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 Wherever translations have appeared  
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Origami Poetry Project™

**BANYAN  
 BY VATSALA © 2012**

Cover artwork by K. Ananya

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Wait...  
 I too can grow fragrant flowers—  
 flinging aside  
 pieces of glass  
 buried  
 deep in the heart.

Forgive me...  
 My poems—  
 pieces of glass  
 drenched in blood—  
 pain you.  
 Tired from a day's work,  
 reclining in an easy chair,  
 what you need  
 are lyrical poems  
 that caress your heart.

**Glass pieces and jasmine flowers**  
 (Kannadi thundugallum malligai pookallum)

What you need are  
 lullabies that ring with  
 happiness,  
 gentleness,  
 patience,  
 rejoicing in  
 this birth attained.  
 after much penance.

Translated by K. Srilata and Subashree Krishnaswamy & featured in *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry* (co-edited with Lakshmi Holmstrom and Subashree Krishnaswamy), Penguin/Viking, New Delhi, 2009.

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Truly,  
 me, with roots like nerves.

Like that monster  
 with deep roots,  
 which can uproot  
 me from home,  
 I too am a banyan.

I too am a banyan,  
 me, with my less-than hundred leaves.

Much like that giant tree,  
 I am,  
 a million leaves quivering,  
 mocking,  
 spitting rotten fruit.  
 Trust me,  
 I too am a banyan,  
 me, with my less-than hundred leaves.

I am a banyan.  
 No, don't laugh.  
 Indeed, I am a banyan.  
 Though I fit snugly into this tiny pot,  
 a banyan I am.

**Banyan** (Aalamaram)

Child, may you grow to be a banyan tree!

I shake my leaves  
 and bless her:

'Only if you place it on earth, it can grow, no?'

The little girl claps her hands and laughs:  
 'It is not big enough  
 to survive on the ground.'

Me, who stands in the shade  
 of this great tree.

I am a banyan.  
 Yet, believe me,  
 but to be a dwarf.

I've no choice  
 branches broken,  
 roots clipped,  
 Trapped in a pot,

**Why didn't I become a poet?**

(Naan yen kavignar aga villa?)

that I wondered:

why I never became a poet.

Digging deep,

I found no evidence that I wasn't one.

'd like to ask you something:

do dead poems count?

Since they dissolved while still unborn,

I couldn't give them shape.

I wasn't aware of their inception,  
 so I never recorded their time of birth.

But, with some, their time of death  
 is clear to me now.

One died when my grandmother praised  
 the neat way I folded the clothes.

A couple when I picked up the ladle,  
 sorry for my mother,

who struggled with my brothers' voracious greed  
 and my father's fastidious tongue.

A few passed away when I befriended a typewriter  
 to save up for a gold chain,  
 just so a yellow thread could be tied  
 round my neck.

Bored, are you?

I will keep it short then.

A hundred vanished as I  
 washed my babies' bottoms,

tutored my darling children,  
 saved up for my son's overseas education,

stood by my husband as he washed the feet  
 of the son-in-law from America.

If they all come to life and take shape,  
 a poet, I will be.

if not, next month,  
 after his death anniversary,  
 when my green card darlings go back home,

after my numb feelings are massaged and  
 I journey a bit into my eyes

and release my breath completely,  
 who knows,

I might become a brand new poet.

Translation by K. Srilata & Subashree Krishnaswamy featured in *Armmu Joseph, Vasanth Kannabiran, Ritu Menon and Volga, eds. Interior Decoration: Poems by 54 Women in Ten Languages* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2011