

(1)

ELEPHANT'S CURL

(Translation from one Malayalam poem
"AANVAALU" by Shri. N.V.Krishna warrier)

To see the tusker that arrived
at temple on the Tenth Morn *
Kittan of Appat
and Kuttan of Koppat
had entered into the temple precinct.
Me too in company.

Tearing coconut leaves,
dusting on limbs and sides,
coiling up the trunk,
stuffing them lustily
into the mounth that shaped
like a flower of plantain,
chewing and swallowing,
screwing up eyes and
fanning ears gracefully
the pachyderm was basking
happily in the morning sun.
Kittan of Appat,
Kuttan of Koppat;
both were overjoyed.
Me too.

Of the four mahouts
Nannu the chief
after placing hook and stick
on the foot of foreleg
of the young tusker
squatted at a distance

* Tenth day from Vernal Equinox

on dusty ground under shade,
 unfolded the arecanut leaf packet
 and scraped scales off arecanut.
 He was about to chew pan leisurely.

Kittan asked to mahout Nanu:

" Give me one elephant's curl, please! "

" Me too ! " Kuttan asked.

" Me too ! " I joined.

Mahout Nanu did ask Kuttan:

"Are you not, lad,

master of Appat ?

Will you please bring soon

two sheafs of tobacco,

the very smell will cause to sneeze,

kept wrapped in palm leaf mat

inside the personal box of your father ?"

No sooner he heard

than Kuttan lept, fled to Appat.

Then with a friendly gesture

mahaout Nanu turned to Kuttan:

" I'll give one curl

to the Menon of Koppat too.

Will you please go home now,

slip into the kitchen

get from your mother

a 'kindi^{*}ful of buttermilk ?

some salt and green chillies

wrapped in packets

have also to bring, lad.

I'll add the required quantity

to the buttermilk in kindi"

Not heard complete

Kuttan sprang up

fled in haste to Koppat.

* Kindi - Bell metal tumbler with spout used in Kerala

When both were gone
I stood sad and silent
in front of the tusker
that was basking
in the morning sun and
relishing the chew of palm leaves.
No memory of father,
mother never chews pan,
no milch cow at home
nor boils rice for gruel often.
Along with Kittan and Kuttan
with what I can
entertain the mahout ?
Tied around their arms
the long curls plucked out
from the tusker's tail
when Kittan of Appat
and Kuttan of Koppat
will loiter in the temple precinct,
me without even a ring
made of elephant's tail curl
I broke into sobs.
The mahout raised his head
who was applying lime to betel leaf,
looked at my face intently,
rose to his feet,
came towards me,
placed hand upon my head
and spoke thus gently:
" Aren't you the son
of Kallyani, the sweeper
at the residence of Namboodiri ?

Kiddy, why your eyes
 are filled with tears ?
 what your desire
 is elephant's curl only:
 that I'll give you, lad."
 Mahout patted the tusker,
 caught its tail,
 held the end bent up,
 selected one good curl,
 severed it with teeth,
 tied a knot using the ends
 made a bracelet fine,
 caught my hand,
 inserted it to my wrist
 and patted my cheeks.
 Kittan came running
 with two sheafs of tobacco.
 Kuttan came rushing
 with buttermilk in Kindi
 and stood behind in silence,
 I held up my hand,
 boastfully displayed my trophy.
 Eyes wide opened with wonder
 also hearts burning with jealousy
 Kittan and Kuttan will
 talk themselves thus, I know:
 " Son of the wench
 who picks elephant's dung;
 is he in scarcity
 to have ^{any} elephant's curl ?"

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