**Foreward**

**Marcie Bower**

When I first read this collection of poems from Muththamizh Virumbi, translated into English by Dr. C. Rajeswari, I was immediately pulled into the world the poet was creating with his words. This is not an easy feat, when reading poetry that was originally written in another tongue. I found myself returning again and again to certain poems, and each time unlocking a new, deeper meaning, or leaving with yet another question I wanted answered.

Muththamizh Virumbi's eloquence and skill is apparent in these poems, as themes of love, mental health, communication, and pressing social and environmental issues rise off the pages and pull the reader further into the text – that at first appears simple and yet carries such impact with each choice of words.

The poems in this collection are both uniquely Tamil and also universal. Muththamizh Virumbi uses quintessential Tamil imagery – kolams and rangolis, paddy fields and drying rivers, Neem fruits and the Marutham tree, glass bangles and traditional festivals – as the backdrop for exploration of themes that resonate across cultures and countries. One passage that particularly transported me back to Tamil Nadu reads,

*Ants move in the ‘kolam’*

*Designed by the rice flour.*

*In the yesterday’s kolam*

*You designed*

*With stone powder,*

*No chillness at all.*

*(From 16. Love Bound Legs)*

It is against imagery like this that Muththamizh Virumbi is able to delve into the universal themes at the heart of this collection.

He also manages to make his poems both timely and timeless – at once referencing both traditional rituals and modern technology by name. (“*The main gates*, *Of the unrespectful*, *Are, Your ears and whatsapp.” From 41. The unrespected.)*This places them squarely in the time of the modern reader but also allows one to see past the confines of time. He explores time in the way we look at and understand children and childhood. As a parent, these poems reflecting on play times, childhood, and that innocence, particularly resonated with me.

*The child, that finds*

*The tools and time*

*Are the ones*

*Blessed*

*With everything*

*(From 14. The play materials)*

Perhaps the most universal theme any poet can discuss is the theme of love. In this collection, Muththamizh Virumbi frankly explores the trials and tribulations of such a complicated emotion, by writing opening and honestly about connection and communication, but also loneliness and rejection – the other side of love.

*Are you really*

*Not going to speak to me?*

*What does that extend to?*

*Is it day*

*or night*

*Or the distance.*

*(from 51. Day or Night)*

*A Lady at the Little Gate* also takes on sometimes difficult social and environmental issues – in these pages you will find a women’s descent into mental illness following the death of an alcoholic spouse (*3. A lady at the little gate*) and a dried up riverbed due to failure of the monsoons in a changing climate and changing time (making numerous references to the changing Kaveri riverbed.)

I respect Muththamizh Virumbi in his work on this collection, as he clearly wrestles with his – the poet’s – own place in the telling of these poems and stories. The poet is at once romantic, and lost, and questioning, and then found. He has put his heart out there on the page.

One may wonder why this collection of Tamil poems is relevant to an English reader, but once you begin reading you will not wonder any longer. So many of the themes discussed are universal, so that you do not need to have ever experienced the feel of a Tamil Nadu morning to understand the meaning behind the poems in *A Lady at the Little Gate.* That said, if you have experienced the daily sights and sounds of Southern India, these poems may bring you back there in a heartbeat.

For me personally, this was the best part of diving into *A Lady at the Little Gate.* I am a native of the United States of America, and my studies in college brought me to study in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, and then to work in Madurai following my college graduation. Now with a career in the United States, I do not get to travel back to Tamil Nadu as frequently as I wish. I find Tamil culture to be so rich, and the mundane, everyday references to daily Tamil life contained within these poems was like food for my India-missing soul.

Since I no longer live in South India or study Tamil, I would in no way be able to read the poems contained in this collection had they not been expertly translated into English. Dr. C. Rajeswari is a master of her craft of translation, studying each and every word so that the translation is true to the original text in form, function, meaning, and feel. She fully immerses herself in the poems in order to bring them to such a large audience – the English-speaking world. Dr. C. Rajeswari is passionate about Tamil, literature, and sharing Tamil culture and language with the world. Her translation of these poems is a gift.

Since my first reading of *A Lady at the Little Gate*, I have felt a need to return again and again to some of the poems therein. This particular passage always sticks with me:

*The darkness of this time*

*Like the waterfalls of the flowers*

*Encircles with*

*The rise of the bumbling sounds*

*And tries*

*To translate the light.*

*(From 10. This Time)*

Dr. C. Rajeswari once told me that poems demand rereading, as they are a “treasure hunt.” Enjoy this journey.

Marcie Bower

Boston, MA

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