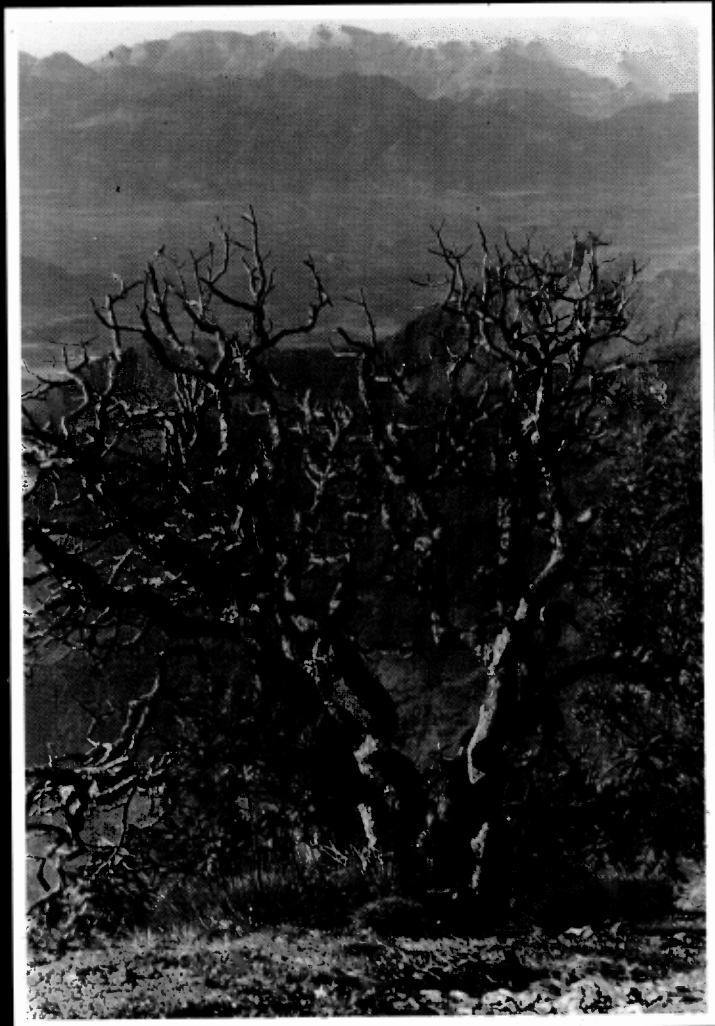


May 1999

Kavithalaya

A Joint
Production of
American
College,
Madurai &
Kodaikanal
International
School



Kavithalaya *1999*

The 1998 Writing Workshop of the American College, Madurai and Kodaikanal International School was held in the Swedish compound at Kodaikanal in early August. The guest writer for this workshop was the novelist Shashi Deshpande.

The editors of this number of Kavithalaya would like to express their gratitude to Ms. Deshpande for her readings from her work and for her kind, sensitive and thoughtful remarks on the writing of the student participants.

The Kavithalaya has been designed and edited by the English Department of the Kodaikanal International School with additional assistance from Zai Whitaker and Rajni George. Barbara Block and her students Gitanjali Harjani, Dana Mohl, Navin Rajagopalan, Akanksha Gupta, Shona VanDam, Kim Samuel, Bunu Tulachan, Anjali Verma and Young-ho Bae assisted with the visuals. The cover Photograph is by Ben Johnson.

Alexandre da Costa

The Cove

*I saunter along
My eyes straining to the
farthest reaches of the tropical sea.*

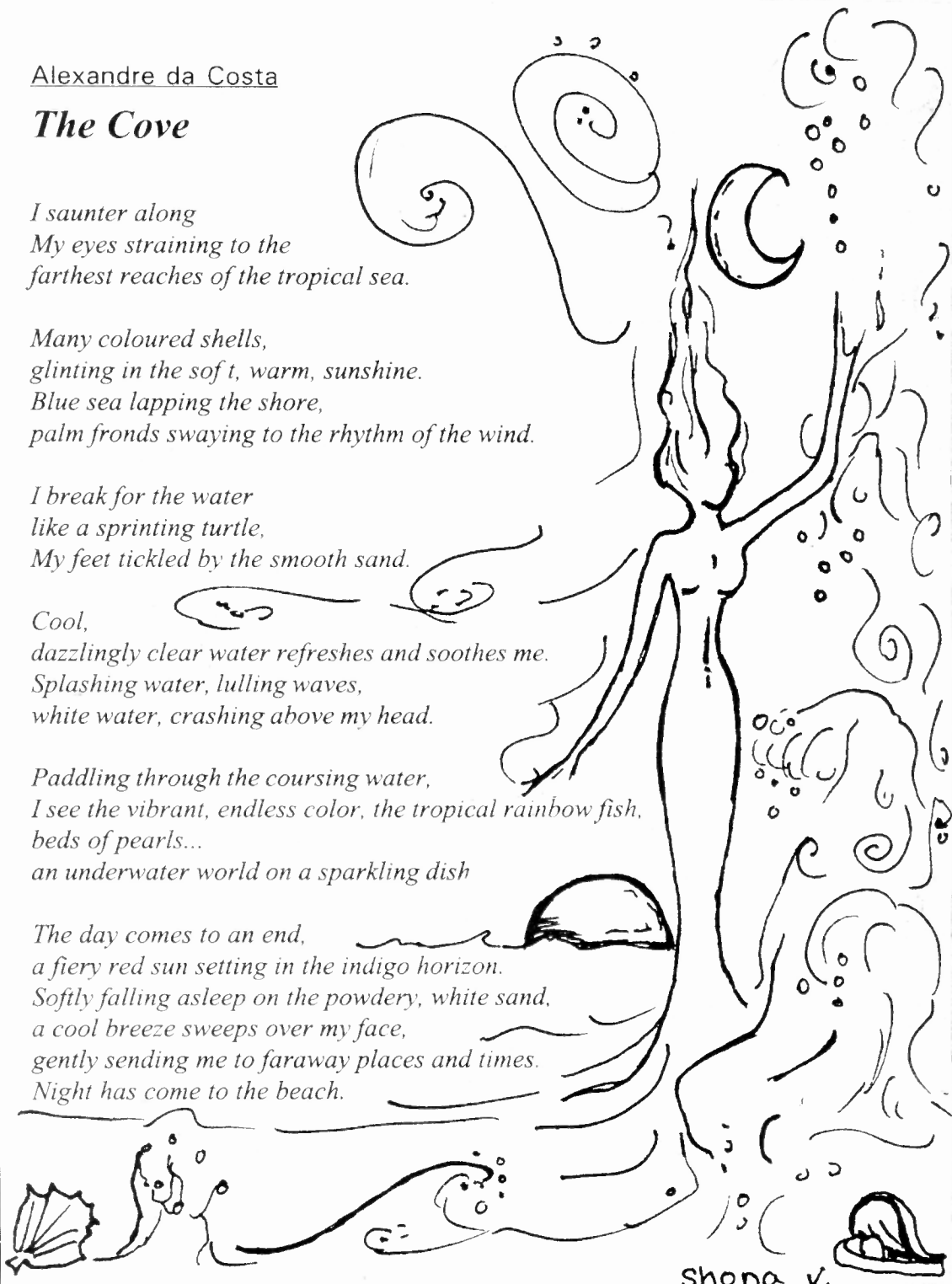
*Many coloured shells,
glinting in the soft, warm, sunshine.
Blue sea lapping the shore,
palm fronds swaying to the rhythm of the wind.*

*I break for the water
like a sprinting turtle,
My feet tickled by the smooth sand.*

*Cool,
dazzlingly clear water refreshes and soothes me.
Splashing water, lulling waves,
white water, crashing above my head.*

*Paddling through the coursing water,
I see the vibrant, endless color, the tropical rainbow fish,
beds of pearls...
an underwater world on a sparkling dish*

*The day comes to an end,
a fiery red sun setting in the indigo horizon.
Softly falling asleep on the powdery, white sand,
a cool breeze sweeps over my face,
gently sending me to faraway places and times.
Night has come to the beach.*



Shona V.

Devina Vadera

Expressions

*I see your face
A warm reflection of undying spirit so pure
The truth of love and destiny.
I've spent searching.
I finally find you.
My wings sail through the air
With my spirit high.
I leave those troubled waters behind
and fly...*

Walking alone

*I unwind
I explore
My hopes and dreams
Deeper
The sky, the trees, the clouds
I face the truth
My inner feelings
My strength
My goals*

Neeraj Desai

Purgatory Paradox

*The immortals walk above me,
footsteps resounding in silence.
The mortals tread on the land below me,
on the growing mound of garbage.
I stand on the border between them,
calm and free to choose.*

*The supernatural enthralls my curiosity,
as I begin to ascend.
At that very moment I am attentioned below,
by a desperate cry for help.
I stand on the border between the two,
calm and free to choose.*

*My mind goes crazy trying to select
my destination.
One appealing to my human conscience,
the other is fodder to my greed.
I stand on the border,
calm and free.*

*Until I know for sure,
I will stand here,
calm and free*

to choose.

Galina Davis

Woman

*From her day of entry to the end,
She is a candle
Who melts to lighten others.*

*People forget to remember
That she has desires and feelings,
And a deep longing heart.*

*"Can anyone understand me?" she
cries.
She finds no shoulder to lean upon,
Only her pillows taste her sour tears.*

*She is a sea of complexity,
Loving, hating, giving and taking
A river of love and peace,
And an Angel of Mercy.*

*No, no more she'll be put down,
None can cage her
Or suck her blood like a leach.*

*She is a gift of God
Who carries the entire World
In her own way.*



Rekha Nair

Memories

*They drift
Like autumn leaves,
Swept along by a frolicsome breeze.*

*They wander
Like pilgrims, down memory lane,
Little packages of joy and pain.*

*They surge
Like waves, in the mind's tempestuous ocean,
Reflecting moments of triumph and passion.*

*They creep
Like shadows, crowding in thick and fast,
Recreating scenes from a distant past.*

*They glow
Like heaps of smouldering embers,
Memories, waiting to be remembered.*

Rekha Nair

Infanticide

*Cocooned in pulsating warmth,
I sleep ...
Cradled by silken threads of dreams.
My lullaby is the rhythmic throb of life
Echoing from my mother's breast.*

*The cushiony womb -
My feather bed, a haven
Of love and security.
Far from the distant world outside
Safe in my cosy, fragile room,
I sleep ...*

*Suddenly,
My sleep is shattered.
Safety, nothing but an illusion.
Icy numbness creeps up my veins.
Piercing agony shatters my frame
Entrapped in the tomb that was once a womb
Now I sleep ... for eternity.*



anjali.v.

Someday I'll Know

Amanda Mowry

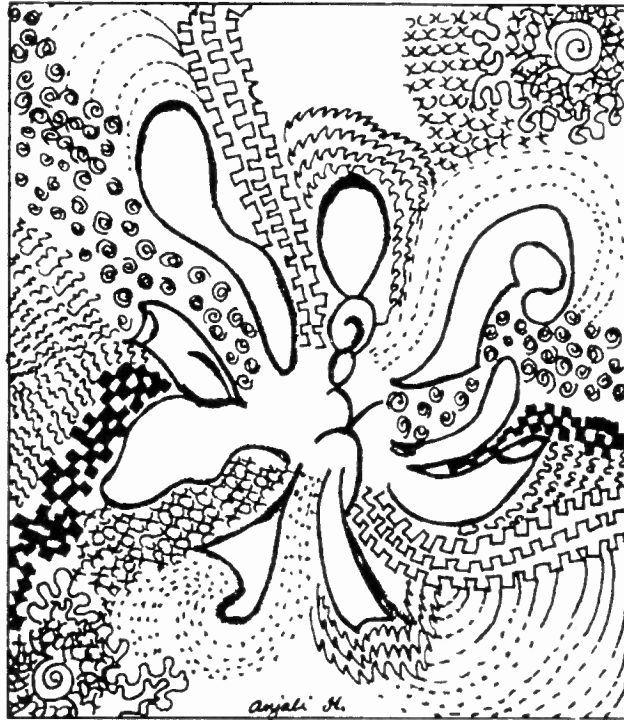
As the sunlight streamed through the windows, I opened my eyes lazily and wished I had never been born. I feel this Way a lot. It's not because of any particular reason or instance, simply because I am extremely repulsed by the way the world turns.

Nothing is as it seems. People I thought were reliable and concerned are really insensitive and completely uncaring. Places I thought were my home were only resting places I stopped at through my journey in life. Scenes from the past flash through my mind and painful memories stab my heart and

brain. Thoughts that I couldn't share before, I've decided to speak out openly. Sometimes it is impossible for me to think at all. Everything I used to find important seems minor and trivial to me now. I don't care about most people or things because they don't care about me.

If my family read this it would make them cry. Crying is good; it's the cleansing of the soul. I'll protect them and try to bury the state my emotions are in now. A lot of people are frightened by emotions. If I cry in front of someone they'll tell me to stop. If I display some anger people say that it was "totally uncalled for." Happiness is generally accepted, but if shown at too high a level or at the wrong time of day; I'll be accused of being drunk or high. Morons run the world today. To them, I can't do ANYTHING "right".

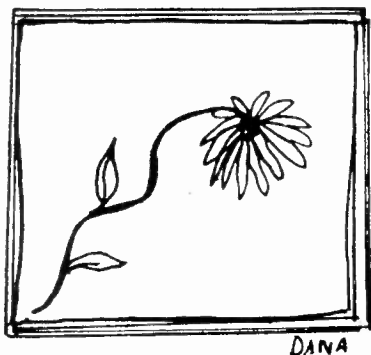
Some days I firmly believe that I will move on to a place in my life where I am free to decide and contemplate things on my own and by myself. Other days I feel I will never be released from this prison I live in. Someday I'll know, and someday I'll die.



Amanda Mowry

Reality

*There is a place far away
I can lose myself all day
I found it once, I found it twice
Where is that place, I want to go there
NOW
We live in an environment
Where control freaks rule
We are asked to bow and kiss their
feet
But when it all comes down
Power won't do them any good
Because inside, we're all free
The air we all breath is free
Each moment passes
They seem to drag on
And on
And on
Will I ever move away from this place
To a place where I can say I feel no
more hurt and no more pain?
Everyday things seem to be constant
But I feel new feelings everyday
I become madder and madder
My frustration attempts to overthrow
The sanity we all SEEM to know
What is real and what is fake
What matters and what it trivial
These things I seek
These things I cannot find
In a blurred vision called Reality*



I've Lost You

*I've lost everything I had
Things I can't retrieve
One year ago my dreams were reality
And now they are just a distant dream again
I wish I could go back in time
I'd do things better this time
I'd cherish every look, every touch, every
glance
I'd be thankful and not fight
I'd be selfless and sweet
I'd make the time pass slowly
With the magic I'd possess
In fact, I'd make the time stand still
On a favorite I'd chose
I'd frame it in a box with flowers
And gaze at it each waking hour
I'd never leave and I'd make you stay
I'd make things stay the same
I'd die this time, before I'd let them change
My life is now so worthless next
To those moments that we shared
Now it's all pointless
And now I'm dead*

M Tajudeen

The Modern Machiavelli

*Politics is his basic business
All welfare plans are his sources of
income
Rowdiness is his academic discipline
Sycophancy is his favourite subject.
He is the modern Machiavelli.*

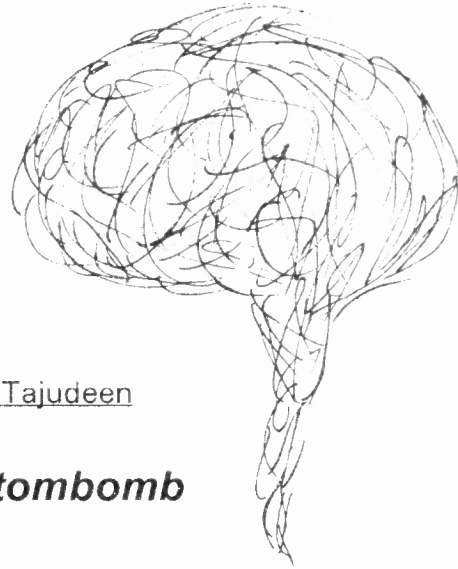
*He is a devoted slave to joy-giving
power
He never fails to make his pilgrimage
once in five years
He is the licensed legislator to legalise
illegal laws
He is the modern Machiavelli.*

*For him ambition is to achieve anything
out of nothing
For him heroism is to break something
in every assembly session
For him patriotism is to blabber
something in flag-hoisting ceremonies.
He is the modern Machiavelli.*

*It is not a parody,
But a painful reality!*



ayala V



M Tajudeen

Atombomb

*It is the eighth wonder of the world.
Havoc is the key to understand its
capacity.
Heaven even trembles at its terrible
beauty.
The mere thought of its marvellous
shape
Strikes our hearts with terror.
It is a fantastic product of progressive
science,
But a venomous force to the victorious
human race.
Its majestic presence makes a country
Mega-powerful on the globe.
Pride may reign in the hearts of its
possessors -
But painful reality is not far away,
For a ruthless ruin up to the extent of
Extinguishing its own inventors.
What comes down may not go up.
But if 'it' comes down, we must go up.
No wonder - it is the eighth wonder of
the world!*

Thomas K. Varghese

Mother Nature

*O Nature! Being green,
You make our eyes green.
You give refuges
To all disturbed hearts.
You are the mark of patience,
You teach mankind what it is.
You are a mother
Feeding your children
And making them happy
When they come to you.
You are an inspiration to poets.
You give peace to all humanity.
People have hearts and feelings
But they slaughter you,
Forgetting that you do too.
My heart suffers
When I see you mutilated.
I cannot stop this sacrilege.
All I can do is to beg you,
Mother! Forgive mankind;
Save us from perils.*

To the Mirror

*O bosom friend of mine,
You wait patiently for me
To come to you
You never lie to me
As I lie to myself
You always tell me what I am; that's why
You mean more to me
Then all my other friends.*

Neeraj Desai

The way

*"Jesus is the way"
I hear the fanatic preach.
Thousands open their minds to his "claims"
for the promise of better days is his
weapon.
The poor find refuge in his words
desolate and helpless.
They succumb to the temptation
that is hope.*

*Five years have passed.
They are all Christians now.
They are still poor,
but they are Christians now.
And the preacher has moved on.*



The T-shirt

Ravindran solomon

Pandurangan shot out his chair. And groaned. bloody piles. it hurt.

Carefully he straightened up, and teetered towards the ensuing melee around the lunch table in the office.

the younger crowd was already there leaving no space for the 54 year old frame of Pandurangan to reach the elusive rim of the table.

The T-shirts lay in a pile, a blazing mass of red tossed about by prying hands. The T shirts were compliments from a client of the company who was much satisfied by the work put in by Pandurangan's fellow workers.

Pandurangan's son had been pestering him for more than a week now for a new T shirt. But he had been putting it off because he had overheard that Head Clerk telling somebody about the T shirts from their client. The T shirts were here now. And one of them could be his, without costing a paise, if only he could reach the dining table.

Two of the successful raiders at the table slammed into him and made off with their **prized catc. skiowly WHAT IS THIS** dodging flailing arms and the close stench of sweat Pandurangan tried to make headway into pounds and pounds of unrelenting flesh. A few leather soles caught his shin straight. A successful hand caught his jaw, almost slipping his glasses off his oily nose. He held on.

Finally he could, across two hulky shoulders, view the table. Empty.

The fiery display of red was gone. Every one of them taken away by a stampeding mass of selfish humanity, he thought.

As his colleagues dispersed to their respective ledgers, he saw it. Close to the western leg of the table where the light could not display its full potential. One lone T shirt slightly crumpled, its brightness more in the heart than in the eyes.

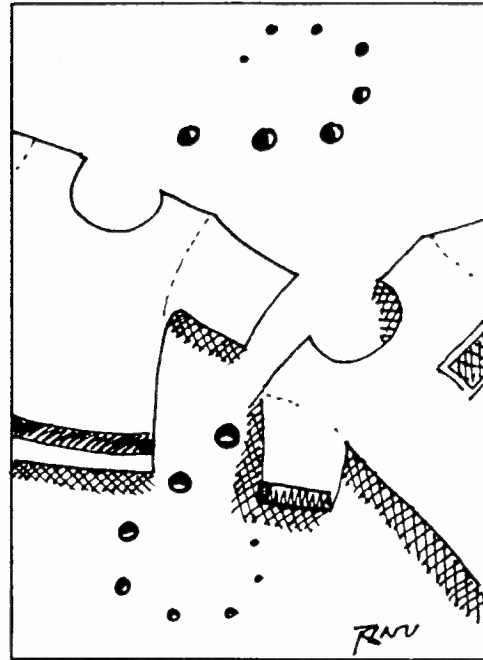
Pandurangan dived. his glasses slipped. He held on to them even while his lunge was half complete. Unable to control his movement with one hand, this shoulder was destined to crash into the leg of the table. but his fingers unerringly found the soft fabric that he so long aimed to get. An animal groan escaped his lips as he straightened his legs, shirt, glasses and his being. he had the T shirt.

Evening. Pandurangan walked into his house and nonchalantly threw the T shirt on the dining table and himself into a chair.

As his wife served him coffee, his son Ranganthan walked in. the T shirt was on the table.

"Dad, you bought this for me?" he asked.

"Ychcha... my manager called me to his room and gave it to me personally. Compliments of the company," he replied, sipping his evening cup of coffee.



Neeraj Desai

Through the Haze

*Celebrations are happening on streets
everywhere,
The people are throwing confetti in the air.
The day of the prophecies has arrived,
And now the battle is on to survive.*

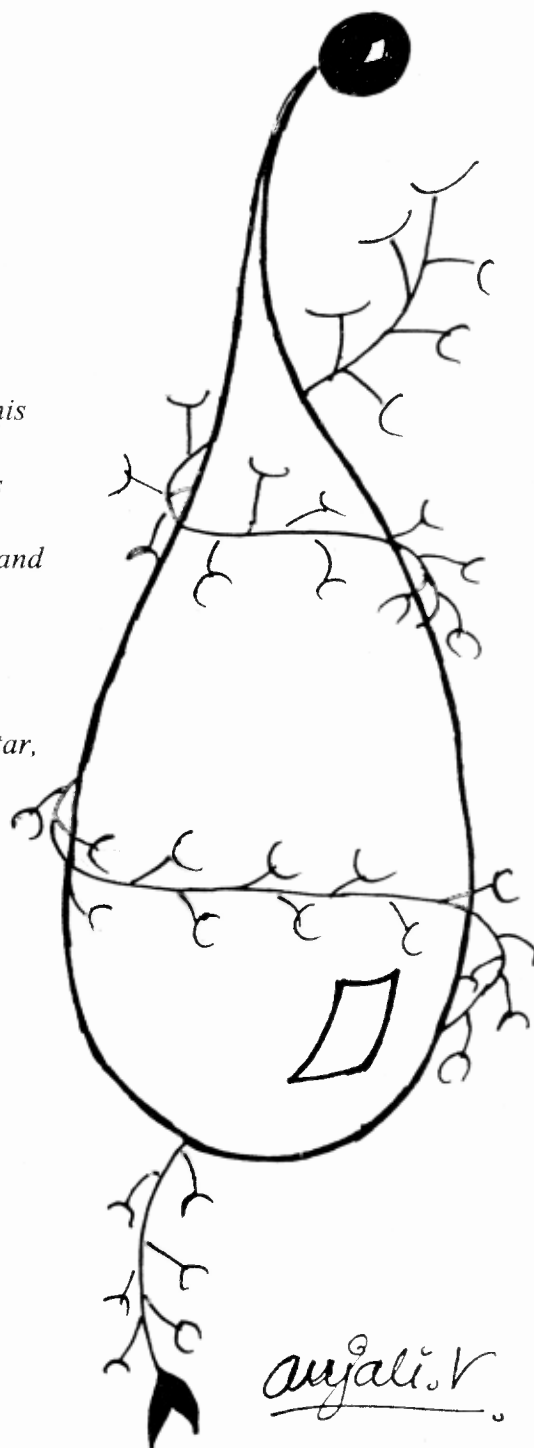
*The Prime Minister clutches the details to his
breast,
Wondering if he should have conducted this
test.
He says, "Let them come to the mountains and
stand,
We will burn their flag and blow up their
land."*

*A bomb glows brighter than an exploding star,
Could Einstein have envisioned it this far?
No one would ever want to see the day,
When life on earth could end this way.*

*The fools, don't they even know what they
have done?
The beginning of their end has just begun.
Soon there will be not a tree in sight,
Or a morsel of food for hunger to bite.*

*The cry of protest is drowned in cheer,
They know the future is what they fear.
There will be no nation when they fall,
Gaia herself will stop and stall.*

*The time will come when the foetus is dead,
All the blame will rest on your head.
India is now a nuclear power,
It is Armageddon's finest hour.*



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Variramuthu's Tamil poems
translated by T Ganesh Babu

Crackers

*For you
Today is
The festival of lights;
One Spring
For the tree of the year.
You rejoice
In making fire
Blossom into flower.
Your fire crackers
Shaking the whole world;
Floods of light
Flow everywhere.
This brightness
Cries to me
Indexing the Dark.
Like the deep sorrow
That lingers of Taj Mahal,
A dumb sadness
Has encompassed
This Deepavali.
We cannot forget
Those children
Who made the crackers
In Sivakasi.
They want to earn
New dresses for Deepavali;
But instead
They earned
Their funeral shrouds.
These human crackers
Burnt by the fire,
Symbolic of hard work,
Oscillating amidst life and death,
They went
To illuminate Deepavali,
But died
As subjects of darkness.
My smiles
Could not overcome
Those tears*

*Can this festival
Be celebrated in splendour
When society rewards
Their toil with destruction?*

*How many more unlit wicks
Await sacrifice
To illuminate Deepavali?*

For Subramanya Bharati

*Has the song of Independence
Not reached
The last Indian's ears?*

*You said, "Let us
Connect Sri Lanka with a bridge."*

*Was this because of
Your goodwill
So that
The refugees can
At least arrive on foot?*

Lullaby

*My dear Son!
The usual kind of lullabies
I will not sing
To you.*

*Luxury of language
They are;
Arrested dreams,*

*The process of taking you
To a conditional sleep.*

*But my lullaby contains
No sedative
Called music.*

*The theme of my lullaby
Is not sleep
But awareness*

Neeraj Desai

LOST CONTACT

*Emotions start to get stronger,
as our outlooks get wronger,
try and get others into a fight,
eventually making them run out of sight.*

*As we run a losing race,
we try and catch up in haste,
in the process we trip and fall,
instantaneously come to a stall.*

*We try to segregate amongst our own beings,
we attempt and lose our real seeing,
our conscience appeals to our humanism,
as we drift closer to totalitarianism.*

*We have been falsely led,
for the real shepherd is dead,
get ourselves together and try and act grown.*

*"God is dead,
we're on our own."*



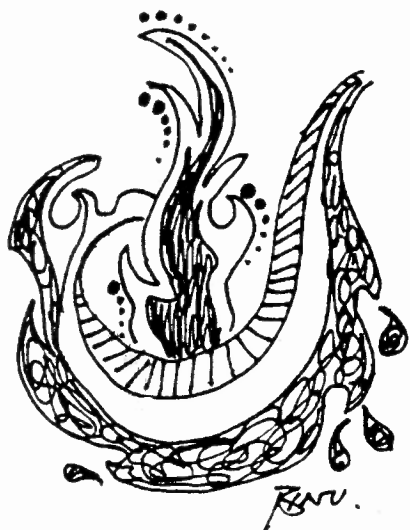
Galina Davis

My Life

*My life will go on,
Unmoved by any worldly additions,
Just like a river strolls its way
With firmness, dignity and confidence.*

*Troubles may sprout
Without any warning.
Just like natural calamities
That root up fear in mankind.*

*Every human eye I have met
Has taught me with a smile
To laugh at my worries and pains,
And to enjoy life to the core.*



The Leper's moon

Ravindran Solomon

He sat undecided. By the tracks. It had been quite some time since he'd heard the jarring horns of a train. One hour? Two maybe.

A pale crescent of a moon was trying to break away from its cloudy prison; the tracks were a dull glint slithering away into a breaking night. In the distance he could see the blood-red light warning any train against venturing further.

But near him there was the comfort of a million fireflies flitting up, trying to be one with the winking stars.

Time, of course, was confident of its course and meandered on, as he sat and considered the stubs that were once fingers and toes. Gnarled and disappearing into the endless days and nights of his heartbeats.

The gravel under him began to hurt him. He slowly turned his head to wipe his nose against his naked biceps. He could smell sweat under his armpits.

No train was in sight. This was not new to him though. He had tried suicide a few times before. But it had never worked. Either his courage would fail him or the train would thunder past in the parallel track. The last time he had almost made it...

It was a drizzling dead day and so there was no one around the track. He approached it with shivering footsteps and almost made it, when he fumbled on a mound of gravel. Slipping, he tried to grab a non-existent pillar and came crashing down. It was a jagged piece of rock that knocked him unconscious then. When he woke up the rain had stopped and a warm sun was beating on his face. He got up and went to the shelter behind the community centre's unused toilet. That was home.

His wife watched him come and asked, "Where have you been?" A guttural voice that shook him out of his daze.

"To kill myself."

She laughed aloud then, "Come and eat. I have some vadais that the school teacher's wife threw out to the crows."

That was then. This time, however, there were no slippery stones to knock him down. And he more or less knew what he had to do.

He heard the train hooting. A noise that suddenly seemed to split the belly of the night. But it was still some distance away. It would at least take another ten minutes before it reached the spot.

The moon or what was left of it in the sky had broken out of the cloud bank.

His nose itched. That flattened piece of irritation always did. He reached up to scratch it and all he managed was a sore rub with his rotted fingers. His nails had fallen away a long time ago.

With growing irritation he remembered his hands when everything was absolutely fine. With long fingers and well shaped nails he had never even dreamt of such a tragedy.

And now he missed them all. White nails that were set within the taut brown skin of his fingers.

The train was fast approaching; he could feel the vibrations already. Everything within him tensed. A firefly tantalisingly flew close to his face. He grabbed for it and the stubby palm only swung into emptiness.

The gravel was hurting him more. He shifted his position slightly to get comfortable and felt himself stabbed by more stones. Frustrated, he threw his head back to let out a yowl of agony. That's when he saw the moon.

It hung suspended above a thin whiff of cloud. A beautifully shaped crescent that reminded him of the days when he used to cut his nails regularly.

The cut pieces used to have the same shape the moon had now. He stood up, his yowl turning into a cry of terror. Slowly he walked along the gravel. The train was very near now. He could see its light wickedly slicing the darkness.

With a moan he arranged himself neatly on the track, head on one rail with both legs protruding over the other. Now the noise was deafening.

He looked at the moon.

Just An Hour Before The Explosion

Somasekar's story translated
From the weekly Ānanda
Viketan" by Velraj P

He was tall and carrying a heavy bag on his shoulders. He reached the center of that mall and spilled out coins deliberately. In the pretense of picking them up, he **placed it a bomb** - in a corner. No one suspected.

Job over, he came out, pretending innocence. Cruel joy in his heart: at least a hundred will be dead ..., destruction immeasurable. The country will be shaken.

While he walked on a narrow path outside, a tender hand pulled him aside. He turned to look who it was. A ten year old boy.

"Uncle... Uncle ... you keep walking looking nowhere. Look in the front. A manhole without a lid. Please go carefully".

His mind cleared, "This kid helps me not even knowing me. But I set up a lot of innocent people just because somebody told me to. I would have been damned".

The thought hit him hard. He looked at his watch. Still an hour to go before the bomb explodes. He thought again for a while, and walked to a telephone booth. With a decision to inform, he dialled the police.



Zareen Bharucha

Father

*Father you were there
from the first time I opened my eyes*

*From that very day;
I could have looked, and seen the love you
gave me
in the hugs,
the castles of sand...
down on a sunny beach
holding my hand*

*I could see it all through theyears
in the looks,
in the touch the melting of your eyes
and when, once you told me,
tha some day, even you would die.*

*I love you Father,
because you were there.
There for me through thick and thin,
through the stormy nights, with calm within
there for me always there for me.*

*And now after all those years:
If by chance I should look back and find you
gone
I will not despair
I will try to be strong
because I know, Father,
that you are always there.*

Child of the moon

*The trees are whispering in the wind,
The moon and stars have come out to play
My stomach lurches every time,
I think about that day*

*What was it like, Child of the Moon,
to know you were falling to your doom*

*that the day above, and the earth below,
were both waiting to welcome You?*

*Set me free, child of the Moon,
Set me free to fly,
Wish you could pick me up and take me
away
But even you went away to die.*

*My whole life I'd waited for you,
my whole life I'd cried,
You were with me for a piece of eternity,
to show me what heaven can be.*

Neeraj Desai

The world I know

*The stench is unbearable,
the place is a mess.
What is the point?*

*The people cause suffocation,
there is barely room to breathe.
What is the point?*

*The backyard is a big dirt heap,
piled up with the garbage of the world.
What is the point?*

*The water is stinking stagnant,
people die when they consume.
What is the point?*

*The apple is full of snakes,
one bite is fatal.
What is the point?*

Is there a point?

Rashi Mittal

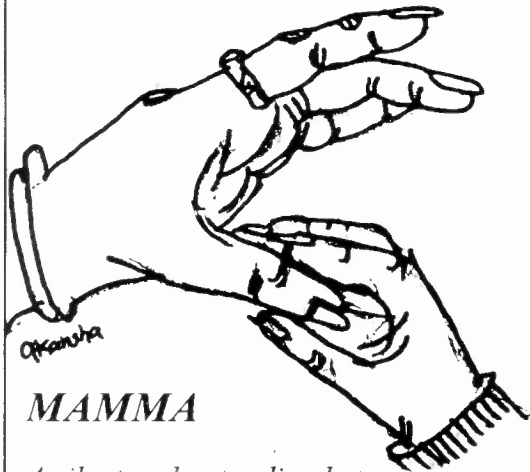
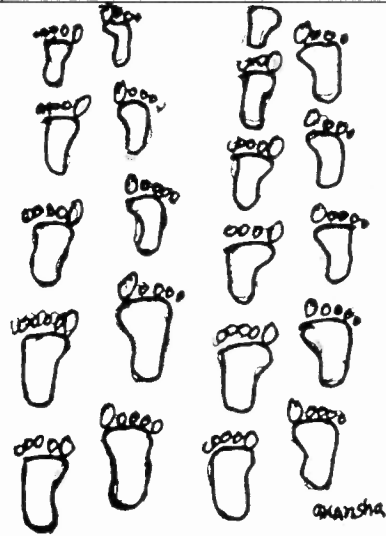
ALWAYS STAY LOW

*I will not be up here anymore someday,
On my own path, and on my own way.*

*I will need someone there beside me -
Someone who really cares.*

*I'm not going to get that someone -
If I'm up here in the air.*

*That's why I say, always stay low.
You never know when God, will steal the whole show.*



MAMMA

*A silent understanding between us,
Need for a hug once in a while,
For more time together,
Thoughts that make me smile.*

*A securance that someone is always there,
Memories of the good times passing,
A smile within myself,
A wish to again do everything.*

*One day I will go away,
With a tear in my eye,
Saying fare-well,
But never good-bye.*

LIFE

*Thank you, life, for all the depression,
Even for all those sorrows.
Thank you, life, for all the happiness,
Even those joys, that I could just
borrow.*

*You've taught me so many things,
and I want to learn much more.
Wonder that future holds for me,
Can't wait to open that door.*

*You're just slipping off my hands,
Every moment, day by day.
Want to live each second as a lifetime,
But that second just won't stay.*

*Every twist and turn in you,
Has its own sweet taste.
Life you're so beautiful,
Sorry I realized so late.*

Manushya Puthiran
Translated from Tamil
By N Poovalingam

Colour-less

*Heavy rains
lashed
on Doomsday.*

*The Last Destruction ...
And the tools of destruction
were totally different.*

*The ravaging downpour
washed away the colours
from everything,
one by one.*

*Flowers in the garden
first lost their colours
without any protest.*

*Shades of the forest flowers
swelled into a
gory flood.*

*Birds flew
baffled by the
denuding of the
colours of their plumes.*

*Chameleons
lost their wits
at colour-shedding trees.*

*No one could
console
the butterflies.*

*The weirdness of
paintings without shades
scared the artist
into crying.*

*The shades of sense
in the poet's verse*

*The tones of the
politician's voice*

*The colour of
the child's whimper*

*The hues of
love, betrayal*

*We did not know
those colours
till they all dissolved
in a deluge.*

*We stare at
this void of colour
having no words to speak.*

*The torrent of the
decolouring rain of Doomsday
annihilates us,
inescapably.*



By Vairamuthu
Translated from Tamil
by J M Indhumathy

Go Ahead

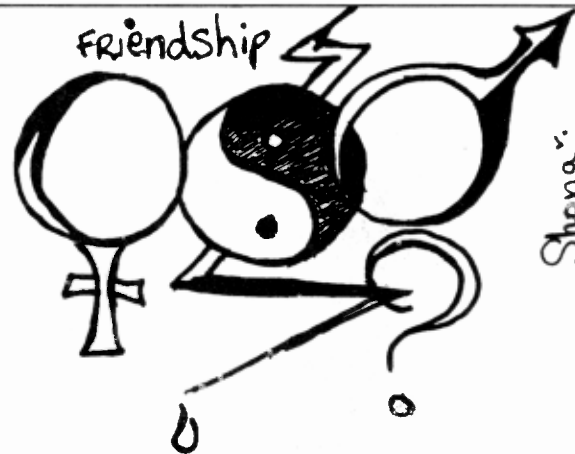
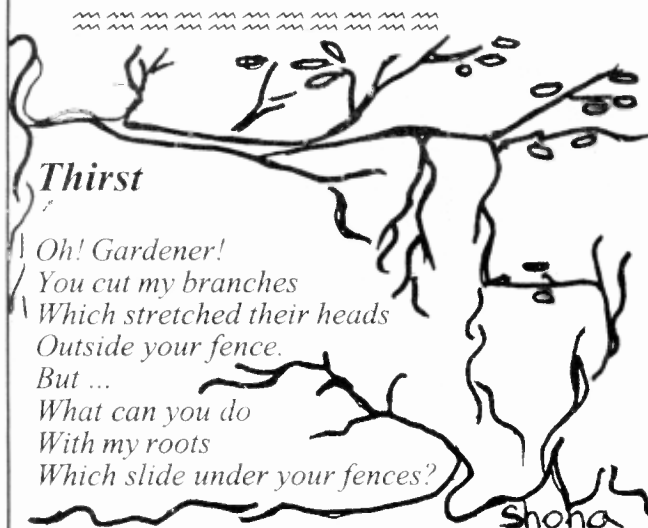
*It's your stage!
Your tongue!
Speak whatever you want!*

*It's your pen!
Your press!
Write whatever you want!*

*It's your instrument!
Your concert!
Play whatever you want!*

*It's your brush!
Your paint!
Colour whatever you want!*

*But ...
remember ...
tomorrow ...
Time's judgement
will unearth
Your dead bodies from the grave
and put them out to hang!*



J. M. Indhumathy

Anger

*The beast within me
Emerged
Often in a sudden rage
for silly reasons.
I suffered.
Tried to control.
At last ...
My pencil reflected.
Yes, it's a surprise!
The animal in me
Got channelised into
a fine art!*

Friendship

*My friend
brings me out from
innocence to awareness ...
But
I don't know
Why people oppose
Our friendship.
Is
friendship between
a man and a woman
Impossible?*

Laura Morgan

To my friends

*I know that I can fly,
Tossed by the winds.
Oh, if only the winds would toss me
To my friends.*

*Oh, how happy I would be,
soaring so gracefully.
Oh, if only I could find
Myself with my friends.*

You Don't Understand

*You Don't Understand who I am.
You Don't Understand where I'm from.
You Don't Understand why I'm here.
You Don't Understand where I'm going.
I don't understand either.*

Lost

*Forever missing, never found.
Where do I fit in?
Part of everything, part of nothing.
I miss them when I'm gone,
They don't understand me when I return.
Who are my friends?
Lost in the midst of everything familiar.
Who am I?
Help me find what I seem to have lost.
Myself.*

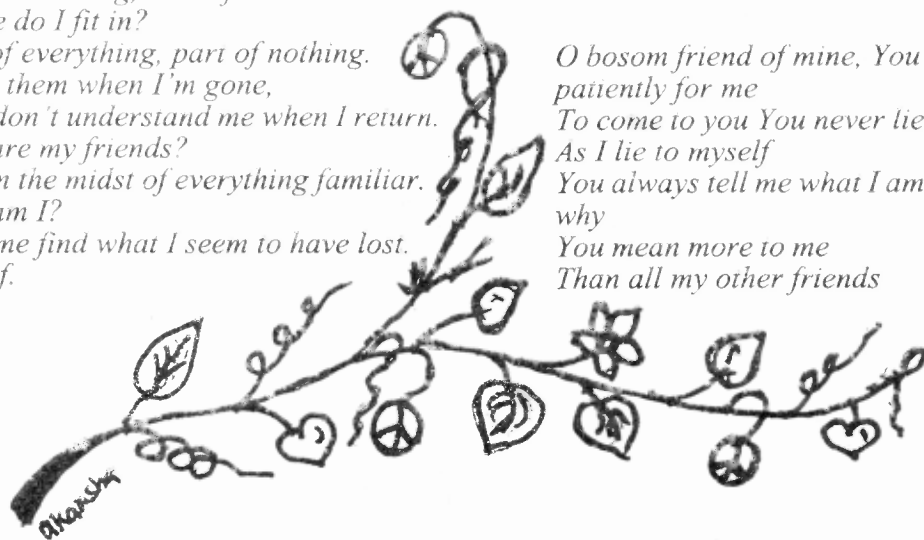
Thomas K. Varghese

Mother Nature

*O Nature! Being green
You make our eyes green.
You give refuge
To all disturbed hearts.
You are the mark of patience,
You teach mankind what it is.
You are a mother
Feeding your children
And making them happy
When they come to you.
You are an inspiration to poets.
You give peace to all humanity.
People have hearts and feelings
But they slaughter you,
Forgetting what you do.
My heart suffers
When I see you mutilated.
I cannot stop this sacrilege.
All I can do is to beg you
Mother! forgive mankind
Save us from perils*

To the Mirror

*O bosom friend of mine, You wait
patiently for me
To come to you You never lie to me
As I lie to myself
You always tell me what I am; that's
why
You mean more to me
Than all my other friends*



The Joke

By Ravindran Solomon

Yesterday we went to the beach.- me, mummy and Vimala aunty.

Vimala aunty lives next to our house. She is mummy's best friend. When my daddy and Raghu uncle, Vimala aunty's husband, go out of town, we three go to the beach.

When we were walking on the beach mummy was telling a lot of jokes to Vimala aunty. Vimala aunty also laughed at all the jokes. Mummy is very good at telling jokes. Whenever she tells one, Vimala aunty laughs a lot. Some jokes are not funny at all. I don't understand some of them. Whenever I don't understand they both look at me and laugh even more.

One day I tried to tell them a joke. They looked at me in a silly way and giggled. It was because they did not understand my joke.

When we were walking on the beach we saw a lot of people standing together near the water. Mummy and Vimala aunty went to see what was happening. I ran fast to be with them but the people would not let me see.

I heard an old man speak, "They are dead. Somebody call the police."

I kneeled down on the sand and looked through the legs of the crowd. I saw a man and woman lying down hugging each other. They were totally wet and they were covered with sand. There was sand on their faces, on their eyes... and their noses were filled with sand. Their faces looked so funny with their noses full of sand. I giggled. A man in the crowd heard me and gave me such a scary stare.

Vimala aunty and mummy saw me watching the man and woman lying down. So they came to me and pulled me away from the crowd.

We went away to another side of the beach. Mummy and Vimala aunty kept quiet for a long time. I started to play in the sand. I built a very big mountain, then I began digging a hole in the mountain.

Mummy said to aunty suddenly, "Must be suicide."

I asked her, "What is suicide?"

Mummy said, "Shut up and play."

When mummy gets angry she always tells me to shut up. Whenever she gets angry I become quiet. Otherwise she gets even more angry.

Vimala aunty said, "Why do people do it? It is stupid."

I finished making the hole and bent down to look through it. I could see mummy's hands scratching her leg on the other side of the hole.

Mummy said, "Don't bend down like that. you will get sand on your face."

So I got up and began to fill the hole with sand. Mummy and Vimala aunty were keeping quiet. Mummy took a sea shell and threw it into the water. Vimala aunty threw one also.

Vimala aunty after some time said, "Poor things, hugging even in death."

Mummy said, Hnnnn. At least it is good for the country's population."

I don't know what she meant. But aunty giggled. My mummy smiled.

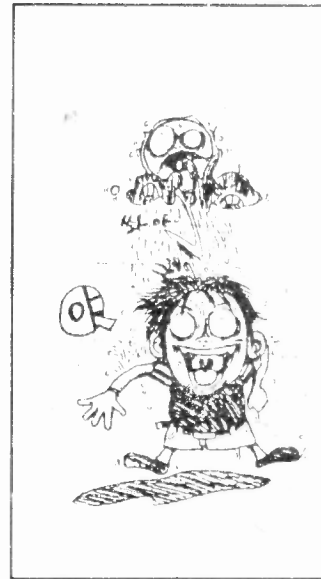
Aunty said, "Did you see how they were hugging?"

Mummy said, "Yes. Stuck together like Velcro."

Vimala aunty laughed at this and went on laughing loudly. Mummy smiled at the way she was laughing. Mummy was not angry now. I was slowly filling the hole with sand. Vimala aunty was still laughing.

I finished filling the tunnel with sand. I wanted to tell a joke to mummy now.

I said, "Look mummy, I filled the hole with sand. It looks just like those people's noses!" And then I laughed. Vimala aunty stopped laughing. And mummy stopped smiling. Like always, they did not understand my joke.



Navin Rajagopalan

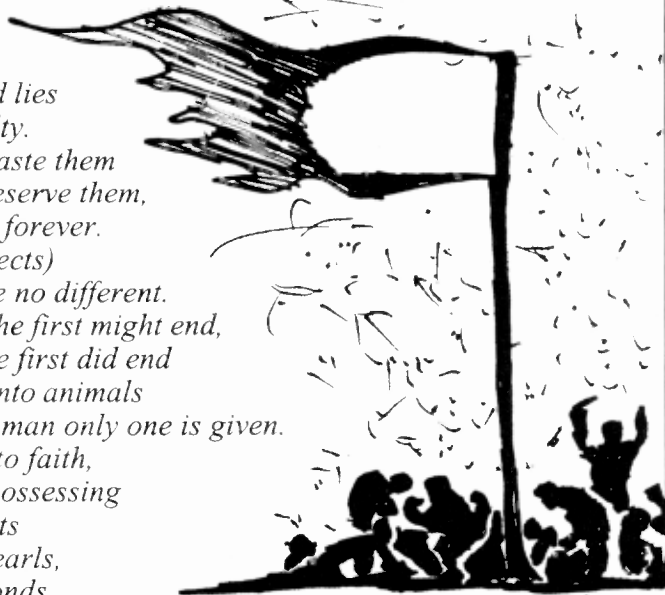
Many savage events.

Silently he stalks, walks without a sound
On the damp and softened ground.
Thousands clamor at his feet, greet him in salute,
But he carries on resolute
For his mind is made and not a single blade
Can curb his will or persuade
Him to reconcile—perhaps even wait a while?
He won't, I know I see it in
Those burning eyes that spark as flint,
And rage, and thirst, and hunger for.
Contained, constrained, a silent roar
Bursts forth in every pupil there,
Electrifying the nightly air
So suddenly, that finally the moon submits,

Clambers down from where it sits
High above the forest night
Until it is within his sight.
His passion is the master now,
He'll not be denied the kill somehow.
Yet abruptly he hears afar
And distant challenge boldly mar
His prospects of a nightly feast
As enters now a larger beast,
And if he was king before, no more, just duke,
Another has come to rebuke
His stated claim upon the kill,
On nothing must he have his fill.
Therefore it has come to pass,
That hunter has now been surpassed,
So who then is the hunter here?
And who then should the hunted fear?

As to why cats have nine lives

Now come and see, what unveiled
Truths hide beneath the overturned lies
To which a man professes his loyalty.
Had a king many lives he would waste them
All, in vainglorious attempts to preserve them,
To keep them safe so he might rule forever.
(How better then, to serve his subjects)
Had a man many lives he would be no different.
Wasting the first from worry that the first might end,
And the second from anger that the first did end
Too quickly. Perhaps that is why onto animals
Many lives are bequeathed, but to man only one is given.
But in vain hope does man clutch to faith,
And for that he chides nature for possessing
Nothing of true value. Yet he forgets
The poorest oysters too, possess pearls,
While the hardest soil keeps diamonds.
From man though is naught,
For his body possess nothing that nature craves.
But to man alone is desire given such heights,
That it would seek to consume him
And he to master it.



L

ACA BEA

Continued from Previous page

as I wait for something to happen. I have at the end of my line a rather crude structure which could pass off for something out of a Spielberg film. This lure I am using was made at home. I started with the top of an empty Gems can (the kind shaped like a rocket), and strung it through a steel wire. I tied a large no. 3 hook to the end and added a few rubber bands behind it to give some semblance of a creature that a big fish might think about eating. The crew of the Aca Bea seemed to find it hilarious as I struggled to get this monstrosity of a lure into the water. I grimly ignored their mirth and tried to concentrate on the task at hand.

I was trying to catch a few Dolphin fish as a good sized “dolphin “ can put up a good fight and they make excellent eating. Other fish were too easy to catch and too hard to eat. I was seated comfortably in my deck chair on the deck of the boat with the rod in my lap and a can of beer in one hand. The beer was purely for image. I would occasionally take a tiny sip and spit it out in disgust. I did however think, “Who would ever see me way out here , and who would care if they did?” I was too lazy to get up and throw away the can. So I just sat there with as much poise as I could possibly muster.

As I sat there struggling with the urge to throw away the beer, a fish had taken my lure. I realized what was happening and I loosened the drag so the fish could take out some line. The line flew off the spool and I fought grimly for control. I tried to slow down the line with my hand but gave that up quickly after I almost burned my hand off. I didn't tighten the drag for fear of breaking the monofilament 20lb test line. I thought about the spool of 50lb test in the kit and wished I had that on instead. “Too late,” I thought to myself. The crew was blissfully unaware of my ordeal and crouched nonchalantly on the deck smoking beedis and chatting. I quickly returned my thoughts to the fish as it began slowing down and leaving some line slack. The danger of having slack line is that the fish could get some room and shake the hook off, so it's best to keep the fish under as much tension as possible. The fish began coming in. I reeled in the slack. Pretty soon it came straight up, probably to look at the moron causing it so much inconvenience.

After a while I saw a silvery-orange flash which made my heart flip over my lungs: a “Dolphin”. I tried to reel it in a little more, testing it. Big mistake: it took off with a cyclonic splash utilizing all its remaining energy. Within a minute it had taken out most of my 250 yards of line. I screamed at the captain, (I sometimes think he resents me screaming when the cabin is two feet away), an old weathered Karen seaman called Pau, to reverse the engines so I could keep up with the fish. I guess what happened next was the single biggest anti-climax in my life. The line must have hit some sharp coral and it broke. I saw the fish leaping out of the water, looking strange with my empty packet of gems in his mouth, the bright red rubber bands almost taunting me in my moment of tragic loss. I got over the disappointment pretty fast, as the crew gathered around me laughing like they were going to die tomorrow (they seemed to materialize at my every mistake to mock my bumbling attempts). I soon joined their infectious laughter, throwing my grievance to the winds (which were blowing pretty hard now). Dinner was taken care of by one of the Karen boatmen who caught a large barracuda on a piece of yellow cloth on a hook... and he didn't have a beer...

S. Uma's Tamil poem translated
by Velraj p.

Torture

The body gleams of manliness.
Within the eyes that wander
With devouring drive
Is a hungry, preying tiger's
Beastly charm.

In the midst of conversation
Sighs breath fire.
The eyes glare at
The breasts that rise and fall like waves,
When the arms are raised
And
Stretched in teasing languor.

Moments of proximity.
Desperation.
Groping for a hold.

Manhood throbs ...
With impatient urge.
And
Soaked in silence
The world distances itself.

Depths of the heart
Ache with agony.
The "being" chokes.

A sudden touch
And the world goes dark.
Confusion.
The orb clear ... slowly -

Burying the nape
Between the
mounds of tenderness,
You had
Shut my eyes.

Rub of warm flesh.
Blood fumes.

The senses coalesce
Into a single spark,
It leaps onto dry leaves,
Bursts into flames.
The Animal awakes.

You discern.
Feigning innocence
You renounce my hands,
Giggle and melt away.

And
I cringe.
Like dribbling spittle
My body tricks.
I loathe myself.

The taut and turgid senses
melt and dissipate.
My flames subside
Into ashen embers.

TWENTY YEARS FROM NOW

*Twenty years from now when I look back....
All those laughs
All those tears
All those dreams
All those fears*

*All the friends I lost
All the friends I made
All the deaths I faced
All the guilt I weighed
..... will probably make me smile.*

*I'd think I'm such a fool,
to do such things.
So immature,
To cry for such sufferings,*

*I'd think I was blinded,
To fall for such a guy,
And for the guy I really liked,
Why was I so shy?*

*But that's twenty years from now - not today.
'cause I'm still an immature girl - just like yesterday.*

THE DAUGHTER I AM TODAY

*My mother did everything so secretly,
She didn't want me to even notice,
And so somehow, I don't know how,
She made me the daughter I enjoy to be.*

*Every time I'd dim out, she'd lighten me up again,
She was the oil that kept me going.
Though this oil will be no more one day,
It's given me enough light to carry on my way.*

*Together both of us wrote a novel.
She was the pen, I was the words.
She didn't tell me when she backed out,
But some pen out there still worked.
She's made me so different and unique,
She made me so simple yet tough,
How much ever I thank my mother,
I know it'll never be enough.*



Vairamuthu's poem translated
from Tamil by Velraj P.

Soaked Crackers

Her breath
Burnt his forehead.

He heeded.

Eyes full of
"Deepavali" desires,
She stripped
The desires held inside,
One by one.

The list of demands completed,
her lips stamped on his cheeks.

Hear, he didn't.
Think, he couldn't.
He succumbed,
To the spell of Jasmine
And
to the cupid-struck moment.

Demands at night.

Moments of dawn.
Reality of light.
He mulled over the past night.
His heart felt heavy with demands.

His salary -
just a dry grain of rice
for the festival's hungry demands.
Saree for her and
Clothes for the little ones.
How would he

Buy a blanket
For his mother,
Who awaits her last breath?

A dhoti for him!
Well ... it can wait.
But, for his children,
Will the crackers wait
Till Deepavali passes by?

Every Deepavali
Cracks his heart the same way
To celebrate itself.

Is there sense
In compulsory joy?

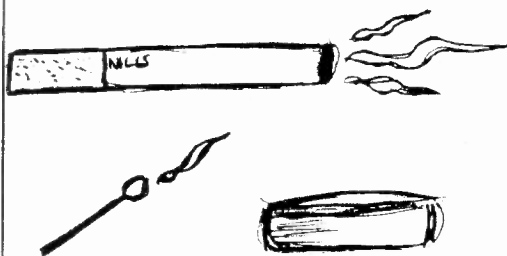
After all
The spine is not made of rubber
To carry all the burden.

This festival arrives
and
All husbands
Offer forced-promises,
Like politicians.

In the Yaga to preserve tradition
The modern man becomes the ghee.

With its hands cuffed
This nation
Desires to cut birthday cakes.

Will the soaked crackers
Of middle-class
Explode, at least,
In the next year's fire?



Shirley Priya

DANA

A Train To Nowhere

*I waited alone for long
at that deserted Railway Station
for my train to come*

*I grew tired and weak
and my legs could no longer
support me*

*Many monstrous trains sped past me
But none stopped to lift me up
and take me in*

*The biting cold and the beating wind
embraced me and I was drawn
into the folds of icy numbness*

*Smog blinded my sight
and I knew not where I stood
The killing Silence stretched on endlessly*

*Still no respite came
I wondered, had I missed my train already?
Or, was I waiting in vain for
the train that would never come?*

*I am puzzled ...
But still I keep waiting ...
And I prefer it this way.*

L. Persis Daffodile

Memory

*Don't go down memory-lane again
Its only a black and white world there.
You may relive every single detail
But all the same its only a shadow,
A dream - a land of the half-dead.
And when the road ahead is not taken
you miss a rung in the ladder.
There's nothing to hold on to
Only an empty heaviness
To pull you through.
You need to grow with every experience,
Not get yourself dwarfed.
Memories should warm you up
Not wet-blanket you.*

L. Persis Daffodile

Forever

*I wouldn't compare
My love to the shadows
that vanish with darkness.
I'd be with you in
light or dark.*

Translated from Vairumuthu

*The match that lights
And the lighted cigarette
Fall in the same ashtray.*

Anonymous Translation

*Looking up to the sky
Opening your eyes
And letting the rain drop in
- that painful pleasure is love.*

Navin Rajagopalan

Night.

The sun is eaten, dead the day, but still I cannot put away
These curious thoughts that flutter through.
This darkened urge to rend askew, my deafened dreams, naiveteu
What pushes me? I cannot say.
Save that it roars across my being, scheming,
Dreaming of the time when it will master me.
Perhaps it has already, this I do not know,
Save that I have grown weaker, meeker than before,
Submitted to that beast within—nothing have I more.
Nothing.

Perhaps my shadow leers at me, fears me, from that corner
Where it flutters in the storm, silent mourner
To my fate as the gates of reason close behind.
And I am led, bled until there is no blood to find
As if my substance does possess some propriety
Some infirmity of purpose that I was blind to see.
But now, who can say? What may or may not be
Has passed, time, my judge of what I have done
Wantonly, purposely, but still—nothing have I begun.
Nothing.

Yet. Yet still I feel that I must start, depart from reason,
Liaison with madness, sin? Perhaps, in what? In doing
What I am compelled to do? By whom? Which dark and brooding,
Elusive god am I bound to? Whose rag doll, plaything
Am I, to stand so unsure before their wrath? Faith or fate, same
Chains that bind a man together, forever and ever. Too late to blame
A god or man for my condition, my decisions are my own
Sown from the seeds of my hand, I stand alone
For punishment, but still—nothing have I done.
Nothing.

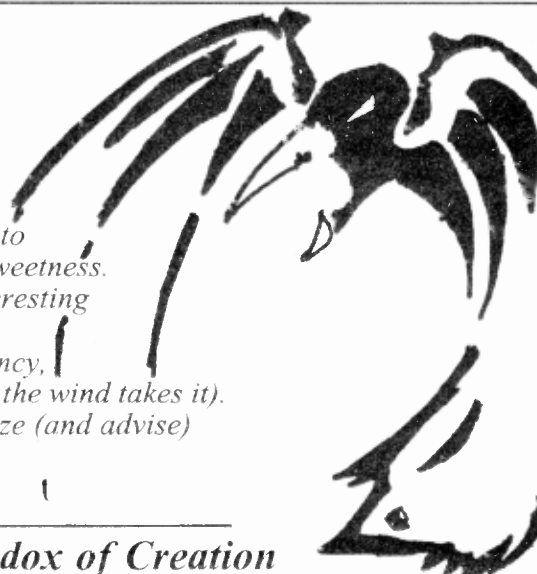
The candle slowly loses, to the night's tenfold abuses,
Cruellest torture to the light, when to the night it finds
All hope of illuminating, saving, gone.
Like the distant sound of crow crooning in the darkness that is consuming,
Consuming me. And I sit here gently waiting,
Waiting for the fingers of the night to play the meadows melody to me.
And I am lifted, gifted with sight that no man can truly see.
Embracing that sea of black, whose beauty enraptures,
And it captures one more this night, but still—nothing have I seen.
Nothing.

Stars like jewels, cruel taunting, beckoning me to follow.
To follow their paths of infinity and touch their souls, every one.
Shimmering, a thousand suns screaming for attention,
Redemption? And I sit under them, waiting, listening, thinking,
Thinking of the time perhaps when I can join them.
And escape, escape everything.
But finally—finally—From nothing did I begin,
And in nothing will I end.



To lonely company

*To lonely company I oft apologize,
My mind, rampant as the ant
Often scurries from one crevice of thoughts to
Another, hungrily searching for new sugarsweetness.
Perhaps you find me distant, perhaps uninteresting
And perhaps you do not care any more.
I tell you it is not intentional but flight of fancy,
(One could hardly blame the bird for where the wind takes it).
So once again my lonely company I apologize (and advise)
If you solicit camaraderie, leave,
Before the silence becomes Unbearable.*



P Arun

Electricity

*Oh Man!
Never touch
An electric wire, or
A Woman.
Both
will destroy you.*



Mirror

*It reflects ... as it is
Unlike the people
Who have
Something in their mind
And talk
Something else outside.*

Moon

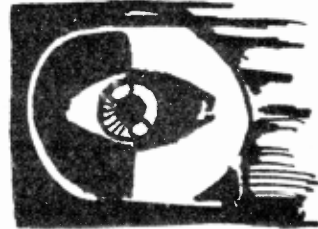
*The moon
Is like a woman.
It gets
The light of the sun by day
And shows
Its true colours only at night!*

Autumn

*Once in a year ...
A woman returns from
her foreign travel.
In a hurry ...
She rips all the leaves
from the daily calendar!*

Paradox of Creation

*Oh God!
There is a paradox in your creation.
You made
Such a
Wonderful
Broad
Vast and
Beautiful sky!
But ...
Underneath -
Narrow-minded human beings!*



SC

Vairamuthu's Translation

On Calculating

*In our motherland ...
Those who came as
businessmen
ruled us.
now
The rulers
are doing business.
But
In both cases -
The losers are
We Indians!*



Rashi Mittal

WHY

*When you said, "I love you",
I thought you meant it.
But when you walked out of my life,
And left me there to cry.
I thought of those three words,
And I wondered why?
Why did you say the things you said?
Why did you touch, the way you touched?
Why did you do the things you did?
If you didn't love me.*

MIRACLE

Only A Miracle can bring us back together again.

*You betrayed me once, I said okay.
You betrayed me twice, I controlled myself.
But this time you've really done it my friend,
Please try and understand, this is now the end.*

Only A Miracle can bring us back together again.

*You kept me waiting, I waited all night.
At the end of all that, you come home and fight.
I'm not the kind of girl, that you can just walk on.
Please try and understand, it's time to move on.*

Only A Miracle can bring us back together again.

*But then again without you, why do I feel this way,
As if without your support, I can't get past each day.
That's why maybe I'll think again,
Because something inside me says.....*

After all, who said Miracles don't happen?

I WRITE

*I write the shriek of pain,
I write the yell of anger,
I write the cry of sorrow,
I write the whisper of loneliness.*

I live the life I write.

LOCK THIS DOOR

*Shut this door with a heavy lock,
Put up the danger sign.
Please go spread the news,
This place is not benign.*

*Four, Five watch guards,
Just to make sure.
Even by mistake,
No one enters this door.*

*For inside here,
Which has already once,
Been broken apart.*

GOAL

*It's there in front of your eyes,
All you need to do is grab it.
If you'd like it there in your hands,
All you need to do is want it.*

*If you wish to be that person,
That you really want to be.
Open your eyes wide and clear,
It's picture you will see.*

*If you believe that you can,
Then all you need to do,
Is to make that goal,
Always be part of you.*

*You will get it some day,
That is a certainty.
No written piece of paper,
But a mind of guaranty.*

by Shirley Priya

Proud Proclamation

*How long should the Soul
stay away from the body
that houses it?*

*"Home is where the heart is"
How long like this should I
wander away from my home?*

*Hurry Up, my love
to take me into your home,
before I wither away
in the Wild West Wind
that rages around me
so fiercely, with an
intention to drown me
in high tides, thereafter.*

*Let me into your home, my love,
I want to show the vile world,
At last I too have got
a place where I can
rest my weary heart in comfort
I can proudly proclaim, 'I too belong'.*

Life-Time Cricket

*Sorrows bounced upon me
and hit me hard as a Cricket-ball.
But with the 'oral boost'
and 'life-energy' that I had,
I batted them aside to the Pavillion
and fled as fast as I could
to the safer side
Before I could reach my destination
though,
Alas! I was announced "Run-out".*



Long-Lost Beauty

*Yesterday,
I looked at myself
In the mirror,
Beaten-brows knit together
into a dismal frown,
Watery-eyes, tear-stained cheeks,
Chin, cleft with care,
Delicate dimples in distress,
Lips quivering unutterable aches.
My heart shivered in agony
It was altogether a face
with long-lost beauty.*

*Today,
After your entry into my heart,
Again I look at myself
in the same old mirror,
Arched-brows knit together
into a mischievous frown,
Eloquent eyes speak secret language,
Smile-stained blushing cheeks,
Deep dimples in drunken drowsiness,
Cleft-chin with comely charm.
My heart bounced in amorous ecstasy
It is altogether a face
with long-lasting beauty.*

Rashi Mittal

STILL LOVE YOU

*Every time, I look away when you happen to watch me.
But I turn back and look at you, when you're not seeing.
Every time you pass by, I pretend I don't notice,
But I make sure that everyday, I know what you're doing.*

*Every time you smile, and do the things you do,
Maybe far away, but I'm there watching you.
Every time our song plays on the radio,
I still dance the same way, like I used to with you.*

*Every time you succeed in life, I smile within myself,
and every time you frown, something hurts me inside.
How much ever I pretend that life is fine without you,
I swallow my tears, with just the thought of you.*

*Because I know, that you used to love me.
But you don't know, that I still love you.*

BLIND

*So what if darkness has conquered my life?
I can imagine all the things
That people can just see
And they look even better,
Than they may have meant to be.*

NATURE

*Sun comes out it's like a girl smiling,
Wind ripples through the trees ... as if a girl's hair is flying,
Birds singing in the meadows ... is that sweet voice of a girl,
To add to it the butterflies ... like a girl's make-up,
and a girl's fair clean skin ... is the blue sky above,
The white beautiful clouds ... a girl's sensitivity,
Sweetest cherries ... as if a girl's kindness,
And the free dove ... a girl's politeness,*

*She closes her eyes, as the night falls,
Nature ... I love you for all.*

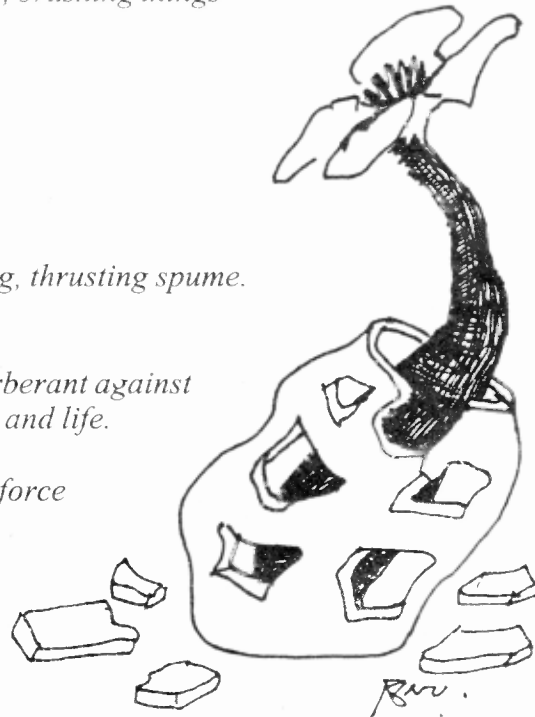
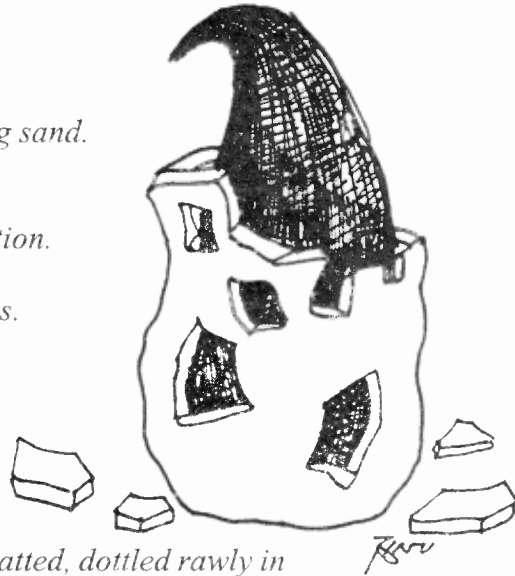
by Raini George

The Stone, The Chisel.

*Mocha cured
he rose - petulant - from amidst the cringing sand.
Great things coursed in his salted blood
grappling everywhere with sparred forces
as did blindly the sand, slipped back to suction.
He slid over the dry skree
ridged feet catching on spiny-pronged shells.*

*Inside, of course, insidious,
slothered, fithered lava
careless of the keening skies.
Ten-finned heat and
sediments lapped hungrily at the surface.
Mewling softly, the limpid new grass was clatted, dottled rawly in
a hundred tender places,
beaconing the hungry new schists layered multiple on the turfed earth.
Warm-brewed, this bit heavily into the air, brushing things
smelted to brassy new strength - yes
now a light thrill
the wind thin-tickling the brave new rock.*

*Yet it did not flail, and being marmoreal
it fetched a crescent vision while
all around, the land was torrid
but reached only now towards the cresting, thrusting spume.
Everything strained towards
the surrender,
everything previously scattered and reverberant against
the staccato respiration of a whole world and life.
Close-dredged and flurrying free,
this liquid relinquishment to the vital life force
sprawled as stone across
a globe pieced together
with so many luminous
gems.*



ACA BEA

Samir Whitaker

I don't think I've ever seen or felt a sun as glorious as in the Andaman Islands. It just seems to seep right into you and fill you up with warmth. Induced by this great ball of fire, an extreme feeling of lethargy overtakes you. The ship we took there seemed to take forever and the hull seemed to groan and creak ominously every time the weather got a bit choppy. The cockroaches and rats and other small creatures seemed to be part of the fare, but they kept me occupied most of the way so I'm not complaining. It was worth it as I sat aboard the Aca Bea, our trusty little boat.

Aca Bea was the name of a tribe that was devastated by disease. I sometimes wonder whether the boat was named in fond memory of the tribe or simply to describe the condition of the boat. The problem with diesel engines like the one we had: it dies a sort of permanent death when it runs out of gas. Petrol engines can simply be refilled and restarted. Diesel engines take a long time to coax back to life. That can be scary on the high seas for a "land lubber" like myself. Besides these minor setbacks, the boat managed to get around the best way possible.

I'm holding my "Shakespeare" brand *heavy salt water bait casting rod*, and a large Diawa *bait casting reel* to match. (For ignorant non-anglers, this is pretty cool fishing equipment). People sometimes ask me "Why do you go fishing?" I feel like answering with a line from a book by Frank Guttfield Fishing. When asked the question he replied with another question: "Why do you hurl a lump of leather at three sticks, or stand among a crowd of thirty thousand others and scream your heads off at two teams charging around in the mud?" I just enjoy it, less NOW than my earlier fanatical days of fishing, but I enjoy it in every form no matter what people think.

The essence of being a good angler is patience, I keep running this over in my head

