

**AKKITHAM ACHYUTHAN NAMBUDIRI**

**THE EPIC OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY  
“IRUPATHAM NOOTTANDINTE ITHIHASAM”**

**Translated by:  
E.M.J. VENNIYOOR**

## THE EPIC OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

When once for my fellowmen  
I shed a drop of tear,  
The hale of a thousand suns  
Arises in my soul  
When once for my fellowmen  
I expend a hearty smile,  
A full –blown moon of purest ray  
Forever floods my heart  
But all these days I knew it not,  
This ineffable Joy;  
And brooding over that heavy loss  
I weep and sob again.

### HEAVEN

Looking back upon the earth  
Where I trod these many days.  
I realize that I too had  
My days that brimmed with happiness.  
A mother's surging love still slakes  
My lips though stained with nicotine;

My prankish boisterous mates at play  
Could make me forget all thought else.  
Short indeed were days and nights  
With rounds of games to fill them out  
I woke before I felt I slept,  
And retired before the game was won.  
How grand was then the festival  
But woe is mine, the glorious sun  
That shone forth on my childhood days  
So radiantly will rise no more  
How great indeed the happiness.  
But grief is mine the full –blown moon  
That spread supernal ecstasy  
So heavenly will rise no more  
The rainbows of those bygone days.  
The rising and the setting sun,  
The hare abiding in the moon,  
The fragrance of the many blooms.  
The jasmine, rose and basil thyme  
All indeed have lost their charms,  
The thrills of joy of all those days-  
My father dwelling upon the tales

From ancient Hindu mythology  
And mother guiding my eyes to see  
The Seven Sages of sky –  
Are now but a shade of memory.

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The life that robed itself  
In garments woven of rays of light  
And decked itself in the jewellery  
Cast in rainbow stripes –  
The that raised a paradise  
Amidst the earth's rough ways,  
with gems of all the nine rays  
And flowers that shine in many hues—  
Alas ! that life has ceased to be ,  
And sorrowing over the loss.  
Mine eyes are blind, and tears surge  
And trickle down in twin channels,  
And when that stream evaporates  
From over my lips that dam its course,  
The lingering taste reminds my tongue  
How bitter is the present woe.

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## HELL

Behold how pale it turns to be,  
The rosy glow of young fancy!  
The ascending sun of knowledge dries  
The dewdrops of innocent joy  
When I came of age to realize  
That the earth is round in shape  
I could feel a fiery heat.  
Brewing in the rays of the sun.  
“I must reach the other side  
By digging, if this earth is round”.  
So said I: and the longing rose  
To fathom every phenomenon.  
But slowly did I discover  
That these too can't determine  
Of waves and stars and grains of sand  
The skies that stretch so infinite,  
Defying flight, unceasing flight,  
The grass and shrubs and vines that grow  
Despite the edge of all the knives,  
Reptiles, birds and amphibians,

The flies and four-legged animals,  
Creatures that throng the watery worlds,  
Creatures seen with naked eyes,  
And creatures that fill my breath unseen-  
I think of these, and my thoughts are sore:  
And still there are such many more  
See the ape that clammers on trees  
With forelimbs raised and leaps  
Merrily from branch to branch and on!  
What he bites is sugar-cane.  
Life as he now perceives it  
Is but a branchy fipal tree;  
And above him stands a new species-  
Man rising on two feet from the earth.

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Sad indeed is everyone  
Living his life in slavery;  
The greatest too are not exempt  
From the chains of Birth and Death.  
No one has known until this day

When this wheel of karma launched  
Its eternal spinning move  
And whether a day will it stop  
And when that will come, and why  
All this ceaseless activity.  
We go guessing like those blind men  
Who went to see the elephant.

If perchance we discover  
The drugs to vanquish death itself.  
What further progress could there be,  
Save perpetuating slavery?  
Man may rise to dominate  
The sun and all its satellites.  
And yet he wins not, for beyond  
In the infinite there would loom  
So many light years a far  
A different sun and satellites.  
Further still we go and we meet  
Different suns and different orbs,  
A million cosmic galaxies  
Making many a universe.

Man never gauged this infinite  
Nor his wildest flights of fancy;  
Ere he has but peeped into it  
He pants before the mystery.

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All is true; and yet I stood  
Marveling o'er the vast expanse  
Of a mighty phenomenon-  
The ego that fills the heart of man!  
The power of men to forget all,  
Bursting into peals of laughter  
And his universal compassion  
As he busts forth into tears  
To him the wood's a blade of grass,  
The mountain just a grain of sand,  
The water of the sea one draught,  
And the skies the span of a parasole.  
He puts to work the animals;  
The trees split up to smithereens,  
The coal that sleeps within the earth,  
The clouds that wander in the skies,  
The power that flowing streams convey,

The beaming sun, the blowing wind,  
The divine might the atoms bouse-  
He puts all these to slave for him.  
There his conquests do not stop  
His brothers too he treats as beasts

Behold the farmer, how he bends  
O'er his plough and tumbles on  
Dark and thick his shadow flits  
Across the curtains of my mind  
His sighs are like the paddy leaves  
And blood-drops in his eyes are grains,  
The day I learned the bitter truth  
That he never eats those blessed grains  
The moon above my heart's horizon  
Waned away and shone no more.

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In factories where roll demons,  
Steel monsters spitting streams of smoke,  
Workers pin their flesh upon  
The teeth of wheels that suck up blood  
From the giant's entrails issue

The finest robes of silk and wool  
But the day I learned the bitter truth  
That he who makes these lovely clothes  
Wears them never to fight the cold,  
A darksome night my life became.

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The trail of a moustache, gold goggles.  
Outer robes of diaphanous silk,  
Gold flake dangling from the lips,  
Perfumed oils daubed on curls,  
A comb in pocket, a watch on wrist,  
In hand a cigarette-case and lighter;  
Jeweled rings on ten fingers,  
Brand-new trousers and shoes to match  
Neurotic and delinquent,  
Alas! the young men grope about,  
Their minds rocked by the stars of the screen  
And the songs from the latest films,  
The purse-strings loosen, coins drop,  
In dark alleys are stripped of grace  
The vestal blossoms; and the sins  
Oppress the world with all their weight.

Another day, and the din of cars  
Drowns the cries of a new-borne babe.  
The dead girl's eyes the crows peck at,  
While mankind's new guest sucks her breasts,  
Since the day I learnt this bitter truth,  
Flames of hell have cursed through my veins.

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The evening suns sprinkle saffron dust;  
Millionaire damsels stroll in that shower.  
There where fishermen ply harpoons  
The bright-eyed ones perambulate,  
Some overlaid with ornaments,  
Gold jewels and precious stones;  
Others with none; and on the beach  
Parade the dreams of city life-  
Malabar girls in robes of white,  
Eurasians flaunting necks and knees,  
Glamour queens in velvet, voile,  
And georgette of many flowing shades,  
Flirts in reticulate brassieres  
Displaying their propped-up anatomy,  
Damsels with hair flower bedecked,

Plaited, bobbed or disheveled,  
The heroes of the silver screen  
Flit in shadows across their mind.  
In many a tongue they lisp their words,  
English, Hindi, Malayalam:  
And while they hum they dress kerchiefs  
And vanity bags against their breasts.  
Laughter like the tinkling of bells  
Smiles beshfully trickling down.  
Necks that turn in studied jerks.  
Eyes that feed on reveries  
Half- closed and black and long  
The lashes winking endlessly  
From painted faces held erect.  
Fingers tired of adjusting.  
The saree -fringes floating curls,  
Shoes that gleam in many a hue,  
And sinuous figures that sway like vines-  
Is all this gaudy restlessness  
The image of a heart at peace?  
Often is it the dark symptom  
Of the mind's dark delirium.

Into the fire of a cook one day  
Fails headlong a silly fly;  
The next morning in sewage drains  
We find a new-born baby dead.  
I wept aloud, and weeping told  
The citizen of the future thus;  
“Light is sorrow, darling child,  
In darkness is our happiness.”  
Ah, the days of infernal cast  
That showed me all these cruel sights  
How great you might for you raise  
The very devil out of man.

### HADES

Behold! along the paths of heaven  
All those bits of dark clouds  
That move so fast, now change their forms  
And turn themselves to hardened rocks.  
Let me confess, my Mother Earth  
Who suckled me so patiently,  
How I treated my brothers  
Who too were nurtured by your love.  
Aren't you to lull us sleep

Tomorrow in your womb again?  
Now I shall recount one by one  
The horror I have committed,  
Unfold to you burning heart  
Sore and swollen with stings of wasps.

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As with a knife of mortal blade  
I pierced and gouged out spitefully  
The eye of the tender coconut-  
The fruit of my humanity  
I drained it then to the last drop  
And even dried its very fount  
The gift of all my former lives-  
Life's affections, tender, sweet;  
Again I scooped and scraped it out  
All its juicy flesh and pulp;  
Its power to dream and power to weep,  
To laugh, to love, to create art,  
To respect liberty, laws obey,  
To care for parents, help the poor,  
To contemplate the power of God  
That gives the mind its balance peace

To share the woes of life's partner  
And entertain the little ones.  
Droplets of one's own living blood,  
And to learn that nothing save  
This unreserved love of life  
Is acting moving everywhere,  
Headlong the thesis comes to clash  
With the thing called anti-thesis,  
And from that springs the heaven on earth-  
The wonder known as synthesis  
Lies, deceit and robbery.  
Loot and arson espionage.  
Murder and treason-all these pass  
For service unto fellowmen!  
Feudal Lords and Mill-owners.  
Officers and quill-drivers,  
Peasants dreaming of private wealth,  
Artists, Scientists, Intellectuals,  
The whole lot who would vacillate,  
Beggars and workers not with us,  
And others such not mentioned here-  
Home sapiens they are not,

Nor animals, not even plants.  
Some the learned call bourgeois  
And the remnant petit bourgeois.  
The latter are the dirtier classes,  
Not to be trusted but feared.  
Both belong to the doomed classes,  
And we spearhead the oppressed ones.  
Never had they nor ever would have  
Brain or heart just stones they are.  
Nonsense to say that they can show  
Pity or selfless sacrifice.  
Nonsense to say their blood is red,  
Nonsense they have blood at all!  
Its water coursing in their veins,  
You may spill it; for stone no pain.  
To pity them, their kindred too,  
Is class betrayal at its worst.  
Learn the lesson might is right;  
The fittest survives says the law.

\* \* \*

In market places, offices  
In railway halts and bus stations

In schools and mills and libraries,  
At every place and all the time-  
The idealistic youth I taught  
The fledgeling doves learning to fly,  
Honest folk, my disciples,  
Into the fire they threw their lives  
From the frying pan.

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Forward flows the procession-  
Banners afloat and torches ablaze.  
The roar of slogans dominates  
The air with torrents of eloquence.  
With a pistol in my khaki shorts,  
My tigrine whiskers stiff as steel,  
And revenge aflame in pores of skin,  
I drank from foreign liquor shops  
And pranced on the whirling ways;  
Parading stubs of pan-stained teeth .  
And forcing smiles to meet the needs,  
Through all the towns I wandered  
From Payyannur to Alleppey.  
Shafts and spears in wayside bushes,

Shotguns gathered in towns at night-  
The houses burn, the godowns burst,  
A policeman is stoned to death  
The press reports on forced harvests,  
The gangs take over police posts-  
And then for me the warrant comes  
And promptly I go underground;  
The devil begins his horrid rounds,  
A shudder seizes every life.

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Bayonets gleam in police vans  
Which go for manhunt all around  
In the hills and on every beach  
Reverberate my angry shouts;  
“A puff of breath will topple down  
Those seats of justice we now have.  
Hark! for Time beckons to us-  
Open your eyes and rise up quick,  
Kill the foe and don his entrails,  
Conquer the land with country spears  
As clouds of hate in thunder burst  
And whirlwinds of terror hiss and blow,

The monsoon rains hot human blood,  
The earth shudders as at deluge,  
Guiltless old men, mothers and babes.

Hang half-dead from bayonet ends.  
As roguish elephants run amuck  
When by chance their chains go loose  
And sport and revel in lotus pools,  
The policeman grace all the camps.  
And all this while for months on end  
I lived on leaves in wild jungles  
And led the battle, while in many ears  
The groans echoed from far away.

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The wretched struggle was over now,  
The land is just a burning ghat,  
Darkness wraps my desolate heart,  
A dread silence and emptiness  
One hears the endless groans of men,  
One treads upon the human skulls.  
In kavumbai and karivellur  
There roams a soul in dread anguish-

Raising his hands he plucks his hair  
He scans the wide sky, and pants for breath;  
And what does he see - a million tears?  
Or nails upon the world's coffin?  
He faints and falls, and gradually  
The starry vision fades away.  
But what indeed are these grim shapes  
That throng around that fallen man?  
Dread hosts of the satanic tribe?  
Deformed creatures bereft of heads?  
Or eyes and ears, of arms and feet?  
In place of limbs is streaming pus-  
Or clotted blood or crawling wooms?  
Do the worms on his body crawl?  
Whence this cold, this dreadful stink?  
The flicker of lonely ray  
Rises and dies intermittently;  
And down the cheeks of the ghosts he finds  
The surging streams of human tears.  
Their sighs in waves upon his face  
Make his tigrine whiskers squirm.  
Their lips, though dumb, do quake, they sob

Like palm leaves being torn apart  
He too longs to burst into tears  
When against the darkness of his soul  
He knocks his head, but he could not  
Until the morrow brings the sun.

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### EARTH

Waking up he told the world;  
“A worse sinner has never been born!  
In woods where fear and hate prowl about,  
In caves where darkness life heaped up,  
Disconsolate, with a loaded gun  
Hidden within my soul’s dark depths,  
I wandered far and wide to see  
The garden of true equality!  
Trusting in my sacred texts-  
Like a wretched demon of hell.  
And all those great and mighty souls  
Who bask forever in that light;  
Forgive me my mortal sins  
Committed out of ignorance.  
Two thousand million fellowmen,

Who inhabit the earth's fair face,  
We shall erect the lefty tower  
Of love my comrades, here and now!  
Elephants will before it kneel,  
White ants will never undermine,  
For me, no cause for shame I crave  
The pardon of my Mother Earth  
None can ever be omniscient  
Nor omnipotent in this world;  
None in complete selfishness thrives  
And none in total happiness.  
Alas, my world the tired and sick  
Afflicted with the dire disease  
Of revenge can never procure  
The limitless power of joy.  
Before I hope to mend this world  
Let me wash of the dirt within me.  
And then shall love in freedom flourish,  
For this Beauty, Trust and Dharma.  
Out of steel that makes guns and swords  
May we make tractors and ploughs,  
And with the mighty atomic power

Wasted now to make those bombs  
May we light the lamps of love  
Along the dark blind village streets.  
Hail holy light, that issues forth  
From the egg of invincible love:  
Hail to you, Oh dove of peace  
May your wing-beats for ever rise.

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