

# kavithalaya



THE 13<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL WORKSHOP

**2005**

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**kavithalaya**  
["a house of poetry"]

*The American College, Madurai and Kodaikanal International School*  
**THE 13<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL WORKSHOP**  
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### *Message from the Librarian*

*Ranjit Hoskote, the visiting poet for the two-and-a-half-day workshop, rightly commented that as this was a workshop, it should be about work, about labor; a laboratorium, a laboratory, in which, through practice, dedication, and craft, we could arrive at "a small miracle of understanding". Part of that work entailed counteracting two weaknesses Ranjit pointed out beginning poets tend to have: first, a certain self-orientation, a self-absorption: after all, we are beset by the problem of living within our own skins; and second, a predominance of abstraction and generalization. He also indicated the antidotes for both weaknesses: for the first, to strip away the skin and reach out of the self through closeness, to detail, to the texture of experience, bearing witness to the world; for the second, to particularize through strangeness, shedding the habitual ways and looking at the world in fresh, unhabitual ones, and through defamiliarization, rendering the familiar strange. Both antidotes mean work and crafting need to be done to the language of beginning poets, ensuring that it goes beyond generic, abstract phrasings which do not communicate; or, rather, that it goes beneath, and falls through, the surface of itself, through what Ranjit called "trapdoors", into the depths of language, of self, of the world. Such trapdoors into unexpected, perhaps playful, insights make of a poem "an architecture of surprise". May you be surprised, then, as you fall through the trapdoors built into the following poems, the trapdoors that bring you close to experience and make it familiar by particularity, and yet keep you remote enough by peculiarity.*

David Stengele

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***May I Come In . . .***

Inside the room,  
Engulfing me—  
Death.

Outside,  
Tapping at the door—  
Life.

*(Thamizhanban, from Oomai Veyil, translated from the Tamil by T. GANESH BABU)*

***A Poet's Ability***

A poet is capable  
Of revealing the innermost thoughts of the mind  
And expressing the feelings of the heart  
In a complex or simplistic manner.

***JOANNA UDAYKUMAR***

***Thoughts***

A bucket full of imagination  
Kindle it  
To be enlightened—like the discovery of an  
Infant emerging, or  
Like the flower that blooms with silent splendour  
Explode the hidden treasures  
That crawl in you,  
Lighten the intensity that flattens you

For it's better to contemplate than to  
Write it down!

***H. UMMA FATHIMA SHARMILA***

***Umbrella***

CLICK – He pressed me  
I spread my arms,  
Under the scorching sun  
Ah! What parching heat  
Thirst I felt and longed to quench it  
But then I had to suffer.  
... WHIFF...  
there came a drizzle  
hey a good shower  
glad I felt with dancing thoughts.  
But CLICK he pressed me again  
How rude of him, I thought!  
I pretended to be deaf.  
This angered him,  
For he wanted to dance freely,  
Putting me inside his pocket.  
With rage, he gave another hard CLICK  
Folding my arms,  
I took my orders  
I crept in crying because I am his slave.

**HAMLIN**

***The Environment***

Drops falling everywhere  
Not a single blue speck in the sky  
All is gloom

Sitting in the woods  
Of brown and green  
A rushing wind

A chill  
Occupies the atmosphere  
All comes to a sudden stop  
Even the mind

**KARASS PAULRAJ**

**Untitled**

It's terribly amazing,  
Isn't it?

Strenuous as  
Solving complications,  
As Macbeth faced the witches;

Mysterious as  
Exploring treasures,  
As Ulysses surfed through oceans;

Venturous as  
Drifting far away,  
As Armstrong flew far above skies;

Minacious as  
Ruling nations,  
As Idi Amin drank gallons of human blood;

But still,  
As joyous as anything else,  
Life, the one and only life, is  
More fascinating since it is only once.

So,  
Shuffle deep into your self,  
Sail far into imagination,  
Fly high above reality,  
Dive fathoms below human minds,  
And there it lies,  
And that it is, life.

**M. PRASANNA VENKATESWARAN**

Love	LoveLoveLove	Love Love Love	Love Love Love
Love	Love	Love Love Love	Love Love Love
Love	Love	Love	Love
Love	Love	Love Love	Love Love
Love	Love	Love Love	Love Love
Love	Love	Love	Love
Love Love	Love	Love	Love Love Love
Love Love	Love Love Love	Love	Love Love Love

*Because life should be loved.*

**KARASS PAULRAJ**

***Paradox***

Then,  
Eyes hiccupping  
Draught of speech  
Still in gestation.  
Faceless noises,  
Ripples in the air  
Gestures yo-yoing  
What was meant  
Was understood.  
Now...  
Speech born  
A million hatched,  
Overpopulated words.  
Dialogues and conversations  
Yet, Everyman an island  
Somehow misunderstood!

***G. JEYALAKSHMI***

***Stain***

The shining moon  
In the dark starry sky  
Is a feast to our eyes.

The 'kunkum'  
On the forehead  
Is something divine.

A scribble  
On a plain paper  
Is sometimes modern art.

But,  
A small accidental stain  
On a shirt  
Wakes the beast in us.

***M. PRASANNA VENKATESWARAN***



***Waiting***

Remember  
You are not the moon  
To play with me  
Behind the clouds;  
And  
We are not  
Two sides of a coin  
That we cannot see  
Each other;  
It's time for the cooker  
To whistle.  
I wait mute;  
Aloud within.

***T. GANESH BABU***

***Expectations***

On waiting for someone do I  
Really mean to wait for them?  
My expectations rise like the morning sun.  
Footsteps heard, people viewed, fragrance felt.  
But not of those I yearn.  
Time, time alone has passed.  
On waiting for someone do I still  
Mean to wait for them?  
No! My expectations fall like the setting sun.  
At last, unfathomable rage is the  
Only wage on waiting for someone.

***S. KRISHNA***

***The Enigma***

I am confused.

I don't know what I am confused about,  
Whether to question or to analyze.  
But I am confused about what to question and what to analyze.

Horror and happiness,  
Simultaneously trouble my mind.  
I look back at the past and remember moments of joy,  
And moments of sorrow.  
I look into the future and imagine joyful occasions,  
And incidents of dismay  
But I am confused about the horror and the happiness.

I am confused.

**KARASS PAULRAJ**

***Friendship***

Whenever I feel that I miss you,  
I close my eyes and sense you beside me,  
I keep them shut of the fear  
That you may come out in bitter sobs.

My eyes are often jealous of my heart,  
Guess why!  
Because you're close to my heart—but  
Distanced out of my sight.

The beauty of true friendship is when  
We sit alone together and never say a word  
But walk away, feeling that  
We had the best conversation.

**H. UMMA FATHIMA SHARMILA**

***Volcano***

it seems dead  
sheathed in numbness  
like a hardened heart  
not yielding  
to eroding winds  
not succumbing  
to churning time  
repressing molten thoughts  
quelling gushing tears

and then,  
it pukes.  
Spewing out bottled frustration.

At times  
Letting out is important  
To show you are alive!

***G. JEYALAKSHMI***

***Miasma***

Soaring down,  
Creeping below  
Filling the atmosphere,  
Surrounding the tallest tree  
And the shortest shrub.  
As far as eyesight carries.

All color disappears,  
Except for one,  
An astounding whiteness

It creeps faster, and faster  
But when it hits the ground,  
It vanishes  
Where it goes,  
I really don't know.

***KARASS PAULRAJ***

***Teddy Bear***

I lie in the porch  
Forsaken by Time  
And by my master  
My once pendulum eyes  
Now crippled, unable to roll,  
My once taffeta skin  
Now faded forgetting to glow.  
In those fresh green days  
My warm hug always replenished  
His drained soul.  
I was his playmate,  
I was his confidante.  
Years volatiled  
We forked apart  
Old faces, as sagging burdens  
Were moulted for new  
And now, I lie in the porch  
Counting my withering days  
With shriveled hands,  
Tattered clothes, rusted eyes.  
Gasping for love. . . .  
With me, lies his mother!!

***G. JEYALAKSHMI***

***Red***

Be it the skull indicating danger,  
Or the cross on the first-aid box,  
A rose symbolizing love  
Or a heart full of blood:  
A sin saying "stop"  
Or a teacher's remark,  
All depict the versatility  
Of this color.

***JOANNA UDAYKUMAR***

***Floral Destiny***

Yesterday, I was young and budding,  
Today I bloomed, bathed in the morning dews,  
And my buzzing friend, the bee  
Was my companion.

Each minute since my birth, meant to be fleeting  
One of a kind and many roles  
To a few a seducer, to some a comforter  
And to more I turned out to be a solace  
The more I am selfless, the less I grieve.

Often picked by the children, I  
Stood in their hands with greatest beauty;  
Not really knowing the import of Destiny;  
Neither have I worried about the past,  
Nor bothered about my future—but still  
Happy, Happy I am amidst the parched winds.

None I owe, but am owned by many  
This is where I stand: The Best, even  
When I say nothing at all.

***H. UMMA FATHIMA SHARMILA***

***Untitled***

He screamed and shouted,  
Whined and grumbled,  
But all to no avail.  
Because no matter how much he spoke  
Or to what level he raised his voice,  
There was no one to hear all that he said.  
'Cause guess what?  
All that he said  
Was contained in a mere soliloquy.

***JOANNA UDAYKUMAR***

***God's Unfailing Promises***

God has not promised  
Skies always blue,  
Flower-strewn pathways  
All our lives through,  
God has not promised  
Sun without rain,  
Joy without sorrow,  
Peace without pain.  
But God has promised  
Strength for the day,  
Rest for the labor,  
Light for the way,  
Swift-easy trial,  
Help from above:  
Unfailing kindness,  
Undying love.

**JOANNA UDAYKUMAR**

***Marching Towards Paradise***

*(Kumbakonam, 16 July 2004)*

Book – a sack of wisdom,  
That shuts the kids' eyes.

Bottle – a vessel of water,  
That dries their tongues.

Teacher – a guide to counsel,  
Who deserts and leaves them alone.

Kids – delicate creatures of God,  
Who leave behind memories of Elysium.

So,  
Fire – a sparkle of light,  
Conveys them to Paradise.

**U. SATHEES KANNAN**

**Love**

It's patient, it's kind.  
It doesn't envy or boast  
It is not proud.  
It is not rude or self-seeking,  
And is not easily angered.  
It does not delight in doing evil,  
But rejoices with the truth.  
It always keeps, hopes and perseveres  
And keeps no record of wrongs.  
Without this, all speech is vain,  
Without this, all prophecy comes to nothing.  
Without this, all sacrifice—  
Be it self-sacrifice or death—  
Amounts to nothing.  
This is the greatest of all virtues—  
A virtue without which  
Life is meaningless  
Or nihilistic:  
A virtue called "LOVE".

**JOANNA UDAYKUMAR**

**She**

I saw a girl  
With long hair,  
Beady-eyed and rosy-lipped.  
She returned my glance  
With a charming smile.  
I was stunned into poetry,  
And flew into the flight of imagination.  
She advanced towards me, alone;  
My friends fled in jealousy.  
She came close to me  
I hardly breathed,  
Eager for her to speak.  
But her words fell like stone as  
She said "Please, give this letter to your brother."

**U. SATHEES KANNAN**

When I was twelve, she told me her secrets,  
Of her confined childhood in the ghettos of Poland,  
Of being forced to wear the once-holy Star of David,  
And of the forbidden rituals her family performed on Sabbath,  
Behind closed doors and in the mist of the dark night.

She told me her secrets,  
Of the daily game of Cat and Mouse, where she was the mouse,  
Of the day she lost the race and was hurled into a hell known as Bergen-Belsen,  
And of the uniformed, giant beasts who held her life in their hands,  
Speaking the devil's tongue and treating the respect-worthy no better than dirt.

She told me her secrets,  
Of the rank smell of human flesh and ashes that filled the air,  
Of how low her people had to stoop to survive,  
And of hope that all of them carried with them everyday,  
That they would be free of this torture and get justice one day.

She told me everything,  
Leaving her mark bare and sharing her burden with me,  
And so I tell you all my neighbor's secrets,  
So that one day her dream will come true—her dream of justice.

**MANJREE KHAJANCHI**



***My Closest Friend***

She's loving and caring,  
And keeps vigil over every move I make.  
She's my source of inspiration  
For every breath I take.  
When I falter,  
She encourages me to go a step further.  
When I call,  
She's ever ready to lend an ear.  
She is my comfort  
In times of sorrow,  
She is the hope of my every tomorrow.  
In her midst, I feel as though I can  
Lay all my encumbrances before her.  
Her helpful nature,  
Her warm smile,  
Her friendly touch  
And timely advice  
Have contributed  
To moulding and shaping my life.  
So, at this juncture of life,  
I consider it a privilege  
To address you, mother  
As my "EVERGREEN FRIEND".

**JOANNA UDAYKUMAR**

***Onion***

Shrouded within  
A scaly partha  
Lurks the naked face  
Of Truth,  
Eclipsed beneath  
The sepals of rumours.  
I peel it  
Layer after layer  
Until  
My eyes brim with tears,  
Confronted by the unpalatable truth!

**G. JEYALAKSHMI**

***Holding On***

Walking by myself down the street,  
Passing houses, street lights and petrol bunks,  
Only the music in my ears and the moon by my side,  
I keep dancing as the world keeps moving by,  
Suddenly an abrupt stop—time is moving yet I remain still,  
The music stops . . .  
Low battery appears on my Discman,  
The quiet loneliness creeps all around me not leaving me alone,  
My attention is drawn to a weary old man,  
Old in appearance, yet young at heart,  
He notices my stare and returns a smile instead,  
His warm eyes show the kindness in his heart,  
Though in a blink of an eye he vanishes!  
The music begins to play again as I am lost in thought,  
I glance at my Discman—the battery is full now!  
Who was that man? What was this unusual meeting?  
Explanations remain for those who live according to logic and reasoning,  
I keep walking, following the music,  
Ignoring the world's uncanny happenings,  
Reaching out to another world,  
From which the weary old man appeared from,  
Hoping to find and attain that happiness he found.

**MERCY LAMECH**

***A Beggar Benefits . . . !***

When I close my eyes  
I'm taken to another world  
Where anything is possible.  
I'm lean and weak  
But there, I can beat Mike Tyson.  
I'm a man of rags  
But there, I can dress as "A complete Man."  
My only house is the platform  
But there, I can own the white house.  
I've no one to look after me  
But there, I've many angels  
To press my feet and  
Flap feathers to make me sleep.  
Even a beggar girl may neglect me  
But there, I can be betrothed with Iswarya Rai.  
I've no one to protect me  
But there, I can have many gun men.  
"Hey! Get up," I hear  
I open my eyes  
Two gun men are standing near.

***R. G. VIJAY***

**A "Key" to Drive**

I kicked the pedal  
The wheels moved  
But, the engine remained quiet.  
I cycled the pedals  
The wheels moved  
But, the engine remained quiet.  
I checked some parts;  
Plucked some wires,  
Blew them twice,  
To remove dust. Again  
I kicked the pedal  
The wheels moved  
But the engine remained quiet.  
I took it to the slopes  
I ran along with it  
Still, the engine remained quiet.  
All eyes of the street  
Are upon me and my vehicle  
Some at the door steps,  
Some at the roof top,  
Some peeped through windows,  
Some laughed loudly, and  
Some chuckled quietly.  
I became a joker  
Before the eyes of the children.  
They crowded around me  
As if to help but never  
Enraged, I drove them away  
Again I kicked the pedal  
My ill luck, the pedal was broken.  
With the bowed head  
I pushed it to the clinic  
The mechanic asked me  
**"Where is the Key?"**

**R. G. VIJAY**

***Newspaper***

Dawn is my genesis.  
When born I pass into countless hands.  
I blush as I move on  
Making humanity happy.

Noon is my solitude.  
I am left apart  
Society scarcely scan me.

Dusk is my staleness  
I am grey and outdated,  
Handed down to another home.

Darkness is my sepulchre.  
Where I falter and fray.  
I think of my future days  
Hoping to be born again.

**HAMLIN**

***A Vanished Friend***

While our eyes flood  
You sleep peacefully  
In your own dark room  
Embalmed in  
                  cushioned petals  
                  and  
                          redolence of roses  
Embellished with carnations, chrysanthemums and gerberas.

How crude can the sting of death be?  
Transfixed my heavy eye lids stand  
Tormented by  
                  imperishable smiles  
And  
          Those words  
                  that linger in my mind

Where can I stretch for comfort  
To calm my tornadic heart?

I await,  
          Believing in resurrection – Once again  
          We will hold hands in the Elysian Fields  
          Chant the praises of glory together.

***GALINA THOMAS***

***The Leech***

It waits for you and me  
Across the lane  
Those adolescent days  
The nibbling weakness  
The cancerous temptation  
It harps on  
Feeding on your basest desires  
Paralyzing your conscience  
And,  
All passions spent and sucked  
It leaves you, seeking another  
And you stand  
Weakened in body and age  
Repenting for the youth lost  
In the clasp of lust  
With mounting guilt and pain  
What's lost

Can never be recovered!

**G. JEYALAKSHMI**

**Untitled**

I come running like rivers  
Through black and white fields.  
Seldom I stop,  
Sometimes I am stopped,  
And I take you along with me.

Don't worry my boy,  
Everything will be fine and mine.  
Alone I come  
To take you along with me.  
Hold my hands, when I come.

Sometimes I spare a few;  
Still someone dares me.  
But nothing is permanent.  
All are my guests.  
Boys and girls, men, and women,  
Young and the old,  
And all are my guests.

(I run even in these lines)  
It is left to you, to find me,  
If not now, surely sometime.

**M. PRASANNA VENKATESWARAN**



In crouching courage you faced the interrogation light  
Wielded by a giant  
Ignorant antagonist.  
You stood still, dim and corpse-limbed.  
The torchlight blaze  
Of hate and fear persisted.  
You stayed motionless,  
In this deadlock no longer a messenger of twilight haze.  
My hate-fire flickered slowly and died down,  
The torch-blaze with,  
As the torturer's delight grew wearisome.  
In a flash you were gone,  
Melted into the darkness,  
Mystery once more.  
You have not come to me again,  
Since the light exposed you in cold clarity,  
And my dreams have gone with you,  
Trapped in that paper shell, your armoured body,  
You spin more dream-catchers  
That are grey-dust filaments but shine  
Suddenly iridescent.  
But you will not weave for me, pale wizard,  
And leave only this last wisdom:  
That you do not return  
To the one who snatched away for a moment  
Your anonymity.  
Denizen of the dark,  
You have borne away brightness with you.

**TARA MENON**

There is a fellow named Paul Linder Love  
Who is often rebuked by the gods above  
Stay in one place so  
We may see your face  
And not have to call you "Gone Again, Love."

**DEBORAH CORDONNIER**

***Speaking of Ranjit***

Lord and lover of details  
of everyday made exceptional  
of clarity and light  
born out of confusion

Master of verbs in all of their  
tenses, tensed and poised  
to fall  
and keep falling

Student of masters and masters' occasions  
visitor to the corridors and doorways of surprise

And now teacher to students  
clear and ready counsel  
high in the hills  
and of all the hills  
here.

**THOMAS H. PRUIKSMA**

It was amazingly fun. But dangerous, very dangerous,  
I mean,  
It was nothing for a drama teacher to go off to rehearse  
A play in the morning, and come back  
In the evening missing part of an ear, or finger, or some other part of a limb.  
Really? Really.

He was talking, and I was listening.

"Batala, Punjab." The name sounded invented.  
He was still talking about Batala when we made it into Kodaikanal.  
He took me to Rock Cottage.

I asked him, "Wanna come in for a minute?"  
"Uh, no, do you mind if I don't? I have to get back  
to Hilltop, you know, I have lots of poems to read. . . .

It's just such an enormous effort to get them all done." Puzzled, I glanced  
Into the car again: the book bags were filled with student poems,  
Not ten or twenty or thirty or forty but hundreds and hundreds spilled  
In the back seat and even below to the steering column.

He had thousands of poems to read before he could sleep.  
He had thousands of poems to read before he could sleep.

**DEBORAH CORDONNIER**

**Claverack: Abandoned Tennis Court**

Who dropped them here,  
Small pine trees sprouting  
In the moss-grown tennis court,  
Pushing their bright heads through beaten earth  
To send their lemon fragrance to the sky?  
The sun shone on them  
And they grew darker, stronger.  
The rain bathed them  
And they shivered and grew tall.  
Stars smiled on them,  
Orphan pine trees  
Lifting their dark, tousled heads in the moon's touch.  
They gain width through the seasons.  
Branches intertwined, they are friendly companions,  
Or are they rivals, wrestling, straining,  
Each one thrusting with all its green force  
To stem the others' growth?  
Leaf pushes against leaf, and I shudder  
As I tear through fresh-scented suffocation.  
Is this youth?

**TARA MENON**

**Dawn**

Reclining upon plush aubergine quilts,  
The down feathered cushion flung across the marble floor,  
A diamond ring, the very quintessence of life,  
Money, carelessly crammed in drawers, the epitome of happiness,  
Along with the rings, bracelets and gems that adorned her  
A gentle yet continuous stream of tears flowed,  
Wondering where she went wrong,  
Was it yesterday, today or tomorrow?

**AARTI CHAWLA**

***Skin Graft***

To write you must  
step out of skin,  
peel layers off  
to see within,  
strip down to muscle,  
even bone,  
to reach a place  
that's all your own

but then you have  
to graft anew,  
tear skin away  
from others, too,  
laminate  
and make it mesh  
till others' skin  
grows on your flesh

***DACHST***

