

India: A Poet Joins the Protest against Vedanta in Thoothukudi

'Remove the Knives From Our Throats'

Sunday 10 June 2018, by [KRISHNAN Ilango](#) (Date first published: 27 May 2018).

“What is not there for you to do as a patriot? / Why do you have to go to protests? / Did we shoot you? / You forced us to. / You protested. / We shot.”

The [police firing in Thoothukudi](#) in the third week of May 2018, in which 13 persons including a 17-year-old girl were killed, has horrified the people of Tamil Nadu and beyond. Many Tamil writers and film directors have openly protested the police excess and have expressed their solidarity with protestors, including Ram, Ranjith, Naveen, Vetri Maaran, Seenu Ramasamy, Raju Murugan and others. Several writers and artists hit the streets on May 25 protesting the atrocity. And it is this collective anger that has kept the news focused on the Thoothukudi killings despite other happenings around the state.

Ilango Krishnan, a well-known name in Tamil literary circles and an acclaimed poet, recently took to poetry to speak out against the killings. “How else can a writer express his extreme sadness?” he asks. “I do everything in my limits to express my anguish, and poetry is one of them. It is the medium I know. To me, this is almost like mourning.”

Krishnan has two poetry collections to his credit. His third collection will soon hit the stands, together with a set of short stories. He is currently working on a novel. His three protest poems are reproduced in full below, together with an English translation by Kavitha Muralidharan.

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I.

Our questions are simple.
Who ordered the firing?
You speak about what it ate
before a corpse had died.
Our questions are direct
Is that young boy a terrorist?
You whisper around about
how the corpse had died.
Our questions betray no confusion.
How many people have you killed?
You wanted to establish that the corpse
was once breathing.
Who needs the tales about your corpses?
Who needs to know your rotten truths?

My sister who died with her mouth blown
Why did you kill her?
My brothers who have not begun to live their lives yet
Why did you kill them?
We will ask this.
We will ask only this.
We will keep asking just this
Till your ears turn deaf
Till your power becomes a corpse

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II.
We are grateful for your mercy.
You have so quickly agreed to shut the plant down.
They say it's twenty five
And sometimes thirteen
What is there in a number?
For lowly humans like us
In a country where cows are protected
We are grateful
Lords, we bow to you
Rulers, we bow to you
Corporate owners, we bow to you
Kings, we bow to you
We bow and pray to you, Lords
Please remove your boots from our testicles

Please remove the knives from our throats
Please tell us when the goats should arrive to be slaughtered
We bow and beg to you
May you kill us
With little pain, our government

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III.
Why are you going to protests?
It is for you
That there is an IPL
It is for you
that there is cinema.
It is for you
That there is TASMAL.
It is for you
That there is Facebook.
It is for you
That there is YouTube.
And then,
Have we locked all the parks?
Who asked you to go to the protests?
Who turned beaches into protest sites?
The air is polluted
The water is polluted
The land is polluted
You are affected by cancer
Sad
But that is why
There are temples.

There are priests to
Talk to Gods for you.
There are armed Gods.
Pray.
Shave your heads
Pierce your bodies
Carry milk pots on your heads
Carry kavadis*
Circumambulate the Holy Hills.
What is not there for you to do (as a good bhakt)
Hand over a petition.
Plead
Put up a status on your Facebook
Cough and carry on your with your life
Vomit blood and die
What is not there for you to do as a patriot?
Why do you have to go to protests?
Did we shoot you?
You forced us to.
You protested.
We shot.

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(*A kavadi is a decorated pole of wood crowned by an arch. It is used in a form of penance by the devotees of Lord Murugan: they carry it on their shoulders, together with other offerings, and undertake long processions.)

Ilango Krishnan

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P.S.

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