

VOL. II Spring 1994  
A Joint Production  
American College,  
Madurai and  
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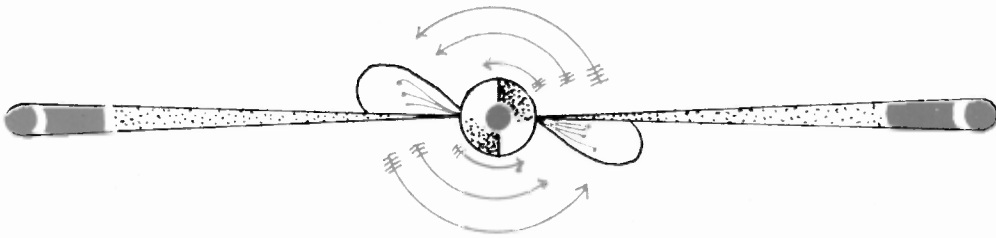
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## FACILITATORS

Kavithalaya Literary Workshop, 1994



*From left to right: Philip Dailey, Amy Stempel, Bob Granner,  
Kamala Das, Mark Antrobus, Paul Love, Lalitha Rangacharia.  
Not pictured, Pramod Menon, Grace Wardell.*



*Kavithalaya is formed of two words — Kavitha and Alaya. Kavitha in Sanskrit and other Indian languages means poetry or the poetic art. Alaya means dwelling or abode. Combined, they form Kavithalaya or the Abode of Poetic Art or the House of Poetry and Creative Art.*

# FOREWORD

*by Kamala Das*

WHEN I entered the sunlit quadrangle of the International School at Kodaikanal to be introduced to the staff and students, I was not exactly bursting with confidence.

I had been warned by one of the teachers that the students were hard to please. I was therefore naturally nervous, and trembled under my inexpensive shawl. I wished to confront them, shedding all guises. I was later told to sit in a hall that had a faded settee and a refectory table. Each student had to come alone bearing his or her poem for my scrutiny and appraisal. The Madurai students were older and more confident of themselves. They brought poems that were conventional. One read a poem that dealt with his experiences at a brothel! It was obvious that he had not gone within a mile of such a place, therefore I asked him to tear it up and begin on another. A poet can make a good witness.

The Kodaikanal students were wide-eyed innocents. They revealed their emotional insecurity in their writings.



A bad poem has no roots. Writing a good poem is like thrusting a needle into your breast bone to aspirate the invisible marrow within — a painful procedure. Bring the private and the invisible out into the sun, to expose it to cold and indifferent eyes.

Yes, poetry is an act of bravery.

A poet requires the nonchalant recklessness of a suicide squad. A good poem cannot be explained or interpreted. You recognize it by the gooseflesh that erupts on your arms while reading it.

I was moved by a poem written by a nineteen year-old who was being compelled by a separated parent to leave India. She wrote that she would have to leave her soul behind. It would only be her 'corpse' that would be carted away from this shore. I asked her not to be ashamed of her emotions. Held in my arms, she wept uncontrollably and afterwards regained her composure. Being a teacher was difficult for me. Being a mother was easier.

Bidding goodbye to the young ones I lost my composure.

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# Kavithalaya

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# WORDS WORDS WORDS...

'I've lost faith in words.  
What I say, others misunderstand  
Explanations — re-explanations.  
Explanations for explanations.  
Words pile up  
like an unpruned bush,  
like an anthill.

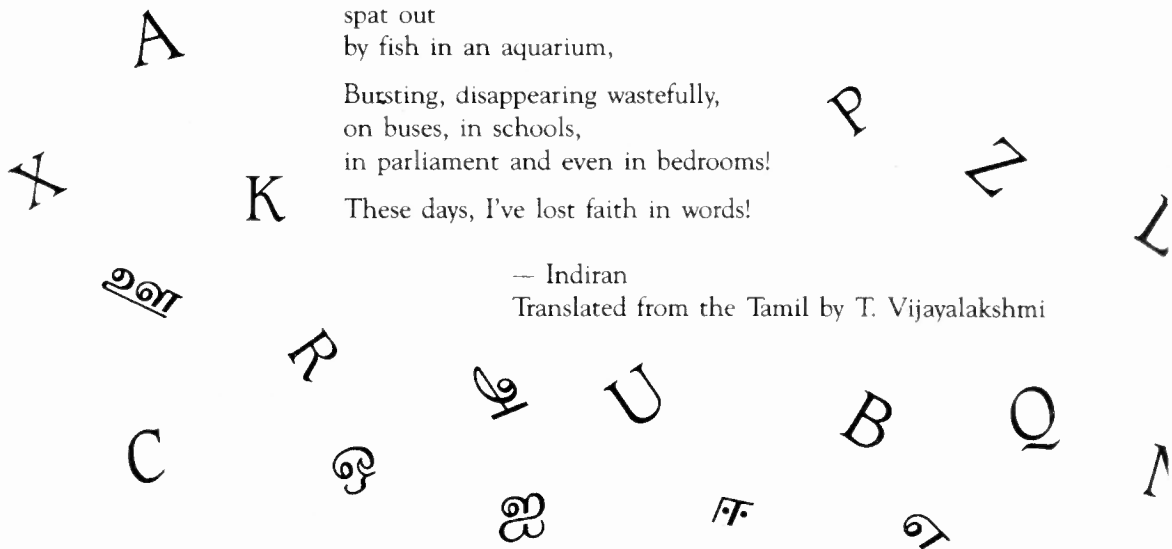
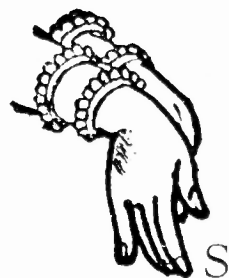
Wasted words,  
futile as light  
used to rouse a sleeping man.  
As 'My dearest friend'  
Now stands for  
'You are very useful to me.'  
Why aren't words  
as yet a lost cause?

As the glasses worn  
To improve vision  
Have now masked the face,  
I've lost faith in words.

Words,  
Which are evanescent bubbles  
spat out  
by fish in an aquarium,  
Bursting, disappearing wastefully,  
on buses, in schools,  
in parliament and even in bedrooms!  
These days, I've lost faith in words!

— Indiran

Translated from the Tamil by T. Vijayalakshmi



## CONCEPTION

"Where are you, O Muse, my husband!  
Gently splash your Shadow on me, .  
I am still a novice in your hands.  
Touch this mortal coil, Moses;  
Let me perform a Miracle.

"Hug me, Coward  
Embrace me, elusive one,  
Mould me, patch-up the breaches,  
Cling to my heart till I sigh,  
I would conceive..."

After anxious pain and pleasure,  
verse is born.

It is labour to deliver  
But I abhor playing the novice.  
Make me conceive once again!

— Arputha Pragasam

## Comfortable Chaos

It's not a mess, it only seems so a lot,  
do parents care? Most certainly not!  
Here they come with the bins and the brooms —  
to sweep quite everything out of our rooms!

Arrange-order-tidy-and-tear.  
Oh, just throw away everything that happens to be there.  
Label this useless, and that a bunch of rubbish,  
do away with everything good enough to publish!

Thus, dear writer with similar complaints  
guard your treasures with the utmost pains.  
Let not the world — tidy or see,  
and thus sadly rob you — of your sanity!

— Nirjhar Hore

# IDEAS OF THE DERANGED

## A Play in One Act

by Sonali Johnson

THE SCENE is a room in a mental hospital. There are five men in the room in gray hospital garb. One man is playing cards (at a table in the middle of the room), another is playing the piano, a third is walking around muttering to himself. The fourth man is building a matchstick house and the fifth sits immobile on a bench.

A psychologist enters the room for group therapy and proceeds to ask a series of questions.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Good afternoon gentlemen. How are you today?

MEN, IN UNISON: Good afternoon.

PSYCHOLOGIST: I feel that last week we, as a group, made a great deal of progress. If you remember, the conversational topic was 'emotion'. This week, however, I want to talk about...mmm, 'truth'..what does it mean to each of you?

*(The Card Player slowly places a Queen of Hearts on the table and looks up, his face evincing a glimmer of interest. He speaks slowly & deliberately)*

CARD PLAYER: Truth is defined by action. It is true I am here. It is true I am, for the moment, looking at you. It is true that I am, or was, playing cards. It is also true that I am stuck in this miserable, good-for-nothing loony bin!

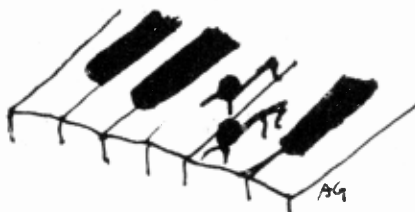
PSYCHOLOGIST: Yes! Very perceptive! Yet, what does this mean?

*(The Card Player shrugs and picks up another card. He looks at it intently, then faces the other way.)*

PIANO PLAYER. *(turns and says, musically, melodically:)* Truth does not mean anything to him. His truth is as frivolous and superficial as he is. Truth comes from soul. *(He trills a few notes on the piano)* It is expressed through what is pure and good. Truth is harmonious and complements the beauty of life. What is harsh and cruel is not truth, it is merely reality!

PSYCHOLOGIST: Isn't truth part of reality? When we seek the truth, aren't we seeking reality?

*(The piano player smashes his hand violently on the keyboard and stares angrily at the psychologist, his lips beginning to mouth the beginning of a swear-word. Yet he suppresses it and mechanically begins to play the piano again)*



*Deranged (Cont'd.)*

PSYCHOLOGIST: *(To the Muttering Man:)* Why don't you share your thoughts with us? How would you define truth?

*(The Muttering Man raises his stuttering voice so that he is audible to the audience)*

MUTTERING MAN: Truth — and her Mother — is defined by society. If we, as individuals, define truth, according to our own beliefs, we will be disregarded, and our views dismissed. Truth is the base upon which society is supposedly run. If this truth is disputed and contradicted then society will cease to function. *(He points out a barred window.)* The world is full of brain-washed monkeys...clinging to the bars of conformity!

PSYCHOLOGIST: But isn't *some* kind of conformity necessary for human beings to survive as a social animal?

*(The Muttering Man gives the psychologist a scornful, sneering look, then continues muttering to himself. The Psychologist now turns his attention to the Matchstick-house Builder. He walks over to the table and passes him a matchstick. The Matchstick-house Builder stares at the psychologist who looks exasperated and quickly proceeds to ask the man his view of truth)*

PSYCHOLOGIST: Do you have an opinion on the matter?

MATCHSTICK-HOUSE BUILDER *(in a deep strong voice says:)* Look at my house. It is fragile. It would only take a gentle breath to break the supports. Truth, like my house, is fallible. It can be contradicted and disputed and completely destroyed. It has the *illusion* of strength only.

PSYCHOLOGIST: But isn't truth a measure of strength? Isn't the real search for truth the search for the infallible and the indubitable?

*(As if in reply, the Matchstick-house Builder knocks the house down with a single sweep of the hand. He then begins to rebuild again, absorbed. The Psychologist shows signs of serious frustration, controls himself and crosses to the bench where the Immobile Man is sitting. The Psychologist sits down beside him.)*

PSYCHOLOGIST: Do you agree with any part of what the others have said? Have they influenced your thinking at all?

*(The Immobile Man swivels his head to such an angle that he looks past the psychologist. He speaks mechanically cool and calm in measured tones.)*

IMMOBILE MAN: Armageddon will be coming soon. Then our truth will be decided, for that is the Day of Judgement.

*(He now turns his head so that he is staring eye to eye with the psychologist)*

Deranged (Cont'd)

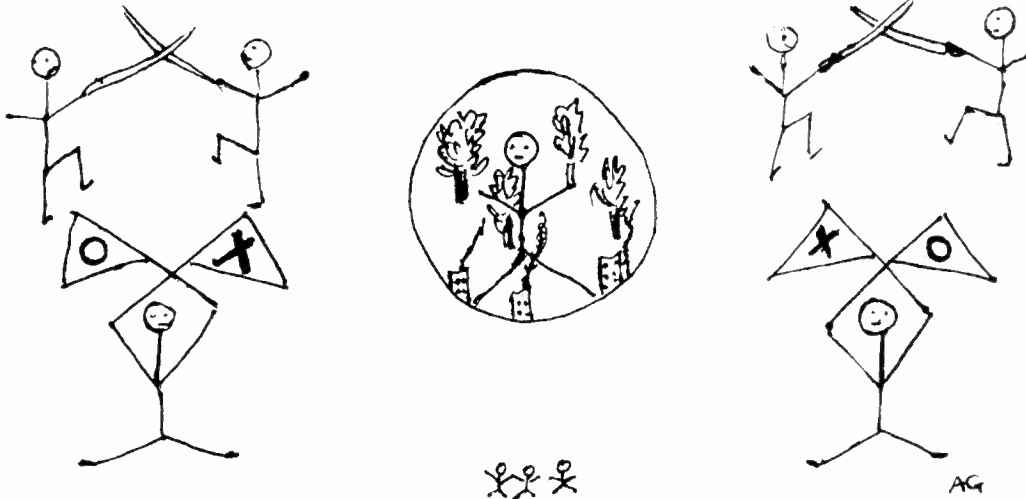
IMMOBILE MAN: Our individual truth will result in our death or our eternal life. What will yours be?

*(The Psychologist takes a few moments before he answers. The five men turn their heads to gaze at him, awaiting his answer.)*

PSYCHOLOGIST: I do not know if I will receive death or eternal life, my truth relates to those around me. Isn't truth a common ideal, that is, one shared by many? Whether this common belief is right in the eyes of God I do not know.

*(The Immobile Man's becomes blank and he slowly swivels his head back to its original position, his eyes focused on the white wall opposite. The other patients return to their occupations. The Psychologist rises and looks about him. The scene is exactly the same as when he first entered the room. The Card Player is playing cards, the Pianist is experimenting with the piano, the Mutterer is again muttering, the Matchstick-house Builder is again constructing his house and the Immobile Man is staring at the wall. The Psychologist frowns and looks at his clipboard. He makes a cross by each name, then turns and leaves the room. His total departure is announced by the heavy sound of a key in the door.)*

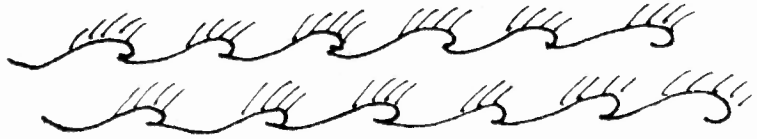
END



## Asa, min van

A tall corn-stalk with deep roots  
walks next to me,  
shadowing.  
Instinctive and totally  
impervious, unknowing  
of what she does:  
leans across stacks  
of dusty blankets  
forcing a man to move.

— Brynn Perrine  
(*min van*, is my friend, in Swedish.)



## Cycle of Eternal Return

Playful wavelets lap sensuously at toes of sand,  
Ripples of delight, remnants of past loving, line the ocean floor:  
Lovers retrace familiar paths with gentle rhythms, hand in hand,  
The elements find their passionate culmination on the shore.

The ocean and the land lie still, exhausted by their play,  
Until the jealous moon — abandoned by her entourage of mist,  
Eternal witness to the cyclic meeting — has her say,  
And drags him to his rightful bed, to be caressed and kissed.

The faithless sea leaves a lover's gift, engagement ring  
of seaweed, wood, and shells — left out of reach.  
These offerings, gathered from his farthest journeys, sing  
Of another meeting, on another beach.

— Beth Scudder

# AFTER THE STORM

IT WASN'T really a full cyclone, just the *effects* of one that had blown across the Bay of Bengal. It rained continuously for five days, often with thick fog hiding from view everything more than ten feet away. Kodai School lies in a shallow valley at 7000 feet; it has probably not suffered this much rain and mist and general dourness since its foundation in the hoary year of 1901.

It's been a long week. Now that it's over, I'm feeling much better. But I woke up this morning groaning at the prospect of another day at school: the damp, dead cold and the perennial drizzle, the mist clutching at the back of my neck, and to top it off a teacher trying to talk about...the rain. But, on opening my eyes I am struck by a knife-line of pure, sharp light on my wall which should *not* be there, but is. I open the curtains. Yes! the tall eukies and pines outside my window are illumined halfway up their length by dazzling glowing morning sunlight outlined crisply against a clear, deep blue sky. The cyclone is over for this year.

## Blow up the Dorm

But this had to be the worst I'd ever experienced. Coupled with the stress of the major research projects which had to be completed and the music I had to perform, the weather alone had threatened to wipe out what little energy remained at my disposal at the end of an already difficult semester. Plus, everyone was touchy, my best friend threatened to blow up the dorm, and my girlfriend's mood shifted between hysterics and depression. Trying to lend moral support to both of them and maintaining my own equilibrium became somewhat tiring.

But just as all hope seems lost, the storm clouds that had engulfed us for so long have departed, and the rain has halted. Looking carefully, not to be blinded by the new sun, I mentally fell into that deep azure sky, a perfect, pure sky, with not a cloud in sight.

## Fractal Landscape

Later in the day just as I return to my house, perched on the edge of the hills that cradle Kodaikanal, I have a wondrous experience of not just the sweeping vista I expected, the algae-green mountains and hot, dry plains a mile and a half below — but a *fractal* landscape of white and grey, a blazing brilliant, even painful panorama reflecting the sun's energy.

It appears as a walking menagerie of infinitely diverse cumulus clouds proceeding slowly, majestically from left to right, as though they are reading something on the mountain wall beneath my feet. The tops of these clouds are hundreds of feet high and they proceed in a *caravanserai* at least a mile out from where I stand on the edge of my mountain. It is terrible sight, a stormy sea of snow, so massive and powerful that God must have created it — if He exists.

## Depression Lifted

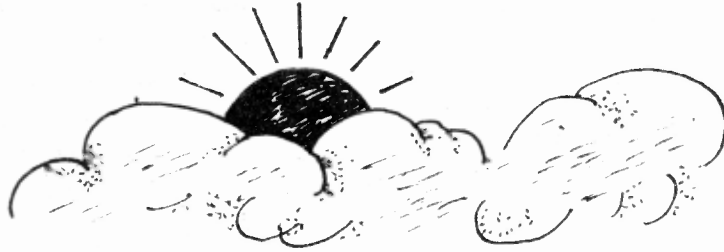
It is awesome. The effect of this spectacle in the sky on me is clear. My depression — a great physical and mental weight — has been lifted from my shoulders. Having to complete my Extended Essay, my college applications, my exams, holds little negative power over this incredible feeling of well-being brought about on this grand finale to the dark cyclone.



I understand now what the ancients felt when they looked upon stars shining like crystals in the night sky untouched by human degradation, or when they saw lightning strike a tree and turn it into a flaming torch. But this beauty that I behld was more gentle (once I put my sunglasses on). I know now why the study of nature can be a passionate thing touching the heart.

I also realized that, no matter how unbearable life becomes, it *can* improve, and when it does, it may do so spectacularly.

— Robbie Jenks



## A Still Lake Ripples, Fades

A still lake ripples, fades.  
Questioning, I plod down the twisted path,  
Till vision is enslaved.  
As I look up to pray,  
A biting mist enshrouds me;  
Darkness prevails, revulsion overpowers.  
Frantically I search,  
Ah!  
The ground is bare.  
  
Ecstatically *we* sink to our knees,  
*Body, mind, soul*  
Resolving, dissolving,  
Into,  
Tears.

— Mohit Mathur

## OLD MAN, ALONE

Rebellion, Order,  
Discrepancies of Beauty  
Come to mind:  
Chaos, or sterile meditation?

These leaden weights, that I,  
On myself do bind

Shall take me to the sea, and  
Set me free.

I have thought of it before, the sea.  
To a landlocked bureaucrat,  
It holds many answers.

These years of felt importance,  
Never allowed  
A moment on a wet beach.

But I wrote and signed those papers  
Which, no doubt describe  
Our great progress —  
Today...by the sea.

But now, I rebel!  
Against that order which held me back!

Now, I regress...  
From my own insidious attack.

They will say,

"He has become slow — that old man  
Sitting on the beach.

"How he looks! Eyes twinkling  
Of long-gone restless nights — now  
Projecting meekly on the horizon."

*I feel weak but I'm still alive.*

"He's bald now..."

*Shall I drown in obscurity?*

*Yes I can, look at that black sea!*

— Nadim Hossain



## FAREWELL

THE BUS IS MOVING at a steady eighty kilometers per hour. The plains flash by my window. Fragments of landscape slip through my fingers as I try to grasp them. They leave distorted imprints framed in my memory.

The sky with its endless acres of blue stretches out as far as the eyes can see. A kingfisher dives headfirst into a field of paddy. In search of lunch? Women are bent over, harvesting rice, multi-coloured saris dancing shamelessly with the wind. Their skin is dark, sweat glistening on the surface. The noon-day sun relentlessly beats down upon lowered heads.

As this scene passes, I am aware of the dust and wind hammering against my face. I am aware of the texture of my hair as it blows and tangles in the stiff breeze. Creating a barrier between my body and mind I erect a wall of music. "Love! Hell-Fire and Damnation!" The jarring voice screams at me. A dog runs along-side the bus. I see his jaws opening and closing — he must be barking. But I cannot hear him.

### Tranquil Village

Laughing children play in a coconut grove, and a cow is slowly making its way through an oblivious vendor's basket of jack-fruit. The bus driver stands outside a tea stall. The tense line of his mouth relaxes. Men sit around in little groups smoking *beedies* and gambling, as the women hunch in front of their door-steps sharing stories, nursing babies and massaging worn muscles after a hard days work. A blanket of tranquility settles over this village.

A ghost taps me on the shoulder. I do not turn around, I cannot turn around...cannot look into those eyes, or see the shadows of my own sad smile as I leave part of myself behind. My eyes remain fixed on the cactus fence. Now the sun has set, and small oil lanterns begin to light up the doorways of the huts which line the highway. In the distance, the city lights up the horizon. My heart starts to pound. The voice slicing through my head still screams. Only now, screeching of "Peace" then "War"... "Pick up your guns! *Gõ, go* fight for Peace." My heart pounds harder.

### Flight Called

At the airport, I stand outside the bus and watch as the boy throws my suitcase over the side into the dirt; it hits the ground with a muffled thud. A passenger plane takes off behind me. My flight is called. People rush about, trying to find a vacant check-out counter. Children cry, pilots saunter towards planes. I look into the shadows of my own eyes — which I have not dared acknowledge throughout the bus journey. I face the moment I had been dreading...leaving myself behind.

The ghost of my arms encircles me. We embrace each other body and soul. No words are spoken: we know each other much too well to have to say "good-bye."

— Lila Nagarajan

# HOPE

MY EMOTIONS burst out of me like a volcanic eruption. I know my soul cannot be empty.  
I search for joy within but I'm as lost as a child who has forgotten his way home, and has  
no one to blame but himself.

The tall mimosa which cradle me in their beauty are but a mask of my soul.  
Actions and words are of no use.

On the corner a child was raped for a dollar.  
Let my eyes and mind absorb the cruelty of the dark side of nature and let it slap me across my face.  
My mind is what separates me from the reality of the cold world, and I shall conquer.

One day finally, before my war is over, I shall enter the realm of eternal beauty,  
a realm in which my love shall be returned.

The bittersweet misery of life meanwhile violates my understanding and leaves me to face each  
day with an empty well of hope.

Tears soothe the half-hidden soul from the pain it sees in its own fragmented reflections.

The last ray of sunshine drowns my heart in its pale red sky behind the overpowering dark  
structures of nature.

No, my realm shall not be darkness but lighted by images of the eternal sweet caress of lovers.

— Arun Chadda



## A long time before...

The clay pots, brimming with water;  
the greens, reds and blues of washed clothes  
basking in the rays of the late morning sun;  
the crass voices raised in a greeting  
of a language unknown for us —

Children playing *kabaddi*  
laughing, shouting,  
eyes shaded from the sun with wide-brimmed straw hats,  
eyeing the cooking pots simmering on the fire,  
wondering when mother's coming to call them home,  
away from their *khel*,  
away from the fast falling dusk...

— Zendyn Mehta

## A Taunt

Death, you juggernaut,  
come and take me:  
I am no coward.  
After all, Death you are sure  
for all creatures.  
Why should I fear you?  
Death, come, let's have tea,  
then go to your abode;  
I am God's creation.

Yama, I am not afraid of you.  
You can take only my body,  
not my love for my fellows.  
I will be living in many hearts,  
as will my achievements.  
So don't be proud, see?  
I am stronger than you.  
Destroyed I'll surely be  
but not defeated.  
Come, take me if you can,  
my dear foe.

D. Senthilkumar



## A life I never knew

I walk past the *veena* room and hear the drone of a *tanpura*.  
As I absorb an eternity of sound, the purity of a distant voice floats to my ears.  
I find comfort in the haunting tones and rhythm,  
and yet, just a bit of it seems so familiar.  
So familiar, I cannot understand why.  
I cannot think straight, my mind goes into two worlds.  
Just then, I bump into a good friend, but  
Even his presence goes unnoticed.

I grope at a wall; searching inwardly, frantically for answers,  
But find none in the deep recesses of my mind.  
As I go deeper into the heart of the music,  
into the realms of the unconscious,  
I come across an obstacle,  
the memory: another life — a life I never knew.

— Manasi Tirodkar

## ♿ ABOUT SURGERY ♿

Succouring words, above the screeching of a moving bed.  
Hungry, thirsty, the stomach rumbling for food.  
A thumping and sinking feeling. Heart about to explode,  
blow up into ten thousand pieces and bits  
splattering me all over the austere white walls.  
Chilling, penetrating; the stinging cold of fear.  
The pungent smell of medicine,  
foul to the nostrils trying to comfort an empty stomach.

As though strapped for an electrocution,  
stripped, drugged, and stoned,  
*to be put to sleep,*  
but not knocked-out enough,  
I endured the needle biting gnawing oozing throbbing,  
the green vein circulating the drug.  
around and around this motionless semi-conscious body.

I am watching. Gazing through half-closed eyelids  
I see men, men like butchers huddled around, knives in hand  
to exterminate the paralyzed prey.

Then silence, darkness slowly drowning in a quicksand of sleep.

I am half-awakened again into a surreal agony, the stench of death,  
Gas creeping in through the mouth and nose.  
Suffocating mist creeping in from the mountains.  
Numb, still, hard on the moving bed,  
Each jerk, like a tip of a cane  
pushed into something in me like a gunshot wound.  
Shrieks and cries escape a mouth barely mine.

Like leeches in reverse, the tubes stuck into me filled me with  
transparent liquids, stinging like salt —  
I don't know whether they are leeches or snakes,  
poisoning, intoxicating.

Family faces cave in, supportive words are barely heard.  
Though happy crusaders quench my thirst, I can't tell if...  
*Brain boiling into bubbles popping at every sound,*  
*light and dark hanging over everything like a lunar eclipse.*

Waking in the little ward  
to the warm smell and feel of a soaking wet bed,

I look up at my leg hoisted, wrapped in white,  
a five-toed log,  
chains clanking at the slightest move,  
stomach still growling in hunger,  
and yet nauseated by the thought of food.  
I think, "Pain, a partner of life?"

Gazing through droopy eyelids, I survey the dullness of my surroundings.  
This is a little-kids hospital, four other beds in the drab room.

Most of the kids I see around me,  
half-playing with toys in bed, or else groaning,  
are younger than me, they have things much worse than I do.  
And one of them, I hear, is getting ready to die.

— Sabina Dewan

## REFLECTIONS

Light comes and it goes  
The child in me remembers  
What the adult in me doesn't:  
Warm hugs, happy smiles.

I look at life through a mirror  
The reflections of the past  
The bearings of the future.  
Shadows walk to and fro.

Yet, it is the adult in me that sees  
What the child never saw:  
Reluctant hellos, sad eyes,

The sounds that echo  
The shattering of my dreams  
The pain the overrides the joy,  
The silence that reverberates.

— Deepa R.



## APPLE!?! OH...NO!

Right from my childhood  
the Apple was my enemy.  
The very word drives me mad  
for I hate the fruit to the core.

On my entry to the school —  
“A for Apple” was the first lesson!  
Why not “A for Ape” or that stupid “Ass”?  
Thus began my education with this fruit.

They taught me Religion!  
Never did they fail to teach “Adam’s Apple”.  
Why in Hell did he eat the Apple anyway?  
He could have tried bananas for a change!

Thank God! I finally escaped into Science.  
That forbidden fruit would bother me no more  
But my joy didn’t last long,  
for my first lesson was “Theory of Gravitation”.

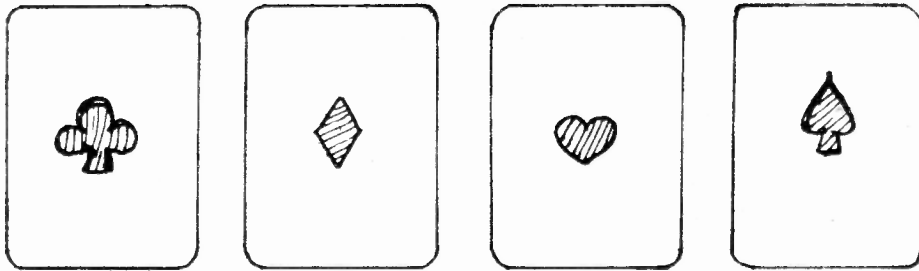
What about Computer Science?  
I applied for NIIT and Brilliants’  
and I hoped for admission to Computer Point —  
Damn it! the offer came from Apple Industries!

How could I bear all this?  
I fell sick and was taken to a Psychiatrist.  
He gave me no pill but only this counsel  
“An Apple a day...”

— Arul David Leo J.







## The waiting game

"Tick-tock, tick-tock,"  
A *Heart* discarded, a lover lost.  
*Clubs*, the weapons of war.  
*Diamonds* are the fine 'distractions and  
A grave is made ready by eager *Spades*.

"Tick-tock, tick-tock,"  
New rounds begin with new people,  
The players each order their cards.  
Bone China, Belgian lace,  
"cinnamon tea is always too sweet,"

"Tick-tock, tick-tock,"  
Listless victims of feeble will,  
drop cards with a practised skill,  
and adding to the party of *Numbers*  
*Kings* and *Queens*, the glitterati,

"Tick-tock, tick-tock,"  
eyes watching, people playing  
cards taken, maps dissolving  
cards arranged, the workers rebelling  
cards drop, the lovers uniting  
cards move, each to the other —  
you play to win, when you play for dying

"tick-tock," waiting, waiting  
"tick-tock, tick-tock,"  
At last, a winner!  
he declares it: death!

— Roshini Palajani

# HIMALAYA

On  
the  
summit  
of Siachen  
He wipes his frost-bitten face,  
Brushes his frizzled hair,  
Buries himself under the snow  
To escape the avalanche.

Not  
a snow man  
But a civilised soldier  
Manufactured for manslaughter.

He  
walks,  
eats, sleeps  
even thinks by order.

Not  
a human  
But an instrument  
Manoeuvred from a  
remote place

By  
megalomaniacs  
endlessly  
verbalising across tables.

On  
frozen wastelands  
He is a fish on sand.

His  
body wages  
a barbarous battle  
Against biting cold.

His  
pensive mind  
pictures a passionate wife,  
Pranks of a tender child,  
Blessings of a dying mother —  
The bliss to be missed forever.

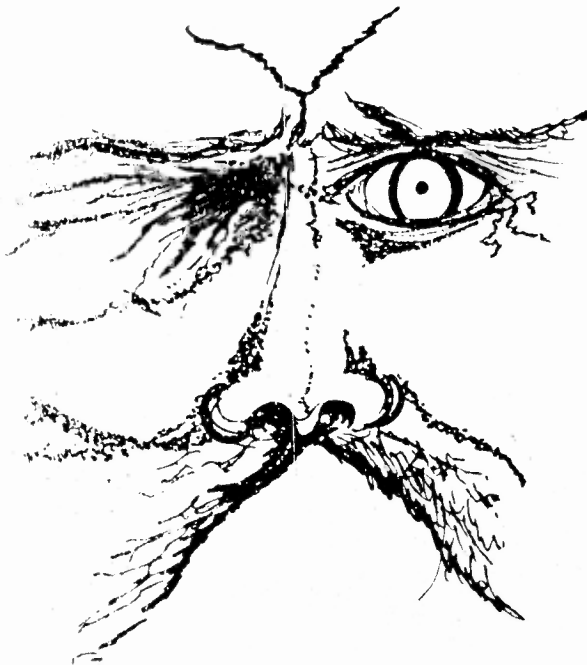
Perplexed  
 By a precarious life  
 On the frosty nights he  
*dreams*  
 His body coffined in the  
*c r e v a s s e s*  
 hovering  
 His ghost                      over the  
                                  mountains —  
 A horrendous owl.

AS THE COLD WAVES ESCALATE HE EVOLVES INTO A 'MARTYR'.

A  
 month  
 later  
 a memorial  
 sprouts announcing  
 HE DIED WITH HONOUR

In future  
 Soldiers will come and go here  
 Leave a wreath to rot,  
 And brood over destinies —  
 Of their own cadavers  
 Germinating into memorials.

— Dev Anand Paul



## TRACE QUIETUS

Time was raped  
the egg spilt a Bastard,  
a temporary filling in the mouth of life: a stagnant tribe.

ostensibly appraised eyes of the green parrot-breed blinked and assimilated blind visions.  
inhaled Death, naturally; countless times,  
at dusk thanked god: the employed pseudonym.

fear of Death born at the threshold of conditioning,  
by priests of ancient today.

abnegated pleasures impede the advent of Death.  
yet, a wet foetus, is spat in the eye by Quietus,  
exuding unborn effervescence of nescience and conformity.

i am stung by a plagued moth: commonality.  
the inevitable eventuates.  
my tasteless life dolled out by exploited religious spoons.  
and spirits boil into the next.

Death, well-accommodated, pours itself into forever,  
reproducing aged clay pots.  
war leaves its perfumed droppings.  
shrapnel perforate those primitive receptacles.

Death swims out, staining the innocuous earth with her  
pregnant blood.  
and dripping comfortably into life.  
emancipated.  
impregnable Death was stabbed, its wound wolfed me:  
a mere poltroon.

but, breathe on...  
we'll ripen.

— kashvi rekhy



## FAREWELL

The Bond breaks —  
Drip, drip, drip,  
it trickles down  
to the sparkling  
white floor,  
making a pattern of its own.  
The sparkling silver blade  
of the condemned knife  
cuts with a surgeon's precision.

Life ebbs out of the  
deep caverns of her soul.  
The once precious blood  
lies wasted on the floor.

Tears mingle with blood to make  
a new recipe for suicide.  
A fleeting look of panic  
as she bids farewell to  
her only companion, life.  
Finally the eyes close  
and a smile touches the lips.  
Silence...  
except for the dripping rhythm  
of the blood.

— Smita Sundaresan.



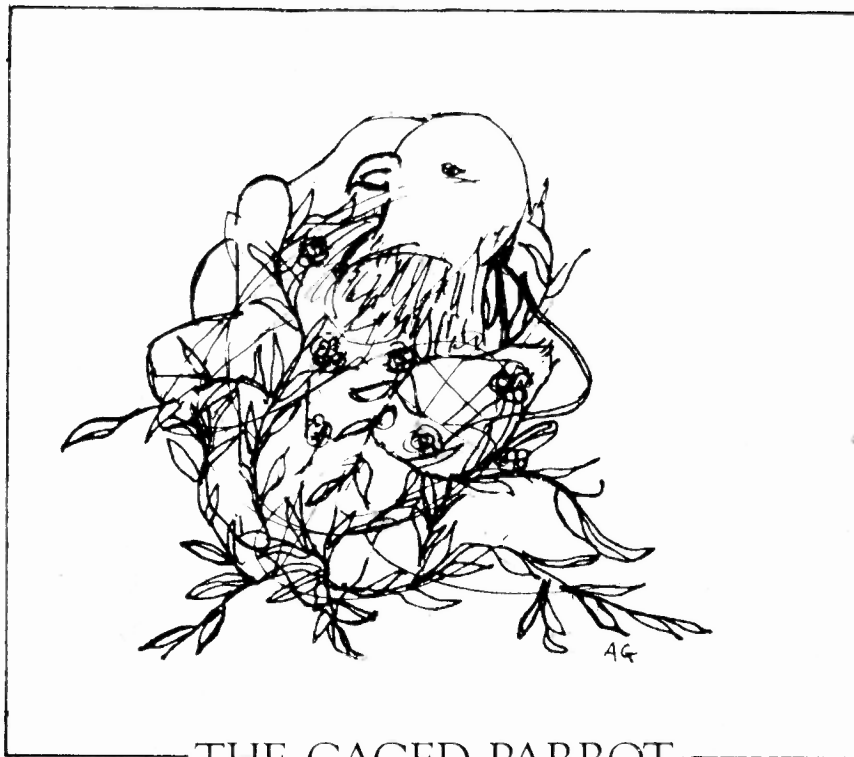
## O Selfish One.

Within the murky pool of coffee dregs,  
reflection, distortion — O, selfish one?  
Faded romantic drivelling lies of love,

Pathetic hypocrite-lover the priority?

No, but to possess, to be worshipped;  
To become a saint of the body.  
Yes, my body with yours; my soul and yours.

— Ayesha Panthaky



## THE CAGED PARROT

I am the Caged Parrot,  
Its story is mine.  
Imprisoned by invisible fetters,  
Born within bars,  
Freedom and flight unknown,  
We both serve life terms.  
My wheel and clay lie untouched  
My loom and yarn lie resting;  
Wings atrophy with disuse  
And so does energy to reach skywards.  
Who's my Jailer?  
God?  
When will we fly —  
The parrot and I...?

— Saroja R.

# The Sinner

Alone —  
In a frenzy of the world  
Among the shattered pieces  
Of the past,  
Dead insects and beetles  
Crunched under my feet  
(Maybe there was human bone too).  
Dried leaves of an ancient  
Autumn flew against my face —  
There hadn't been a Spring  
For a long time —  
Fossils of yesterday engraved  
On each rock, stared back blankly at me.

Bitter memories echoed —  
In the hollowness  
Of the piercing wind  
Silently deafening my ears.  
My soul a solitary wanderer roamed aimlessly  
In a world...  
A world now dead...  
A world I'd once known.

Solace —  
I tried to find  
In this cruel world  
Of accusing eyes,  
But darkness only gnawed  
At my soul;  
No moon or stars in the sky.

Dreams —  
I tried to dream,  
Tried to paint the world  
I'd known:  
But all I saw was nightmares  
In the hellish world of  
half-crushed skulls.

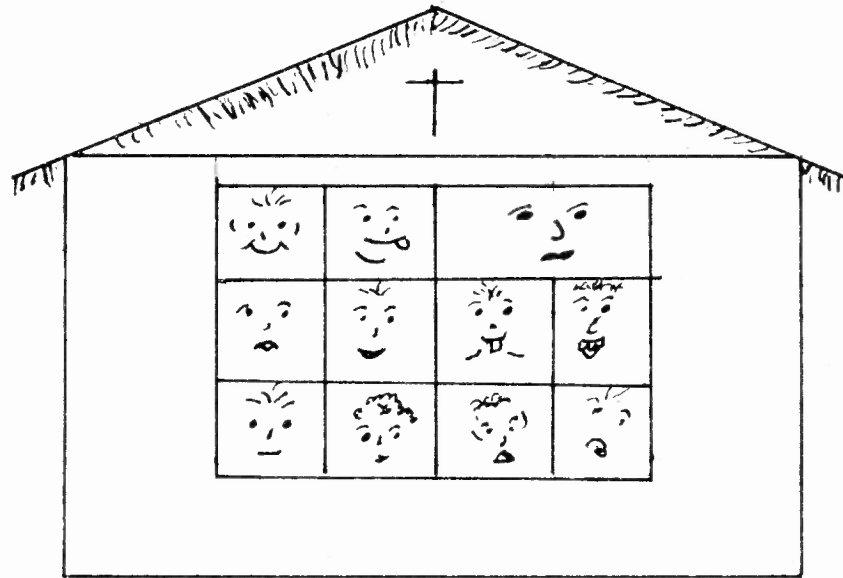
Creations of the God above —  
We had been ruined  
By our bloody deeds;  
Demolished love —  
The earth, now pregnant  
With animosity.

As to a Mother who drew her,  
New-born to her bosom,  
I was embraced  
By the darkness, the sins,  
the criminal  
results of man folly.  
Alone on the Earth,  
Swallowed in, despite  
Her belly-full  
Mankind's criminals

"You are a sinner!"  
She bellowed to me,  
Gorging me in  
To satiate her appetite  
for bloody sin —  
The bloody sin of being born...

— Ruchi B.





## MY CHURCH

MY CHURCH is the one on Second and Cedar, built way back in 1863 I think. No, don't say anything about getting old and senile, but I remember when it was a beautiful building. Looks like a block of concrete now. They added all those glass doors and soft lighting. And those speakers! It sounds like Jesus is gonna jump out of the pew behind you and beat you silly when the Pastor yells, "Praise the Lord!" We even have new stained-glass windows. The PC kind where Jesus looks like a Jew and not some Swede. You know the kind that gives the Church that up and coming, modern, open minded impartial (non-biased) look. The look that bugs the Lutherans.

### Creaking Stairs

Have you ever been inside? Inside, it still looks like they forgot to remodel. All the pews and arches are still heavy oak wood. The stairs to the balcony still creak. There are still the same red carpets dividing the sanctuary like four thick slices in a lemon pie.

I still smell the mixed prominence of exaggerated perfume, lipstick and coffee. I still see the children running out of the service when they think that no one is looking, and the sea of old faces in the crowd. Ah the scar of age! Only my face is one of them now. I'm still at home in my church. Its still my church.

— Jenny Garrison



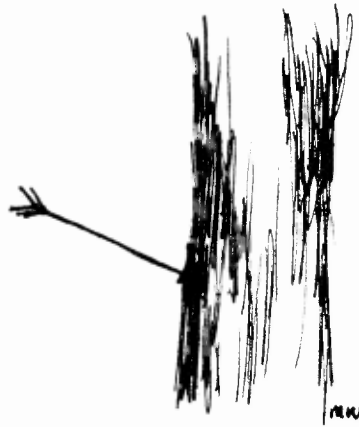
# My Grandmother Had a Heart Attack

"No! she said. You shall not have it!"  
And she briskly walked away.  
"If my father were here he would have bought it for me,"  
I bleated.  
My Grandmother was a proud woman.  
But no,  
My playmate Richard detected tears in her eyes  
When he caught up with her.  
"Let her cry" I said.

I'm 24 now, everything's changed.  
My older cousins consult me about their marriage proposals.  
To one such I said No.  
And suffered to see the ageing girl still unmarried.  
This I confided in a friend,  
And was soon relieved to hear  
The girl had finally found a match.

Silently I still suffer  
For the suffering I caused my Grandmother  
Almost fifteen years ago.  
Will there be redemption for me  
If I confide in you?

— Edison Thomas



## VICTIM TO OFFENDER

THE HANDS of fire groped in the darkness, wanting to touch, to feel — but the explorations were a violation that rendered her immobile.

“Push them away”, an inner voice said, yet instinct and reflex failed to comply.

“If you don’t stop him now, it’s your fault,” the voice was now bitter and cynical.

“Close your eyes and pretend you’re somewhere else,” she tells herself. “Step outside of your body, so you can’t feel the pain,” Lying still with her eyes shut as if asleep, is merely a pretense; he must know that, yet he won’t stop.

In the morning she seeks refuge within, and nurtures an ardent dread of older men.

Lying in fear at night as she watches him creep into the room, one vision plagues her. Fire. The way it jumps and dances with such grace, while being so destructive. She envisions it licking through and devouring the whole house, and hears the cries of pain reverberating around the room.

This hatred and fear of fire grows to the point of destruction.

She sees the familiar scene of flames dancing and leaping in the house. Mesmerized she gazes at the house being consumed. The flames beckon her, inviting her to partake of their deliciousness. Still afraid, she obeys.

— Sharmila Lawrence

## Conscience

Perfection is a  
destination  
I gave up long ago.

Since, I’ve tried  
to cover up my faults,  
glorify my strengths,  
and somehow move along.

My conscience  
gave up on me  
before I gave up on it.  
Society became my conscience,  
approval by others my goal.

But then, en route  
Why do I stop and think?  
Giving up  
doesn’t mean dead,  
I suppose.

Maybe I should  
retrace my steps  
before its too late.  
The wings of Truth have fluttered,  
not flown away.

I’ll nurture It and hold It  
and bid adieu to the rest.

— Lyola Paul

## JOURNEYS CONTINUE...

But, that was a nice dream  
Shattered at the cost of the journey,  
that ought to continue.  
A sudden jolt, new engine connected.  
Engines change; journeys continue  
but dreams cannot.

My child sleeps,  
I get down for a stroll.  
People, scattered on the platform,  
busy, even at night.  
The coffee vendor  
with tired looks  
works round the clock  
to make ends meet.  
His life continues,  
my dreams never do.  
Life seems so heavy,  
The porter nods his head  
not in agreement, but in sleep.

I look into the train.  
A young couple, happy together,  
showering love,  
sharing responsibility,  
hope in their faces.

I look at a child  
who sleeps near the window  
in the next compartment,  
and at the many who care for him,  
the parents, grandparents  
my child lacks.

I'm reminded of my childhood.  
I travelled by trains,  
steam engines then,  
they troubled me with soot.  
No need to worry  
with parents and relatives  
around me;  
tears preserved, to shed in the future.

The guard whistles,  
the journey continues.  
I board the train  
and reach my child —  
sleeping alone.  
The train moves,  
the journey continues,  
My dreams — hardly.

— J. Srinivasan.



## A NEW DAY (RAP)

Now lemme tell you rappers about  
a time so long ago...  
They had a thing called smoke  
and a thing called fog  
But there jus weren't  
no such thing-called-smog.

And when you wanted to get-scared...  
you watched a horror show... Now, holy smokes,  
just-check-out-the-news-show...!

I never thought anybody'd have to see a day  
when things and people had to get-this-way!  
Poverty, starvation, attempted genocide,  
bloody hell whipping us from side-to-side!

Say, what about the latest one, the kid who got-shot?  
Kill her! Who?  
There goes another nut!

You're stuck in-this-place  
with no-escape.  
If you don't-wanna-die, you gotta live...and-lie.

Who-says, "we're civilized"? who says, "We're better"?  
Soldiers still pluck-out-eyes  
and try to kill your brother.

I'm going quite insane, can't-take-the-pain,  
The world, was-it-only — created in vain?

Hell, no! This is a lovely place....

THAT WE HAD...

Why did we have to go and colour-it-bad?

Out of streets so cold, I'll one day welcome a wisdom-of-gold  
There must be a way, 'cause tomorrow-is-a-new-day.



— Adnan (the Rapper) Alam

## INHERITANCE (Rap)

In darkness we are all the same,  
Looking for the answers,  
Answers to questions which sound inane.  
  
In confusion, we all *seem* to communicate,  
Listening for the words,  
Words of wisdom which we try and manipulate.  
  
In life we climb the ladder,  
Climbing for the top,  
Top from bottom which we hope is better.  
  
In love we call for peace  
Moving to better from worse which still doesn't kill the beast.  
  
In this world we are all giving,  
Praying "Peace" for the dead —  
What about the living?

— Vinod Srinivasan

## Into the Night

In the castle of my skin I am a prisoner  
looking for a small door — When I leave  
I will run fast into the night  
and wait for you  
under the willow-tree.  
  
In the darkness no one can see the colour of our skin.  
There are no knives to throw at us  
as they laugh in derision.  
  
Let us run into a field of marigolds  
and laugh,  
laugh until we are exhausted of content.  
  
Come with me, to the springs of the dark forest  
where we can wash  
all this filth away.

— Paul D. Lall

## ★ ★ ★ ELECTION TIME ★ ★ ★

TODAY IS THE DAY of the elections... Mani has been assigned to collect votes by any and all means. "Just one more person to complete my quota," he thinks "which might give our party a much needed majority!"

But he is tired and dust-laden from roaming around the constituency, the heat is catching up with him. He has one hour left before the voting begins.

★ ★ ★

An old woman, with hunger as her only companion, lays on the sidewalk in the same place day after day under a small patch of shade. No food now for her for two days, the fruits of begging being swept away by the forceful undercurrent of the oncoming elections. She can no longer lift herself, as the arsenic hunger eats into her through protruding bones and shrivelled skin. She remains there still, in the ragged remains of the sari given her in return for a vote she cast in the previous year's elections. Would her vote be ignored this year? She could no longer walk to the polling station.

Mani takes his tea and comes out of the tea shop still fatigued. He pulls out a beedi and lighting it, takes a long puff to help him arrange his thoughts around the concept of one last voter.

He could ask Muthu Dada to supply him with the dummies to cast any amount of deficient votes, but that meant eating into takings from the cozy election fund he had kept especially for himself. Freelancing was more profitable than subcontracting.

★ ★ ★

Thinking along this strain, he hears a groaning sound; it is the old woman surrounded by flies she no longer bothers to shoo away.

"Hey old woman, why don't you come with me and cast your vote, for our esteemed and noble leader?" Mani yells in her direction.

"I cannot even lift this old body of mine, how am I to cast a vote?" the old woman replies.

"But, I will give you a ride there myself, just as a favour. And I'll tell you what, how would you like a nice meal with *appalam* and *payasam*?"

He counts up his savings on her vote, while he walks away from the woman to arrange for the van. He carries her into it just like a bundle of rags and promises to return her to her 'home' by the side of the road after the voting and the sumptuous meal.

★ ★ ★

The old woman puts her thumb impression on the voter's list and is carried out of the election center to have the rich meal of rice and *sambar*, *rasam*, and curd with sweets and bananas and all variety of vegetables. Spoon after spoon of rice she receives hoping that it could somehow always be like this. Afterwards, her full body hobbles towards the crowded shade of a tree near the election building.

While waiting there with Mani's other voters for a ride, she begins to develop a strong feeling within her worn-out system, rebelling against anything more rich than gruel *conjee* she has been so used to. Behind the ruins of the buildings she relieves herself and staggers back to the tree where the others still wait. Several times she repeats this ritual, hoping meanwhile she would not miss her ride with Mani. But as time wears on, the others have begun murmuring curses against him and begin to disperse.

★ ★ ★

The last time the old woman hobbles from behind the ruins — the polling station is entirely deserted. "The scheming rascal," she mutters. Her thin legs pull her body back towards her old spot beside the tea stall. Finally the old woman's weak legs desert her and she crawls the last kilometer to her place on the wayside... to wait, perhaps, for another election and further double deception.

— Jessie Furvin S.

## DROUGHT

The plouging penniless farmers,  
Eyes staring under sweaty foreheads,  
Penetrated the sky's blue lacquered sheen,  
The sun mocking their desired vision.  
By hope deserted  
they rest under shadowy trees  
Cursing Fate.

Hope races through their minds  
As, wisely, winds wipe their sweat  
with warm lightning:  
A mirage entices them  
Of pastures never before seen.  
A random cloud expels sudden droplets  
To bless the thirsty earth.  
But the blueness never breaks again  
To resurrect the earth with rain.  
It was merely an interlude  
To stir hopes nearly dead,  
That life would come anew.  
Are they doomed to unfulfilled dreams,  
Needs gone unrealized?



— C. Charles Dilip Roy.

## ✕ THE TRAIN ✕

I admit it, with dry contempt I saw them  
sitting and chatting happily  
at the entryway of our carriage:

The man, his dhoti in rags,  
his wife, adjusting her colourless sari  
the sons, wearing half of half-trousers.

A classmate of mine, a native cousin,  
is also travelling with me —  
we were talking about psychology!

“Brutes! Why are these beggars  
blocking the way? We should call the TTE  
to clear them!” We said.

But when the TTE did come,  
he came like a God on Judgement Day.  
He checked our tickets  
and then, with a stern expression  
went over to the huddling family  
at the door.

“*Ticket ekkada?*” the TTE asked.

The man not producing any,  
said something in Telugu.  
Suddenly, the TTE transformed himself into an enraged lion  
and swiped at the face of the man with all his force.  
We were apprehensive, but interested to watch.

The man fell at the *lion's* feet,  
and received more punches on his back.

The wife beat her breast and cried out  
at her husband's thrashing and humiliations.  
Her two children fell at the *lion's* feet,

He abused them like dogs —  
kicking them as they cried out  
for their parents and for their pain.

The train was still running fast; the TTE  
turned to us,



"Spoiling the train, you see,  
breaking the laws, unfit to live," he sputtered,  
as he proceeded on to the other carriages.  
For a long time we watched them...we watched them cry.

The man hugged all his family  
and they cried till  
the next station arrived.

There, they wiped their tears,  
got down  
and vanished from sight.

As the train got up speed again,  
the breeze flapped its wings near the windows.  
Trees and bushes slipped backwards fast,

Suddenly, I begin sobbing.  
My cousin asks, why?  
He doesn't understand  
that all I see,  
is the man still crying,  
hugging his family  
at the entrance of our carriage.

— A.S. Arulswamy



## THE PROSPECTIVE BRIDE-GROOM

THE WATERPOTS were nearly all filled for the day. The floor was smooth and cool from a fresh plastering of cowdung. The little courtyards in the front and back of the house had been swept twice over to keep the dust down. While the mother scurried about checking the food, the younger girls staked claims for the best clothes at home. After all they had paid for them with the money made from the cloth they wove and the beedis they rolled from morn to dusk. They certainly had to dress better than Priya who sat at home and did nothing because she'd been to college for three years.



Priya watched them out of the corner of her eyes as she scrubbed the turmeric paste off her face under the coconut tree in the backyard. Wiping her arms and face on the *pallu* of her faded sari she then listlessly discarded it for the one her sisters had rejected and wound it around herself. It wasn't anything a girl would wear when a prospective groom came to see her. But as she outlined her eyes with *kajal* and put on a *bindi*, she said to herself, "Sari or no sari I look better than my sisters in all their glittering clothes and glass bangles." Squinting into a broken piece of mirror, she turned this way and that to get a good view of herself in the lone beam of sunlight that had penetrated the poorly-thatched roof. As she oiled and braided her wiry tresses flowing past her waist like the aerial roots of banyan tree, she wondered what sort of a person the prospective groom would turn out to be.



Would he be tall? Of course, he had to be fair and handsome if he was to marry her. Would his mouth smell? She hoped he wouldn't smell like other men who stank of sweat and had long, dirty, cruel-looking nails on their toes.

Suddenly there was a commotion outside, women shrieking, shouting, pleading.

It all ended with a loud crash. Priya ran outside, smashing her toe on a door frame. There, before them lay a young mango tree they had nursed so fondly over the years, chopped in the middle as though beheaded. The small buds with future tiny mangoes lay scattered all over the newly swept yard. The leaves from the felled tree fluttered like the locks on an unclaimed corpse in the wind.



"Stop shouting, you old hags," barked one of the Mudalali's henchmen, "don't you see the tree would be in the way of the electric line?"

Priya watched them trample over the tender shoots as they left. There wasn't going to be an electric line anywhere here. It was the Mudalali's way of getting even with them for resisting his lecherous advances towards her.

The blood boiled in her veins as she watched them helplessly. If only there was some man in her family to put an end to this menace.

As she cleared the leaves around the chopped tree stump, Priya pretended not to hear the comments behind her about nobody wanting a degreeless scholar who wouldn't take up petty jobs: the prospective groom and his folks had made a hasty retreat when they heard the dowry was a pittance and that she hadn't any job. Education and a pretty face, they felt, wouldn't fill empty stomachs.

She watered and manured the stump with a little ash and dung. Probably with the next rains would come new shoots, and a young man to marry her. ☺

— Reeba John



## Inferno

An acute angle complimented by an obtuse one  
to create a complete circuit  
impermeable by any notion  
fire errupting by every touch, sigh  
fueled by chaotic turmoil

Like an eternal nightmare burns deep inside  
Yet it has no surreal epicenter

Electricity arcs between obsession and despair  
the already transcended passion elicits the twilight  
of the fatal spark  
But as the hands of time painfully continues its journey  
With it the flickering flames die out  
and an abused crater is left behind.

— Andrea Baranyai

## GRANDMOTHER

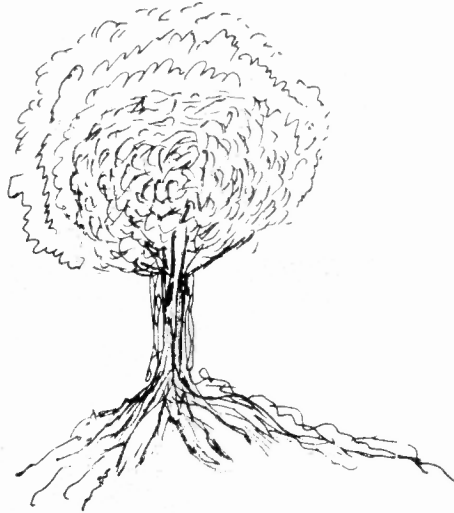
The tree has aged  
Twined soft  
And now she only sways  
Slightly, as the wind  
disturbs her.

The fresh green of before  
Could be torn  
Ripped painfully  
Amidst protests of violation.

Her world had been uprooted  
Many times.  
Its fragility exposed  
And bent  
Like a sapling  
Crushed by a raindrop  
Seemingly tender.

We are worlds apart  
But across oceans  
And continents of the mind  
We reach out,  
And that is family.

— Maya



## BETRAYAL

The wood burns  
with rising flames  
Bright as a morning star  
at the birth of  
Love,  
Passion brimming with vigour:  
They dance and seem to take the world  
in their stride.

But soon  
the flames dim  
moving slowly away from  
their benefactor:

Losing the vitality of Love  
they vanish,  
abandoning the embers:  
which shimmer and linger  
in anguish.

But Oh! the solitary lover,  
Bereft of flame,  
forlorn, turns into  
murky deadened ash —  
A souvenir of Betrayal?

— S. Caroline J. Padma

## ♥ A CORNY TALE ♥

BECAUSE I could think of a lot more interesting things to do, I took out a dry corn seed which I had kept in the drinking water bottle left at home.

Being determined not to travel light, I packed the water bottle and my knap-sack into the smallest handkerchief I could find.

Using a flotation spell, I drifted six feet in the air and buried the seed in the sky. The seed split, the cornstalk grew and grew, and reached into the heavens... at about two-foot tall!

### The Largest Tree

Suddenly, I realized for the first time, that the largest tree in the world known to man, had been living in my water bottle all along. I stood in the shade of the plant where the sun grew hot and strong.

I stood in that naked heat for so long, I got frostbite. To thaw out, I leapt into a freezing lake and sighed with relief. The air was balmy, Snow falling heavily. Suddenly a wingless bird bit off my head and flew away with it. I screamed in annoyance sweat running in buckets down my brow.

I heard the rasping smile of the bird as it escaped with my head. Poor head. I ran after walking as slowly as possible due to frostbite and chillblains, and reciting my grandpa's favorite song. At last, I marched up to the island on the lake. On the island was an angry boar who slept on a spider's web sixteen feet from the ground, and did not like strangers.

### Never Again

"If you are brave enough to sleep on a flimsy spider-web you should be brave enough to meet strangers," I said, "besides, you can't stay on an island forever." The boar was too shy and said nothing. At long last, before five minutes were over, I got my head back. I swore I'd never lose my head again, literally, figuratively or otherwise.

I felt that my friends, being such a disinterested group, would be curious indeed to see "the largest tree in the world, now known by woman" They were disgusted with the plant, and gave me a corn-seed sized box to applaud my brilliance. I figured that if that that huge, nay, gargantuan plant could fit into a seed, it would fit into a seed-sized box. It did, and now, since you have my box, can I have it back please?

— Marina

## THE SICK MAN'S UTOPIA

THE ARENA lay illumined. Like a screaming vacuum, it pulled everyone in. The ringside was especially plush, the carpeted risers ascending like a many-tiered cake. But the ringside seats, did not flow one into the other nor, in fact, did any of the seats; they were divided up as though into a *pie-chart* by picket fences, the cute ones you see in suburban gardens. The white, and then black arc of seats were the largest portion of the *pie chart* but they still didn't go full 'round, for there were also the yellow, red, and brown sections to the *pie*. Regardless of the color, however, the seats were upholstered in a deep, comfortable velvet pile. All sections had a prime ringside view, no one felt that anyone else could see more than they could of the arena which awaited the action like a wide-open mouth.

People of all colours started to trickle in — even though it was still early. There were a series of passageways with a *white entrance* located under the *white* ringside seats, a *black entrance* underneath the *black* seats, and so on. The *yellow entrance* was busy: A yellow boy's black shiny haircut bobbed up and down as he talked to his friend. "No really. They don't have a better view than us. I know, I snuck around to that side one day. Just because they're *white* doesn't mean their view is *better*."

"That's true," the friend replied, his slanted eyes creasing into a smile.

He pointed to a petite yellow girl with delicate eyebrows and painted eyes. "Oh look who's here," he teased.

"Shh! don't embarrass me like that," The boy replied

"Who cares," the friend said, "she doesn't speak *Universal* she only speaks her native tongue. Besides, she likes you, I can tell."

"Well, I guess UA (Universal Asian) is hard to pick up. Its easier for the whites, their Universal is English!"

"Say, lets hurry, I still want to get a front-row seat today."

The arena soon resembled the Tower of Babel. The effort to universalize languages into large ethnic blocks was demonstrated by the grand multiplicity of voices, some guttural and harsh, some melodious and flowing.

"What are the reds so fired up about?"

"I dunno. Can a yellow understand a red?"

"Don't you ever feel like sitting in the white seats just sometimes?"

"No-way! Anyhow the whites are incomprehensible. It is better we stay with yellows. That's what we are! Reds to red, blacks to black, I always say. You know, united we fight, divided we get along? Oh look!"

Above them all, a great emperor descended from the ceiling, seated on a floating golden throne, which rotated ever so slowly like a disco ball. The emperor wore a golden costume with calligraphy embroidered upon it in all the Universal tongues. All around the emperor a retinue also descended walking like acrobats upon thin golden tightropes in the air.

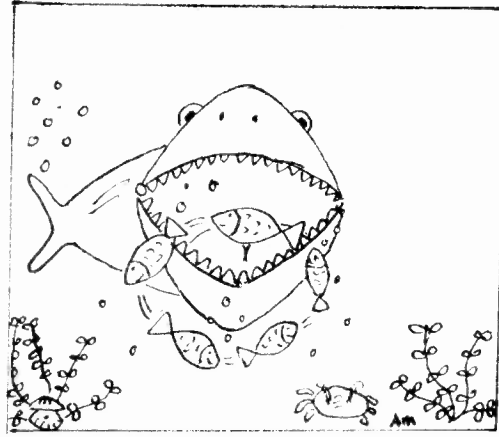
But the emperor's mysterious countenance was the most commanding of all sights in the bustling arena. His face, covered by a decorative mask of golden mirrored glass, attracted the attention of all the people, for when they looked at the huge masked face staring down at them, all they saw reflected was themselves.

The boy pulled his attention away from the awe-inspiring sight above their heads and said, "Okay forget it, I wasn't serious about changing seats. But what if..."

"Shh," the other boy whispered, "It's about to begin. I hope it's good tonight!"

The two boys settled down, along with the other spectators each in their color-segregated seats. The crowd hushed one another as the lions paraded out onto the ominous arena.

— Vanessa Ralte



## DINNER (Non-veg)

Running hiding tiring fearing,  
Time is running out.  
Trying to elude, trying to avoid  
ending up as someones dinner.

Frantic eyes, searching,  
body trembling,  
escape...only perhaps.  
Must continue, must survive  
cannot submit, cannot relent.

He is very hungry,  
tracking waiting watching drooling...  
He will seek, he will devour

Only moments left now  
Predator. Animal.  
Pouncing tearing ripping biting  
bleeding, screaming, dying  
ecstatically having been eaten,  
burp!

— Kutty Datta

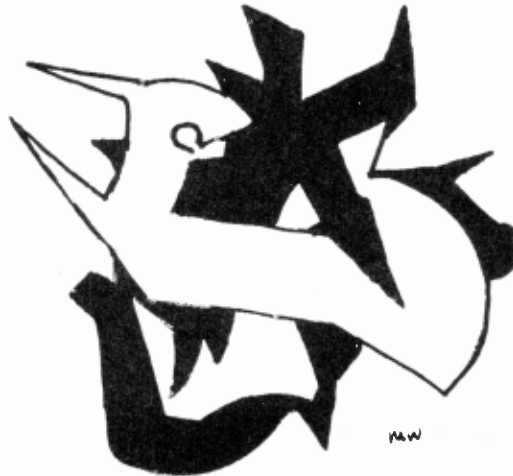
## STUDENT'S RESPONSE

Kamala Das was not only a tutor in the art of creative writing, she was poetic experience itself. At the Kavithalaya workshop, she had the ability to emote with young people's passions and pains (often more *pain* than passion).

Adolescent vicissitudes, youthful traumas, insecure relationships, uncertain futures — were none too new to her, or her writing. Relating effortlessly with the aspirants she embellished their creations with her expertise. Kamala Das was not there to instruct on the mechanics of writing. What was shared instead, in ample supply, was her genius for understanding, and an ability to live the young experience. Underlined repeatedly was the fact that all creative art had to be the product of felt experience. And the workshop saw just that — a riot of word and sound, emotion and introspection — all crystallised as very personal art.

The sylvan slopes of Kodai and the verdant undulations of Swedish Hill blended into a breathtakingly grand and fitting paen to the flair of Kamala Das, the total experience becoming a ineffable inspiration to fledgling talents.

— Edison Thomas  
American College, Madurai.





## TEACHER'S RESPONSE

"BUT YOU haven't experienced that, it will have to go. Above all, poetry must express the *truth*. Try it again."

"Look around you, look at what is real. Everyone of you has a story to write."

"I fall in love all the time, it's what inspires me to write."

It was comments like these of hers, that endeared all of us to Kamala Das at our 1994 Kavithalaya Creative Writing Workshop, our third, held early in February again this year. Teachers and students from K.I.S., together with a similar group from American College's Centre for Indian Literature under the direction of Paul Love — fifty of us in all — took advantage of the spaciousness and natural beauty of the Swedish Compound here in Kodai for three days of concentrated effort in creative writing. What you see in this collection are some of the achievements. Dr. Paul Love, Director of the Madurai C.I.L. and Latha Rengachari, his colleague provided able leadership for us once again. And Philip Dailey, Pramod Menon, Amy Stempel, Mark Antrobus and I were facilitators from K.I.S. Most of the time we broke up into groups and simply responded to the impetus and excitement that Kamala brought to us. She was available constantly; speaking about her experiences and her writing to the entire group, critiquing students' work in small-group sessions, or counselling with individuals. Though our time together was brief, we all came to know Kamala not only as a gifted and sensitive poet and short-story writer but also as a close friend. We all feel honored to have sat at her feet, quite literally, for these 'ephemeral' days.

"Time past and time future  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present."

These words, from T.S. Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' express for me the meaning of such moments 'in the garden.' Because of experiences such as these, we find ourselves.

"...at the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance."

Those who spent this time together will grasp the substance of these lines, and those who read them may become inspired to look *down*, *up* and *around*, and compose the story or the poem that is waiting to be borne into the world.

— Bob Granner  
English Department  
Kodaikanal International School

## P.S.

dEAR a, LOOKING oUT, tHE cRACKED wINDOW pANE  
tOWER bLOCKS gLASS sTEEL jUNGLE gROWING sLOWLY iNSANE  
eXPLOrING WITH mY yOUNG 'aYE,' tHE oLD hORIZON...  
aS tHE fAT bRIGHT sUN fADES tO dIM.

dARK sMOKE iMPRISONS tHE sTAINLESS sKY.  
bLANK fACES eMPTY pASSING bY  
aN oLD wOMAN bEGGING oN tHE rOCKY, sTREET sIDE,  
sUCH eXISTENCE aLWAYS gOES uNRECOGNISED.

BOOM bOX'S bOMBING sTATIC pLOYS  
mACHO mEN, mOTOR cYCLES, pLASTIC tOYS,  
aLL pATCHED tOGETHER iN a tURBULENT wORLD.  
iNTO wHICH iNNOCENT sOULS aRE hELPLESSLY hURLED.

yOUTH cONVERTED bY tHE hIGH pRIESTS oF hYPOCRISY  
aDVERTISING, pOLITICS, nEWSPAPERS dEMOCRACY  
uGLY fLIES dEVOURING uNSOLD sWEETS  
tHE uLTIMATE tRUTH, hARD tO fIND.  
tHE gOLDEN aNSWER lIES iNSIDE!

mOTHER, mAMI, pROF, sANSKRIT sCHOLAR.  
rYTHMIC cHANTS vEDIC mANTRAS...  
vISION oF tHE tRUE wORLD — gOD iTSELF  
vEILED bY hUMAN mADE mANIFESTATIONS

fILLING lIFE wITH sORROW aND dEVASTATIONS.  
cIVIL wARS aND lOSING nATIVE cIVILATIONS.  
i sTILL rEMEMBER bEING wASHED, bEING uNDEFILED,  
fROM tOUCHING mY fRIEND, a sUDRA'S cHILD.

oLDER, sHADOWY fACES sURROUND mE wITH dISTORTIONS  
mERGING aS oNE cHAOTIC, sTORMY sEA  
wHERE mY lIFE dROWNS iN tHE tHICKNESS oF tHE aIR  
pEOPLE sAY tHERES nOTHING tHERE,  
bUT i KNOW, i KNOW i sHALL bREAK fREE.  
love v.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our heartfelt and sincere thanks to Kamala Das for her hard work and emotional support before, during and after the 1994 Kavithalaya Literary Workshop, and for her painting which adorns our front cover.

We thank Paul Love and Bob Granner for their tireless efforts organising this workshop and keeping us all focused on our purpose.

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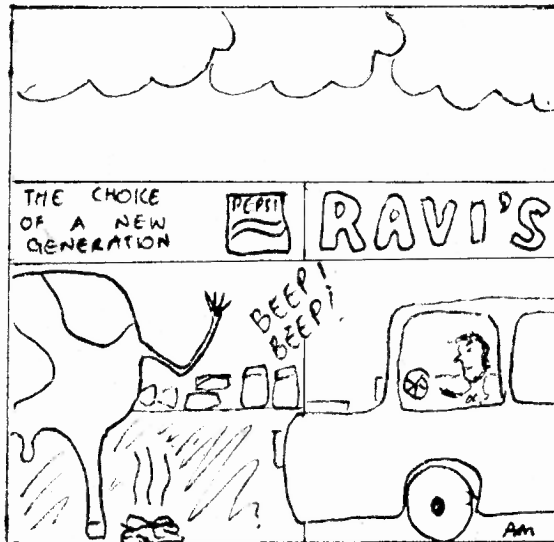
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Without Grace's and Mark's professional efforts this book would never have been completed.

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A special thanks to Mrs. Lazarus for the use of Swedish Hill and for the excellent food!



**KAVITHALAYA**  
**LITERARY WORKSHOP 1994**



**PARTICIPATORS**

Kamala Das with students and facilitators  
from The American College,  
Madurai and Kodaikanal International School