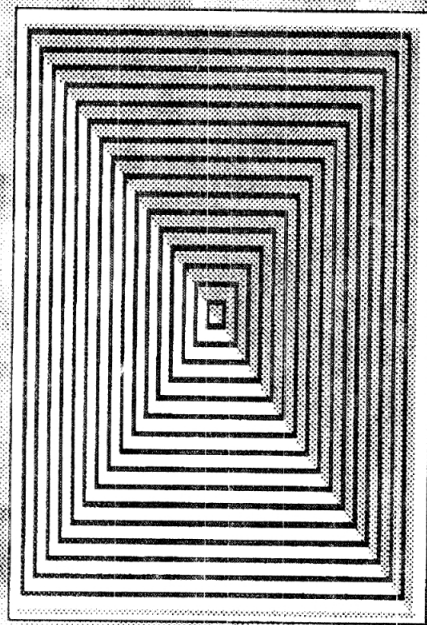


Kavithalaya 2000



Acknowledgements

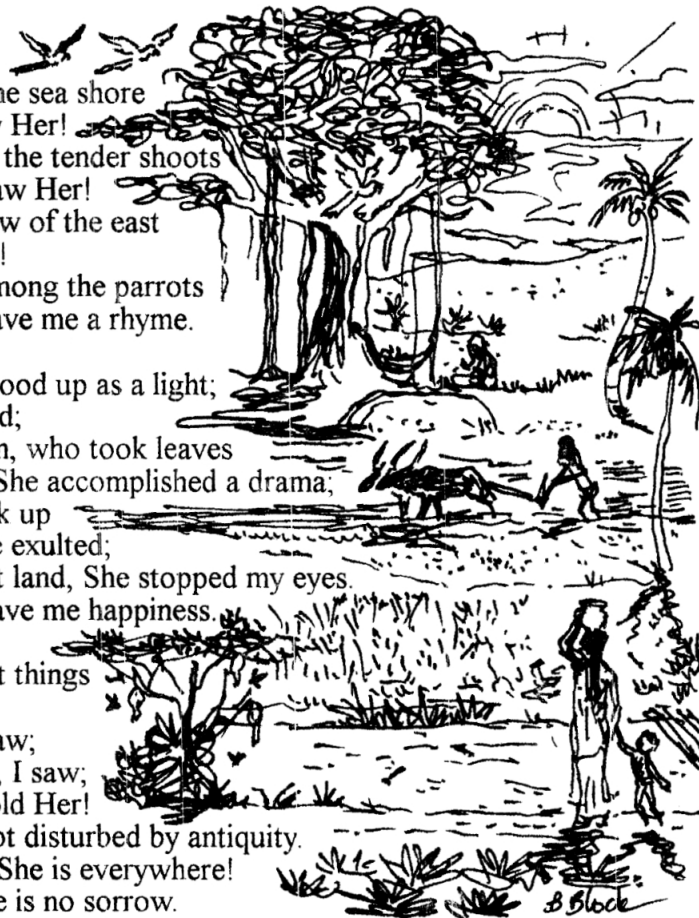
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On Beauty

In the budding sunshine, On the sea shore
And the gleaming lights, I saw Her!
In the groves, the flowers and the tender shoots
Wherever I laid my hands, I saw Her!
In the dusk, the dissolving glow of the east
Like a shining ruby, I saw Her!
In the road of banyan trees, among the parrots
On the boughs, that Beauty gave me a rhyme.

In the eyes of an infant, She stood up as a light;
In the bright lamp, She laughed;
Among the fingers of a woman, who took leaves
To garland the efflorescence, She accomplished a drama;
On seeing the farmer who took up
A plough on his rod arms, She exulted;
In the coloured crop-filled wet land, She stopped my eyes.
By abiding in my heart, She gave me happiness.

Direction, sky, and the deepest things
Of the interior, I saw;
All things shaky and erect, I saw;
The Beauty and the happiness, I saw;
Among the living beings, behold Her!
Everlasting, young looking, not disturbed by antiquity.
Look upon Her with longing, She is everywhere!
If Beauty appeals to you, there is no sorrow.



ORION

Majestic as ever, even in the stars
A story told, a story passed on.
Each night, I gaze upon the stars
As they gaze upon me, wondrously
I search for him, the hunter
Seeing his belt in all of the twilight glory
He speaks to me
Enthralled, I listen to his story.

—Jai K.

—Bharathidasan

Translated from Tamil by V.P. Sagimaynonathan



Sukuram

When the sun
Knocks at your door
You lock it inside.

When the wind
Comes with a song for you,
You shut your deaf ears.
Every moment
You are becoming old
Every season
Dampens, falls and covers you.
Even then
Have you ever felt the ocean in your eyes
Once, at least once?



We'll make a temple.

Within a few days—
All the Legislative Assemblies
May become temples:

Even there
Entering with sandals
Might be prohibited.

—Vairamuthu
Translated from
Tamil by Rachel M. Sylos



FARAWAY

I lost a friend today
Actually, it was ago, many yesterdays
The change of her and I,
And the progress of our lives.
I tried and I pursued
But all for vain,
And how I was so inane
In my way towards.
How regretful I am
To have lost my friend.

So close she was, my friend,
So far we have ventured
So enigmatically we have traveled.
Yester-year she was so close
And today she is far.
Once we were of the soul,
Yet now we are ignored.

—Jai K.



ADIEU

I walked along the road of life,
In union with my friend,
Dawdling, singing, crying, fighting,
Sharing dreams and fantasies

The world I walked in
I entered with my friend
Who made my journey through life
Zestful

But when the dusk came
The total harmony vanished,
Leaving me alone in the
Vacuum

I bid adieu, smiling,
'Cause I bear this bereavement,
Expecting an eternal Comradeship
Across the borders of the universe.

—S. Christina Rebecca

AN EPISTLE

Dear Wisdom,
I climb every mountain,
Ripping through difficulties,
Ignoring spasms,
Crushing thorns,
Burning pleasures,
Stifling fatigue,
Smothering desire,
Just to grasp you.
Sprint to me,
And be my mentor!

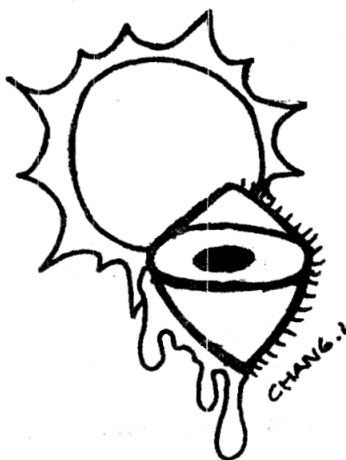
—S. Christina Rebecca

LIGHT

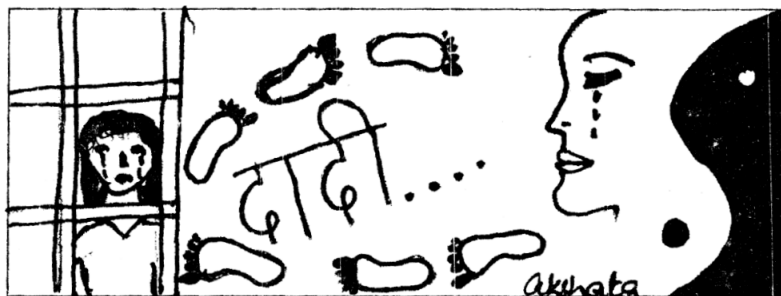
The light is scorching my back,
The rays burn the fibers of my purple
sweater,
My eyes twinge at the sight of light
My blood cells throb against my head
My skin shies away from the heat
I walk down the road looking beat
My hair all curly, burnt under the sun,

I am walking on the thin line between two
worlds
To see myself get burnt in existence.

—Shubha Janardhan



TO DADI



I examined my newest bruise carefully. Unlike the sickly one on my elbow, my knee glowed radiantly in shades of indigo and crimson. I admired it from all angles, and decided that Bharat would definitely be impressed. My bare feet felt cool on the polished white marble steps, and I could smell the wax that coated them. The sun outside scintillated. The light was almost white—like heaven, I thought.

My pastel shorts and pink T-shirt were raggedy and caked with mud and dirt. I groaned inwardly. A bath loomed ahead.

Usually, I didn't mind so much, because Dadi was so gentle. She'd lure me in with a new, colorful beach ball or toy boat; she knew I couldn't resist. She'd hum a *ghazal* in her sweet melodic voice so I could close my eyes and settle into the warm suds. She would lather me up and scrub me gently, and I would sing along, completely out of tune . . . just content to be her backup. I practiced my sitar fingering on the shampoo bottle, and she would softly correct me. Then, she would wipe me off, fluff my hair, and remind me to wipe between my toes.

But lately, Kamala the ayah had been doing it. She would drag me in by my hair and scrub my scalp, clawing it off with her long nails. I knew she was a witch. I hated her—from her coconutty hair to the fat folds that bulged out of her scarlet sari.

"When's Dadi coming?" I asked her for the fourth time that day.

"Quiet. You'll find out soon enough."

I was just about to go look for Bharat when Mom's car drove up onto the curb. I anxiously glanced up, hoping to see Dadi's face beaming down on me. But it was only Mom. Her eyebrows were furrowed, a sign that I had painfully learned to mean "get out of my way." I just about managed to contain myself.

Mom smiled at me, and sat down beside me on the step. I waited for a blasting on the grease on my elbows or grass in my hair, but it never came. Looking back, I wish it had.

She began talking about Dadi, how young I was, and how difficult it would be for me to understand . . . the words are a blur. I just remember examining my bruise again, and pressing it till tears pricked up in my eyes. And I slowly began to realize that I would have to live with a lifetime of coconutty hair and coarse scrubbing.

I still wipe between my toes everyday.

—Saiba Varma



MOMENT

Just a moment ago I met him,
Just a moment ago he smiled,
Just a moment ago we spoke,
And now we're far by miles.

In that moment our eyes sparkled,
In that moment we had our fun,
In that moment we had each other,
And now that moment's done.

THINKING OF YOU

As I lay here, alone as ever,
Shadowed by this mist of love.
My thoughts follow just you my dear,
As I admire the moon above.

"Even he," I hear the moon say,
Happens to be thinking of you.
Even though he's miles away,
He's admiring me too.

ANOTHER LOVE STING

As this tear on my cheek runs dry .

I think of you, as I close my eyes.
That one word of yours—Why?
Did it change my life and make me
cry?

I feel so isolated and alone,
I gave your love my everything.
And this is what your love has
shown,
So now I'm afraid of "another love
sting".

I don't think I will ever
Be able to bear this pain.
But still I wait, impatiently . . .
till I find you again!

—Rashi Mittal





A SMILE

When it for SURE will happen . . . Rest.
 When you WONDER what'll make it happen . . . Think.
 When you CAN make it happen . . . Work.
 When it just MIGHT happen . . . Hope.
 When you really WANT it to happen . . . Dream.
 When it's NOT happening . . . Pray.

SILENCE

Silence.
 Footsteps come.
 Silence.
 Footsteps go
 A tear.
 Silence.
 A smile.
 A Friendly hand
 . . . a dream!
 Silence.
 Unspoken words.
 Loud feelings.
 Silence.
 Hurt
 Anger
 Grief
 Suffering
 Silence.
 Un-supporting walls
 Shelterless roofs
 Silence.
 A sigh.
 Pain.
 Sorrow.
 Tolerance.
 Silence.
 Tolerance.
 Tolerance.
 Silence; Silence
 Silent.

No matter what,
 Just make that smile . . . Happen!

—Rashi Mittal

SUNSHINE

I stood on the hillside,
 Rubbing my hands,
 Eagerly waiting for you.
 I confess
 I hated you,
 Have forsaken you
 Many a time.
 I have rebuked you.
 But come back to me
 just once.
 I am waiting for you.

O! Emperor of my world,
 Come and touch me just once!
 I would be happy.
 I've got enough from your enemy.
 Now I want to lie in your bosom
 Why don't you come
 and at least have a look at me?

I felt he was
 Hearing me.
 For the clouds cleared.
 The mist disappeared.
 And he emerged,
 as a stellar leader from
 Behind the trees
 To cheer me up.

—S. Parvatha Varthini

The death of the guitarist

"Coming Lord, Coming Lord, Lord I'm coming Lord" was the song of the old guitarist every night at 8.30 PM. He sat on an old rickety chair at the entrance of his house. His music was always sweet and melodious. Oh! how beautiful was his voice! There were no listeners except the bats, the owls and Gurka. Of course, we were another family who listened to it.

He was a very old man, whose wife was ten years younger than he was. She was fat and plump and she always ate only non-veg food. Never had I seen her wearing a saree. Being an Anglo-Indian, she always wore only tight frocks and nighties. "Peter, Peter pumpkin eater; had a wife and couldn't keep her," was her favorite rhyme, about her son Peter. None else than the son cooked for them. Indeed he was gifted with swift legs to run to and fro throughout the whole day. Didn't he ever get tired? No, never! My dad remarked, "Peter must be taxed," because he walked up and down the road every ten minutes to buy something or the other.

The couple led a very happy life in spite of their hardships, except for their son Peter, who was not quite normal. He put everyone of us in embarrassing situations as often as he could. He walked for miles to get everything done. His only possession was a rat-eaten bag which he carried with him everywhere. On his way home, he dropped everything and the birds and animals were always well fed. But, what a pity, it was he who took care of his parents.

It happened that my mother and I had gone to see my grandfather who was in bed. We reached home only after four days. Within that time, the old guitarist had fallen sick due to a chest pain. There was none to look after him, since his wife was also not well. Gradually, his health became worse. The doctors examined him and would have tried to revive him, but for his son who raised up his voice, "Let him be buried, let him be buried!" That was because he did not want his father to live anymore. So, it is suspected until now, that the old man was buried half-dead.

If this was the reaction of the son towards his father, what would happen to these in the orphanages and old age homes? If this is the life even for a just person in this evil world, what would be the end of the unjust?



PARANOISYNEIGHBOUR

Little snake, little snake
Slithering on the grass,
Have you no name?
I have but one, my friend, my friend
Yet it rhymes with shame.

Little roach, little roach
Scuttling on the ground,
Have you no thought?
Perhaps I do, my friend, my friend
But what it could have been, I forgot.

Little lizard, little lizard
Crawling on the wall,
Have you no importance?
I am what you make of me, my friend,
my friend
And thus my eternal silence.

Little rat, little rat
Scurrying in the shadows,
Have you no grief?
I think not, my friend, my friend
For what may you steal from a thief?

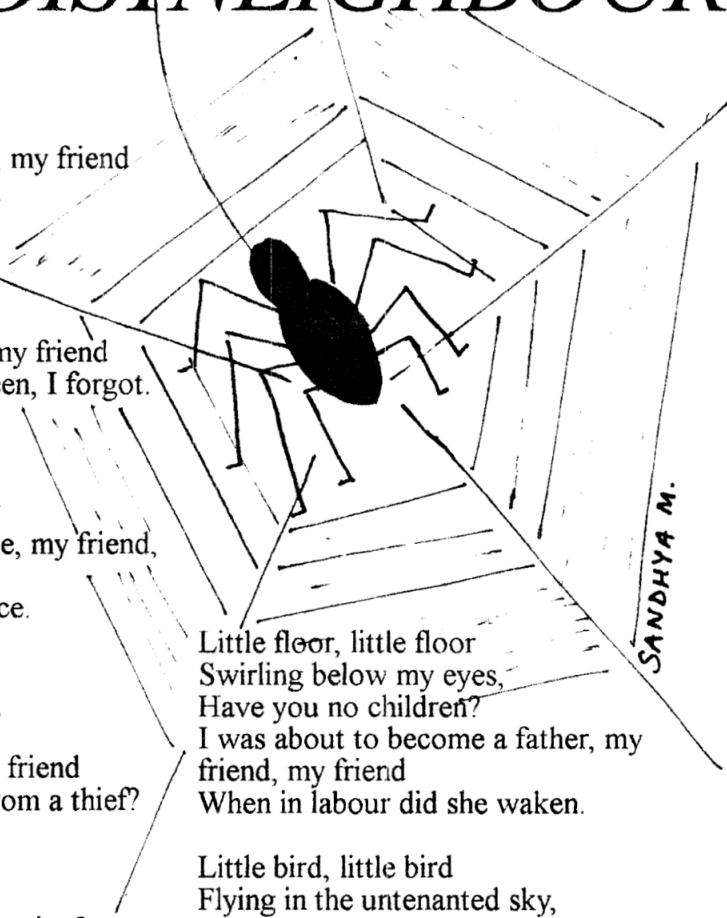
Little spider, little spider
Clinging on the ceiling,
Have you no wish for dreaming?
I did upon a time, my friend, my friend
But I got hoarse from screaming.
Little eyes, little eyes
Lurking in the shadows,
Have you no place to go?
Most certainly, my friend, my friend
But it is quite difficult to return to utero.

Little darkness, little darkness
Skulking in the corner,
Have you no sleep?
I once went insane, my friend, my friend
From attempting to count sheep.

Little floor, little floor
Swirling below my eyes,
Have you no children?
I was about to become a father, my
friend, my friend
When in labour did she waken.

Little bird, little bird
Flying in the untenanted sky,
Have you no more song?
I am tired and angry, my friend, my
friend
From singing to you all day long.

Little worm, little worm
Squirming in the sand,
Have you no stories to tell?
What else can I do, my friend, my
friend
That is all I have left to sell.
Continued on the next page



PARANOISY NEIGHBOUR

Continued from previous page

Little ant, little ant
Traipsing on a discarded body,
Have you no tears to cry?
I wish I did, my friend, my friend
If life 'twere so easy to simplify.

Little leaf, little leaf
Gliding on the wings of metal air,
Have you no air to breathe?
Every time I pull in, my friend, my friend
I find myself bracing teeth.

Little drop, little lost raindrop
Moistening the cheeks of the world,
Have you no love to hold?
I held her tight, my friend, my friend
Until I realized her hand was cold.

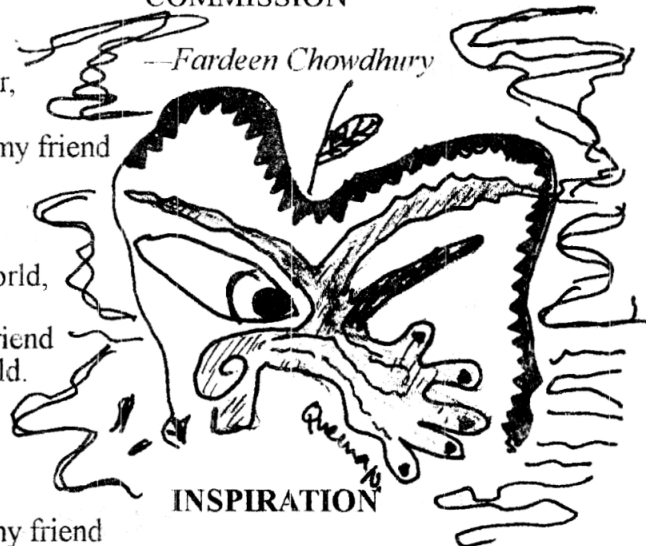
Little flea, little flea
Not letting the sleeping dog die,
Have you no fear?
Yes, I have no fear, my friend, my friend
Unless my own voice I may hear.

Little drug, little drug
Breaking open the little girls chest,
Have you no words?
I may compose a song to them, my
friend, my friend
But I have forgotten the chords.

Little man, paranoid little man
Urinating so freely on your neighbour's
lawn,
Have you no saviour?
I would have welcomed one, my friend,
my friend
Had the load on my mind been not
heavier.

Little boy, noisy little boy
Holding your head in shame,
Have you no mother?
I used to, my friend, my friend
But she decided to parent another.

LITTLE PIG LITTLE PIG
LET ME IN
I KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN
AND AS FOR THOSE YOU
BELIEVE IN
I KNOW YOU ARE ONE TO
COMMISSION



Personally, inspiration is a sound,
a vision, an extraordinary sight, a
thought, a feeling, a concept.
These inspirations affect my
emotions, brings them to a
different level. The emotions
which we feel evoke a response
within us that is unpredictable,
yet so familiar and comforting.
My writing is a reflection, an
expression of my emotions which
are found from within; an in-
depth perspective of our lives.

—Shirley Bobby

A DREAM

It was Sunday morning and I got up from my bed. I decided to have a walk. I had my coffee and started. I climbed over the hills and the valleys. I saw a small hut and went over to it. There were no houses nearby. I knocked on the door. An old lady with a baby opened it. I told her that I was very tired and I wanted to take some rest. With a smile she nodded her head. The baby was very thin and it always cried, but it had a very bright face.

I thanked the lady and started to walk again. The next day I got up very early and went to the hut again. I knocked on the door. It was open. I went inside. But I didn't see the lady or the child. I saw two people walking near the hut. I asked about the lady. But they said no one was living inside and they began to tell this story. Once, there was a young couple. The girl's mother was the old lady and she also stayed with them. The couple had a baby. The old lady was very affectionate to her daughter. But one day the girl died by accident. Her husband married another woman, leaving his child and his mother-in-law. The old lady was very upset. She cried continually. So she decided to commit suicide and to poison the baby. She did as she planned and now they were no more.

I was terribly frightened and I said that I had seen the old lady and the baby the previous day. They didn't believe me. I came running to my house to tell my parents. But someone woke me up and I discovered it was only a dream.

—*J. Magdalene Sheeba*

Tragedy reflected

It seems haunting when the sky remains a mirror when two completely contrasting lives are in a battle within one soul.

Under the sky, a soul is submerged in sadness. It is often questioned why this spirit of innocence should be forced to stand alone among the sharp thorns and dry surrounding which seem to scream out as to tell me—tell me I deserve to suffer in a vacant desert of pain. This soul continues to hold on to the flame of hope—while such destroying and unstoppable winds rush by; not knowing at which second the flame will burn out. This soul of despair still continues to walk.

Beneath this same sky, this soul stands with a different face. Everything below is a stream of clear beauty which can only be seen deep inside with eyes of experience and patience. The flame of hope transforms into an eternal being—an endless fire that is almost impossible to put out—that which is the life of this soul. These unstoppable winds now lift this innocent spirit into understanding and love. These winds now run with this soul. All which exists below, the boulders, trees, and the Sun itself all seem to tell me—tell me my soul is loved by all entities under this sky of eternal hope and love.

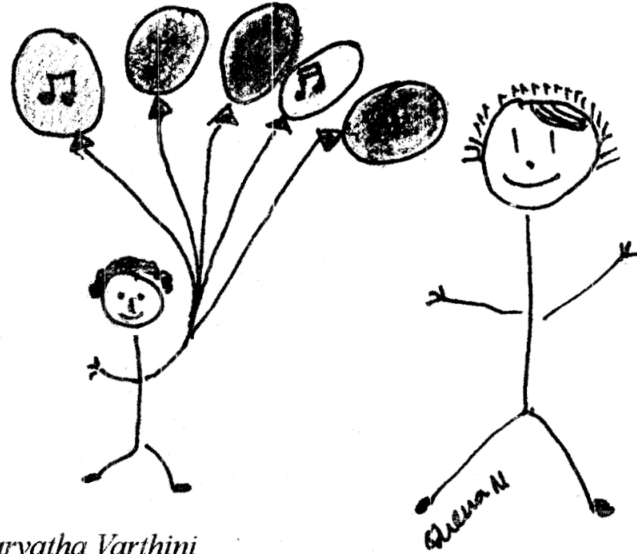
—*Shirley Bobby*

LULLABY

Don't lament that
Colourful balloons
are not
hung on your cradle.
Feel happy that
You have ropes for your cradle.

For, dear son,
I don't have
chains
either to adorn you
or to
Shackle you.

—Vairamuthu
Translated from Tamil by S. Parvatha Varthini



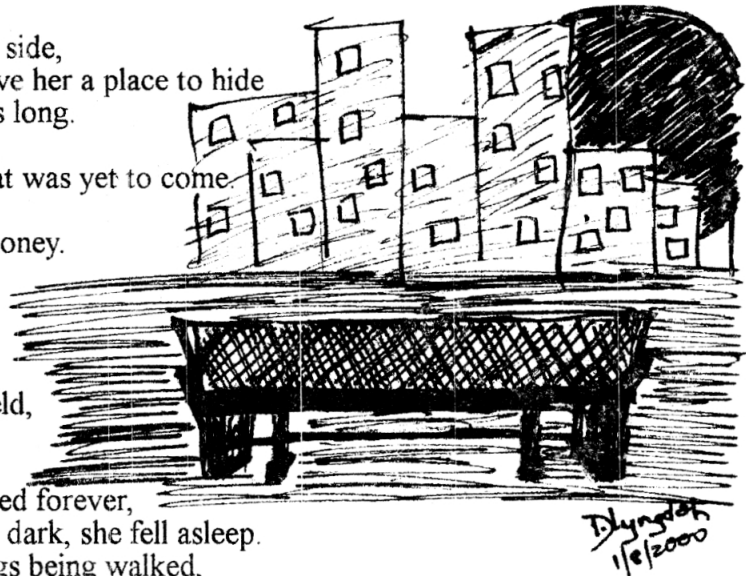
LONG AND DUSTY NIGHTS

She lay there with a baby by her side,
and the shadows of the night gave her a place to hide
The street was still and time was long.
She lay there on the park bench,
afraid of what had been and what was yet to come.
The light was yellow and dusty,
and she was short of love and money.

She used to like to be alone
Ah! But like an old hit song,
she longed to be heard again.
She longed to be loved, to be held,
to be able to end her pain.

Hours passed and seconds seemed forever,
and when the sky was no longer dark, she fell asleep.
She awoke to noise and saw dogs being walked,
She tried to awaken the baby by her side,
but he'd been freed from long and dusty nights.

—Karan Basu



Temptation

There it grew, nothing more than an apple tree, yet more magnificent than any other I've seen. My friend told me of its existence, but his descriptions did not come close to its real beauty. Though its true significance was a far larger concept to be grasped by my feeble mind.

It had taken me many sleepless nights of deliberation to reach this far. I wrestled with my conscience to somehow justify my action, and I finally won. A funny thought, though, after a battle, one's supposed to feel tired regardless of the result. But I, on the other hand, had somehow been spurred on and had drawn on my victory to reach this hallowed ground with great anticipation. But now that I was here I felt my conscience nagging me, never leaving me at ease. It was like a faulty tap, dripping water incessantly. My mind was frantically trying to drain these drops of hesitancy. Trying to make it clear for what was ahead. But it kept at me, persistently pounding at me. It kept telling me, "You know you're wrong." "What you're doing is not right." Repeating the same thing over and over again. "It's not yours to take." But I pushed these thoughts aside, best I could.

My eyes searched the branches. There was no need to, actually. It hung, the sunlight streaming through the leaves. It was light green in color with a dollop of red which turned warm orange as the rays of light caressed its cheek.

I could not wait any longer.

The sight of it made my mind water with lustful desire. My hand moved towards its, dispelling an eternity of content as I touched its smooth surface. I gasped at the icy cold of its touch. I was held fast, my soul in pawn. A cold lifeless draft of air rushed through my nose, a harsh swift movement which burned my insides, searing my sense of smell. My mind cried in anguish, a deafening roar that shook my senses. The apple was torn from its place, and was brought to my mouth. As I took the bite, walking away, memory was no more.

—Nikhil John



Slowly the Pain rises;
Very, very slowly it gathers
Until it can no longer hold back,
Then gently it falls;
Warm and salty
On the soft smooth surface
The colors fade
And it falls
Leaving a wet path
Of LOVE

—Shona Van Dam

INDIA

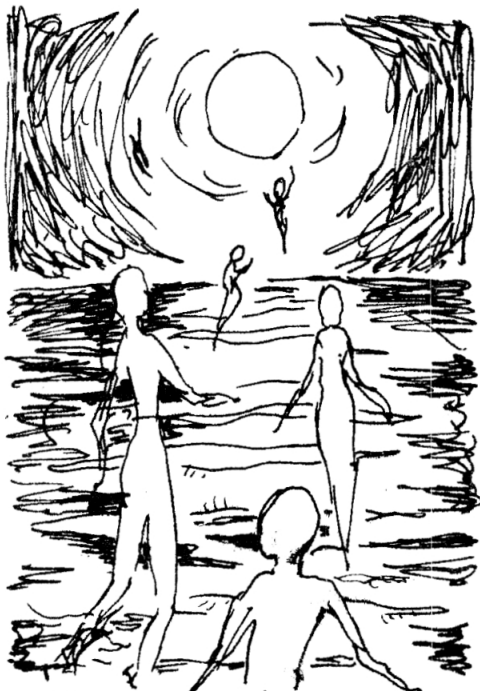
She stands high in my mind.
Another place like her I will never find.
Under me she doth stand,
With every grain of sand,
Full of strength, power and dignity
For even the smallest fig tree
Is full of the eternal Soul of India.

—Shona Van Dam

MY SOUL

By the Sapphire tumbling of the sea,
The sparkling pearl moon arose.
Form the foaming waters' crest,
Creating a golden path upon the water,
Where all the spirits go
Wandering on the golden path
To heaven.

—Shona Van Dam



BBlock loosely based on a painting by Shona



ME

I am an empty room.
Empty, waiting to find myself.
When I go inside myself
I cannot find myself
Someday I hope to find myself,
But then what will I do with
Me?

—Shona Van Dam

LOVE TO LOVE

Like the light reflects on the water,
Like the foam rides on the waves,
Like the sand washes into the ocean
And the stream joins the river,
In that same way our love flows
into one source,
Mixing and mingling
Until we are one.

—Shona Van Dam

THE BIRD OF LIFE AND DEATH

Life is like a dove in a golden cage.
Everyday it learns to sing a different
tune,
Each day it races up and down the scales
Until one day death may find it
and sets it free from its cage,
So that it may sing the song of freedom!

—Shona Van Dam

THE SNAKE'S ACHE

"Sshh! Seems somebody is strutting about.

Should be Human beings!"

"Tell me one thing, shall we slowly slide and see them—some say they slightly resemble the God-in-temples, in their appearance."

"Sure, it's so; still, some caution is to be observed."

"Yesss . . . say they suddenly bounce on us."

"Why should they do so? Don't they know that we want to befriend them?"

"Perhaps, they know. But that's how they respond. Anything amiable comes their way, they either dismiss or destroy. And those that are ferocious, they chase and chase."

"Yesss . . . you are right. You remember our sleek, glossy Sarpanch?! She was slain for her skin. The other day, I was mistaken for a second when I thought I'd found her. Actually, she was hanging from the shoulders of the supposed-human being. There was some Zip/strap stitched through her."

"Oh! I really miss her. I seek to meet her someday."

Sudden comes a slap-stick and blood oozes generously through the crawling creatures.

"Does man always inflict ache and danger to others—especially the snakes?"

No, not really, for now there is hanging on the wardrobe our bereaved friend, along with his sarpanch friend, next to one another, as carrybags.

—Kamala G.



A FLOWER, VIEWED SCIENTIFIC

A set of circles contouring,
Well-aligned and concentric
The length of sprout, steeply ascending
—Is the stalk's design, highly geometric.

A Deliberate Design, reminding
One open-minded, not a pedantic
That there is a continual flowering
—A sequential process, never static.

—Kamala G.

THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE

Sitting on a rock by a lake
In complete Tranquility . . .
Contemplating the being of the stars
Watching the serene lake
Gliding lightly by.

I steal upon a certain awareness,
Of an empty space
A feeling of incompleteness
A missing presence
The absence of my friend.

—Shona Van Dam

BLACK

A swirling vision of depth
Her intriguing field of attraction
A molding liquid of art
A passionate look of longing.
Her infinite tunnel of temptation
Takes me far into the place where
I need to rest.
Those who miss her beauty
Perceive her as death.
She unleashes your dark vapor
That hides in your mind,
Throws forward the shadow that
others leave behind.

—Shirley Bobby



UNTITLED

I walk down the rough path, looking at the sea
It cries out to me— “Do you still remember
The long walks by my side
The cool spray on your face
The waves retracing your cautious steps
And the warm hands that put a jacket around your shoulders when you
shivered.”

I sit by the hilltop looking at the blue sky
It calls out to me— “Do you still remember
The long lazy sunny days, with clouds that drifted aimlessly
The time when I would cry my heart out to you
The wind playing with your long hair
And the smile that accompanied a bunch of scented flowers—just for you.”

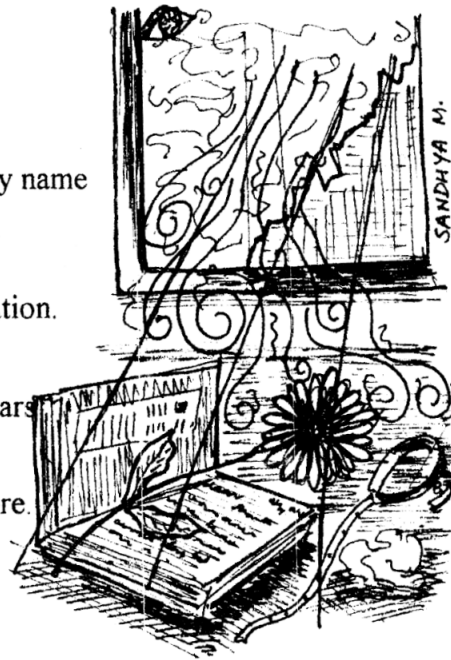
I gaze up at the stars and the night
It whispers to me— “Do you still remember
The dew that fell from flower petals like tears
The beautiful silence that surrounded me
The lonely moon gazing with longing at your face
And the soft voice which would, in your ears, whisper soothing words of love.”

—Shweta Modi

Nostalgia

A small smile, the sly sidelong glance,
 The note stuck on my locker
 A broken photo-frame,
 Startling when someone in the mist called my name
 A dried daisy, an old love song,
 A newspaper cutting, a sad verse
 An incomplete letter,
 Broken threads of a now-forgotten conversation.
 The wind that rattles the broken glass-pane.
 Brown hair shining in the golden sunlight,
 A crumpled tissue stained with now-dried tears
 A lost puppy
 The ocean of your eyes
 That's all I have left nothing more.

—Shweta Modi



Lightening

Fireworks
 In the sky's carnival

 Fiery snakes
 Spit by the colliding clouds.

 Illuminating blabber
 Of dark lips

 Scribbled shorthand
 Of a thunderous discourse.

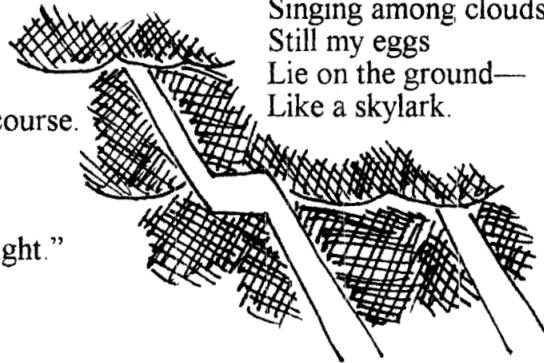
Irony

"Swaraj is my birthright."
 Read a note
 On the prison wall;
 The prisoner smiled
 From inside.

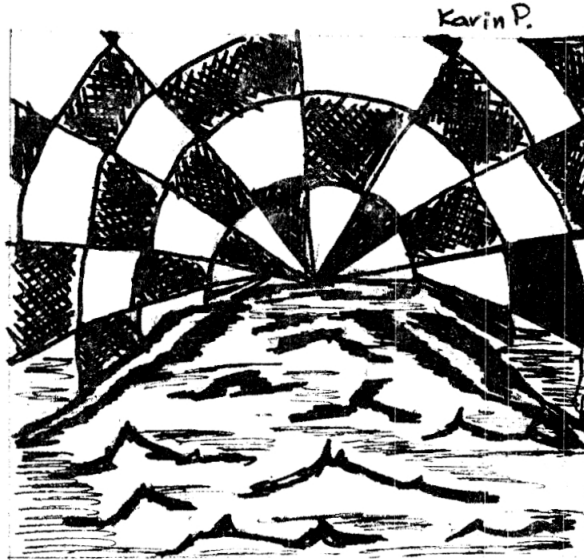
My Roots.

Sitting on the throne
 In the sky,
 Still my eyes
 Look at the Earth—
 Like a star

 Singing among clouds
 Still my eggs
 Lie on the ground—
 Like a skylark.



—Translated from Tamil by R. Vidhya



LILIES ON THE WATER'S SURFACE

Gently caressing the water's face,
The willow branches hang,
Slowly stirring the crystal blue water.

Dancing, softly on the water, the lilies float,
Slowly as if in a motionless dream,
A boat flows downstream.

Underneath the hanging willow bows,
There my dream boat goes,
Silent, under the willow branches
Which over the still lilies hang.

Let the gentle breeze flow
From over the hills it rolls
Slowly rippling the calm, peaceful reflection
Which in the water lies,
Reflecting the true beauty
Of life and nature.

Through this, my dream boat goes
Down the stream it flows,
Carrying my dreams away.

—Shona Van Dam

FRIENDSHIP

We gave life to
a four months' old Child
called FRIENDSHIP.

We fed our feelings as
food for this infant,
with delight.

Due to
needless rage and
indiscrete talk, the child
faltered,
stumbled,
Yet, never
Went off the track.

Alas!
This flower of four months
withered
before it bloomed.
Instead,
the flame called hatred
entered into us.

We tried to build
a close relationship
by quenching the flame.
We took great efforts
to resurrect the dead soul.

But
Though we tried to begin it again
it ended in vain.

So
We surrendered
to the hands of Time
hoping that they would
chase the hatred out
and bring again the happy days.

—L.D. Easter Raj Densingh

WAR

It was war!

There could be no other way. Muthu decided he could wait no longer.

Yes. Pandi was bigger. And stronger. But he, Muthu, was a fighter to the end. Be it victory or defeat.

It began one night when Muthu went to his favorite “bedroom” on the street. It was the steps of a medical shop that closed at 9.00 PM. The steps were broad enough to accommodate his twelve-year-old frame easily. But better still, there was a broad awning in front of the shop that protected the steps from the sweaty summers and slushy monsoons of Chennai.

Besides, this was the place where he spent his first night in the city after he ran away from home.

To top it all, the teashop where he found work was just a stone’s throw away.

Muthu loved his bedding place. This was where he could soothe his body to sleep after a fifteen-hour day. This was where he could dream peacefully of the teashop he planned to open one day.

That night he went to his steps and found somebody already asleep there. In the orange glow of the street light he could recognize the person.

Pandi!

The dirty bully who had joined his teashop a week before. The idiot who served tea with his grubby fingers inside the glass

Muthu never liked him. But then Pandi had size on his side. A head shorter and slimmer than him, Muthu naturally tried to stay away from him.

Muthu was irritated. He had never let anybody sleep on his bed.

Once on a rainy day the dog he used to feed the occasional leftover bun tried to encroach on his steps. He chased it away with a stone and never ever gave it another piece of bun.

Now it was Pandi. How dare he?

After a moment’s hesitation he walked over to the steps and tapped Pandi on the shoulder.

“Pandi, get up.”

“Mmmff . . .”

“Get up. This is my place.”

“Get lost. I’m sleeping,” growled Pandi.

Muthu tried again. This time Pandi got up with a roar, took up a stick he had hidden from Muthu’s view and advanced menacingly towards him.

Muthu ran.

Continued on the next page

War

Continued from the previous page

After all, tomorrow was another day.

Muthu's days thereafter were dedicated to thinking up ways of evicting Pandi from the steps. The subsequent night he dirtied the steps with cow dung. Unfortunately, Pandi decided to stay away that night. Because of the dung, Muthu could not sleep there, either.

The next day he was wiser. He finished his work quickly. He washed the dirty tea glasses in a hurry, swept the floor like a hurricane. And dashed out of the shop. As he ran past the first lamppost, he heard the rush of footsteps. Turning too late, he could do nothing to stop the charging body of Pandi. He hit the ground with a hard "thwack". Slowly he picked himself up to see his enemy reach the steps first. Enemy? He considered this for a moment. However much he disliked Pandi, he had never thought of him in this vein.

Muthu was getting desperate for ideas when he remembered the tea-master at his teashop. He was a loud man who kept scolding Pandi at every turn. So the next day Muthu poured out his heart to the master. Albeit at the wrong time. Busy making twenty cups of tea at a time, he turned around, slapped Muthu and said, "Go do your work." Fortunately, Pandi was not there to see this.

He was all alone now. He couldn't expect any help at all.

It was war. And he could wait no longer. He felt like one of those soldiers getting ready for the Kagil attack, the pictures of whom he had been seeing regularly in "Dina Thanthi" over the previous week.

Luck smiled on him suddenly the very next day. In the form of Pandi himself. One of Muthu's responsibilities was to supply tea to a few offices across the road. That morning, having delivered tea to one group of offices, he entered the teashop to collect the tea carrier for his next round. There he found Pandi crouched near the teacups that Muthu had to deliver. Moving closer he could see his rival furtively trying to push down a dead cockroach into the hot tea.

It was time for war.

Screaming all the filthy words he knew Muthu charged blindly. Caught in the act, a startled Pandi swung around to meet him head-on. But Muthu for once was too fast for him. He crashed headlong into Pandi, who in turn brought down all the teacups. Hot tea splattered all round the shop, along with broken pieces of china. The brunt of which was borne by swearing customers who were, a minute before, sipping their mid-morning tea.

Muthu, now on top of Pandi, started pounding his fists into his enemy's face. He was finally tasting victory.

It took the tea-master and the shop owner to pull the fighting boys apart. On the day the Indian Army planted the Tricolour on Tiger Hill, Muthu and Pandi lost their jobs.

—Ravindran Solomon

CHANGE

I felt it the moment I saw you again.
It wasn't there anymore
What we had, at least
What I thought we had,
Wasn't there anymore.
I confused you
So you confused me back,
I broke your heart
So you broke mine back.
I felt it then
And I still feel it now
—You've changed.
I thought it was I,
Who hadn't stayed the same
But everything,
Everything around me hasn't changed
I am still the same
You moved away,
I can't even remember
If we said goodbye.
Change doesn't take time,
And you've proved that right
You left me feeling cheated
And I still don't understand . . .
We pass in the halls and,
At times . . .
I feel nothing's changed,
You still smile at me
Still make me laugh
But, no . . .
It's not there
The endless teasing on long walks
Yeah,
I guess it's all changed
Maybe you couldn't help it . . .
Did you need this change?
I wonder,
I have questions which may go unanswered.
It all depends,
On how long you keep on,
Changing.

—Anjali Verma

UNTITLED

No. I can't take it
anymore. You say you
love me—Liar. Even if
you're not one, I cannot
accept your idea of love,
for love never equalled
pain . . . but I knew I
would suffer, for every
rose you gave me still had
its thorns. Blinded by the
covering petals, I couldn't
look further, but now as I
reach for the same rose,
its thorns prick me.
Stop. Don't reach out for
me, for sadly my body
won't forget you. Keep
your distance and please
don't look at me like that,
don't give me the look
that once could've melted
away my doubts and
stolen my heart, for now
my heart is battered and
bruised and can't hurt
anymore.
Shut up. I don't need to
hear any last attempts of
yours to get me where I
so gullibly was . . . my
ears got tired of listening
to your lies so they don't
even recognize your voice
anymore.
You thought I loved you?
Sorry. It was a
misinterpretation, a
misunderstanding—how
on earth could I have ever
known love, if you were
always breaking my heart?

—Anjali Verma

LIVING DEAD

Loneliness
Calm.

Even the sound of
My blinking
I hear.

In the room where
The silence was sleeping . . .

The real rose that I bought
Yesterday
And the paper flowers I bought
Last month
Were lying on the
Glass table.

Some petals of the
Real rose
Lay there withered.

The paper roses giggled
At them.

"Hi! Red Rose!
You can't even hold your life
Even for a day!"

The real rose
Opened its lips.

"You know,
It is better to die living
Than to live dead."

Even now
The mantra of the rose
Echoes upon
The walls of my dream too.

The reason is that
The number of breathing corpses

Is on the increase
In the streets
Of the country.

They made honour
Fly away
Out of the country.

They sank into the ditch of slavery
Happily
And called it sandalwood.

They included words like
Why, How and so on
In the dictionary of
Bad language.

They grew up saying, "Aama"
Well before they learnt to call "Amma"
In their cradle.

By breaking their backbones
They lit not the fires of the conquest
But the ovens of their officer's house.

Blood
Commits suicide
Inside their body.

Why the hell
Do some of us grow moustaches?
Why not shave them off?

This descent to slavery
Is not a symbol
For a healthy life.

If this goes on
Another Tholkappiam
Will wonder
Whether to include men
Among living beings.

—Vairamuthu
*Translated from Tamil by T. Ganesh
Babu*

A SWEET VIEW

I'm ungrateful
I'm incensed
I'm prone to
Prior to dance
I'm outcast
I'm in love
I am everything
You're thinking of
She crosses to the window
And she sees him walking
Away into the city
Felt like talking
Felt like stroking
the newborn sunlight
Strikes the asphalt
Oh so slightly
The dogs go hunting
In garbage cans
Fighting with
a drunken man
The gutters
filled with yesterday's utter
Waste
The cars start coming
out of their wombs
paving the way for
mobile tombs
Children
smiling on their
Way to school
They don't know where
or what they'll do
As long as the teacher
is absent too
the airport
With yawning people
wearing frowns
and faded signs
not knowing
the flight's in the next town
The shopkeepers
open their stores
come and buy some bread or more
The smell of

toothpaste
and shaving cream
razor blades dipped in nicotine
Morning bells
raising hell
Short and tall
Running down the halls
The trees
in the sunlight
seem to me
green for
eternity
The morning birds
looking round for
what's the word
Coffee
and toast
Two old friends, ready to boast
Thank you
so much
I'd have thought
you'd have given up
The morning
joggers
Just in time
to meet the muggers
The ancient people
walking by
the park
Sitting down
having larks
Harking back
to olden days
She comes away from the window
draws the curtains to a tense
and she lies thinking of him
and how it all made sense
It doesn't
need to be real
it's just immaterial
She may not see
him again
but at least
the morning's still the same.

—Fardeen Chowdhury