

Charity

R Murukaiyan

Come hither, people of the world.
Let us carry out tasks to make the land fertile.
Let us throw seed into the furrows
Dug by the plough as moved by the hand
Along the path trod by the bull
So that green plants may surge.
Let us extract the juice of fruit and
Consume it to heart's rejoice.

Let us bore the earth to bring out in plenty
Gold, silver, iron and gemstone.
We will build all kinds of machine that
Whiz away with a spin and a swing
Spit fire with vigour and fury
To carry out countless tasks.
We will make a thousand elegant goods
That make the possession of eyes a true blessing.

We who produced fruit and goods
Will share and set up a new code.
Let us make it a rule
That there shall be none here
To cry and to groan in pain.
No more is any to worship or command.
No more is a fate to weaken and wear down.
Arise ye world that is aware of truth
Achieve for yourself
A path of joyful goodness.

1975

MARXIST SALUTE TO COMRADE MANIAM

Sillaiyoor Selvarajan

Comrades who have gathered here
To recall in a cascade
Thoughts of a great man called Maniam
His life of bravery, his conduct of humility
His broad outlook based on service,
To pay tribute to that immortalised soul,
Allow me a mere ten minutes to sing of my man.
Yes, I arrogantly referred to him as my man.
I called him my man
For there was such intimate fellowship between us.
Forgive me if I was wrong.
I said so since I was one who shared and lived among friends
In the warmth of his shelter with his wife and children

And comrades who united as one in the policies of struggle.
Forgive me if I was wrong.
Our friendship budded in my schooldays
Then we ran free. We were mere lads
Who parted company
In our adolescence, unaware of the revolutionary sweep,
Not knowing that we will meet again
To merge through struggles for rights that would dominate,
Through arguing the case for the oppressed and
The class struggle of the workers,
In political debate and in battles for cultural thought.
We met again in battlefronts, on the same side.
I met at St Henry's College, Ilavalai
Maniam, the meticulous student
Who preserved silence, with little time for chit chat,
A man of mystery,
An underground fighter who lives on after his death,
A leader who breaks his silence at the head of a mass rally,
A hero who did not sing and swear only to surrender,
A hero who achieved things without compromise.

Poetry stammers to describe that joy.
A silent tribute for Maniam—
The fighter who refused to be silent
And spoke up in struggle for the masses?
A silent tribute in place of a battle cry?
Forgive me, I cannot!
We have been captivated by the communist way
Along the path of Marxism Leninism.
We met. We spoke. We embraced the path
And entered the battlefield on different fronts.
I, in the front of art and literature, and
He, in the field of relentless action in struggle.
Having consumed the poison that
Emerged in the churning of the cement factory struggle
To feed the ambrosia to the folk*
He continued in struggle in the hartal,
In the militant demonstrations for equality in education,
To dedicate his efforts to working class struggles,
To lend his shoulder to the oppressed in caste conflicts,
To lead the way like the flame of the lamp
Amid ideological confusion in the worker's unions,
To identify the issues by scientific analysis
Without losing heat by communal violence,
To work like a tusker and
Struggle with character to the end with relentless militancy,
And to lead a life true to the definition of a martyr.
I am a friend of KA Subramaniam, my man,
The personification of friendship,
The able master of egalitarianism.

Poetry stammers to describe that joy.
I recall the Comrade Maniam
Who identified the principles that prevent filth
From infiltrating art and literature and,
When I among others was tempted,
Stood behind to warn me,
“Hey, Selva, do not be baffled”, and show me the way.
Poetry stammers to describe that joy.
As the times of close relationship
Cast their shadows in my mind and soak my thought
Poetry stammers to describe that joy.
For me to sing of the times
When Maniam and I discussed in privacy,
The warm hospitality of his dear wife,
The sweet words of the three tender children,
Sathiyarajan, Sathiyakeerthi and Sathiyamalar,
Calling me “Uncle”
In a tone akin to the comfort of a cool spring,
I have not the words.
Poetry stammers to describe that joy.
The friend of the dispossessed, we have been dispossessed of you.
Maniam! My Marxist salutations to you!
Farewell Maniam! But
The golden moments of happiness I had with you,
The golden moments in which we shared
With sweet drinks and our majestic confidence in
The desire to make a new world,
They have not gone away.
Your little boys, your little girl, your son-in-law
And so many more whom you had aroused before you went.
Those are golden moments, tender golden moments.
Farewell Maniam! When you return
Your task would have been done.
The thoughts that you had,
The scenes of your great dreams
Would all have been realised.
Farewell my prince! When you return
With the desire for equality,
Communism would have blossomed on earth.
With aching hearts we would await your
Return from leave to see that new world.
Maniam! My Marxist salutations to you.

[This poem in tribute to Comrade KA Subramaniam was read out as funeral oration by the late Sillaiyoor Selvarajan a close friend and a leading Sri Lankan Tamil poet.]

* Note: Refers to Hindu mythology where the Devas and Asuras churned the celestial ocean of milk with the celestial serpent as rope to extract its ambrosia, and when the serpent spat venom Lord Shiva swallowed it to save all living beings.

Let us Celebrate the Miracle of Cuba

Vasudeva Nanayakara

A poem to mark the occasion of the Cuban National Day 2002

Cuba, the island country once colonised like ours
How fortunate and blessed you are,
as you dazzle with courage and commitment
showing a way to the third world.
Beside the giant of imperialism
you stood up courageously and in your determination hot and red,
as imperialists encircled you with embargo
you emerged victorious isolating the super power.
The Soviet block fell confronting you with an impossible challenge
the spirit of the revolution raised from your inner depth of history.
With a renewed revolutionary consciousness
you faced the imperialist onslaughts,
harassments, violence and conspiracy with glowing success.

Dear Cuba who gave you this inspiration?
The towering strength of Fiedel and others?
Che Guevara and all those who sacrificed their lives
whispering 'patria O mute'
for the revolution and the idealism of humanity
Is the eternal song of the revolution
echoing through the winds of the Sierra Maestre
embracing the hearts and minds of the people?

As the tidal wave of globalisation lashed across the world
Fiedel it is your voice that rang across the globe
'globalise the struggle against imperialism'
carrying it with the power of resistance.
When he sand "If the red flag of our struggle will not fall to the ground
and if we can go to death amidst the voices
of resistance and defiance, we can embrace death".

A flame of inspiration was kindled by Che
among millions of people across the world
to make scarifies for the struggle of liberation
against imperialism, oppression and exploitation.
Let us celebrate the miracle of Cuba
born out of the strength of the struggle of her people,
and the inspiration of their leaders.

Song of the Revolution

K. Pasupathy

Onward to the battlefield

World revolution is on its way.
Arise, arise and to the fore.

Are we not the masters of the world?
Do we not create and protect?
We the noble ones defend this world.
We are the mighty ones born of earth.

We fear not war, fear not fight
For we are those that seek new life
Who will dare to fight us and
Perish like moth in burning flame?

Of oppression we had enough.
Now the world belongs to us.
To burning hell shall them we drive
Those claiming that we are their slaves.

The old conditions we shall change -
Where workers toil and parasites thrive.
To our last breath we'll defend
Our beloved socialism to the end.

The earth is flooded by blood so red
That blends so well with the glowing light
Of the bright red hue of the mighty sky.
A red flag flutters across the sky.

The song of revolution loud and clear
For you brave soldier who arose
Amid the forces surging high.
Arise, arise and to the fore.

A Clear Vision

Siva. Rajendran

This is the *raaga* of the morning seeking the dawn
Within it is much to be born
This is an army of heroes marching to victory
Wisdom its guiding force

A new force has set out
To turn the sky red and make earth prosper
A people's army is on its way
To wage war to make things new

Comrades arise and come forth
Let us banish this darkness forever

Ours is the path of equality
A new path in our history

The people's army rises like the hills
To bring great changes to the hill country
The worker's army swells like the streams
To put an end to this life of slavery

This army links hands as a true friend
with workers toiling without their rights
This peoples army is determined
To make the toilers own this world

Let the new army leap forward
Along the righteous path of the red flag
The peoples army is on the march
To create a new Lanka
To establish equality

04.05.1991

Train of Tears*

E Thambiah

They leave by the train of tears.
Like cattle and sheep
the young men and women
who circled the skies as couples
like birds in springtime
part company, and
leave behind
their children, their parents,
their husbands, their wives.
“Chug chug Nilgiri Hatton Gardens –and
it's too crowded in the train we go in”**
They leave by the train of tears
that narrates even today
true stories –
many a story of the silenced.
Thus –
in this land where
separation is in the embryo,
the breath of fury of some
tears the sky asunder.
They toiled for this land.
While they live a dog's life, and
seemingly possessed by evil spirits,
some are out to deport them.
Can we live this life of decimation
without a word in angry protest?

- * Refers to the deportation of Hill Country Tamils to India under Indo-Sri Lanka agreements.
- ** Lines from a folk song about trains that carried indentured labour

On the Sands of Jaffna

Ragala Panneer

Cry not cry not Krishanthi
You aren't an orphan Krishanthi
A crime so cruel was allowed to happen
On your way to school Krishanthi
The state that turned the oppressor
An evil deed took place Krishanthi
The stripped you at the point of a gun
You lost heart at the sight of the gun
Did you weep till both your eyes did swell
Or shed tears with only God to tell
The tall Palmyra saw it all
The sound of your sobbing made tears fall
Konesvari and Manamperi
Lost their lives like you Krishanthi
On the sands of Jaffna you will rise
As a soul of wisdom Krishanthi
The earth will tremble when you set foot
You will destroy those that destroyed you.

Four poems by Subadran (1935-1979)

People Power

It was the physician called the people
that made my dumb poetry speak
that made my blind poems see
my dead poems hear
my crippled poems walk
and my cowardly poems fight.
Friends
bring your poems too to that physician.

Here to Sing

I am not here to gather fame
before I am carried in a coffin
I am here to sing for the revolution
until I am carried in a coffin.

Human Might

Has not the one that arched the rainbow
set the arrow in place?
Come along comrade, let's climb
the watery rope that descends from the sky,
place an arrow on the rainbow,
and with the might of mankind

capture the roaming sun and
place it at the feet of mankind.

Peace

O, war sharks of US imperialism
the sprats that roam the Indian Ocean
are not hiding away in fear of your war rehearsals.
They are transforming themselves
into whales to combat your cruelty.
The pece boats of the Indian Ocean
Will drown your warships, for
peace has no faith in the talk-shop of the UN
but in the battlefields of your destruction.

God Bless America

S. Sivasegaram

Your Excellency the President
of the United States of America,
I, an American citizen,
speak from a room in a burning tower
where lights suddenly went off
following the impact of an air plane
that struck like a thunderbolt.
I know not the direction in which you are.
Nevertheless,
since the all mighty American intelligence
has ears in every direction and
since my legs are too weak
to stand while addressing to you,
I remain seated and
speak in the direction in which I view.

Your Excellency,
forgive my inability to stand
facing you while addressing you,
for it is not out of disrespect, and
be kind to listen to my words.

Darkness reigns in this room while
that thundering sound still ringing in my ears
cuts through the screams of fear that fill them.
It bears the sound of the explosion
that declared American nuclear might
fifty-six years ago in Hiroshima.
Embedded in it is the roar
that later spread
through Korea, then Vietnam and
heard until yesterday in Belgrade and

still raging in Iraq.

The voices of fear and the screams of death
that flood my ears
echo the voices born of every throat
that was strangled on every land
that lost its sovereignty to America
for the supremacy of American sovereignty to prevail.
Thoughts that were denied expression
in every language that was killed and
in every language that is killed
are spoken aloud in it.

The heat of the fire that encircles and
lays siege to the building
is rising slowly but steadily.
Its every degree rise
takes me close to the Vietnamese peasant
who experienced the heat
of napalm bombs sprayed across Vietnam
by American war planes.

Amid the heat of the air, the odour of smoke
and the toxic fumes
that enter my lungs through my nostrils
I sense that
I now receive a share of the poison gas
distributed to Kurdish villagers
with the blessings of America
and chemical fumes gifted to the city of Bhopal
early one morning by Union Carbide.

Now darkness has subdued this room.
I could only guess where the walls are.
But my vision pierces through the darkness and
the walls of the building:
half a century of history unfolds before me.
I see blood stains on the military hands
that uphold American domination.
The blood of
half a million communist suspects in Indonesia and
the blood that flowed over many lands
from Vietnam through the Dominican Republic to Panama
are deposited there.
I am not intimidated by its sight.
Amid the imprints of blood
many faces known and unknown
parade before my eyes.
For every face that feared and
every face that surrendered

I see a hundred of defiance:
Mossadeq, Lumumba, Allende ...
For every face that fell to conspiracy
smile a hundred that vanquished conspiracy:
Mao, Kim Il Sung, Ho Chi Minh ...
Before Castro could be toppled in Cuba
Chavez stands up in Venezuela.
From the boy who throws stones in Palestine
to the armed militant in Colombia,
the Philippines and Nepal,
the defiant Iraqi and Afgan,
fighters join in parade in a long march begun years ago.

Now I realise that
Qadaffi, Saddam Hussain and Osama bin Laden
could be eliminated
but not terror –
for the source of terror is not elsewhere
but here.
I do not lose heart,
for the liberation of America is interwoven
with that of the world.
Let the collapse of this tower be a symbol
of the fall of a terror
that made America the enemy of the world.
Let it be the beginning of the end
of a goddess of evil bearing the trident
of exploitation, oppression and war.

Your Excellency the President
I love America
more than I love my life that will soon depart:
not the America that you seek to save,
but the America that strives to save itself from you –
an America that the whole world would love.
God bless that America!

The Ghost and the Mighty Tree

S. Thevarajah

the cloud transfigured into a ghost
shook the mighty tree that stood in defiance –
having failed to uproot
took revenge by knocking to the ground
each flower and fruit tender and ripe
for the floodwater to drag away.

in the ditches, palmyra groves and street junctions
the scorching sun stacked firewood.

arguing against wasting time

to make distinction between flower, tender fruit,
the ripe and unripe,
the “practical” ones plucked unripe fruit
and tucked away beneath hay
in cane baskets and wooden chests
in vain and wasteful efforts that spoil the fruit.

the mighty tree with roots deep in the soil
extracted nutrition from the very earth
in which lay buried its decomposed seeds of life,
waved its head in the gentle breeze,
joyously fed its fresh flower and tender fruit
resting on its erect shoulders
to bear ripening fruit –
the seeds went underground to
rise anew and endure.

Fire churning from within*

Pannaamaththuk Kaviraayar

Tea flourishes and thrives
on the highlands manured by
the dead bodies of great grandfathers, grandfathers,
children and women buried beneath.

The hands of those who poured sweat and blood
on the hilly woodlands ... no, no, they are wanted no more.
Driven away from the roll call site,
they are now out in the street.

The tender descendents of those who made the roads
arrived like the smoke exhaled by the factory chimney
to roam like the spirits of the dead
on the roadside ... the bazaar ... the street junctions.

The infants, who once leant against the beautiful breasts of their mothers
covered by tender fresh cloth
have now been thrown on the roadside
to suffer a plight worse than a dog's, as prey to the cannibals.

The faint moan of the meek was inaudible
on the streets that the honourable live –
only their self respect went cheap.

Women with nothing else to sell
sell their bodies
to stave off hunger.

To demonstrate their chastity
by hanging or drowning themselves in the well –
are they a mere few in number?

They let another touch their body
before Yama could take away their lives.

The tender femininity
whose tender fingers plucked tender leaf
is falling charred in the street.

Damn the society of the honourable.
A fire is churning in the belly.

[*Plantation workers thrown out of the plantations in 1973-74 were reduced to begging].

White Doves in Search of Peace

K Thanikasalam

While war and sorrow continue in
the many directions of the globe
the eagle eyes of imperialism
circle around the countries poor.

Cruel events continue as they with their sharp beaks
nibble at the body of the nation
weakened over centuries.
The nation's jackals living in their shadow
give them support.

Aesop's fable of the fox drinking the blood
dripping from contending bulls recurs
as those armed with their Star Wars strategy and
with nuclear devices for teeth
look for human sacrifice.

With the moan of humanity as national language
the drunken festivity of dehumanised hunters
takes the form of national culture.

Can one expect the fragrance of spring blossom
from these fields of bloody sacrifice?

If the cats do not unite to share the bread
the future will be with the cheating monkies.

You white doves trapped in
the net cast by the hunters
rise in unity into the sky of freedom
to cut loose your nets.

When will this rainstorm cease?

Mavai Varothian

The sound of guns loud as thunder
The agony of people in pain
Our heads crushed by legs in boots
A shower of bullets taking lives

A shell accepts its command to go
Lightening strikes the route that it takes

A bird makes sketches in the sky
It quenches the thirst of a flying ball

News of the conflict is announced
in words contradicting themselves
Rain falls announcing the glory
of mankind perishing into earth

Where is the rain to fill the belly of
the poor starved of his rice
living in the hope of salvation for
this land tomorrow, not today?

When will this rainstorm of fire cease
for an end to the sorrow of the
folk that crossed the seas
fleeing from bad life on this land

The old sore of war has led to gangrene
It has cause rot in the main root
Will not this long war ever end?
Will Tamils not live on this land?

Change after change leading to disappointment
Alternate routes leading to disappointment
Today is the opposite of yesterday
Each day determined by destruction

Until our hearts change to
accept multi-ethnic variety of human life
goodwill among men will never come
the rainstorm on this land will never cease

We are not dead leaf

Maruthur Gani

Even if we
inhale the poisonous air
bellowed by the urban factory,
even if we
wander about
with muddy feet
and ploughshare in hand
in the countryside,
we are not dead leaf
to be swept away
by the dry south-westerly wind.
In our journey towards
an era of common ownership,
we will endure
the fiercest attack of
thunder and lightening
and wind and rain.

We will put an end to
the era of private ownership.
It is simply enough
if we could only catch a glimpse
of the rising red glow of light
over the eastern horizon.

Tomorrow, there will come a man

Puratchik Kamaal

Tomorrow, there will come a man
for earth to celebrate from all directions.
Tomorrow, there will come a man!

In the moonlight of clarity of mind
in the flame of brilliant thought ...
in the mingling surge of spring water
in the form of the rising sun
tomorrow, there will come a man!

He dwelled for a myriad of time
in the womb of glorious dreams of
the great minds that revolved
in the spinning whirlpool of time...
tomorrow, there will come a man!

A peasant who will plough
the paddy field called this earth
erect bunds and irrigate it
to achieve an elevated form of life...
tomorrow, there will come a man!!

A scientist who finds fulfilment
in the evolution of man as one caste and one colour,
of one religion and one language, and
justice and status common to all ...
tomorrow, there will come a man!

In this grand mansion of this earth,
under the firmament as roof,
to greet and treat as one's own
all children of the human race ...
tomorrow, there will come a man!

The crop gets destroyed

Paandiyooraan

Mortgaged the *thaali* to buy the equipment,
ate the rice with just skinny dried fish stir-fry,
cleared the forest in July and set ablaze in August,
set up a shelter, pulled out tree stumps and uprooted shrubs,

sowed the *chena* crop and properly fenced.

Within the fence many hut we s had built
guarded with care, but the crop got destroyed!
Crackers we lit-
elephant crackers, Chinese crackers and triangular ones-
but yet, my dear pal, the elephants did come.

If all our efforts go waste in this way,
mister, will the towns of your land prosper!
Look at the sorrow of our whole neighbourhood.
Risking our lives we walked
past the tiger and bear of the black hill forests.
It was the *chena* crop that
we spruced up with our working hands!

Rather than lie beside the loving woman
with hands on her breast, we abandoned sleep
to lie beside snakes on the watchman's platform,
bathe in ash and pluck out the flea.
For all the care of the watch by the day
the elephant is sure to come by the dusk.

Banda and I tired of chasing for days.
Mohammed, Arumugam and David, nearby,
exhausted by yelling till their throats went sore.
All the effort with eyes for lantern and flame on our hands
is going to waste.

Each in his direction, each in his voice,
each on his platform, each in his way.
Divided each day, where is our dawn?
With crop destroyed each day,
on our land only ills will flourish.

If the sky and the soil would raise our earnings
let us cast the fire-toungued snares in all eight directions.
I the platforms in all four directions would unite among us,
thunder will soar from the hoot from our throats.

Is the monkey to eat the honey
while the bees just sit and wonder?
We will gather the might of our two hands
with the *chena* as our support
we will plant to crop the mounds looking skywards
and the forest packed with shrub and wood.
Who will dare stop us from
defending with care the crop that we planted?

As arrive monkeys to break the corn,

birds to nibble the seed
and droves of parrots by evening,
the plantation to be harvested in that one day