

## WIND AND LIGHT

EDASSERI

Translated by: **Asokakumar Edasseri & Jayasree**

**Note by the Poet:** *This poem was inspired by the memories of the deep anxiety I had about my pregnant wife, during the most difficult time of my life.*

Like looming elephants, they come;  
 The Eastern Winds! Do you not hear  
 The trumpeting sounds reverberating  
 Off the walls of the Palakkad pass!<sup>1</sup>  
 They enter the banks of river Perar<sup>2</sup>  
 Each year, in time to frolic,  
 Feasting on the fragrance  
 Of the flower festooned  
 Areca palm groves. Behold!  
 Are they not rubbing the palm trees  
 With their temporin<sup>3</sup> oozing cheeks;  
 Are they not shaking trees violently  
 knocking off leaves aimlessly along;  
 Spraying droplets with raised trunks;  
 Winds they are not, but  
 A herd of bull elephants!  
 A rare, alluring, dreadful sight!  
 From the valley afar, up till here,  
 It's not a range of trees, but  
 Huge waves; hear them roar.

'Eternal mothers'<sup>4</sup> of the world,  
The animate and the inanimate,  
Fleeing with dishevelled hair  
From its irrepressible might;  
Sky syncing with the enfeebled clouds  
Earth camouflaged in a dust robe.

In my orchard, the honey-mango sapling  
Planted adeptly, watered and well nurtured  
Sprouted fine leaves, grew lush, and  
Blossomed for the first time; and I thought,  
Which 'Dasantharam'<sup>5</sup> it chose to blossom!  
Is it for offering final rites to the ominous  
Incessant ruthless gale, that this blessedness  
Was born after numerous penances!

Blooming in abundance, like sparklers,  
It radiates overwhelming brilliance!  
The rising sun adorns the beloved  
With golden rays again, and again.  
Golden wings leaving the inflorescence  
Of the coconut tree, dance around!  
My heart stands still for a moment,  
Forgetful of the surroundings...  
Like Kajal<sup>6</sup> applied to the sky getting smeared,  
The great mountain in the east, looms large;  
Red Kumkum flows from above  
Fine waves of mist spread along.  
Mango trees dense with golden blooms  
Aa ha! Light in all its splendour, sways  
In the wind, bright and colourful!

Helpless I am, as if watching from afar  
 A child standing playfully,  
 On the collapsing river bank,  
 Perilously facing the raging flow;  
 My mind goes berserk,  
 Watching the mango tree, with its  
 Frail twigs dense with inflorescence,  
 Reeling under the fury of the tempest.

Not all the darkness of a no-moon<sup>7</sup> night  
 can hide the brightness of a tiny silver star;  
 The blooms on my tree swelled into tender mangoes!  
 Oh! Mighty tempest! Who, ever thought that,  
 Thou, who uproots everything in your path,  
 would lovingly shower pollen on the blossoms?

Oh! the frail one; when thou attain motherhood  
 Hostile forces gently rock the cradle of your baby  
 Thy word, the controlling force of the universe!  
 Not I be surprised; if the waves of the ocean  
 Rose to form the walls of the birthing room<sup>8</sup>,  
 Or the leaping wild flames became  
 Foster mother to the wingless nestlings<sup>9</sup>.

---

First published in Mathrubhumi Weekly, January 3, 1960.

Translated during April-May-June 2021 when all of us were, and are still reeling under the pandemic.

*Notes by the translators:*

*Thanks are due to all those, especially Professor Sathi Devi and Ajith Kumar, who contributed in making this translation as good as possible.*

1. *Palakkad pass is on the mountains generally known as the western ghats. However, this mountain range is on the eastern side of Kerala. It allows the dry eastern winds originating from Bay of Bengal to lash Palakkad and neighbouring districts in Kerala during January end through February. The wind that comes through this pass is so strong that it will shake even the roots of the trees.*
2. *River Perar flows mainly through Malappuram and Palakkad districts of Kerala. This river is also known as Bharathapuzha or Nila. The bridge in Edasseri's poem 'Kuttippuram Bridge' is built on this river.*
3. *Temporin is the secretion produced by the temporal glands of male elephant during the time of Musth.*
4. *In Puranas, earth and sky are known as the 'eternal mothers' of the world; of both the animate and the inanimate.*
5. *Dasantharam – Change of a planetary stage as per astrology; implying that it selected a bad time to blossom.*
6. *Kajal, mashikkoottu or Kanmashi is a thick paste jet black in colour, and is used as a cosmetic by women. This is applied in the eyes of women usually in a thin line. At times, the Kajal will spread below the eyes, may be due to sweating. Note that the sky is mentioned as one of the eternal mothers, so naturally Kajal is applied!*
7. *No-moon night: In Malayalam the word used is "Darshaneseedham" means a night without moon. Since "new moon" night has a crescent (even if it is for a small time period), the word "no-moon" is used to indicate absolute darkness.*
8. *The waves of the ocean rose to form the walls of the birthing room: This has reference to the story from the Indian epic Mahabharatha. Upon the birth of Krishna at mid night in the dark cells of the prison of King Kamsa, Vasudeva, the baby's father took him to Nandagopa, his friend; otherwise, Kamsa would have killed the child. It is said that there was heavy storm and rain on that night. Not just the guards, the entire universe was in a state of stupor. Vasudeva noticed that the iron chains on his feet had unfastened. The prison doors were wide open. When Vasudeva came out of the cell carrying the baby in his hands, the thousand hooded serpent Anantha formed a canopy with his hoods to protect the baby from the torrential rain. Vasudeva, with Krishna in his arms reached Yamuna, which was in full spate. Nevertheless, when he stepped into the river, he found the waters of the river parting to give way for him to cross over with Krishna.  
After seeing for himself that the hostile tempest helped in pollinating the flowers, the poet states that he wouldn't be surprised (not the river) even if the ocean, parted ways for making the birthing walls for the new born.*
9. *Foster mother to the wingless nestlings: This too has reference to a story from Mahabharatha and is taken from 'Khandava Vana Parva'. During the Khandava forest fire, bird Jaritha's babies on the tree top nest were nestlings; wings yet to grow. As it was impossible for them to fly and escape the wrath of the forest fire, they urged their mother to leave them to fate and escape. Their contention was that if Jaritha escapes, she can produce babies in future. If she also succumbs to the fire, then there will not be anyone in their species. Jarita, with deep sorrow left the babies praying Lord Agni to save her babies. The story tells us that the babies were protected by Agni, as the fire did not approach the tree where the nest was.  
After seeing the role of the tempest in pollination, the poet states that he wouldn't be surprised the leaping fire even if acted as foster mother to the wingless nestlings.*