

Green in Boiling Cauldron: Readings into Paandu's

Poojyathin Rajyam (Tamil)

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Even though Green literature largely talks about jungles, forests, green mountains and water bodies and the solace these offer to the ones that go and live in the lap of nature just as Henry David Thoreau did a century ago in the US, the present paper has nothing to do with the scintillating aspect of Nature and Ecology, but the loss of such greenery and the modern man's apathy to it. None the less, there is a renewed awareness in the summit forums of the world these days as the earth is heating up day by day and the fossil fuels get depleted at a fast tempo. The fragile Ozone layer is punctured in many places just as the tarpaulin sheet of a modern refugee camp in the Middle East and Europe. Sensitive individuals especially the poets have raised their concerns through their voices which seldom reach the thick-skinned politicians. Politicians and bureaucrats do not live for tomorrow; they are concerned about their to-days. But litterateurs, cross all boundaries and raise a big hue and cry against the mindless exploitation of natural wealth like the large-scale pulling out of granites and marbles, oil, coal, wood and water, to list a few resources. Green is going grey, nay, in the cauldron and will be no more by green. One of the South Indian Tamil poets who beautifully captures this is Paandu with his composition *Poojyathin Rajyam*.

Our children in cities and small towns have fast become addicts to Pizza and Cola. One of the recent advertisements, in this connection, on the Net is pulling people towards Pizza. See it by yourself: Papa John's

The dough masters at Papa John's hand toss circular masterpieces with original and thin crusts made from high-protein flour to support warm bouquets of toppings. Hand-cut produce crowns all of Papa John's pizzas, mingling with the sun-soaked sweetness of sauce made from fresh, California-grown tomatoes. By adhering to its

brand promise of "better ingredients, better pizza," Papa John's grew from a back-tavern pizzeria into more than 3,200 restaurants within three decades' time. (<https://www.groupon.com/deals/papa-john-s-328>)

Just as Pizza is a much favoured meal for the economically rich and stylish Indians, Coca cola is also a sought-after drink in modern man's day-to-day meals and parties. An advertisement on the Net about its popularity and sales volume is mind-boggling:

Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Private Limited (HCCBPL) is the largest bottling partner of The Coca-Cola Company (TCCC) in India. TCCC is one of the world's largest beverage companies refreshing consumers with more than 500 sparkling and still brands. Led by Coca-Cola, the portfolio of TCCC features 20 billion dollar brands including Diet Coke, Fanta & Sprite. HCCBPL has a nationwide presence with 25 bottling plants across the Country. (<http://www.coca-colaindia.com/facts-myths/perundurai/>)

Pongal items are being replaced with Pizza and Cola and innovative food displays of fast food items like desserts and salads in hotels. The Pongal loses all its sheen as days go by as it seems to be boring. I have chosen some five poems for supporting my theme statement—"Green in Boiling Cauldron". All the five poems have been translated by me into English.

In his first poem, *Pongalo Pongal*, Paandu deplores that man is mainly responsible for consuming all the five land divisions (*thinais*). Read Paandu's poem on this hot issue:

PIZZA AND COLA FOR PONGAL!* (Original title—*Pongalo Pongal*)

Where ever you turn to gigantic *Kurinchi*¹ is blasted and swallowed in blocks and blocks!
*Mullai*² is fast disappearing from the very face of the earth with poaching of trees and animals!
*Marutham*³, the fertile wet land is fast turned into housing plots without leaving no traces of it!
*Palai*⁴ is expanding an' heated up with unremitting emission of Co² from diverse vehicles!
*Neithal*⁵ the seas and the oceans have boiled and drained depleting everything in it!
Who is this monster or the dragon that has consumed these *five thinais*⁶?
We are the ones that take pizza and cola instead of taking rice for Pongal!

Are your insides not burning like boiling rice with this renewed awareness?

Are you not burnt down with the consuming fire?

Is not your mind turned into a cauldron yet?

(Paandu's Poem *Pongalo Pongal*. P. 30. Translated by Dr. S. Robert Gnanamony)

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It is an eye-sore to the conscientious people of Tamilnadu to wherever one turns to, agricultural land is being converted into residential localities and industrial areas. Cultivation shrinks day by day; farmers do not come forward to till their lands; even if they farm their lands, they do not get the desired price for their products; as a result, farmers, as there is no other go, sell off their farm lands to ravenous realtors and the *binamis* of politicians at a down-to-earth rate and whimpering in the corner of their huts. I quote here a supporting evidence that I found on the Net:

Over the last one decade, large tracts of agricultural land have been converted into residential layouts across the state, especially along all state and national highways and district main roads. This has not only led to an artificial realty boom even in remote rural areas, but has also led to shrinking of areas under agriculture, thereby eroding crop output. While the broad government policy permits only conversion of rain-fed dry land for non-agricultural use, the reality is that even wet lands have been put to real estate use in many areas.
(<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/tn-tightens-rules-on-conversion-of-wetlands/articleshow>)

Pandu's poem "Pani Maattam" captures the poignancy of this situation. The poem is re-titled as "Ex-Farmer, Now, a Security Guard".

EX-FARMER, NOW A SECURITY GUARD! (Original Title—*Pani Mattam*)

(Transfer of Post)

High-rise apartments in the place of pregnant corn fields!

Tall walls blocking the growth of the trees and the flying squirrels!

Bull dozing the natural springs an' replacing with the artificial springs!

Ever increasing blockades blocking the monsoons and the rain clouds!

Co² an' monoxide-emitting vehicles parked on grassy lands chasing sheep and cows!

Disappointed hungry an' colourful birds languishing deeply for corns!

Scarecrow images un-tastefully planted in the name of landscape architecture!

The anxiety-ridden ex-farmer now a security guard is staring hard at a sold-out paddy field!

(Paandu's Poem—*Panimattam*. P 29. Translated by Dr. S. Robert Gnanamony)

3

Even though many write off the farmers as if they had no impact on society, print media gives some attention to farmer suicides in our country. Even though Maharashtra tops the table, Tamilnadu doesn't lag behind. Reports say that the more a farmer owes to some financial institution, the higher his chances of suicide. Rural households in Tamilnadu is 31.4% and in 2013, statistics show that 105 farmers committed suicide. As the Times of India jokingly points out, "When it comes to repaying debts, not everyone gets as long a rope as liquor baron Vijay Mallaya" (**Times of India**, Trichy, Saturday, March 12, 2016). On March 4, this year, a farmer named K. Balan in the Tiruchy region was attacked by the policemen for failing to repay the tractor loan to a private bank. As **The Times of India** shows, "Financial agencies are hiring goons to threaten and beat up farmers to recover their loan amount in the recent time" (**Sunday Times of India**, Trichy, March 13, 2016).

DISCOUNT THE LOANS WITH THE LOANEES (Original Title-- *Vivasayeein Ulaichal*—Restlessness of a Farmer)

Stay a while, hei, political bigwigs!

Why do you rush in for globalization

When the nationalization itself is a big question mark?

Why do you air-dash to the US to get weapons

When you do not have guts enough to get water

From the neighbouring states?

Alas, our shrunken children are rolling on the empty vessels that once was

Ploughed with elephants yoked on!

Either you get water for our parched lands
Or pour a drop of parting-milk on our open mouths!

No water in our wells;
If there's water, then there's no power to draw it out!

Either the harvest is poor
Or if the harvest is good,
Then the price of the farm produce is the price of a dead cow.

Stay a while, hei, you, just a request please!
You discount us along with our crop loan!
For we have nothing else to sell!

(Paandu's Poem—*Vivasayeein Ulachal*. P 25. Translated by Dr. S. Robert Gnanamony)

4

Paandu's poem, "Interview with the Crescent" is a true green poem and there is no sinister tone in it. The crescent moon's attractive qualities are being highlighted in this poem. If one could imagine that the moon were not there, it would be a catastrophic situation. The moon shines on all alike and it has no partiality. If human beings emulate the qualities of the moon, the world will be a green paradise on earth.

INTERVIEW WITH THE CRESCENT (Original Title—*Nilavuden Oru Paetti*)

Why does everyone call you crescent?
You're present in everyone's mind!
Is it not natural to wane after waxing?
It is to remind the footlessness of the sifting sand called life!

Why do you shine day in and day out?
Is it to share your soft light without discrimination!
Why do you meander along the dark clouds?

Is it not to respond to your duty-consciousness!

Why do you reuse to come down from heaven?
Is it not to aspire for greater things!
Why do you bear along the dark guilt and sins?
Is it not to distinguish the pure and beauty from the stain an' ugliness!

Why do you hide before the impending blazing sun?
Is it not to kneel down before the source of light!
Why do you roam all alone in the pitch darkness?
Is it not to offer security to the slumbering humans!

(Pandu's Poem—*Nilavuden oru Paetti*. P 25. Translated by Dr. S. Robert Gnanamony)

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Paandu's poem, "Just a Trader of Seeds" highlights the importance of quality seeds of green vegetation and the quality seeds alone will keep the world going. Good seeds do not decay, according to the poet and they are more important than the fruits. The poet wants the humans to nurture orchards with joy, because there alone lies the health and sanity of the present day humans. Even birds and animals largely depend on the fruits for their survival. Although seeds are very important, one has to ascertain that there is enough water to plant them.

JUST A TRADER OF SEEDS! (Original Title—*Vithaykalin Viyapari*)

I'm just a trader of seeds!
Do not come to me for fruits!

I offer seeds an' manure to plant and grow them into healthy plants!
Pray, do not come to me for water!

Adam's apple or Isaac's apple
Or even Marx' mango
I'll spread these before you to choose!

Nurture orchard with joy!
I'm just a trader of seeds
Do not pester me for fruits please!
Fruits may go decay
Some even be food for worms!
But seeds. . . !

(Pandu's Poem—*Vithaikalin Viyapari*. P 54. Translated by Dr. S. Robert Gnanamony)

In conclusion, it must be point out that the postmodern world has come a long way from what it was some 50 years ago. Now quality of any item, be it some eatable item or some household utensil, has to appeal to one's senses as well. Therefore elegant displays are the order of the day. Even on the road side fast food stalls, fried chicken, full or pieces, are displayed in gory shapes and colours that attract a good number of visitors. As **The Times of India** shows in one of its articles, 'Food is as much about what you see as what you eat' (**Times of India**, Trichy, Monday, March 14, 2016). In the world of Nature, many shed secret tears for not seeing the mountains that they saw a couple of years ago. Tall giant trees that ruled the forests and the banks of the water bodies are secretly cut and carried away with the connivance of officials and politicians. River sand, and sea sand are being uploaded into ships and the beaches wear a sad look. So green has given way to grey everywhere!

Notes

* The poems quoted here have been translated by the author of this paper Dr. S. Robert Gnanamony from Tamil into English

1. Kurinchi is the mountain and the mountainous region, one of the dichotomies of the ancient land system.
2. Mullai is the Forest and the adjoining area.
3. Marutham is the fertile paddy land adjoining waterbodies.
4. Palai is the desert land.
5. Neithal is the seas and the oceans.
6. Ainthinai is the five divisions of the land prevalent in the Sangham Age (Kurinchi; Mullai; Marutham; Palai; Neithal).

Works Cited

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