

KUTTIPPURAM
BRIDGE ¹

EDASSERI

*Translated by **Asokakumar Edasseri & Jayasree***

Note by the Poet: *From childhood, the river ferry at Kuttippuram was quite familiar to me. Later a bridge came over the river. This poem is the sum total of my feelings of surprise, happiness and angst when I walked over the bridge and crossed the river.*

On the bridge newly constructed
 spending nearly twenty-three lakhs
 proudly I stand gazing upon the
 dwindling river 'Perar' beneath.
 Haven't I played 'Poothaamkole'²
 on the river sands, many a time?
 Haven't I dipped in the cool waves
 to take ablutions before prayer?
 Up above, where kingfisher, cuckoos
 and herons were flying, I stand
 with pride, head high in the air
 looking at the river beneath again, and again!

She raged through, during heavy rains,
 bursting the banks; arrogant and boisterous!
 Without any ferry crossing over,
 not even the 'Garuda'³ flying above.
 Oh 'Nila', you will swell again and flow unbridled;
 Bursting the banks again; arrogant and boisterous!
 I chuckle when I think of it; now you will,
 'crawl'⁴ to flow below this bridge!

Yet, while standing firm on my feet
 on the glory of victory of mankind,
 an unknown feeling stream inside;
 and haunts my conscience with agony.
 On the threshold to the new world
 constructed brilliantly, such as this bridge
 I stood reminiscing about
 the fading picture of my village life.
 My bosom friend since childhood
 sweet and wealthy damsel, my village;
 Maybe she is regressing farther and farther
 maybe she is bidding the final farewell.

Vast paddy fields, where green
 and yellow hues flutter in turn;
 Houses flanked by resplendent groves
 full of bowing fruit-bearing trees.
 The hill valleys, a kaleidoscope of colors
 displaying an assortment of bloomed flowers.
 Temple festivities in the sacred groves
 sacrificial altar, banyan tree and oil lamps.
 Farmer's songs that fill the day;
 Those chills, in the dead of night.
 All these are slowly moving away, for
 some other things to come to light.

Granite, coal, cement and steel
 start their reign over tender buds.
 Roaring and surging ahead, are
 tyre and petrol, round-the-clock.
 Walls are rising everywhere, they
 densely sprout, left and right.
 Shrill noises all day long,
 shrill noises all through the night,
 Noises resonate everywhere,
 movements quicken everywhere.
 Brawling erupts amongst strangers
 love thickens amongst strangers
 strangers become neighbours
 all familiar faces – alas! But outsiders.

'Malloor' depth, hearsay from now
 Lord Siva of Malloor - a street-deity!
 Even the 'Anthimahakaalan' hill,
 standing high up and serene,
 would now spin like a top, spun
 by an egotist machine child!

If the man, who with his usual playfulness
 laughter and tears become machine like,
 will you too mother '*Perar*', change
 into a canal of grief carrying sewage?

(First Published in Mathrubhoomi Weekly, February 21, 1954)

Translated during June 2018.

Note from the translator:

1. Construction of the 11 span-bridge on National Highway (NH17) in Kuttippuram, Kerala (India) was started in January 1949. Construction was completed in September 1953. This is the most important bridge that connects north Kerala to the south, crossing the river *Perar* (also known as '*Bharathapuzha*' or '*Nila*'). Edasseri was born on December 23, 1906 in Kuttippuram. The Poet must be 47, when he walked over the bridge for the first time.
2. '*Poothamkole*' - a game played in olden days by small children using a small stick. While one playmate looks away, other playmates hide the stick. If the game is played on river bank, they hide it below the sand. Once concealed, this playmate is challenged to locate the spot and find the stick. On nearing the spot, playmates would signal 'hot' and while moving away, they would say 'cold', thus helping him/her to locate the stick. The child wins, if the stick is located.
3. "Garuda" is the mightiest of the birds as per Hindu mythology.
4. We admit that the translation "You will now crawl to flow below this bridge!" does not convey the full impact of the mockery that the poem conveys. The poet has used the phrase "naatta noozhum" in Malayalam. This phrase has a connotation difficult to be translated into English. In the games children play, there was this ordeal of making the loser to crawl below the spread legs of the winner. This is the ultimate shame for the loser, as the kid has to perform this act in front of the onlookers. Present flow of the river below the bridge between the piers is compared with the crawling of the defeated (The river) between the spread legs of the winner (The bridge/The mankind).