

# Ayyappa Paniker's *Kurukshetram*

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## The Man

**Dr. K. Ayyappa Paniker** (12 September 1930 – 23 August 2006), poet, professor and critic, has been the pioneer of modernism in Kerala. His influence has been quite profound and far-reaching in the entire cultural and intellectual life of the Malayalee. If in poetry Paniker could be seen as the harbinger of a new voice, in the field of literary criticism he ushered in a paradigm shift towards a radically newer awareness. He has come to be regarded as an icon of modernist culture and thinking. A widely travelled scholar and poet of international renown, he is a unique instance of creative and intellectual genius.

Paniker was a recipient of a number of honours including the Padmashree, Kerala Sahitya Akademi award for poetry and criticism, Kendra Sahitya Akademi award for poetry, Saraswathi Samman, Distinguished Teacher award, Mahakavi Ulloor award for poetry, Kabir Samman and many more. *Kurukshetram*, *Ayyappapanikkarude Krithikal* and *Chintha* are among his seminal works. He had also written a comprehensive history of Malayalam literature, an authoritative volume on Indian Narratology and has edited many notable works.

Paniker was as well versed in modern and postmodern literary theories as in ancient Indian aesthetics and literary traditions and had played a major role in transforming Malayalam theatre, which had been stuck in the proscenium mode. His was a life of enquiry and it might safely be said that he was instrumental in familiarising the new generation to the changing contours of modern literary theory, besides working closely with an entire generation of writers to herald a new poetic sensibility in Malayalam.

## His Poems

The main tools that Paniker employed in his poetry were irony and black humour. He was not satirical in the conventional sense. He used irony as a kind of scalpel to clinically unravel the hypocrisy of the Malayali middle class. He was never afraid of experimenting with the form of poetry. He lifted irony to a level that was unfamiliar to Malayalam poetry and his own renditions of some of these poems were quite popular during the 1970s and 1980s. He also played a major role in familiarising the average Malayali reader with poetry from different parts of the globe and in taking Indian English writing to the rest of the world. His poetry was powered by realism.

Omcheri N. N. Pillai, a well-known writer, and former head of the Malayalam Department, University of Delhi says, "Mr. Paniker's poems stand out with their disturbing and powerful images, symbols and words. His imagination hovers at a higher plane and he has made poetry writing a joyful experience. Critics and connoisseurs alike have hailed his impressive body of works. He created magic with words and his writings can be jacketed as a cross between the writings of Ezhuthachhan (the father of Malayalam literature) and Kunjan Nambiar (whose writing was full of irony, acerbic wit and sarcasm)".

Paniker's poems are compelling and mystifying and they transport the reader to different levels of consciousness. Poetry, in fact, is a disturbing passion with him, and realism is woven with deft use of words and symbols. His vision of life borders on reality and starkness, and he pens events and issues around him as

they are, without oversimplifying or exaggerating. His use of language varies from the figurative to the intense, creating a visual reality, which is appealing both to the reader and to the critic.

### ***Kurukshetram***

*Kurukshetram* can be undoubtedly considered as Paniker's masterpiece. He was hailed as the T.S. Eliot of Malayalam with this remarkable poem. The prominent Oriya poet, Jayanta Mahapatra once said that, "Paniker's poems have helped me to see the world through implication". At a time when Malayalam poetry was still in the grip of its most popular romantic figure, Changampuzha, and the classical masters, Asan, Vallathol and Ulloor, Paniker burst on the scene with his *Kurukshetram*, bold not only in terms of form, but also in terms of substance.

As T.P. Sreenivasan in his article, "Ayyappa Paniker: the Guru of Modern Poets" writes, "Initially, his poetic experiments were dismissed as imitations of English literature by an English teacher. It took some time for readers and critics to realise that the images in his poetry were rooted in Indian myths, legends and classics and that they were discovering an indigenous genius".

Sreenivasan continues, "He used free verse and articulated the collective despair of a generation as T. S. Eliot had done before him, but his *Kurukshetram* was very Indian in its essence. Dhritarashtra's question to Sanjaya as to what the Pandavas and Kauravas were doing on the battlefield was a good starting point to Paniker to lay bare a different wasteland of his own. The anguish was intense:

"And it is the bones that eat the marrow here,  
while the skin preys on the bones". (Section -I)

Ayyappa Paniker began writing *Kurukshetram* in 1952. He said, there had been an inherent discontent in him not only with what others were writing then but with all that he too had been writing till then. "The atmosphere was saturated with the nauseating stench of decayed poems coming from within and without", he said recollecting the staleness experienced in poetic expressions, and suggesting the creative urge that the time had necessitated.

Panicker took six years to complete this 494 - line poem in five sections and it easily found its way to the readers by itself, and even crossed the borders of language by becoming a 20th century epic in the language. As K. Satchidanandan, one of the major voices in the post-Paniker generation in Malayalam says, "*Kurukshetram* is the first poem of Ayyappa Paniker with a definitive thematic and idiomatic significance". Though most of its themes, like "value and valuelessness", "repeated betrayal, failures and hazards in the country", had fleeting appearances in his earlier poems, it was in *Kurukshetram* that all of them were organically amalgamated into a 'monologue of momentous hesitations'".

See us  
caught in the labyrinth of our daily grind:  
this crowded market  
where we plunge and push and outsmart  
to gain each our end —  
this is the world as we style it  
And here they come,  
come to buy and come to sell;  
themselves they buy and themselves they sell,

in human souls they deal. (Section – I)

Ayyappa Paniker's poetry is a collage of poetic practices and moods and, throughout a career that spanned more than six decades, he remained unpredictable with regard to what he would write next. The poet who startled the literary orthodoxy with an outright experimental poem in free verse the other day, would emerge as if from nowhere with a conventional hymn in traditional metre.

Death, in a way, finds a subdued presence in many of his poems; sometimes its treatment is sombre and overt, sometimes matter of fact, sometimes plain funny, depending on the mood of the poet.

While *Kurukshethram* marked a watershed in Malayalam literature, something that provided the impetus for change, Dr Paniker did not stop with his experimentation with it. He did not stick to any given formula for writing and continued to evolve his style in everything that he wrote, whether it is 'Mrithyupooja,' 'Gothrayanam,' 'Passage to America,' 'Kudumbapuram' or the 'cartoon poems' or nonsense verse. He touched upon every subject one could think of, from the sublime to the ridiculous, from the advent of space travel that opened up new vistas for technological innovation and ingeniousness to the pleasures of scratching an itch.

### **A Glance at *Kurukshethram***

*Kurukshethram* is a poem that runs close to the T.S. Eliot masterpiece *The Wasteland* but when one delves deep into the poem, it is easily understood that the comparison stands only on the surface level. Unlike *The Wasteland*, the sections of *Kurukshethram* is devoid of titles and the man who speaks is none other than Sanjaya who has been blessed with divine sight by Vyasa to describe the battle sequences that happens in the battleground of Kurukshethram to the king Dhritarashtra, father of the Kauravas. In *The Wasteland*, it was the de-centred Tiresias whose monologue we heard. Eliot fused the blindness of the king and the vision of Sanjaya in Tiresias but in *Kurukshethram*, Paniker keeps the two characters separate – Sanjaya taking the role of the commentator and the King becoming the listener. The background of the poem is of course the *Bhagavad Gita* where Lord Krishna spoke to Arjuna. Paniker uses the image of Arjuna to represent the modern man who is moving in a labyrinth and finding no ways to get out. From him, the past has been robbed off; the present is filled with agonies and pain; the future too does not promise anything substantial for him. This echoes to what Arnold has said, "Where ignorant armies clash by night" (Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach').

*Kurukshethram* can be rightly described as a modern oracle and its five sections artistically present the crises of the contemporary society. The poem laments on the 'cultural sterility' that has gripped the world all over. It begins with the words of the king Dhritarashtra, "Tell me, Sanjaya, what my sons and the sons of Pandu did, when they gathered on the sacred field of Kurukshetra eager for battle?". In the contemporary world, the battle of Kurukshetra happens inside the mind of every man – a constant clash between the right and the wrong; what to do and what not to do; whom to believe and whom not to believe.....

Sanjaya narrates the on field happenings to the king and through those sequences, he speaks about the loss of values and ethics. Today, the selfish groups fight with each other in a world of insanity. The poem raises the issue of how one should regain one's consciousness in such a world. Paniker finds out the contemporary connotations of the older text and connects it with the present one. He has extensively borrowed images from the myths, legends and even folk-tales. The 'star' becomes a leitmotif in this poem.

The first section begins with an invocation to the star, as it remains a silent witness to all the happenings down the 'stage' (the earth). The world below is slowly getting into an aura of eternal darkness. The star represents the spiritual powers, the *elan Vital*, passion for life, man's cosmic longings and also the imagination of every human being but since it is void everywhere, the star has been "hurled out". The star can also be seen as the soul of the human being which works as a guiding force. The same theme is echoed in Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode':

Our birth is but a sleep and forgetting  
The soul, our life's star  
Hath had its setting elsewhere....

The star has been a regular image for the writers from time immemorial. The same star that took the messengers to Jesus Christ and also that showed the way and inspired the young Santiago in Coelho's *The Alchemist*. The star inspires the poet to come up with good verses and without the concept of star, there is no poetry. In *Kurukshetram*, the star is the energy, the lover and guide to the poet. It also signifies man's excessive affection for life. The whole world is shrouded with darkness and the universe got startled because of this – within it, there arose a force of protest and a star was born out of it. The poet urges the star which was once in love with life to look upon the earth where the mortals struggle. He wants the star to shed the tears of empathy for the humanity and thus provide light to the world beneath so that the people can get at least some consolation in the vacuum.

Let drops of light fall from your eyes like tears!

As Wordsworth wrote, "the shades of the prison house....", Paniker too says that the society has lost its sheen. The poet compares the world to a market to highlight the cultural sterility that has encompassed this world. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* also muses on a similar theme to some extent. Here, man himself becomes a commodity who is trying to 'outsmart' the other 'to gain each our end'. This is the type of world, we live in or that we have designed and the humans deal in souls. They come to sell and buy themselves. The poet tries to depict the image of the capitalistic world through these lines.

From there, the poet moves to discuss the loss of identity. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* strikes a resonance with *Kurukshetram* in this context. There too, the writer is concerned about the existential problems of humanity. The same is echoed in the works of Kafka and Ionesco. Paniker brings the dilemma of the mythical Arjuna in this context. As he is worried about fighting against his elders and relatives, the modern man also is worried about the pathetic picture of this world where everything seems to be futile. Here, "the eyes suck and sip the tears", the nerves consume the blood, bones eat up the marrow and the "skin preys on the bones" – even the roots, which is the symbol of new life, turns carnivore (all consuming and destructive) with no flowers and buds. Without realising the dangers of the situation, men still go on doing the age-old methods like having the patterned floor (a *kalam*), divine chanting (*manthras*) and ghee lamps trying to bring back God and spirituality on to this earth to save the humanity.

Paniker also talks about the various religions which are expected to lead men to righteousness – how they have become dangerous. Churches, temples and mosques have become centres to turn men blind. The religions carefully destroy the vision of the poor human beings and are substituted with 'the lenses of faith', that is, they destroy the self-awareness of the individual. The poet rather authentically pictures the situation and it is applicable even today. Here takes birth a 'blind fanatic chanting the gospel'. The poet uses the

images from Christian religion to exemplify the situation as the Christian images are more universal and familiar. The religious leaders are like doctors and the nuns as sisters (nurses). Paniker seeks the help of images from the medical field and he uses them with utmost care and perfection to explain the condition. The 'religious doctors' have the same precision of a surgeon as they cut off one's original essence and fill that void with superstitions in the operation (may be the sermon). The religious leaders are expected to free others from sins but here, they themselves become the sinners. The prayer of the sinners to Virgin Mary goes unanswered.

By connecting the series of emotions of dawn, day, dusk and night to the different stages of life, the poet presents the tangible figures of childhood, adolescence, motherhood and old age. The infants are like "the sun at break of day" with golden rays, the adults or the youngsters like the dusk, the mothers like noon with "the strength and purity of their passion of maternity" and finally the old women "like sombre clouds of darkness that spread over the earth at midnight". On this earth, everyone has a soul – a passionate soul that announces its strong presence. The poet is confused why people fail to realise this charisma and still complain about the grief from which they suffer. Even death is afraid of the frantic vigour of the soul. However, men still go for the sermons and religions where the soul "tremble, dwindle and waste".

The second section of *Kurukshetra* echoes the thoughts in 'A Game of Chess', the second segment of *The Wasteland*. Vyasa, the sage had foreseen the quandary of humanity much early and the very thought of it makes the poet feel distressed. In this portion, we get to know about the presence of another person, a friend of the poet or a reader who shares the same feelings and fears of the poet. The section is devoted to this reader. This elevates the poem to another dimension where one can trace the elements of 'Reader Response' criticism as the reader or the friend of the poet becomes the representative of all the human beings. He is there for us with the same angst that each one of us possesses. The poet witnesses a civilisation closing its eyes by putting fire to the forests erasing even "the last traces of the dark blue clouds" – that is, wiping away even the last chance to survive or even get the rain. Naturally, his soul wilts seeing all these because no one is interested in reviving the forests. He urges the reader to look into this matter. The dense forests have a major role to play in bringing down the showers thus making the ground (the earth) fertile. The destruction of nature leads to the absence of rain making the land dry and infertile. In this barren land, we people are caught in a tangle losing all the values and thus leading to a spiritual inanition/hollowness. Paniker is more concerned about the tragedy of the infancy and childhood as they are the sufferers for our deeds – the coming/next generation.

Even the dreams have lost the route and we wait for the mercy of time and space, which is too tricky for us. We carry the burden of the disturbing visions and memories. We cover them with a shroud and our cradle becomes almost like a pyre with red and yellow flames. Still the memories toss and turn like children in sleep causing disturbance to the minds. Here, the poet employs apt images to convey the soreness of humanity. They do not have any pleasant memories of this world but still they wish to cover up these things. Even at that time, it does not allow the people to sleep peacefully as it always causes disturbance to them. The children have lost the lullaby, which was expected to take them to life.

In the next part, the poet depicts the picture of the earth which is yearning for a shower. The tall palm trees stretch the hands against the blue sky expecting the rains but nothing happens. The poet skilfully paints the pathetic picture of the Mother Earth dying for the touch of monsoon (the same theme is echoed in *The Wasteland* and Bharathan's Malayalam movie *Vysali*).

And the tall palm trees  
stretch their skeletal fingers athwart the  
blue and glassy air  
to plunder and pocket the blue of the skies. (Section – II)

A thirst is burning inside the mind of the poet and also all other human beings. The extremely hot sun is boiling the water in the vexed lake but still the rain fails to make its presence known. The humidity is soaring. The thirst of the poet is laid deep in the mysteries of the universe. Science says that all these planets are created of a pressure that got intense within a small atom and the same pressure and tension gets into the minds of the human beings creating endless troubles.

The melody simmering in the veins  
reflects the pattern of the world  
arising from the clash and clasp  
of Being and Becoming. (Section – II)

This disturbance created by constant pressures leads the humanity to numerous questions about his very existence and also the identity. Here, the poet's soul too rages like the star suffering from various agonies. The poet wishes if the reader could empathise with him.

Then he once again walks back to the past, the golden days when they spend their childhood in complete enthusiasm and happiness. He asks the flower, which was once the inspiration for the poet, now carries 'fevered look'. The lines run parallel to the 'Fallen Flower' by Kumaranasan. Even the singer of his dreams has drooped and bears a withered look. The poet tries to remind his friend about their childhood days "the time of your ample innocence" (*Ode on Intimations of Immortality*). But now the time has changed the main stage is occupied by the inferiors and they hold the show. We are filled with sorrow and poet is quite anxious to know whether his friend is also on the side of the 'groundlings' who have nothing other than a scornful laughter.

In such a situation, people lose their ability to judge things properly and they go for quick solutions. Such people go in search of philosophers and astrologers with thousands of questions. The wily tricksters by turning the 'vedantic wheel' suggest absurd solutions making the life of the innocent more miserable. So, for an unborn child, even the womb of its mother which protects him cannot imagine or predict what all events are awaiting him outside in this devious world.

The poet notices that the sky and earth have a mutual attraction. He portrays the sighs of the earth like soft breezes diluting themselves into the dewdrops of moonlight. Thus, fragrant buds are born – "the earth sighs and the buds burst open". The universe is both a bridal chamber and a labour room. The poet succeeds in waking up the fresh dreams which lay asleep within the reader and raising his heart to an untold loftiness. In following lines, the poet presents the agony of a woman who is denied of true love. The woman is trapped inside a room and behind the window covered with a curtain. Inside the room, she is perplexed as a shadow of her dreams, despairs and longings. Blood – red roses are blooming but without any destination. Even the stars who remain strangers in the distances are trying to embrace each other. The real offence is to avert one's desires. Natural thirsts are blocked in the nunneries, which resembles a prison with its high walls and watch persons, "inside the convent walls / that so well serve like a fortress". The same happens in the family too, "in the bosom of the family / which circumscribes like a cage". The infants of the new era go unborn.

They “bloom and fade in succession” and the poet feels sorry for those infants who perish before flourishing. The Keatsian poem ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ also expresses a similar theme. In such a disastrous world, occasionally a meteor flashes and then vanishes but the world remains the same and it continues the movement.

The third section is an extension of the second where the same ideas reverberate. It begins with certain questions from the poet’s part. He enquires about the existence of man on this earth. The earth is filled with nothing but “skeletal crags” and the query is why we are born on this valueless earth where duty and morality are dead long ago. It is on this earth that we people have travelled and that too in this “mortal guise”. The poet examines the concept of *Dharma* through the epics – *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In this world, *dharma* itself becomes a dilemma. What is right and what is wrong becomes the most important question. In *Ramayana*, Valmiki writes about Rama abandoning Seeta, killing Ravana causing bloodshed in Lanka, making a consensus with Sugriva, accepting the moral solitude of Vibhishana and seeking the advice of Vasishtha but at the end of the whole act, did Rama gain anything? The question broods in the mind of the poet. Even the dialectics of the ‘renowned Chanakya’ fails to give an impetus to this world. The poet says that even Chanakya’s tactics burn to ash like worthless grass. Soon, the poet becomes the representative of humanity at this juncture who is struggling in his quest for justice.

On the field of battle  
crying for justice  
with streaming eyes  
Arjuna heard the Gita  
but that Arjuna I am not. (Section – III)

The human mind is like the battleground of Kurukshetra and we all are in a perplexed situation akin to that of Arjuna. It was there, he listened to the Gita but the poet refuses to be that Arjuna as he is the modern man. Everything one sees and hears is vague. Here, most of us become sinners without our knowledge like the great Athenian son Oedipus, who unknowingly greeted sin when he killed his father and married his mother. The myth of Oedipus taken from the Greek mythology adds more charm to the poem. Suddenly Paniker returns to the Indian concept when he talks about Vyasa having a son named Vidura, as a result of his relationship with a low-caste woman. The reference here is to the great Indian epic *Mahabharatha*. When people committed sins, the eyes of the God remained tight shut. The Gods have gone for a sleep. The poet becomes the representative of all the sinners in the entire human race.

The fourth section begins by addressing the disturbing memories that are haunting the poet. He says,

Fade and begone  
you, memories of cast iron,  
withered dugs of a battered dame!

The poet feels that the memories have lost its sheen but there remains some which always remain young. It is like cast iron always fresh as youth and is inflicting pain upon the humanity. Such memories are the ugly wrinkles of a “battered dame” (an old woman) not willing to leave. The darkness and shadow are like two pieces of the same door. When the door remains shut, it is night and when it opens, it is day. But both of them will come together one day and then, the movement of time will come to a stand-still causing eternal darkness (indicates death). At that moment, even the dreams “too shall fade”.

The poet once again returns to the haunting memories of his childhood when everything was enveloped in an eternal bliss. The theme of the famous poem, *Ode to the Intimations of Immortality* once again runs parallel to *Kurukshetram* here. Like Wordsworth, Paniker too imagines the bygone days of infancy and its perpetual pleasures.

Like a wave of rapture  
like a single faith for this vexed world,  
in that brief season of my innocence.....

The poet had absolute freedom those days as he was under the guardianship of the star – always gazing upon him. The star who has been a witness and friend to the poet now turns into a lover of his. The star has become the symbol of love. They had all the luxuries in life and they lived a life of heaven on earth. But now, they “sit in the porch of oblivion and grin” (forgetfulness) neglected and avoided. The good days have left and the smile is no more. What remains is ugliness. The poet asks:

Can the Banks of this world  
yield a better return?

The next part of the poem suggests the futility of political theories, which come in a disguise to save humanity from the loss of values. Various political philosophies promised an eternal bliss for the civilization but they have eluded from the world leaving behind a “broken dream”. The philosophers or the apostles of the ultimate truth (as they say) “grin and hoot” but without any use. Their meetings are absurd many a times and they come to a “ludicrous close”. The poet asks, is there any political philosophy that supports the human beings; that can understand the problems of humanity and which knows the essence of human life? The hope of regaining a paradise lie shattered around us. They “grow dim, dwindle and die”. The poet enquires whether anything is left for the humanity to look forward. The only support is one’s own hand, acting according to one’s conscience, taking the path of righteousness and trusting oneself (like the philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson – the concept of ‘Self-Reliance’). Keeping this notion in mind, we can move ahead with great excitement to shape and remould the world around us according to our will. Paniker’s *Gothrayanam* also presents the fulfilment of one’s journey defeating all contradictions.

Let us, then,  
move into a new frenzy  
and wage an endless fight  
to shape and remould  
the world around  
nearer to the heart’s desire.  
Our own hands must trace the route ahead  
our own eyes decide where the feet should go.

On our journey ahead, we may face a thousand questions like “What is first? What is second? What is ahead? What is behind?” and many more. This will give us two options - shall we fight and try to find a solution to all these questions or just simply enjoy all the opulence the living moment (the current life) promises. As human beings, we have to be conscious and cautious to understand that we created this life and hence we should not allow it to be taken or snatched away by time. We have to protect the fruits of our deeds.



The world is our foster mother and it invites her sons with “thousand bonds of delight” (umpteenth number of pleasures). Later, one day, all of us are forced to welcome ‘death’. But at that time, we will be thankful for the passion we had for life that “taught us to love one another”. As the conflicts between right and wrong continues, we will enter into the world of oblivion.

The poet wishes the birth of a new world. The arrival of a new philosophy or a new ‘Lord Krishna’ or ‘Christ’ when the Sun, the supreme ruler sends down its strong rays down into the depth of the “womb of the sea”. As a result, a new world is born – a globe with full of joy and virtue. So after a long breach of sterility, the world has once again become fertile with almost everything blossoming anew.

When,  
out of the white seeds of fire  
hurled down by the sovereign sun  
and plunged into the womb of the sea  
days are born anew;

The power of the flames will fall into the depths and from the safe womb, a new era will take birth. The poet sarcastically corrects the earlier statement “The womb that breeds them.... (Section II) into a totally positive proclamation.

The time will change and the dynamic continuity for life is restored (no more barrenness). The future vision of a creature is a blend of beauty and terror (as in ‘The Second Coming’ by W.B. Yeats – “a terrible beauty is born”). Unlike the legendary Oedipus, let us refrain from being sinners watching the whole affairs just as “wayfarers”. Then, the ‘Life’ will become a dream woven or created by time like an artist who immortalises time through his works.

The concluding section is once again addressed to the ‘star’. In this world of uncertainty (the place that permits us to stay and die), our life is too short. The ‘star’ which came with us also shall leave when our life comes to a close. Here, the poet tries to find the meaning of life. He says that, after all, what we gain from this life is a few moments to be remembered – the time that we spent together with mutual trust and comradeship and the happiness derived out of it.

The time we spent  
in friendly camaraderie  
is the sum of happiness  
gained; this much I know;  
this, after all, is all that life means.

The poet greets the ‘star’ because he finds it as the essence of life, the source of everything, from where affection and love arises. It is the ‘star’ that taught the poet many things, that showed many dreams and made him speak a new language, the language of love. He asks the ‘star’ to burn high in the heavens, so he can get inspired always. The guidance from the heaven and the “blood” dripping from the poet (a union of soul and body) uniting can shock the world and awaken it to a new life – an attempt to embrace the essence of beauty. The whole poem is created out of that pleasure – the happiness of that union. The fusion adds a new rhythm to life, and with this force, a new joy is created. The rhythm of life later will sound like the sea leaping across time and space. The poet hopes that, may the world listen to the song of love and peace. The divine seed of my thought had fallen into you and as a result of that fusion, virtuous children shall once

again walk on this earth (take birth) spreading sweetness and light, spreading the message of a 'new-born world' filled with happiness.

Thus we break the sterility of earth with the roots breaking the shells. Here, the poet suggests that life and fertility is slowly making a return to this world. The message of love and compassion will initiate the buds to blossom, then to fruit and later to seed.

...the message of my eyes  
and the compassion of your rays unite,  
and your love buds into blossom, into fruit into seed.

The dead roots will sprout by the warmth of the soil. The fusion of 'prakrithi' (nature) and 'purusha' (man) can result in a new spring on this earth.

At this phase, the poet identifies himself with Gandhi. When the entire world stood silent suffering from nightmares, when the land got traumatized (due to communal clashes), it was me who mediated at Wardha, who wandered through the streets of Noakhali spreading the message of love. The various philosophical schools lay paralysed; they might dazzle the eyes of the onlookers with their speculations but are far from finding a solution to all the problems of the world.

Schools of speculation dazzle the eye;  
they cannot trap the bird in the air.

The cacophony of all these philosophies is polluting the atmosphere. The people stay and watch silently. The poet says that the time has come to act, to have an awareness to understand the problems of the world and to find the solutions to it. For this, we need not sit under the Bodhi tree to achieve enlightenment like Buddha. If we can live for a little time with the real essence of humanity, with our soul illumined, there is no need to repeat the story of Jesus Christ.

If the soul illumined,  
who has to speak  
of the Mount Calvary?  
If indeed for a rare moment  
we could all just human be.....  
We could redeem, take a new birth as virtuous men for achieving a new world.....

### **An Epilogue**

Satchidanandan writes, "Ayyappa Paniker is one of the pioneers of that transition of poetic sensibility, which began in the early fifties in almost all the Indian languages: a transition that consisted primarily in a realistic revolt against senile romanticism on one side and mechanical progressivism on the other. He has remained alive to the variety of forms and patterns of poetry that range from short confessional fragments, hymns, lullabies and epitaphs to long revealing sequences, dramatic monologues and classical ballads. Paniker has also been a bold innovator of metrical designs. Besides bringing back to Malayalam poetry the glamour and the music of the Sanskrit, Dravidian and folk metres, he has experimented with metrical collages, rhyme-less verse with irregular rhythms and stylised as well as sinuous, forthright prose".

His poems are with a definitive thematic and idiomatic significance. As Satchidanandan observes, “the first section of the poem introduces the ontological anguish shared by Arjuna and Abraham alike and inherited by the alienated modern man in his Hamlet-like trepidations. The second part points to the futility of philosophical systems invalidated by the burning reality of existence. The third contrasts the phenomena of experience with the archetypes of imagination and rejects conventional moral standards as stale and unrealistic. The fourth expresses a kind of metaphysical surrender to the illusion of existence of which we are mere observers. The concluding fifth section rejects even the solace of mystery; the tension-fraught lyrical ego finds its final comfort only in the assertion of the authenticity of the self-contained individual after the Yeatsian fashion”. The poem is not opening the path of sorrows but an attempt to find for new ways to restore passion and happiness in the world. Clifford Endres writes, “The victory of *Kurukshetram* is a fulfillment earned on the twofold battleground of self and poetry. Proceeding from *The Waste Land* on one hand and the cauldron of Indian history on the other, it stands as commentary and beacon. *Kurukshetram*’s call to action on every level, anchored in its powerful and intuitive disclosure of Vedic meaning, stands in pointed contrast to *The Waste Land*’s desperate hope for a *deus ex machine*...that will bring salvation from outside. In the final analysis Eliot’s is a static poem, whereas Paniker’s is dynamic. It energizes us by insisting on the transformation of the waste land...we can see then, finally, how Ayyappa Paniker’s long poem became the vanguard of a revolution in Malayalam literature.

#### Works Cited

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