

KAVITHALAYA

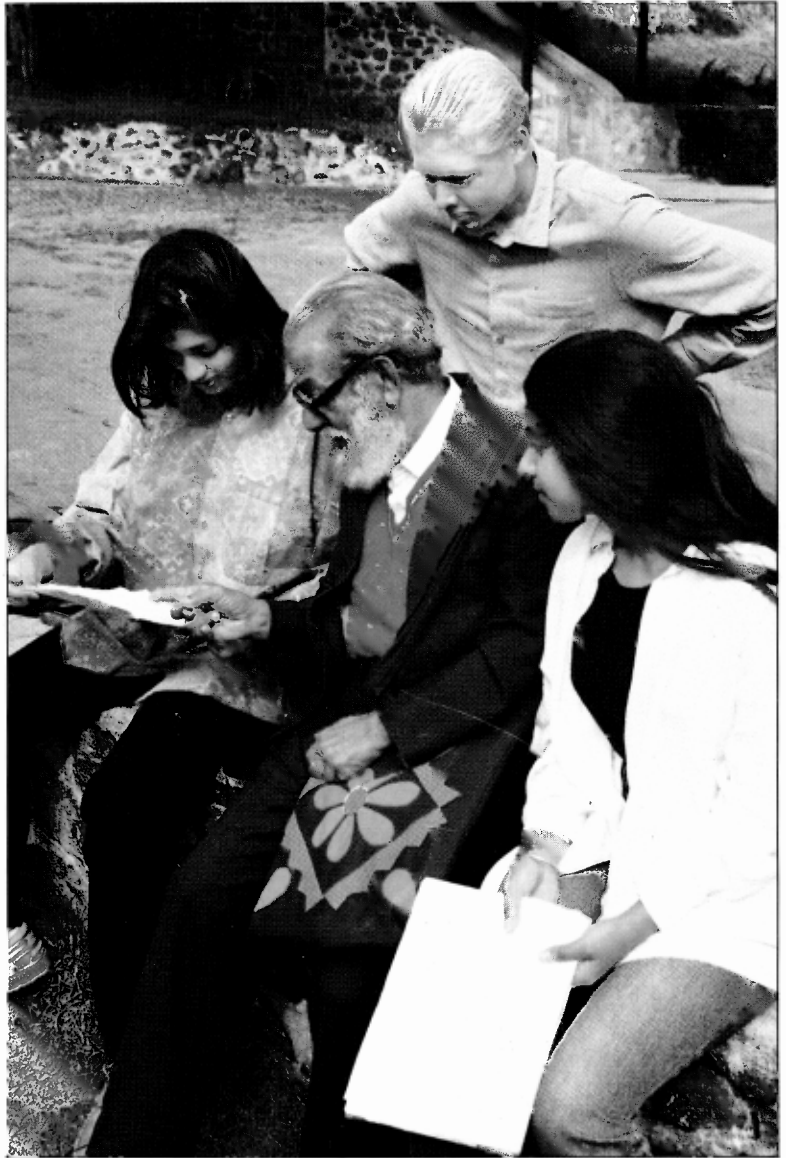
*Literary
Magazine*

Vol II
No 3
Spring
1996



A

Joint
Production
American
College,
Madurai
&
Kodaikanal
International
School



K. Ayyappa Paniker (center), visiting poet for the 1996 Kavithalaya Workshop converses with young writers at Kodaikanal.

FOREWORD

by Lindsay Coleman

THE LIGHT WAS SO STRONG, every color sprung out with extreme clarity. They were special days towards the end of summer, 1995, when the Kavithalaya Poetry Workshop was held at Swedish House in Pambarpuram, Kodaikanal. As every year Mrs Lazarus and the folks there hosted our group and served up delicious lunches to inspire us. We stayed away from the shadowy portions of the complex, taking advantage of the good weather. Our mentor Dr. Paniker too sat to interview the aspiring writers bathed in sunlight and, unlike previous years, the mist did not roll in.

Dr. Paniker encouraged differences and a variety of creative attitudes with simple poetic exercises. Our world view was challenged with opening lines we were expected to complete: "I woke up one morning and found the world . . ."

Small of stature, modest in tone Dr. Paniker often startles his audience with the strong sensuality and earthy humor of his poems. His feeling for the poetry he read set the mood: upbeat, relaxed, and sunny.

Dr. Paniker's criticisms never came across as those of an aloof instructor but more as a fellow writer. If he liked something, rather than tell you how to improve it, he joined in your enthusiasm, recognising your intent - a special gift. Apart from the interviews to discuss work formally, he was accessible, moving between groups, sitting beside you out of the blue to discuss your work. It was not so much that he was the single iron source, he was more like the loose almost invisible coordinator of our inspiration.

K. Ayyappa Paniker, PhD (Indiana University) *distinguished poet, critic and translator visited Kodaikanal from his home in Trivandram to chair the Kavithalaya Literary Workshop. Author of several research papers in Malayalam and English and six books of poetry in Malayalam he is a retired professor of English Kerala University, a Fulbright Scholar and recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award, New Delhi - he has travelled the world in his love of language and the spreading of knowledge.*

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Literary Arts Magazine

Volume II ♦ Number 3 ♦ Spring 1996

*A joint production of
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American College Madurai*

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Mark Johnson

BLISS

I yearn to go somewhere,
For you to come too,
To travel to the lake of bliss
Journey 'cross the sands of time
Rest at the oasis and drink our fill,
meet passing bedouins (with the same destination)
Letting them lead us, onward-bound.

Arriving at the garden, the grass is passionately inviting,
Together, we lay on the turf
Playing with the smurfs, entertaining them.
We eye the magic carpet,
Ride the magic carpet,
Riding him over the mountains
To reach the lake, reaching in one splash,
The universe achieving unity.

We swim and drink from the life-giver,
The water loves us and we love the water,
Wondering whether tomorrow will be the same.

The walk back was long.
The music played, but the hall was empty:
The music only for us.
Together we sang, two voices intertwined.
The music died, and then
We found ourselves outside the castle
The kiss was brief,
The bliss eternal.

G. Mariya

Hard to Remember

He saw her.
She saw him, and,
knew not what it was.

She seemed to like him,
Her eyes spoke noiselessly
When his met hers.
Deep within
She heard a voice longing;
There's no real struggle
to invent a reason.

She asked him,

"Do you know this?"

"Yes? Oh! - I am not sure -
I'll let you know tomorrow."

Waiting for dawn
She returned to her routine.
On her way back home,
She found him walking
On the other side of the road.
She caught that smile.
Stony, imposed, artificial
And dreadful.
It made her eyes dumb.

Morning came.
He gave the answer,
She forgot the question.

Poem by Ayyappa Paniker
Transl from Malayalam
by Jayaraj Pillai

PRETTY GIRL

Is she pretty?
She doesn't know.

And yet - before her
The rain dances . . .
When she rounds on her heel
The earth's circular motion
comes to a halt,

The clock becomes blind
In acute amusement,
The woods darkness
And the day's complaint
Merge.

Is she pretty?
She doesn't know.

One day
Her movement
Ceased.
The clock opened its eyes;
The earth circled counter-clockwise.
The darkness-owned forest
And the grievous day
Broke apart.

Poem by Meera
Transl from Tamil
by R. Arul Prakasham

LOVE

My kinsman who
sails the boat of criticism
across the expanse of literature

queried,

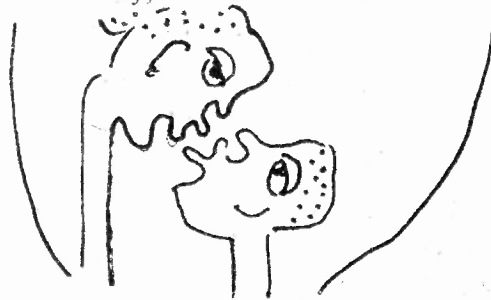
"Is Love
true or not?"

Oh. . .
. . . thank goodness
I met you
at the right time.

Otherwise
I would have given
the wrong answer.

EASY OVER

Three out of four, but I'm still happy.
All I need is a bathtub, a bar of chocolate,
and you to stay this way
And then what?
Will all disappear like a headache after
a couple of aspirin?
"Take two and call me in the morning,"
they say
Well I say, call me now and then take it easy.



DOUBLE INDEMNITY

I love the way you make me hate you,
Hate the way you make me love you.
Clench your fist and leave no breathing space
Make sure you don't let go
It just might disappear
Like a ring that slips off your finger
And falls into a mysterious sinkhole.

Hitasha Rupani

THE FLOW

It ended suddenly:
My feelings had been flowing
Like a stream after rain
Abruptly meeting with the dam.

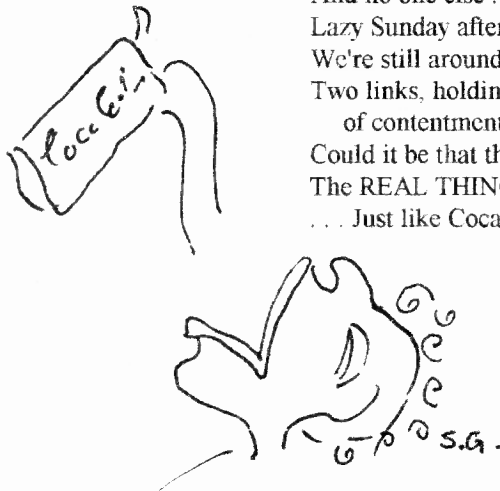
I longed to flow ahead; I fought,
Created mayhem
Like a river during storms:
Flooding . . .
Destroying . . .
But the dam did not crumble . . .
it did not weaken.

My feelings were squeezed, instead,
into the four chambers of my heart.
Alone and helpless, I cried Å
A drop of water in a raging whirlpool.
All you said was, What is love -
If you have to give it up?

Sumana Ghosh

COULD IT BE?

You and me
And no one else . . . I hope.
Lazy Sunday afternoons roll by;
We're still around
Two links, holding together a chain
of contentment.
Could it be that this is it,
The REAL THING,
. . . Just like Coca-Cola?

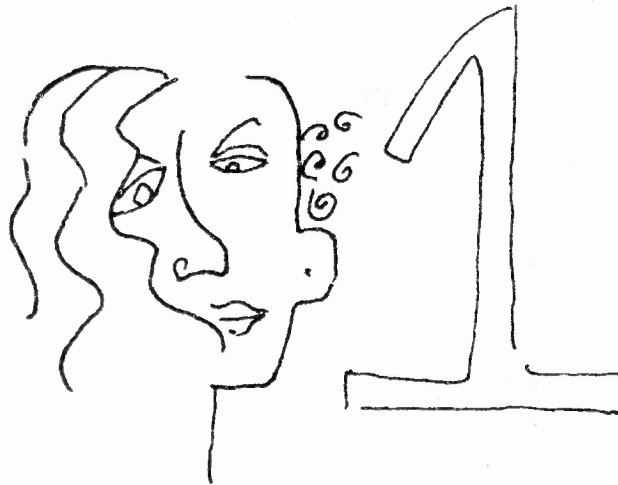


WEDLOCK

The warp and weft weave in
Blistering paint washes over
As the Gods take their shower;
Milk, honey, turmeric, red pigments . . .
Horoscopes matched, heirlooms
handed down,

The crowd gathers, nervous laughter,
Machine-crafted threads exchanged,
Metal imprisoning fingers.

Two souls meeting . . .
Are they meant to be one?



Chiki

PORTRAITS OF A MARRIAGE

(i)

We are two
in one life . . .
the radio hums,
we need no talk,
there's always the BBC.
Sometimes, I wonder
whether this silence
is intimacy
or distance:
the answer lies
in the newspaper you read
in the sweater I knit
and in the
space between us.



(ii)

Is that how I came?
(came to be, that is)
Hopes and dreams
are sometimes shattered
by the routine of familiarity.
But there is a romance
in habit - I think -
the thought of suddenly
seeing anew
the thing that I have seen
for so long

(iii)

To live in someone
day upon day
is frightening
what if we were to bump
into each other
and, finding the strange unknown
were to run away?
or, worse still
were never to feel afraid?

Chiki

TO NO ONE IN PARTICULAR

The sun blunts the earth
In the listless heat,
I'm too tired to feel anything.
All things change -
Even your not coming
Is beginning to cease to matter.

Heat beats down the slope,
My shoulders burn,
The cat licks itself,
And the days slip through.
Sometimes, nowadays
More often than not,
I catch myself not thinking of you.



DEAR DOG,

You sit with me on these steps,
black as night with canine
sharpness.
I am a little afraid of you
sniffing around me.

But now that we sit
in shared contemplation
of nothing -
have we this emptiness in
common?
- until a tree bends
and disturbs this peace?

Nevil Stephen

A BOND

On a Sabbath day, a sultry noon,
I rushed towards the station,
Ascended the steps, the weight of my luggage
Crushing my hands and shoulders.

Crows made a fortune
Out of leftovers on the rail-tracks:
Others on the wires,
Consuming, cawing, dirtying.

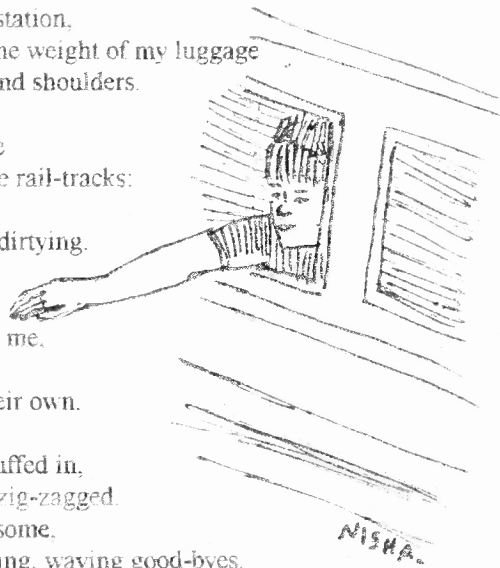
My eyes frisked over
The florid folk beside me,
Rural and frugal,
More interested in their own.

Suddenly, the train puffed in,
The animated crowd zig-zagged.
The train swallowed some,
Others waited, watching, waving good-byes.

Abruptly, the Guard whistled;
The elderly mother beside me took her lad's hands,
Their eyes overflowed,
Mingling their kisses with tears on his cheek.

The salty drops,
Progeny of their tenderness,
Were void of impurity
Not two beings, but mother-and-son:

And not just tears . . .
Oh, what a divine wordless bond.
He, with heavy eyes, boarded the train
Bearing the essence of life.



PROGRESS

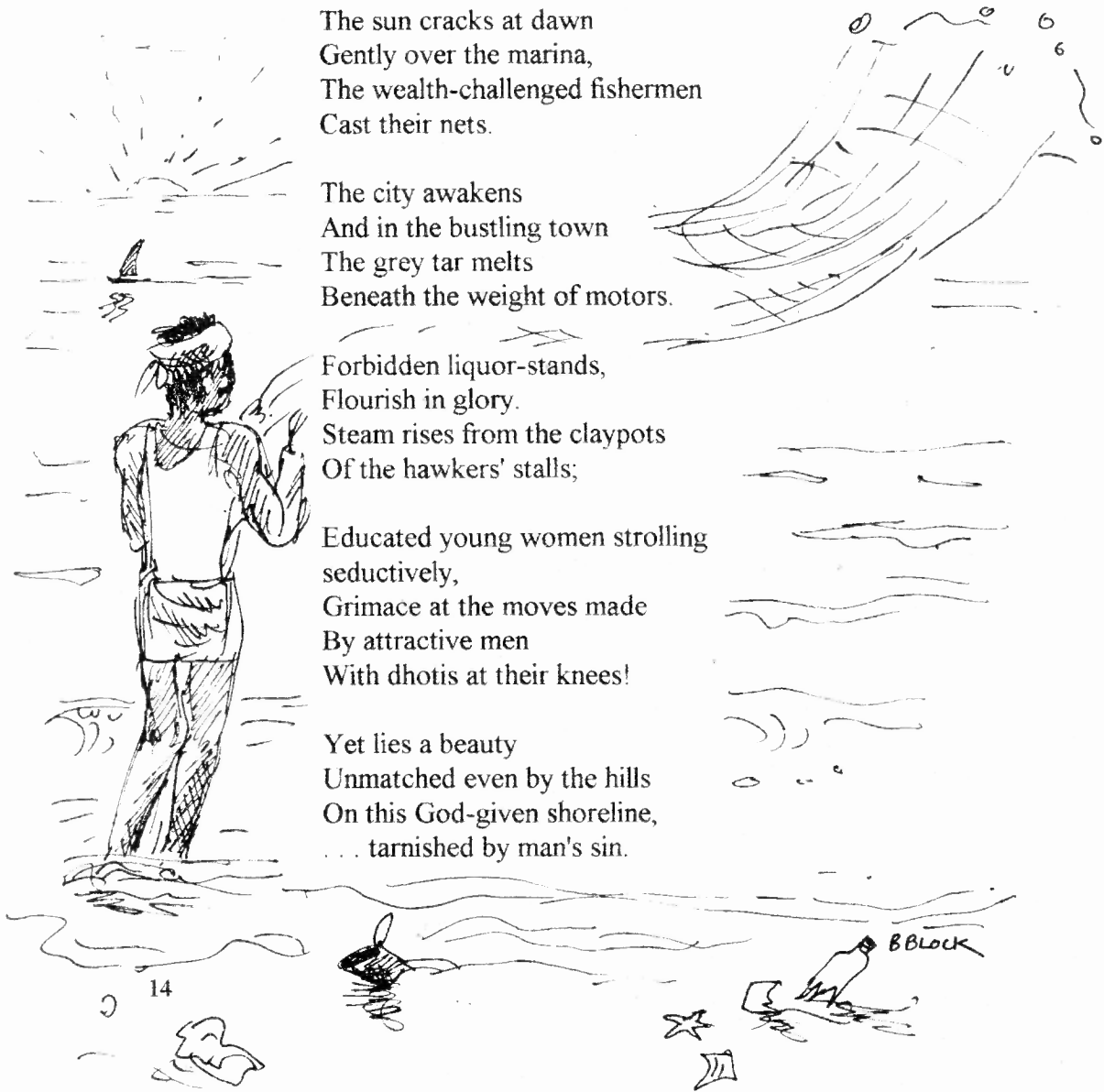
The sun cracks at dawn
Gently over the marina,
The wealth-challenged fishermen
Cast their nets.

The city awakens
And in the bustling town
The grey tar melts
Beneath the weight of motors.

Forbidden liquor-stands,
Flourish in glory.
Steam rises from the claypots
Of the hawkers' stalls;

Educated young women strolling
seductively,
Grimace at the moves made
By attractive men
With dhotis at their knees!

Yet lies a beauty
Unmatched even by the hills
On this God-given shoreline,
... tarnished by man's sin.



Shruthi Guruswamy

THE RIOTS OF MAY

There was a fight today in town
Rumors say a petty quarrel between
a Christian and a Moslem started it.
Rumor says the Moslem burned the
Christian's shop.
So the Christian hacked

off the Moslem's head.
Others joined in the fun.
Spectators gathered.



*This is my home-town.
I had to depend on rumors.*

3 hours later word spread that 15 people were dead.
And that the numbers were still rising.
The market areas were fenced off.
Shops were closed and people lay low at home.
Tribal clans were grouping and arming themselves:

*those dead people had families too.
We'll be attending their funerals in a few days.*

Emergency and trauma units were working full-time.
Even children were brought in with bullet-wounds
and lacerations.
There was a curfew, beginning at 8 o'clock.
God help anyone on the streets after dark.

(Shruthi G. cont.)

*We avoided the bloodied downtown area,
I lived in dread of seeing mutilated corpses.*

According to CNN, 30 people had died;
The BBC declared 45.
Local media said nothing - censored.
By word-of-mouth updates were circulated

*Telephones were constantly ringing
Each ring churning fear in my stomach.*

The military did nothing
They were on the government's side;
And the government was too mixed-up
to come to a consensus.
So, the citizens had to fend for themselves
They were scared {out of their wits.

*Our neighbors had guns for hunting.
I kept a kitchen knife under my bed.*

Strange, how a common fear also brings
people together.
Terror seems to have the unifying ability
that peace lacks.
It seems that all of humanity works according
to paradox.

*Local media said nothing - they were censored
in my peaceful town.*

Lindsay Coleman

WATERLOO

I HAVE JUST STREAKED through the Gate of Europe - Waterloo - Eurostar rearing up to blast to the moon, my *Timberlands* slamming down the moody tiles. Big Ben rang, the sound startling in its nearness; The network, maze process of the Underground swelling this urban[e] patch into a megatropolis by the speed stimulus of overdose-perception. Ah, but there's Whitehall - less than a mile off, reflected against the murky Thames - It does look dull: This seat of power for the All-day Empire, small like a postage stamp close up, gilded, old, impressive very exciting place to be . . . the capital of an Empire not much left, though. On my way out of Waterloo I find myself walking through so many worlds from the bowels of London to Space Age eurocentric pretensions. Suddenly, twentieth century glass arcs above me. Sunlight's trapped lights.

I chase through a patch of trapped sunlight and exit from the back of Waterloo to an Evil Empire setpiece, blank structures in faceless concrete with awful black brass-looking things supporting Glasnost, facades of off-grey . . . cascading into the Thames. I've entered a new world, maybe the second, The reality of the neighboring Victoria-Commercial Piccadilly severed by a few 60's-style tower blocks.

- D'ye know where the Nashnul Theatre is ? -

(query I a tattooed beggar.)

- Follow th' arrows, mate. Go' a quid spa' ? -

I sweat on: dozens of viaducts and twisting arrows later through all sorts of manisfestations of English culture . . .

Culture: The National Theatre (pinnacle of dramatic talent: "Birthplace" of Olivier & Burton, Bennet & Hopkins): another concrete bunker hidden behind a painted hoarding, a 60s monstrosity where people come to listen cello being played and steal postcards. . .

SHE

SHE SITS by the well, chewing paan
The red nuts stain her teeth like the hard-baked mud
catches her feet.
She squats by the fire, stirring dhal
The smoke makes her eyes water, but her children
must be fed.
She bends over the rocks, slapping clothes
Venting her frustrations on her husband's sudsy *lungi*.
Who is *she*?

SHE WAITS by the bus stop, defensive arms folded
over her chest.
Her thick, well-oiled hair swings provocatively side
to side as she paces, the jasmynes fragrant.
She hurries past the wine shop and its customers,
touching her nose-ring in unconscious reassurance.
Only loose girls sit around and talk to strange men.
She serves the evening tea, quite demure and shy.
A boy has come to see her, horoscopes
seem compatible.
Who is *she*?

SHE HOSTS the *kitty party*, smug about her beautiful house.
With a large picture of Big Ben exhibiting her
last visit to the Isles.
She Tangoes at the night club, basking in the stares
of the circle around her,
Her strapless *choli* emphasizing the ruby
choker that has been allowed to grace her neck.
She arranges the annual charity bazaar,
scanning the crowd with expert eyes from
her *chaat* stall.
After all, one must be seen with all who
matter.

Who is she? She is the Indian face.

A. Caroline J. Padma

VANITY

Folded into a bundle
Tied to a post
It yearns to be
Lifted to post's end.

People curious
Gather and await
The tug of the leader's hand
To unfurl the folds
... an explosion of flowers!

Standing high on a mast
Looking down at people
Who gaze up in anticipation,
It revels in its own transient freedom

Mocking human bondage -

Only to be soon brought down
... folded and preserved, and
Taken out
At the next annual ritual.

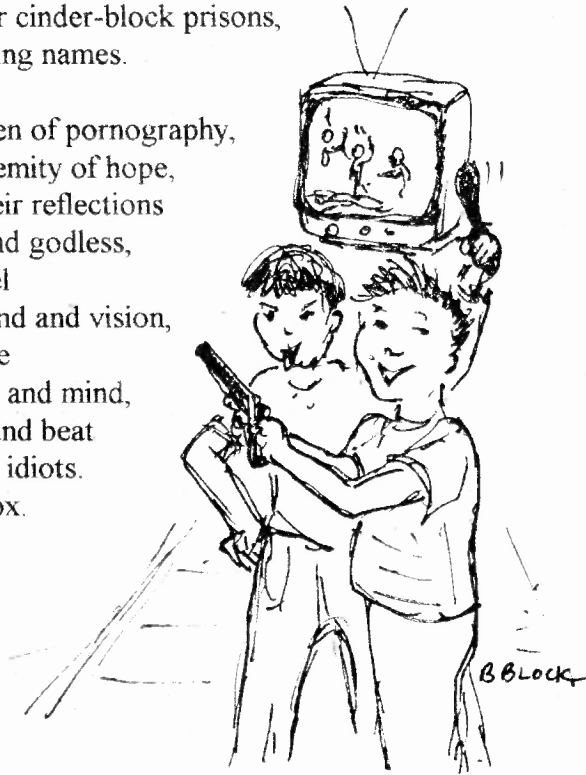
Kiran Ambwani

THE KILL-BOX

The children of pornography wail and cry
above the multi-colored violence,
crackling to blackened carbonate ashes,
tender and brittle beneath their diaphanous skin,
glowing holy in the flickering sunlight.

Frightened
little boys coddle their primary abuse,
concealed
within their cinder-block prisons,
never naming names.

The children of pornography,
in the extremity of hope,
gaze to their reflections
faithless and godless,
they shrivel
by the sound and vision,
sucked free
of marrow and mind,
bone-dry and beat
by the box idiots.
The kill-box.



Lindsay Coleman

CONCEPTION

We know what we are, not what we may be,
Within the womb of the mother we have not seen.
Light permeates through walls of flesh,
And we kick, kick, kick in frantic expectation.
But then, how comfortable this life is :
all that swimming and free blood, free food.
Time ticks away in the respiratory cycle and sadly
There is no print on these elastic walls.
Oh. Now we are no longer foetus, such transition!
And the walls bend inwards in impatient love.
I want to see you my love,
I want to know the dowry.
We concede and leave our very first home,
Willing to please the old girl for being so kind.
Out we tumble with one wordless phrase in our mind:
"Put me back, Put me back!"

A NIGHT IN SAMOA

I saw Samoa once, one dark night in Wellington,
Sheperded up steps to the beat of islander drums,
And pushed into a sea of rhythm by my impatient aunt.
All of the island was present there that night.
The elders with their legends and looks, the nubile kids,
The boys with grins as big as their guts
And the women with words in their waists,
Even a lanky tourist, trying to keep pace.
And they were all together, part of the dance,
Guided by their minds and mouths,
Calling for a far-off sun to dawn,
To bring back the islands in this colonial cove.

Danica Sullova

THE PARTITION OF MY COUNTRY, Czechoslovakia, took place on January the First, 1993. The night before, in the future Czech Republic and in Slovakia there was no cheering for the New Year, or even crowds of people in the streets.

I spent that decisive New Year's Eve in Turkey. My father was working there as a diplomat for, yes, the *former* Czechoslovakia.

Istanbul, 31 Dec, 1992.

I am sitting in the living room in Istanbul, watching absently some Turkish program on TV. My parents and sister went out to the city. The lights just came back, but I leave the candle shining.

The clock reads 11:55:00. It won't be long before my identity will be torn in two by force and I will become a foreigner in my own country. Only a few moments and my words and spoken ideas will be forcibly restricted to the sweetness of the past.

11:58:30. I am trying to concentrate on the singer, on the Turkish words of a love song, but my thoughts fly back to Czechoslovakia about to be the victim of a crime. I feel as though my parents were separating and in a few minutes I would be left entirely on my own. I dread the midnight minute of the separation, the time when I will have to decide who to go with, and where to formally belong.

There are only two possibilities: choosing Slovakia would give me a feeling of home, but I would have to put up with the loss of the freedom of speech and risk the return of a totalitarian regime.

Living exclusively as a Czech, on the other hand, though I there would be prosperity and democracy, this would mean another loss of identity, a realization of never being accepted, due to my Slovakian birth. . . .

In Slovakia the following two years saw the unemployment rate increase to 14%, inflation officially stood at around 15% since privatization in Slovakia has been halted. Citizens are afraid to go out after sunset due to the growing crime; retired people are unhappy, unable to afford anything but milk. In Slovakia, factory workers receive higher salaries than doctors, and some essential medicines are slowly disappearing from the hospitals. Teachers refuse to teach - their salaries are three times lower than that of factory workers. [DS]

There is no middle way . . . I have to choose now. But, how can I? I need both my parents. I've lived with them for all my 15 years. I know them both. I love them both. I am a creation of them both, speaking fluently both Slovak and Czech. I used to attend a middle-school in Slovakia, we read books in Czech. I lived in Slovakia, but I spent my vacations in what is soon to be the Czech Republic. Both places are home. Both «parents» seemed to love me, until 1992.

But then an insensitive political power decided to break them apart. From then onwards, these «parents» have been quarreling constantly. My life has also changed. Due to my place of birth I am officially no longer seen as a friend in the eyes of the Czech Republic. . . . People ask me which «parent» will I live with - where I will stay? But how can you decide when you are part of both?

11:59:31. Half the candle has burned down . . . I stand at the crossroads, unable to decide.

29 seconds left . . . I have forgotten I'm in Istanbul and all about the Turkish songs on the TV tube in front of me. All I see is black and white, the opposites - one will become my future. If I don't decide on citizenship, it will be assigned to me. I cannot think straight . . . I am powerless against the higher interests of the few people "at the top". I quietly curse the ones who caused this «divorce».

Ten seconds to Midnight - official Hour of Partition. My hatred towards its cause and its invisible initiators steadily grows.

The First stroke of the bell announces the beginning of a New Year, a New Life. I am being sucked in through the tunnel of sad and hopeless people into the depth of nationalism, and a return of Communism, in Slovakia.

The Second stroke: "What kind of life will it be? What kind of future? . . ."

The Third stroke: The Turks along the streets of Istanbul are screaming with joy, laughing, singing . . .

The Twelfth stroke: I am sitting by the candle. Its faint light brings into my mind the question, "Is there any way back?"



C. Manjula

PLAYERS

Players in a game:

generate

energy levels belying nuclear explosions,

pulsate

with the desire to win, and a dread of losing;

scheme

to stalemate opponents;

manipulate

rules for violations;

lose

themselves in their pursuit,

forgetting

it is just a game.

8 8 8



Zenobia Gimwalla

Tree in the Forest

My Banyan Tree
Such beautiful branches
So strong, so powerful,
And yet gentle enough to cry on.

What happened, my love?
Where are you going?
You were so firmly rooted,
So fair and just

Undiscriminatingly
Giving shade to all.
Then who - or what?
- is uprooting you

Taking those arms
Away from me.
When I need you now,
You won't be here.

PLEASE SOMEONE-
Keep him home with me
I need to feel that
Quickening pulse,

Those limbs around me
The security of those shoulders,

The love in those eyes,
And that smile of leaves -

MY DARLING,
smile for me [as your leaves
shimmer in the breeze] one last time
Yet, go only if you must, my love
My banyan tree.

B BLOCK

*Poem by Abdul Rahman
Transl from Tamil
by T. Vijayalakshmi*

SCARECROW

I set up a scarecrow
in the field
to guard my corn
from the stealing birds.

I made him a head
with a cooking vessel,
my woolen shirt
became his costume
his stomach stuffed
with the hay for my cow.

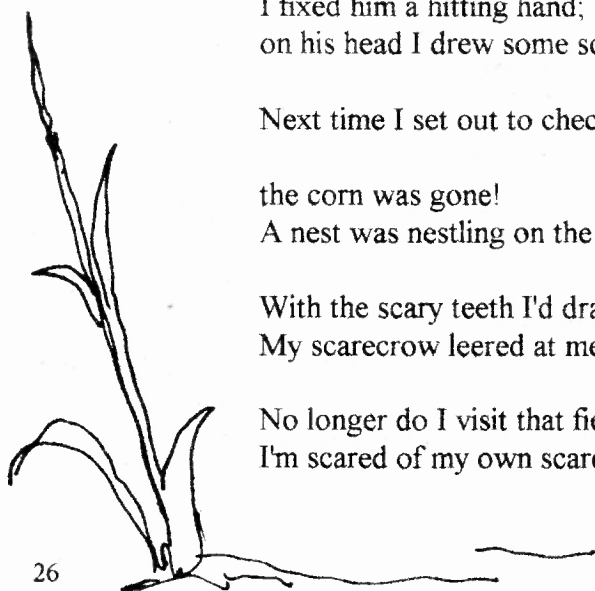
I fixed him a hitting hand;
on his head I drew some scary teeth.

Next time I set out to check . . .

the corn was gone!
A nest was nestling on the hitting hand!

With the scary teeth I'd drawn
My scarecrow leered at me.

No longer do I visit that field -
I'm scared of my own scarecrow.



Lyla Nicholson

SLEEPING SATELLITE

The Moonlight was beautiful and stark,
Pure, and white;
I admired her presence,
Mesmerized by her dazzling, shy light.

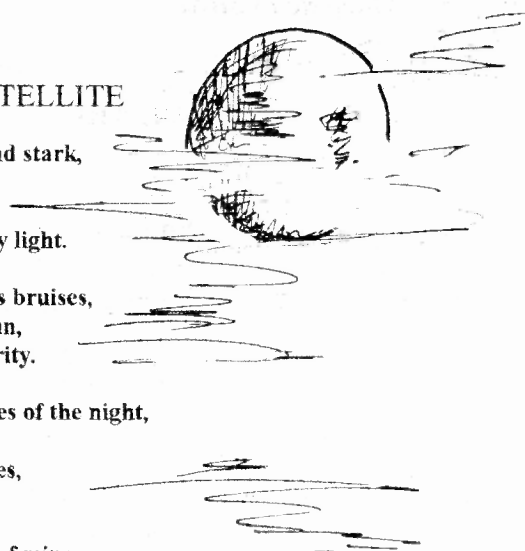
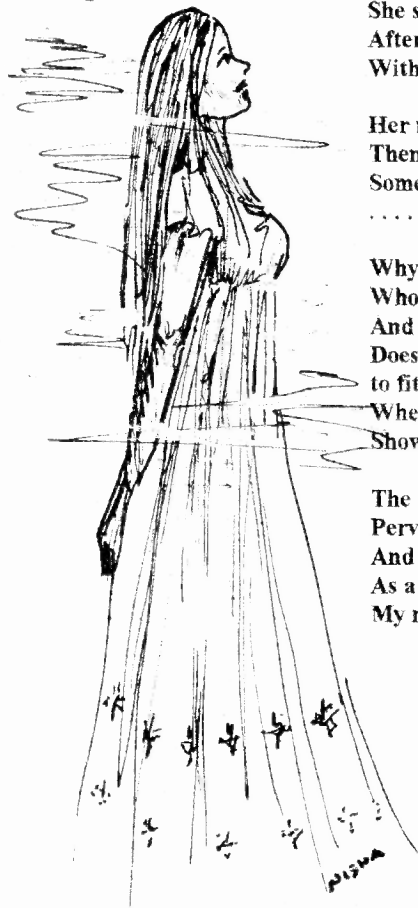
She seemed to soothe the earth's bruises,
After the scalding rays of the sun,
With her silent, silvery superiority.

Her moonbeams glanced off lilies of the night,
Then reflected on my face,
Somehow chilling my cheekbones,
.... yet warming my soul.

Why was she so shy, this moon of mine
Who hides during day,
And coyly illumines the paths of lovers at night?
Does she change her phases and shapes,
to fit her shifting emotions?
When she was sad and crying, she wouldn't
Show at all, but weep alone.

The night would then be stealthy and mean,
Perversely misleading strangers towards their doom.
And I'd lay my heavy head down slowly,
As a piercing pain took its birth in the pit of my stomach.
My nocturnal light wasn't there watching me patiently,
As I forced my body into a restless sleep.
The window always open,
the curtains always drawn.
the hope always there,
that she would show her mysterious face again.

... And I would pray ...
'Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Moon my soul to keep,
And if I die before I wake,
I pray the moon my soul to take!



Michelle D'Silva

WE ARE . . .

Sitting in a grassy meadow,
by a sparkling, babbling brook
My mind wanders to the trees around me,
Standing in solitary splendor
Like kings in palaces in far-off kingdoms.

Shall there soon be nothing?
Not a drop of water,
Nor a blade of grass,
Nothing . . . except dust.
Dry dust roaming the land,

Ruling the conquered domain.
The prattling brook awakens me.
My thoughts return to now
And I wonder - "What will happen?"
and, "Why?"

The answers lie with us
we are . . . the answers.



J. Srinivasan

SAVE US KODAI

It's been a long time since
I've been here, my friend
I'm happy to see you again.

Time has marked me cruelly,
but you are my best healer.
I feel jealous of you
One who makes everyone happy.

The innocent child
feels at ease in you.

See that couple?
Warriors back at home
with vessels as weapons
sharing love is unusual,
unless they come here:
They don't even need separate shawls!

That well-dressed youth
tries to capture everyone's attention
here he hardly remembers
his failure in the exams.



(J. Srinivasan cont.)

Look at that old couple,
they forget their age.
See how she blushes,
at his mention of their honeymoon?

But why are you sad my friend?
Don't you want to share our joy?
I know,
we've punished you
for giving us happiness.

We cut your veins
to decorate our apartments.
We pollute you
for providing us fresh air.
You lake is our dust-bin,
even while we enjoy you.

Pardon us my friend.
You may lose your charm,
but we are the real losers.
You'll be redeemed
when your true wealth is discerned.
Our children will help you.

Until then,
forgive us, and,
give us joy. *

Anuradha Kumar

SUNDROP

One single droplet on a twig
Frozen like glass
A reminder of last night's rain.
Sun laughs lightly at her,
Kindling a brief friendship,
Her warmth seeping into the droplet:
she sparkles, scattering a prism
Of smiles teased from her by Sun.

Cool, lazy breezes slide by,
Dewdrops on the grass below, wink at her,
Beckoning, charming her to join them.
The droplet's hold on the twig relaxes,
Sun lulling her into a languorous mood.
Long green fingers from the earth extend
To cushion her descent.
She hangs, briefly,
Topples and
Mingles with the earth

Returning to her parent body
 below the cool crust of soil
No longer a single droplet,
 but one with the whole.

Kiran Young

A Mind of Its Own

Release all control of the mind.
Amazing how it can, when
Independent, create the most
Fascinating pictures and ideas, with absolutely
No help from me. I . . .

Feel as though I have access to some
Strange, rare, almost
Illegal device. Or
Do I? The
Pricelessness of all that
Lies within is
Unimaginable. I realize what
I know about what
It knows is relatively
Nothing. Clearly, my
Creative juices spin wildest when I let my
Mind have a
Mind of its own.

Lindsay Coleman

ADDENDUM

I think Dali must have visited this place.
Perhaps it was in a dream
Though with him you never know.
I think I'm leaning on a figure's arm
As far as I can tell, a woman's.
I guess you could say I'm living art.
A moving part of the canvas of life.
But then again, I could be just a fly
The artist decided to add.

Jehan Moddie

I AM GOING TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO WRITE
WHATEVER I FEEL. . . .

I AM . . . struck by the number of hangups - the mental sickness - the average person is possessed of today. Yet, when we try and think of it we do not see it, because it has turned into the norm.

We, from childhood, are constantly surrounded by the power of different minds: jealousy, greed, materialism and other such negative energies. This has profound effects upon us and on our minds, but even more scary is, we do not realize it. The reason we are unaware of it overwhelming our minds, is because ignorance is the only way to survive. We naturally build up a defense towards it; however, this defense acts as an offense towards others, setting up a chain reaction.

Then what? We find the defence we have used is exactly what is offending us!! We are fighting greed with greed, hate with hatred and stupidity with duplicity.

We are so wholly involved in our everyday worries and materialistic problems, that our minds are not being used to full potential. Not only that, they are also being used wrongly, thus half of what fills our empty minds is in any case negative, and harming no-one but ourselves. You may be thinking that it's too late to do anything about such a "problem" - if that's what you would call it.

I tend to think the same way - but I refuse to believe in pessimism. It may take a millennium to change, but if everyone worked slowly towards changing their ways, there would no longer be a need to harvest anger, greed, and jealousy.

Anyway, I have written this piece to make you aware, and to present you with a "problem" you will see if you look carefully into the mirror.

MASKS

What type of face shall I put on today?
A smile as friendly as the sun's bright ray?
Or my jealousy mask of green, brown, and grey?
Shall I wear a face today, that the world has
not seen?
Or invent a new one that has never been?
Maybe I'll be royal with the grace of a queen.
What if I should paint a mask of blue?
Would you guess what mood I'm in, or
would you have no clue?
I just don't know my face today - maybe I'll
try something new:
An all-colored mask
So you won't know how I feel.
So if you see my mask today
You won't know if it's real.
So - what type of mask shall I put on today?
A pale, pallid mask, or my bright array?
I wear one mask in sorrow,
And another mask in play -
So tell me!!
What type of face shall I put on today?



Carlo Launer

SACRILEGE

..The candle light shimmers
the wind whispers . . .
Away my mind goes, far, far away . . .
What profane secret will I uncover today?

In the Abyssm of the soul
lies a blazing Fire
Never far away,
ever out of reach . . .
What does it feed on,
what does it consume?

You know what I mean . . .
I know what you mean.

Far in the thundering sky
a crash is heard.
Was it the fall of the graveyard tree
or was it my passion erupting free?

You know what I mean . . .
I know what you mean.

Images of orange, red and shadow
seep into my mind . . .
Is it the candle playing a trick
or imagination, that nifty maverick?



(Carlo L. cont.)

Forgive me preacher, My heart speakest not of love
but rather of an unholy longing.
For is not the world a ball of fire,
roaring to heaven,
the very image of desire?

Strange would it be
to refute that primeval impulse of glee;
Stranger still would it be,
to accept this blasphemy . . .

Hold your horses my friend:
I will not unseat you
Nor even do I mean to upset you,

But the flirtations of Eros and Thanatos
seem more hypnotic
Than the promise of a future land
and the attendant benefits that *would* seduce me.

You do not accept what I tell you:
Verily you cannot, should not.
But in the absence of reason,
in the dark of your soul
You know
that what I say is true.

You know what I mean
» I know what you mean.
But do you know what you Yourself mean?

Poem by Abdul Rahman
Transl from Tamil
by P. Velraj

THE DUSK-LESS "I"

**OUT OF DEATH'S EYELIDS
WOULD I DRIP.**

**STARS FALL IN SILENCE
FROM THE TONGUE
OF THE BELL, WHOSE
BREATH-ROPE SNAPPED.**

**MY LIFE-SPAN
BECOMES THE LINES
ON THE SOLES OF MY FEET.**

**ITS ROLE OVER NOW,
THE SPIRIT
GOES BEHIND THE CURTAIN
SEEKING ITS REAL FORM.**



Lennie Stillman

Silence

The palms sway
As the wind blows strong:
I can smell the rose
Sweetening the air around me.

All is silent

The people dance
As the party moves through the night.
I can feel the speakers pounding
Sound waves thrown out,

But all is silent

I see a child cry,
As the mother shouts in sudden anger;
I see the cars go by,
impatiently rushing down their streets,

But all is silent.

I can see your lips moving,
As they communicate.
I can never hear your voice,
I am frustrated, for I am deaf.

All is loudly silent.

Ole Warnecke

WALKING THROUGH THE DARKENED STREETS,

I think of you;

Footsteps echo on wet cement, as mist obscures my feet,

Darkness and cold are everywhere around me, yet my
mind is free.

In my thoughts, I sit beneath bright skies,

The water in a stream tumbles softly and bird-song fills the air.

I see you before me.

with your long hair about your shoulders,

Your smile radiates innocence, joy, and deep understanding,

Your eyes sparkle in the light of a setting sun as I try and reach you.

But with every stride towards you, your image fades.

I look up and see a streak of black in the brilliant blue of sky;

The dark and cold reality of now is trying to get into my world of bliss.

My mind tries hard to preserve your image, the sky, the stream,

But the force of reality is too strong.

Just as I reach for you, You are gone;

The sky turns to black, the beauty of your landscape fades to reality.

Once more I find myself in the emptiness of a wind-swept street.

I long to see your face again, your radiant smile, your eyes,

But you've gone forever.

A tear dampens my cheek as I walk towards the first rays of
sunlight from my horizon.

Another day begun.

Kiran Young

THE LIFE

A fountain

each sparkle up
shooting continually up

up

Each moment a unique image

forever changing, growing, reaching

down

down

Down

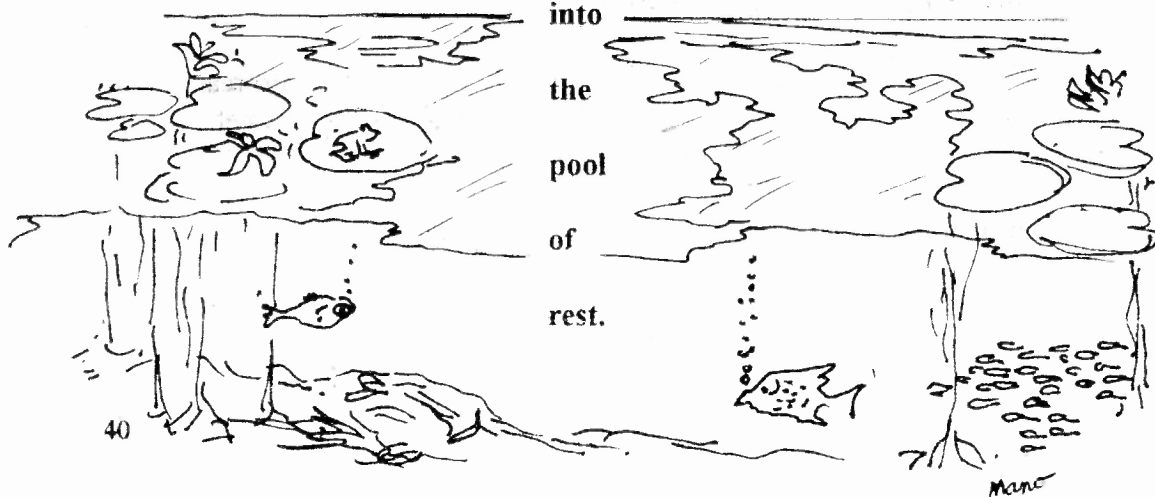
into

the

pool

of

rest.



Corina Eberhard

I sat on the cold stone,

Oblivious to my surroundings.
Anger festered in me.
My thoughts flew like ravens,
birds of dark origin and unknown future.

The lightning shot these
birds of death with a single flash.

I gazed upwards with glazed eyes,
mirroring the display of light and dark,
my mind blank,
my heart heavy.

As thunder shattered the silence,
my emotions overflowed.
I could not hear my own scream
until the thunder had passed,
and I listened at the echo in the valley.

Then the rain began - slowly at first
it soon fell in torrents.
My body was cold and wet,
I took no notice.
I seemed to find
distinct pleasure in observing.

(Corina E. cont).

Watching the trees dance, hearing the wind sing
Smelling the wholesome gratitude
As the earth drank deep.

Feeling drops of water landing on my face.
I could not resist getting up and dancing.
I danced to the wind and the rhythm of the rain.
I screamed with the thunder,
releasing *cavewoman* in me.

Gradually as the storm ceased
I awakened as from a dream.
I heard frogs croaking,
to my ears the sweetest song.
I could not resist the urge to smile.
I turned one last time and saw,
a solitary bird of prey
spiral and screech.

Is the primitive scream the absolute
form of free expression?
Who knows: *She* is silent now.
Tamed,
I returned to the dark morning.

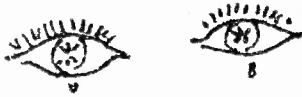
Haunted.

MY EYES?

Eyes, what are you?

You say much,
Yet you speak not.
Oh, instrument of expression,
Help me hide my emotions.

Lost in night am I,
without you as a guide.
Your vision is mine,
Yet my dependence is not yours.
You are the lord of my day and night.



Should I worship you?
No, I think not,
For god you are not.
You aid in my worship
Is great indeed, for it is you,
Who chooses the path for me.

Eyes are you mind?

Mariza Dias

IT WAS A DARK STORMY NIGHT. The wind was howling, it seemed to beg to be let in. The branches of the tree on the window made scratchy, clawing sounds like chalk running along a blackboard. The wind brought images of witches, ghosts and vampires moving around in the darkness.

No one was home except for me. On such a cold night I preferred to be snuggled inside my bed reading a nice scary book. The thought of spending it with my friends on a camp-out did not appeal to me. My parents were away visiting friends, I was very much alone.

I crept upstairs to the security of my bedroom and sat down to read when I couldn't help thinking about checking on locked doors and windows. Once again I trudged down to do the needful, double-checking the entire house. While investigating the kitchen back door I heard - or, thought I heard - a rustling noise but then I thought, I imagined it. Up again I went to read . . . a horror fiction story by Christopher Pike. It was fascinating and I wondered if such things could ever happen in life. The story was about people changing into monsters, and how no-one really knew what was going on. The thought of anyone changing into a blood-sucking monster was revolting but somehow exciting.

That night I dreamt that I too changed into a blood sucking monster. In the mirror I saw myself reflected with blood splattered all over me. It wasn't a pretty sight. In my dream I began to feel hungry, but instead of eating human food I looked about the house for mice or even insects. Something moved in the corner of the kitchen and I grabbed for it. As I was about to eat it, I awakened from that nightmare.

I shot out of bed and ran for the mirror. Never expecting to actually find blood on my face, I gasped at the small red dots that covered it. I began to marvel. Though I kept hoping this would be more of the dream . . . to no avail did my pinching work.

My parents returned, and hearing their voices I ran downstairs. My mother gasped when she saw my face, and then checked my arms and legs. I was getting seriously worried I might be turning into a ghoul. I asked her. She broke into laughter. Between giggles I learned that what I thought to be marks of a monster was, well, I had the *measles*!

ALONE:

In the depths,
while silence screams,
my mind is resting
only now and then distracted
by the harsh Reality.

Concealed by the dark face of the night
and the pallid stars, my true feelings
lay unexposed, untouched.

The eternal flame of sorrow
burns a crater through my soul,
(just big enough to let the villain in)
murdering my inner happiness,
as though to mock its very existence.

And as this bitter sweet melody
of empty echoes
repeats itself once again,
I remain a prisoner.
Trapped in my own body.



J. Arul David Leo

KEEP MOVING

My eyes whispered to me,

"No! It's not hell, keep moving!"

Scarlet corpses sullied the ground,
The tree, the road.
And everywhere, thundering bullets,
Slender smoke of aircraft,
Danger sirens of fire-engine and ambulance -

"Keep moving!" said the whisper.

Vigilant men with great rifles in hand
Guard the *gauche* negotiators:

'No!' - 'Why not?' - 'Divide!' - 'Impossible!'
'Separate!' - 'Peace?' - 'Into pieces!'

While the guns outside keep blaring.

"Keep moving! Peace talks are progressing!"

The ship in the port jerks and hauls anchor
None on the deck, yet barrels of cannons
Watch all four sides.

A sudden cry pierces my ears -
The cry of a child 'midst the roar of war . . .

HIT - a bullet to my forehead!

"Oh! Sri Lanka! Sri Lanka! Sri Lanka!"

My cry swallowed the screaming of the child.

"Keep moving, keep moving
Keep mov . . . !"

.. *One more corpse . .*

Aatish Taseer

Experiences with the Unfamiliar

THE NARMADA

The road was dusty and long;
the romantics were wrong,
Indian villages were diseased and filthy,
nothing was pretty and the air was dirty:
They told me I would lie
in an old fort under a starry sky -
I was beginning to see
a decrepit ruin and a filthy stream.

But as I stood upon a garden top,
I choked as the sight of the river
took my breath away.
Below me: the Goddess in the light of day.

The sun shone down in a burst
on our lady of the earth;
with no more than a glance she stole
everything a man could give -
from his power to his soul,
believer or non-believer
there was Heaven in this river.

That night she slept beside me,
her emerald waters composing a symphony.
In the morning when I awakened
I left without a look.
Had I seen her face again
she might have driven me insane.

*Poem by Abdul rahman
Transl from Tamil
by K.J. Jayaseelan*

Private Apartment

Yet another name for death
is darkness.

Forget not,
the womb also is darkness,
hence time is enshrouded.

Youthful urges lie dormant,
but in light's absence
uneasy calm prevails
within and without.

Therefore, plead for a new birth
from within that nameless void:
prepare to march.

Rena Thiagarajan

TCK-COLLOQUY

I STARED DOWN at my food. He stared down at his food. We were strangers to one another. Finally we both looked up, to stare at each other. His eyes were like my eyes : Scared. Uncertain. Lost. Alone.

"What's your name?" I finally got the courage to ask.

"Alan" came the answer. But I heard "Don't bother me, leave me alone" instead. Maybe that was what I was feeling.

"Where're you from?" I persisted.

His mother was Japanese, his father Brazilian. He was British. His parents were divorced.

He could have been me.

My parents were divorced. I lived in India with my father and stepmother. My father was Swiss, mother French.

I didn't want to be here. He didn't want to be here.

We were different from everyone else. WE didn't fit in. Would never fit in. We were somehow wrong.

And yet *here* we fit in. Here everyone fits in. The less normal you are anywhere else, the more normal you are here. Being different is normal and that's what brings everyone together.

We were not alone after all. We would never be alone.

Shruthi Guruswamy

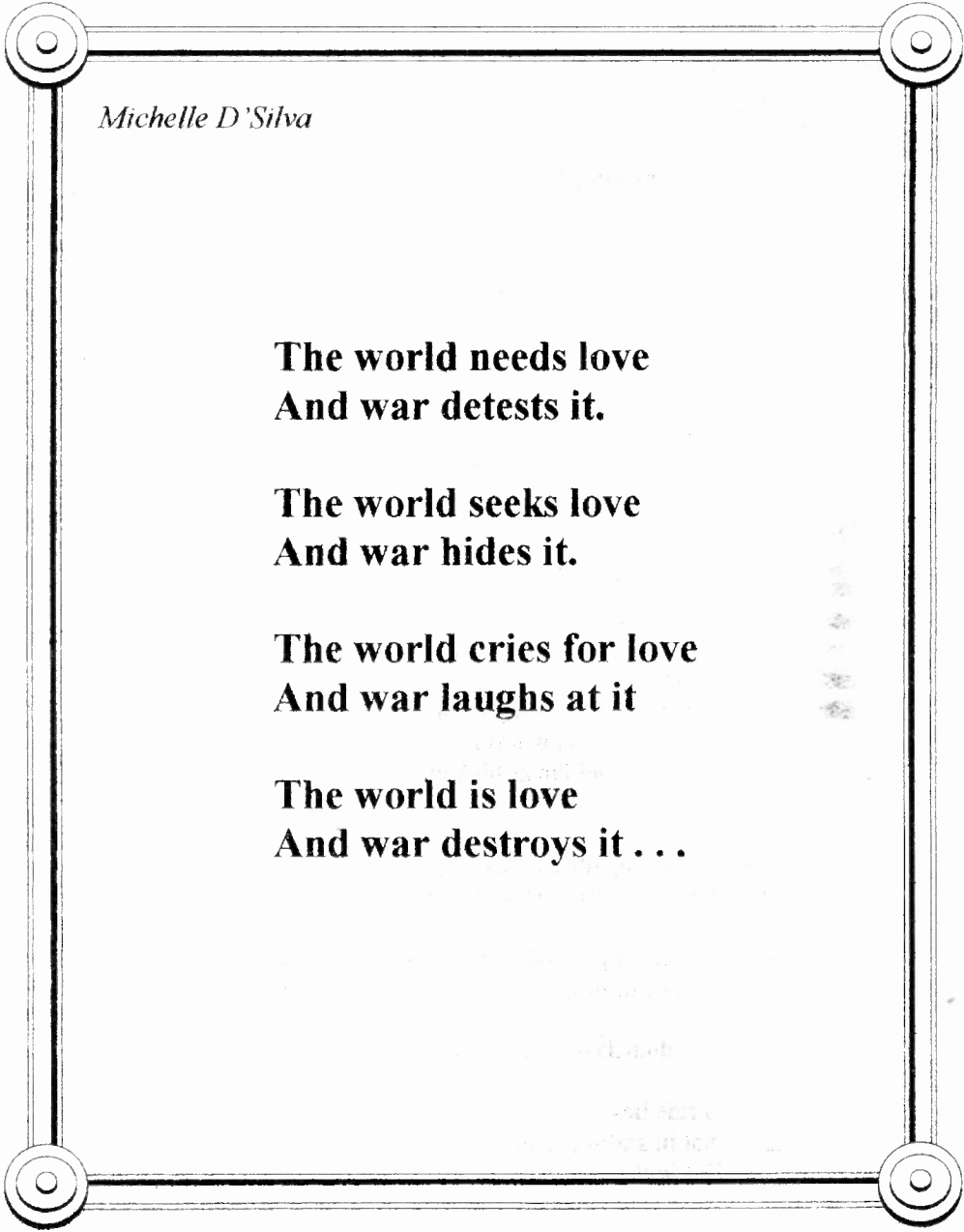
BUBBLE

Sometimes I become like a bubble
Neither belonging to the air nor water
Complete, yet nothing.
There are many like myself
But just one of me.
I float and glide
I remain constant
Just like a bubble
Part of something greater.

Hitasha Rupani

Hope

The world seems empty
But is really filled with hope,
Hope that's growing slowly
Like a drop of dew sliding
Down a blade of grass
Collecting smaller droplets as it passes
Getting larger.
Someday
We shall have a river full of hope
A river full of dreams
And eternal love
Cascading through our lives.
Then Our world will be full of happiness
And we shall smile together.



Michelle D'Silva

**The world needs love
And war detests it.**

**The world seeks love
And war hides it.**

**The world cries for love
And war laughs at it**

**The world is love
And war destroys it . . .**

Poem by Abdul Rahman
Transl from Tamil
by T. Vijayalakshmi

Reincarnation

The wind is sightless,

It wafted the smoke high.

At such height
The smoke was jubilant.

He eyed the sun and moon,
Steaming with vanity

And said, "I too traverse
The royal path like you."

He looked at the cloud
And said, "My complexion is as yours
so is my form
and I'm as high up as you.
I too, am cloud."

A few stupid peacocks danced,
Mistaking the smoke for a cloud.

The cloud gurgled with laughter
And came down as rain.

The drenched vivified earth said,

"Pride lies
Not in scaling heights
But in the manner of descent."

Poem by Anon
Transl from Tamil
by R. Arul Prakasam



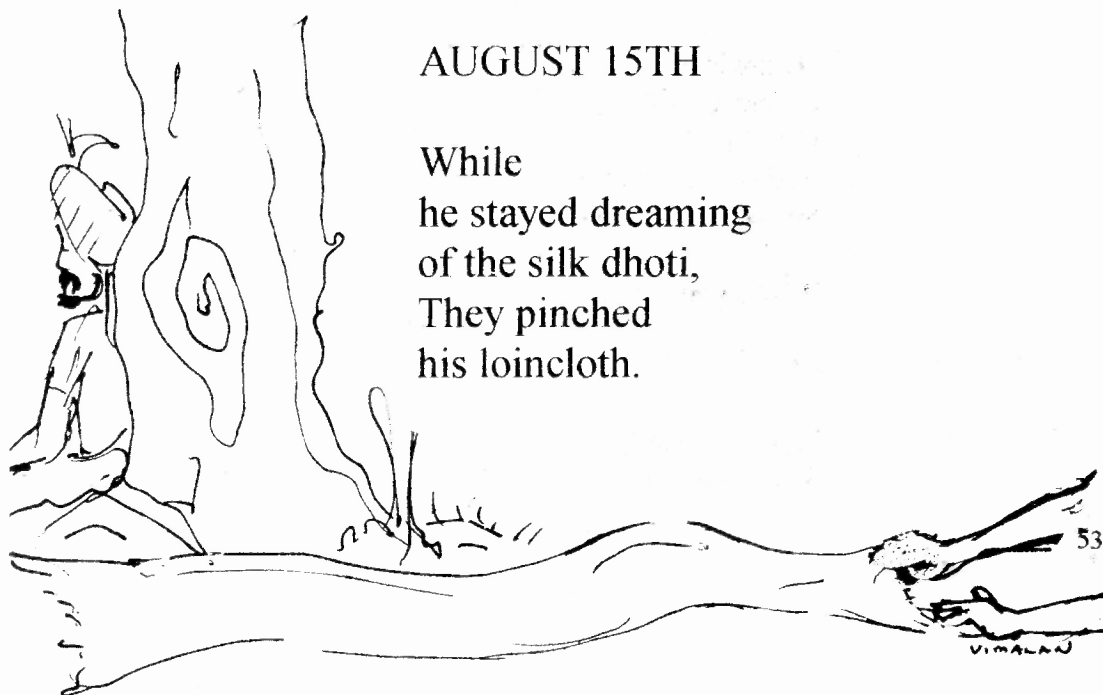
TEACHER DIED
Student Sorry
Summer break.



Poem by Vairamuthu
Transl from Tamil
by R. Arul Prakasam

AUGUST 15TH

While
he stayed dreaming
of the silk dhoti,
They pinched
his loincloth.



D. Senthilkumar

REALIZATION

My father always saw
me as an engineer or doctor.
But I have become,
Head of Sales.
Still - I discharge his ambition
earning plenty of cash,
living a life of *style*.

Now, with a fabulous life -
house and car, fully air-conditioned
and much else besides;
married with a trophy wife,
got two enchanting kids -
I party every night
with my own train of sycophants.

My life is style
as Father fancied,
I have it all.
And yet . . . and yet,
Something's missing.

What's that?"

Oh!

I lost my own life
in my lifestyle.

Greg Meyer

FIFTEEN

The Brown Tile Lounge
was the name we coined:
Sammy's cellar **actually**, a dim insulated
bunker beneath suburbia,
to which the *'rents* were
too oblivious - or too **knowing** -
to come down. In this Lounge,
on a plush and **flaccid** couch,
was where I first tried *weed*.

The couch was **brown**.
The tiles were **brown**.
Rustoleum-Brown-#3-poles
stood in support of the shimmering
television echelon upstairs.
While we sat on mashed dirty cushions,
me and my first lust Liz,
her pupils, massive, galactic, gone.

Liz held a satchel **in** her lap.
She had bought it **at** a shop
in Bloomfield called the Taj Mahal
where Messrs Das & Das plied
thin skirts, beedies and Ganesh
Incense cones for a buck a pack.
We found it mysterious, and after Geometry
Class we'd disappear among its parallel racks.

... 

Greg Meyer cont.

Liz unzipped her satchel. She lay
three buds on the brown velour.
They came from Mexico, she averred,
somewhere far down the tangent.
Somewhere with trajectory, beyond
the station-wagon's daily compass of
garage, store, office, store, garage.
She, sullen priestess, packed a stiff bowl.

Sammy came down. He had been washing
the family Tupperware in the kitchen.
His mother was up there, cutting out coupons
and clipping them to a little book.

"These are the best days of your lives.
They really, really are!"

This was her axiom:
She was living proof.
We would skulk with our protractors and ennui
to the Lounge.

"For *Geometry*," we said,
cutting a transversal from Plane A to Brown.

Liz leaned back on the couch
It was raining. It was March,
Reagan reigned, and middle-aged men
were putting a run
on a nation's Fedora stocks. . .

... To be like Indiana Jones,
who shot dumb Egyptians
and rescued our faith in Arks and sacred Covenants,
and to keep dry in this kind of rain
that angled against the windows of the Lounge.

Liz lit up ceremoniously, shut her dark eyes,
kissed the pipe and slipped it to me.
I kissed the pipe where Liz had.

Ember glow - cough - that was that. Nothing
more thrilling than flying in a Jumbo jet. It was like
knowing you were teetering seven miles above your
demise but not caring because a slim stewardess
was coming down the aisle with grape juice.

I was being dead bored in a brown basement
and enjoying every minute.

"This is good *shit*," Liz announced.

"This is the real *shit*!"

Whatever. But at fifteen, in a warm Utopia achieved,
waiting for the prospect of the less-than-best years,
this at least was ours.



FAME

A WISP OF MELANCHOLY filled my nostrils, the memories of childhood were nearly tangible as the torture of reality confronted me. I was in the middle of my passage to fame. For the first time in my journey through life I momentarily stopped to observe my surroundings.

A non-ending carpet of dirt pierced my feet, as glass entrapped me, giving me no choice but to continue. But my eyes lingered on what was beyond this entrapment. People that's what there were. Some laughing, some crying but all were *living*.

Me, I made my choice, to give up humanness for the sake of success. My soul choked with the emotion of realization. I would never belong to this happiness, to these people, for I was elite, part of a group destined to make it in life. What kind of life, you may ask. I did not know yet for I was still searching for the answer. But this moment of wonderment, this moment of self-evaluation and maybe my last chance of escape passed. My body moved on as my soul was left behind.

Today I have made it. But looking around I realize where I am - nowhere, where I have always been.

Sunil Watumull

HE WATCHED BOMBAY'S CROWS, Cawing in groups, scavenging for food. The fan above him rotated noisily in a vain attempt to protect him from the oppressive humidity. He twiddled his thumbs impatiently, eyeing the rosewood grandfather clock in the corner of the room, seconds passing in no hurry.

The television blared from a room on the other side of the musty corridor, his grandparents' hearing obviously not improved. The Hindi movie and its music were foreign to him, but he felt that he would learn to appreciate these things - eventually.

The smell of cigarette smoke drifted into the living room from the bathroom in the hall. His mother was killing herself with her nicotine, but she would never talk about it. She came out avoiding eye contact.



The phone rang and the boy snatched it up, desperate for a change. His aunt was calling from London . . . Uncle Hari was in a coma following a massive stroke. Doctors said it was due to stress. Auntie sounded bad, her nerves "wrecked" by the whole incident.

The boy rushed down the corridor and yelled to his grandparents over the clamor of the TV. He returned to the living room and sprawled out on the old sofa, concentrating intensely in his mind. Hari was his favorite uncle, who had lived with them in Philadelphia for 11 years - Mother's only sibling. Would his uncle die? God knew the boy wouldn't be able to handle it if he did. And what about Jyoti, his 10 year old sister? How would she be able to deal with it?

His mother came down the corridor, and sat on an armchair next to him. "He's going to be all right," she said. "He has regained consciousness, and he has basic motor skills."

Mother and son embraced, expressing a love that had been neglected for so long. The boy stood up and went to the window gazing at the Bombay coastline. Suddenly, the water didn't look all that brown, the cawing crows didn't seem irksome, and the heat was not so bad.

I ROLLED DOWN THE CAR WINDOW

to offer her a one rupee coin.
"Be careful not to touch her!"
warned my mother.
I was careful.

The old woman clutched her torn sari
And gave me a toothless smile;
Her mouth was stained red with betel juice.
As I bent forward, her eyes touched her arms,
I saw a million scars,
Each with its own story to tell.

She was a victim of abuse.
Burnt by a drunken husband.
And homeless.
I searched in my imagination for
a light of hope . . . BLACKOUT.

"Hurry up, you're letting the cold air out"
yelled my brother.
The window was rolled up.
The car drove away.

I saw her again the next day and the day
after that,

Every time I laid eyes upon her,
She wore a different face that told the
same story.



Rimi Sen

A curiosity about one's roots is inevitable.

Diary: July 17, 1995

"Why you should want to go is beyond my understanding . . ."
My father called the journey a waste of his hard earned money.

"I have no desire to return to that primitive society," were his exact words.

My father's only connection now with India, land of his birth and growing-up years, was the monthly check he sent to his ailing parents. My mother had been to India once, after her marriage to pay the customary respects to my father's parents. She was appalled by the lack of civility she encountered and returned home relieved that her husband felt the same way. But, a curiosity about one's roots is inevitable.

And reaching there, somehow the dirt and filth to be found in India *appealed* to me much more, I have to say, than the disinfected, sanitized environment of Minnesota.

Walking along the streets of Calcutta I saw that the rickshaw puller had just banged into the vegetable vendor, tomatoes rolling out into the middle of the road. I watched fascinated, as the two men arranged their lungis in the strategic position to begin an extended argument.

Neither spoke of suing the other, there were no insurance hassles or "I'll let my lawyer handle this . . ." tirades. Our group of bystanders gathered around the two men, already engaged in battle. We were there as judge and jury. And because of this there was a certain order, a peace despite the chaos. It was this that appealed to me.

Things would never happen like this in Shoreview, Minnesota!

I enjoyed the familiarity of my Indian roots, the simple humanity of disorganization. (This is probably why I never let my mother clean my closet at home.)

India reminds me that in a world where perfection is the goal, familiar fallibility still rules the soul.

THE JOURNEY

Alive, kicking, free:

Pelted, pampered!

Crying, bedridden.

Bigger, walking, about five:

Abundance, comfort

Stained, scorched.

Maturity, exposure, rules:

Disobey, pardoned,

Disobey, dead.

Wedlock, dependence, expectations:

Joy, inheritance

Struggle, earn.

Old, still kicking, generations:

Atrophy, will,

Optimum, experience.

Dust to Dust:

Coffin, burial rights.

Corner, Highway 15.



Kirsten Winkler

ON A CLEAR DARK NIGHT

... Three teenage girls excitedly waited,
Three teenage boys came to the door.

They all ate supper together and called "Goodbye" to parents, who called back to them, "Have fun!"

In the parent's van they went, out for a night of fun at the High School dance. Amidst much laughter and jesting, they were on top of the world. They took pictures and danced, bought Slushies and chili-pies on the long ride home. (*Funny* how suddenly things can end.)

It was an old country highway, the girl was an expert driver, no one had been drinking, she just forgot the road as a sharp curve loomed up. And the night was deadly quiet, as though expectant, waiting.

Suddenly, the van flew out of control, squealing tires, breaking glass shattering the silence of the night. They had crashed into a gigantic tree and spun completely around - just inches from a gorge. One girl's brother received a handful of glass, her boyfriend got deep gash in his head, and she was hit by many trees. Her face turned into a bleeding mass of torn flesh and splintered bones, the others got off lightly only battered and bruised, but, wierdly, only on the left side.

Six teenagers came close to losing their lives that dark clear night, all bearing the scars of that journey, if not on the outside, then within. Many a lesson was learned because of that night - the main one being about the value of life, and how quickly it could end.

Tasmin Din & Grace Wardell

Plus Z for Zenith

An acrostic abecedarius poem:

As an American ambassador arrived, after
Being boldly beckoned by bland Brits,
Consul Clien calmly, courageously cruised coalitions,
consequently
Daringly, demanded definite decisions.
Each erudite employee eulogized endless endorsements
From faithful financial foreign factions.
Gee!
Hell hovers
with its Itinerant intent
Jockeying for for joyousness
But Kindling kisses
Not Love
This Meant in the meantime
Nothing is noted by the notables
As Opinions not options
Are promulgated.
Questionable and quantumless
Racking their Rosicrucian
And Sanctimonious sensitivities
The temptations terrorize.
Unable to understand ultimatums
The Veterans of verisimilitude
Wasting no words on weary wisdom:
eXit
Yelling
Zapata!!

Boudhayan Sen

THE INSCAPE ROCK

A loud knell rings out
When things go wrong;
That ship, cargoes with emotions,
Careens forward and impales itself
On the Inscape Rock.

Feelings steer her
And emotion and sin combined
Propel her to her
Doom.

The sailors are desperate men -
Their hot hands grasp and cling
At the cold glassy surface
Of the Rock.

The Rock stares back with hard, glazed eyes -
Little orbs, riches and glitches of granite
That perceive more dimly
With each raging lust
And each deadly impulse:

... 

The Inscape Rock, cont.

The paralysis.
With every moment
Seamen slip
Deeper into the wild clear water.

Knowledge is placid, certain and exacting.
The pathetic rages and jealousies of the sailors
Create few reflections -
The water affords no sympathy.

With every lick of its cold tongue
Emotion loses its fervent grip
And slips slowly, surely
Into the transparent realms of intellect.

Water cannot dilute emotion.
Bubbles of ugly red, black and magenta
Appear and disappear eerily
Forming the turbid confusion we call life.

Peering far away: *"Can you see those . . . little dots?"*
"Yes, . . . they're the stranded sailors -
They're . . . swimming back to safety, from the
Inscape Rock."

Reem Siddiqi

RUNAWAY TRAIN

A runaway train,
hurtling through the tracks of life.

The sound of cold metal faster and Faster
against the black blanket of night.
Senses frantically screaming Halt!

A stop sign; a caution. Faster and faster
Yet, the incestuous grinding of wheels continues,
Determination bares its teeth.

An impulse racing, a scream welling, Faster and faster.
Memories jump out from the dark corridors of life
On and on, faster and faster.

Decisions lurking around every corner.
Decisions past, decisions future.
On and on, faster and faster.

The steam of the night releases itself into the tranquil,
silence, goading the still, quiet emotions.
Innocent dreams, insatiable desire.
Burning within, threatening stability.
Faster, faster.

Bhima Auro

THE FEELING OF DROWNING

HE TOOK TO THE WATER like a fish, sleek and splendid. We told him not to go too far from the shore. Yet he was convinced he was a fish. Under the water, deep and deadly were his dives. We warned him again; he would not listen! We turned to leave, that's when it all started.

I turned to see why he was splashing violently about. He was going to drown! Without a moment's hesitation, I dived into the placid sea. Swimming like an Olympic swimmer, I soon reached him. Panicked as he was, I held him to me and swam for the shore. That is all I remember of the rescue attempt, for he had pushed me under in his hysterical frenzy.

My mind went blank, nothing could I see. A darkness like a tunnel without an end, enveloped me. Up ahead in the distance a light appeared, drawing me towards it like a magnet. Obeying, I flew through time and space to reach a loving warmth and caring light. A comfort, inexpressible in language of any kind, was my experience. The presence of divinity was all around. I thought back to my life and all I had done, when I realized with horror, I was being drawn back into the tunnel.

Slowly, with longing for divine comfort and loving warmth, I moved towards the other end of the tunnel. I saw my friend attempting to revive me on the beach. They shouted, "COME ON BREATHE, YOU CAN DO IT, BREATHE." Slowly my lungs began to function, and I awakened in a daze on the beach. My eyes opened and I cried, "Why did you bring me back?"

Kiran Young

HOURS

The skin is layered with a film of drying sweat.
Energy is being sifted out of
This tired body as the day walks by,
Though I haven't done a single thing
Besides perspire. I collapse into a slouching chair.
It is also exhausted by the evil heat.
The poor house pants with me.
We sit,
Not moving,
For hours.

My clothes are suffocating:
Sticking to my damp skin.
Even the solitary layer I have on
Is too much. Insects circle the room,
lazily searching for something to
Sustain them. We watch them moving,
The chair, the house, and I,
And wonder . . .
How?
We can only rest,
Not moving,
For hours.

Outside, cars hurl out steamy exhaust,
Polluting the air, adding to the humidity.
The sky is blanketed with an
Oppressive, sleepy haze. It lies there with us,
The chair, the house, and me,
Not moving,
For hours.

(Kiran Y. cont.)

Drooping trees gaze at children playing,
Amazed that they have so much energy.
The house, the chair, the sky, the trees, and I
Sit there,
Not moving,
For hours.
I consider getting to work, but
The heat is too strong to even think
At all.

The chair, the house, the sky, the trees, and I
have visions of beaches,
Of winter,
When the heat will be gone . . .
And we rest,
Not moving,
For hours.

Carlo Launer

"LEMONADE!"

Last year in June I had two months free before transferring to Kodai School. My mother was in France and here I was in India. This was my opportunity to visit the Himalayas as I'd always wanted to do, and possibly Kashmir. Accordingly I took the train from Madras in South India to Delhi, the capital of India far to the North.

Now you may not be acquainted with Indian trains so let me brief you. First, you must reserve tickets well in advance. Second, there are different types of trains in India: The Superfast (gets you there within a day or so of scheduled arrival time) the Express (slow and steady, two days arrival threshold) and the unnamed trains (get you there within a *reasonable* five days-or-so of scheduled arrival time).

I was lucky enough to land a 2nd class berth on the Express to Delhi arriving only a day and a half late. What was interesting to me on much of this sweltering dusty ride was the water shortage. This precious liquid becomes very scarce in these hottest months in North Central India, and a train is worse than anywhere else. Very soon on our journey there was no water at all, whether in anyone's flasks or, you guessed it, in the toilets. When the train pulled into a station, people would often fight amongst themselves to get water from the single pipe.

I soon calculated that the 600-or-so parched passengers on each and every train like this constituted a captive and desperate clientele for anyone enterprising enough to offer them a drink.

After my treks (getting lost in the middle of nowhere) in the Himalayan foothills but with a few more weeks to go before School, I made my way back down to Delhi: as I awaited a chance of a train I began to ruminate over my half-remembered capitalist designs upon my unsuspecting fellow travelers.

A further trip to Kashmir I had planned, but I wound up waiting for five days with no ticket in sight. Meanwhile, I hatched a scheme. After almost compulsively purchasing a massive oversized tin traveling trunk, I bought a hundred used plastic Aristocrat Whisky litre bottles (empty, of course!) 1000 paper cups and a lemon press.

I had blown off my idea to go into gorgeous (and troubled) Kashmir or alternatively to return to Madras early, and booked a ticket to a place called Itarsi whose distinction lay in being a major train junction two days and nights from Delhi - from where I might ply my trade. Arriving in Itarsi I purchased 600 lemons - one per passenger - and two kilos of sugar and I began pressing the little Indian lemons into juice, mixing it into a concentrate with sugar, working 'till 4 a.m.

The following morning after two hours sleep, I bought an enormous block of ice and with a great procession in an auto-rickshaw with the help of one gangly old railway porter (I was too cheap to pay two) hauled my overweight paraphernalia aboard the train back to Delhi.

. . . 

Once aboard the train I took my courage and accepted the dubious honor of being possibly the first underage foreigner to become as one with the brotherhood of Indian hawkers - talk about international coöperation - using my scraps of Hindi, crying out tunes of *filmi* songs along the aisles, "*Thanda thanda, neemboo pâni!*" Cold, cold lemonade!

Vive l'Aventure!

I did well. The first day I sold all thirty bottles I had brought with me, managing to squeeze out about 900 rupees that day, equivalent to about a month's salary to a laborer in India.

But I only lasted three days . . . making good moolah at first, but many times the corridors between carriages were sealed, and I would have to backpack my wares from one carriage to the other. And there were hassles with the conductors. Of course, I did my thing unashamedly for the entrepreneurial cause with a bhaksheesh here and a bhaksheesh there . . . And no, I didn't have what it takes to do as the peanut vendors and other hawkers do which is to climb along the outside windowsills even as the train decides to put up steam at 200 hundred kph!

Then the heat began to get to me, and the noise, and the grime of poorly maintained public spaces, and especially the stench in the waterless slow trains. After the third day the novelty had worn off though I had proved to myself that a true man not only thinks but acts also, taking up a self challenge.

All I wanted now was to crash out in a clean hotel, sleep as late as possible, eat a decent breakfast in a clean environment and reflect upon my journey into another world. The earlier touring into the foothills was beautiful and adventurous, but it somehow had been eclipsed by this descent into a parallel reality, the human reality of travel, thirst, and trade.

On my last trip towards Delhi I now imagine myself ready to edit a chapter or so on entrepreneurship in modern India, and give some hard advice! For the moment this budding businessman felt like my concentrate, sour, pressed, and saturated, and looking forward to a nice cool bath. ☉

Jeyapaul Asir

DISARRAY

One morning I woke up
and found the world in disarray!

"Perhaps someone is dead,"
some said. No! He is not,
he is in the hospital.
Some said, "He is in the post-mortem room."
Some said, "He is in the mortuary."
Let people say what they like,
I heard something within me say,
"Somebody important is gone."

I turned to my antique collection,
tuned in my great granddad's valve radio:
it said, "no broadcasting today,
only kirthans."
Everything has come to a halt.
My heart said, "Yes! Something had happened."

I sprinted to the shop for a newspaper.
Headlines read that someone special is no more!
Tears clouded my eyes,
no more music for the day.
The world is in disarray.

J. Srinivasan

A "Good" Day

One morning I woke up and found the world . . .
Good.

I woke up early: unusual!
Mother did not scold me: great!
Sister did not quarrel with me: *fantastic!*
Reached College earlier than ever.
Answered all the questions.
That has never happened!
My girl even gave me a kiss
without my usual gift.

Night came.

I thought about the day that passed.
Was I really happy?
No.

I need a day
filled with quarrels,
brimming with scoldings,
and of course, a petty fight.

This day was monotonous
I don't need that.
I need a day in which
I fight for survival.
Give me that and
I'll be happy.

J Arul David leo

THAT DAY

One morning I woke up and found the world.
Amazing.
I could hear nothing but the wind.
The rising sun chased the fog and made the rose yellow.

Is a gurgling stream drowning the cacophony of pupils?
Where are the buzzing children firing arrows of questions?
Is the school anthem gone with the wind?
Have the cuckoos swallowed it?
The clock shows nine but where's the bell?

Warmly and freely I extend my hands
Tickled with unknown happiness, I jump once
Sunday!



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★ 1996 ★



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