of absurdity of existence or to be pessimists. I will not question their courageous nature. If this is the condition prevalent in independent India, what else can you expect from our great literature? Literature is the resonance of the society. If we are not able to change this attitude, what will be our future? What is the real reason for this sad state of affairs? What I have to tell my younger brothers is that they are unable to envision great dreams. Earlier, I had told you about the pre independence era, where we struggled to shirk away from slavery. Even when our legs were chained, there were gigantic dreams in our hearts; dreams about a unified, prosperous and happy continent. I am not saying that the dream is fulfilled in its entirety. But we could achieve many things. India which was chopped into several pieces was united. It was free to select heaven or hell as it wishes. In fact it opened the gateways of heaven, albeit a few. But, today's youth who are lucky to have been born free, do you have any strong concepts? Are you able to visualise dreams? In the dreams lie the seeds of reality. That power to visualise a better world alone will make you brave and righteous. That alone will motivate you for great creations. Do achieve that divine power first. Then world class literature will emerge in your generation.



Notes:

- (1) Edasseri was born on 1906 December 23rd
- (2) India got independence on 1947, August 15th

*A speech at Madras (Chennai) appeared in Jayakeralam weekly 1967, March.  
Translated by Edasseri Trust Team.*

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