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## When the River Was Sold

**A.P.Govindankutty**

A wolf in striped uniform  
And wearing a cap,  
Holding a cash bill device,  
Stopped the white lamb  
At the shallow stream  
Of the river Nila  
On a sizzling summer afternoon.

“Pay before you drink”  
said the wolf,  
“for my company owns the river”.

Aghast,  
Looking at the wolf in awe,  
The lamb asked,  
Mustering all courage:  
“My parents tell me  
water flowing in the river  
is the mercy of God;  
How come your company owns it?”

I know you and your like  
Revel in arguments  
But if drink you must  
You have to pay first;  
That is the rule.”

With tear-filled eyes  
The lamb  
Gazed at the wolf,  
And suddenly he saw  
An apparition  
Descending from the blazing Sun,  
A tall man, clad in white,  
Swinging a walking stick,  
Right behind the wolf.

Seeing the hapless lamb in tears,  
The man swung his stick  
And dealt a blow  
Right on the wolf’s head,  
And made him fall dead.

“Drink your fill  
and go back in peace”  
Said the man to the lamb.

On complaint from the company  
Police questioned the lamb,  
Brought out picture of the man  
That caused the death of the wolf.

Those who had lived long enough  
To know and remember  
Said the man was Poet Vallathol\*  
And none else.

How could a man long dead  
Beat a wolf to death,  
The police couldn't comprehend.

But people who crossed the bridge  
On moon-lit nights  
Vouched they had seen  
The man walking on the sandy bed  
Swinging his stick  
And reciting poems.

\*Vallathol Narayana Menon, eminent Malayalam poet and founder of Kerala Kalamandalam, on the banks of River Nila in Kerala, India. River Nila was close to his heart in the same way Kshipra was to Kalidasa and Padma to Tagore.