



Translation

A Street Singer's Homage to a Father of the Nation

(Translated from Tamil to English)

Originally written in Tamil by Mu. Metha

Translated into English by K. Denish Raja Durai

Author Note:

Mu. Metha was a renowned Tamil poet and songwriter, born in Periyakulam, Theni, Tamil Nadu. He taught Tamil at Presidency College, Chennai, until his retirement. A key figure in modern Tamil poetry (Pudukavithai), Metha played a crucial role in popularizing the form in the 1970s and 1980s. He authored over 30 works, including novels, short stories, and essays, and was an integral part of the 'Vannampaadi' literary movement, which aimed to write poetry from a Marxist and global perspective. His celebrated work, *Agayathil Aaduthaveedu*, won him the Sahitya Akademi Award (a prestigious literary award in India) in 2006. He was widely recognized for his distinct literary style, blending social consciousness with modern aesthetics, making his poetry both intellectually rich and widely accessible.

Translator's Note:

Denish Raja Durai is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Sciences and Languages at VIT University. He holds a master's degree in Translation Studies and English Literature. His research interests include Translation Studies, Literary Historiography, and Comparative Literature.

I

As your photographs are carried in procession,
Why do you stand—
Head bowed,
In the middle of the street?
On this sacred day,
When your faded portrait is adorned with color,
I hear your cry—
A father mourning the loss of his child.
Oh, Father of the Nation!
I wail each time I see your peaceful statue.
With a heart weighed down by sorrow,
My poem remains unfinished.

II

The lines drawn on the map of this nation
Are ribs of the martyrs—
Their bodies carved into borders,
Their blood shaping the land.
We pay homage to them,
Not with cold stone monuments,
Nor with tributes that time can erase.

III

O, my son who once sought refuge—
After the sinking vessels sang in the sea of tears—
You gifted us ships filled with nectar,
But now,
Begging bowls rest in our hands.
Who are the magicians
Who turned gold to dust,
Hope into despair?
Who can unearth the shadow
That lies buried beneath another shadow?

IV

Is it because Bhagat Singhs
Are no longer seen
In the dim glow of nonviolence,
That rats now scramble and swindle
In the grand mansion of freedom?
Come, in the tradition of kings,
Who drape peacocks in golden shawls,
Relieve us from these rags—
The only clothes we've ever known.
We raised sheep,
And in time,
We too became sheep.
Our stomachs remain empty,
Yet our milk is taken.
We are left unfed,
But the shepherds somehow
Always receive their gifts.
With a heavy heart,
My poem remains unfinished.

V

Laws, once pillars of justice,
Now stand full of cracks,
Yellowed with age,
Shaken at their roots.
A hopeless life—
We dwell in darkness.
Sin after sin,
We commit in silence.
And yet,
There are enough sacred rivers
To wash them all away.
Bharat, my brother,
Stay pure,
As pure as you were meant to be.

VI

Crowns of flowers adorn the capital,
While in the slums,
Children's tender eyes
Glisten with unshed tears—
Salt-heavy drops falling to the earth.

VII

The spinning wheel you invented,
To weave khadi,
Now spins golden threads—
But for us,
Gold and silver exist only
In festival songs and distant dreams.
The people of this nation
Follow you faithfully—
But only in one thing:
They wear incomplete clothes.
At this pace,
One day, our birthday dress
May become our national dress.

VIII

Our leaders,
Standing before microphones,
Roar eloquently
About driving away poverty—
Yet it lingers.
Who said
Nothing has changed
In these twenty-five years?
O, my son who once sought refuge—
After the sinking vessels sang in the sea of tears—
You gifted us ships filled with nectar,
But now,

Begging bowls rest in our hands.
The waters released from dams
Do not reach the fields below—
Instead, they flow upwards,
Rushing in the wrong direction.
I know the journeys you took,
Through the slums,
Yet those who once loved you
Have turned you into a slum.
Garland the magicians
Who caused this change.

IX

As your photographs are carried in procession,
Why do you stand—
Head bowed,
In the middle of the street?
I hear your cry—
A father mourning the loss of his child.
Oh, Father of the Nation!
I wail each time I see your peaceful statue.
With a heart weighed down by sorrow,
My poem remains unfinished.
