

**Question of Human Suffering in Ethnic Wars in
R. Cheran's *I Could Forget All This...***

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R. Cheran, born in Alaveddy in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, is a poet activist. He composed an anthology *Maranathul vaalvom* (Amidst death, we live) in 1985. His recent work entitled *Miindum kadalukku* (Once more, to the sea), was published in 2004. He is currently a professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Windsor, Canada. He writes about the tribulations in his native soil – Srilanka. The cold war existing between two communities are highlighted in his poems. His writings are in Tamil and one such heart-touching poem in Tamil is translated by Lakshmi Holmström in English is *I COULD FORGET ALL THIS...*

It is a literal translation of a famous poem by the poet Cheran. The poem exposes the terrible events that happened in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, in 1983. Once after a group of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) killed 13 Sinhalese soldiers, a terrible attack on Tamil Families happened. Thereafter, Tamil civilians working in the tea estate were targeted. These tea workers were emigrants to Sri Lanka long back. They are distinct from Jaffna Tamils who are the native ancestors of the Island.

Cheran writes about the toils and turmoil of such a heart sweeping event. He states:

Everything can be forgotten;
this life, wretched and helpless,

But this is just an ironical connotation considering the previous lines. The eruption and the peak of violence creates trembles in the heart of the readers.

from an upturned burnt out car
a protruding thigh bone,
between the earth and the sky
fixed on a spot somewhere
a staring eye,

without an eye, within the eye socket
caked blood,

An upturned car with the thigh bone protruding between earth and sky creates a horrible picture of the situation which further reveals the intensity of the situation. Moreover, the phrase “eyes caked blood” presents a gruesome picture. Cheran writes further,

instead of black heads
blood red, split open,
six men,
escaping the fire

How the black heads turned to red ones show the unbearable blood stains. He further depicts the peak of violence in the following lines:

a piece of a sari,
losing its partner
as well as its watch
lying alone
a left hand (or arm),
from the burning house,
a cradle
unable to carry, (yet) carrying it out,
a pregnant Sinhala woman

In this description, a pregnant Sinhala pregnant woman unable to carry the load of a small kid tries to escape the burning house. He states that he could clear from his mind all these problems of arrogance.

all these,
everything can be forgotten

He asks the readers a direct question of how the people in Sri Lanka could hide the kids. He raises the question where he could get a place to cook the rice for the kids. He further asks how to forget the plucking and flinging away of my girl leaving behind the broken pots with scattered parched rice on the floor. He depicts the atrocities done to girls in the living arena:

plucked and flung away, my girl,
the broken pot,
and scattered on the ground
the parched rice,
how to forget?

He says that the community clashes have gone up to the extent of abandonment of life of young kids who even do not know what *is* war and life.

The title ironically signifies that no one could forget the cold-blooded murder of the civilians. He gives the title in a paradoxical way pronouncing the cruel behaviour and the indelible imprint on the minds of the people who witness the situation.

This poem “I could Forget all these...” is really a mind-crunching story which questions the human values and humanitarian principles at the cost of communalism. Though the politicians speak of the unity, very little solution is achieved. The moral implication he wants to highlight is really a question among the readers. Further, the readers are reminded of the problems in the ethnic clash area.

Lakshmi Holmström who has translated this piece from Tamil to English has really given the content without compromising in quality and usage of words. Further the extent of extremist activities and the suffering of the pathetic souls play a remarkable role in this translation piece. She has made use of this translation skill to exhibit the gruesome events to the whole world though the translated language, English.

Work Cited

<https://modernpoetryintranslation.com/translating-a-tamil-poem-lakshmi-holmstrom/>

Colophon

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