

“AyirathOn”

(In Tamil by Prof. K. N. Sundaresan)

Translation: S. Naranan

“THOUSANDER”

As we celebrate counting a thousand moons
From your happy day of birth,
We see your power and vigour undiminished,
Your long life as the thousand-pillared temple *mandapam*.
We applaud you as a “thousander”. (1)

We see in the painting yonder,
The golden lotus with thousand petals
Enshrine the venerated goddess Saraswathi.
Do only a thousand delicate petals adorn the golden Goddess ? (2)

We see the swaying branches of the majestic trees
Called the “thousand-fruiter” coconut trees.
As the trees bear bunches of coconuts every month
Do they cease yielding after one thousand nuts? (3)

We see the sprawling street drenched in light
By the thousand-rayed Sungod.
For the rays to illumine the myriad homes
Will one thousand rays suffice? (4)

Like the lotus, the Sun and coconut trees
May your glorious life be long amidst us;
Not a slave to the mindless moon-count,
Prosper with unwavering health and cheer. (5)

May your life be a quest for knowledge
With God's blessing, free of bodily ills. (6)

As your numerous kin faithfully stand guard
And your spouse delights in your happiness
Protect yourself against any harm
Like the thousand-legged millipede
Lying curled up in the attic. (7)

As one thousand moons brighten your face
May your life shine forth with thousands of lights. (8)

Chennai
22 December 2010.

Some remarks about “*Ayirathon*” (K.N. Sundaresan).

First I had intended to write the gist of the poem in prose, but as I started writing, I was bold enough to attempt free verse. This is my maiden effort at translation, but I enjoyed it, because of the beautiful concepts in the original. I translated ‘*AyirathOn*’ literally as “thousander” – a word not to be found in the dictionary. I was skeptical of this poetical licence, until I realized that my father would have approved of it! “Thousander”- a noun - sounds also like an adjective (comparative degree) suggesting “more than a thousand”, which captures the main theme of the poem. Thousander is not too radical a word coinage, when compared with the common words fiver, sixer and tenner.

I am tempted to add a few remarks about the theme of the poem. In practical terms “thousand” means ‘many’. Thousand is a number, a marker – here biological and astronomical – but no more. Author cites three instances of the attribute ‘thousand’ in common parlance: the lotus, the *AyiramgAchi* coconut tree and the Sun. Lotus is the seat of the Goddess Saraswathi symbolizing knowledge, the *AyiramgAchi* is a metaphor for long and productive life and the Sun is the supreme ‘giver of light’, in this case giving enlightenment. Quest for knowledge and good health are emphasized. The poem starts with a comparison of life to the strong thousand-pillared mandapam and ends, somewhat in an anticlimax, with a reference to the vulnerable thousand-legged millipede. From lofty idealism to earthy pragmatism, the poem covers all phases of human life, a common feature in many poems by K.N.Sundaresan (KNS). KNS was averse to superstition and rituals and this is reflected in ‘not a slave to the mindless moon-count’.

The original Tamil poem was written by my father KNS around mid 1960’s to felicitate Sri S. Vaidyanatha ayyar, father-in-law of his daughter India Devi, when he completed 80 years. However its universal theme makes it apt for all thousands. It was published in one of his early books, called “*Minnitru*”. My sister Selvi discovered it recently and decided to include it in the album of felicitations prepared for my 80th birthday. The task was completed in record time with help from brothers Seenu and Rangan, Professor George Hart and my daughter Gomathy. Imagine a son receiving felicitations from his (late) father for his 80th birthday! I am overwhelmed and deeply touched by all the effort put in by so many for including this gem of a poem in the album.

S. Naranan

Chennai, 23 December 2010.